

**SOUTH AFRICAN GREAT WAR POETRY 1914-1918: A LITERARY-  
HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS**

by

**GERHARD GENIS**

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**I declare that SOUTH AFRICAN GREAT WAR POETRY 1914-1918: A LITERARY-HISTORIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.**

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**DEDICATION**

To my wife Regina, who had to keep the homefire burning while I was in the trenches.

To my two daughters, Heidi and Meleri.

To my mother Linda, whose love of history and literature has been infectious.

To my sister Deidre and brothers Pieter and Frans.

To my father Pieter, and brother-in-law Gerhard – R.I.P.

To all those who served in the Great War.

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## PREFACE AND SUMMARY

Within a southern African literary-historiographical milieu, the corpse of the First World War (1914-1918) either wanders in the 'darkling' woods or wades in the ice-mirrored sea of a sinister psychological landscape. The *veld*, with its moon, flowers, bowers, animals and sea, is a potent South African metaphysical conceit in which both the white and black corpse – the horrific waste product of war – is seemingly safely hidden within euphemistic shadows. However, these shades are metonymic and metaphorical offshoots of an Adamastorian nightmare, which has its inception in a nascent South African literary tradition.

This thesis explores these literary-historiographical leftovers within the war poetry of both civilians and soldiers. Both 'white' and 'black' poetry is discussed in a similar context of dressing the corpse in meaning: a meaning that resides deep within the wound of loss.

In tracing this blood spoor in the poetry a highly eclectic approach has been followed. As the title illustrates, both literary and historical approaches were used in analysing the effect of the Great War on the poetry, and by implication, on the society from which it sprung. It is, therefore, a cultural history as well as an intellectual subtext of wartorn South Africa that has been scrutinised, and is revealed in its poetic literature. Archival research and the scouring of individual volumes were the sources of the poems for this study. This is true especially with regards to the 'white' poetry, where very few examples of poetry have been published in secondary histories. Various anthologies and studies on 'black' poetry considerably lightened the search for war *izibongo*.

A variety of literary theoretical approaches have been most useful in extracting the subtext of early 20<sup>th</sup> century South African history. The psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung's collective unconscious have been most insightful. The poststructuralist theory of Julia Kristeva has cast more light on the recalcitrant corpse, the main waste product of war.

David Lewis-Williams's recent archaeological-anthropological approach has also been crucial in understanding the indigenous *izibongo* by putting forward Neuroscience as an explanation of the universally held neuropsychological hallucinatory poetic experience.

Finally, war poetry in this thesis is seen as verse written by both soldiers and civilians as a response to the reality – or rather surreal unreality – of conflict, in an effort to come to terms with the abjection of both body and mind. Thea Harrington's *manqué* reading of Kristeva's poststructuralist corpse is used as a referent for the abject, or loss thereof, that is to be found in the war poetry. Throughout the thesis, the term *manqué* is used to refer to the corpse as a fluid linguistic-psychological signifier saturated with loss. It is the *manqué* that has essentially remained hidden behind the various political histories of the war.

#### KEY WORDS

South African poetry, Great War, First World War, war poetry, *izibongo*, Adamastor, *manqué*

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## Introduction: The Body of Text that is Missing in Action

South African war poetry of the Great War is an unexplored literary no-man's-land. Even in England, where so much literary poetry had been produced on the war, there was and still seems to be, although to a lesser extent than in South Africa, an aversion to this genre. This is so much so that the eminent Irish poet W.B. Yeats did not include any war poet in the 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*,<sup>1</sup> or in the 1937 *Oxford Anthology of Modern Verse*, indicating that pity and passive suffering should not be the concern of the modern poet (Campbell 1997: 823; Sychterz 2005: 1; French 2009: 12-13; Norris 2005: 143). Yeats's premise is that war poetry is the imaginative and aesthetical re-conception of war (Goldensohn 2003: 82). "The poetry is" therefore not, as Wilfred Owen (1893-1918) has famously stated, "in the pity" (Owen quoted in Campbell 1997: 823) or in Owen's testimonies to raw trench experience (Goldensohn 2003: 82). To Yeats, the soldier represents a tragic and even comic figure to be admired and aesthetically rendered on the stage of art as an active and stoic actor joyfully dramatising man's endurance, and not to be pitied at all; the dead body is emptied of its Owenesque signification of victimhood and made a symbol without intrinsic meaning (Sychterz 2005: 3-4; Goldensohn 2003: 6) – tragic war is humankind's fate and war poetry's elevated subject (Goldensohn 2003: 72-73,74).

French (2009) makes an emotional case for the soldier poets who are "suffering [from] canonical ostracism" (9) and who are "Missing in Canon" (10). French (2009: 9) asserts that these poets' work is under-represented in the standard anthologies such as the influential *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* and the *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*.<sup>2</sup> However, it must be stated that *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975) by Paul Fussell did go a long

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<sup>1</sup> Norris (2005: 143) points out that the only trench poet included in this volume is Herbert Read.

<sup>2</sup> In the fifth edition of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (2005), First World War poets are given their due, by the inclusion of, amongst others, Rupert Brooke (1887-1915), Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918), Wilfred Owen (1893-1918), Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967) and Edmund Blunden (1896-1974).

way towards "restoring British trench poetry to the canon" (Norris 2005: 144), by postulating that it provides the topos for all subsequent 20<sup>th</sup> century war poetry and war experience (Sychterz 2005: 11-12; Christie 2007: 1; Campbell 1999). Additionally, in 1984 *The Oxford Book of War Poetry* was published by Oxford University Press. The 250 war poems, which cover a period from Biblical and ancient Greek times to the recent past, were chosen and edited by Jon Stallworthy, and republished in 1988 and 1990, and, more crucial to this study, with a South African impression in 1993 (Stallworthy 1993). *The Washington Post* describes this collection as one "of exceptionally high quality", and Bernard Bergonzi, the highly regarded British scholar of war literature, indicates in the *Observer* that this work is "deeply interesting [...] the editor's good taste and literary judgement are apparent throughout".<sup>3</sup> This work has done much to make war poetry more popular, and includes the important poems by the major war poets. However, there is only one poem by a South African war poet included in this anthology. This is F.T. Prince's Soldiers Bathing. This neglect illustrates the literary ostracism of South African war poetry in general by scholars of Mars's verse. Furthermore, the greater majority of the poets in this publication are male. Women war poets are seemingly subject to the same canonical omission as their male counterparts had been before *The Oxford Book's* publication. May Wedderburn Cannan (1893-1973) is the only instance of a British woman war poet from the First World War whose work is anthologised in major collections (French 2009: 16,21,31), although the *The Oxford Book* does include some dozen female voices. Similarly, Acton (2004: 54) seems to refute French's pessimistic estimation by indicating that war writing by women poets has received greater scholarly attention since the 1990s. Clearly, war literature in general has not been elevated to the same level of literary appreciation as the canonical works. It has primarily been seen by mainstream war critics and literary historians as poetic instances of suffering, political or war protest and the truthful witness to modern war (Campbell 1999: 210).

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted on front and back pages of the volume.

Much of the criticism of war poetry revolves around Yeats's estimation that Owen's trench lyrics are "all blood, dirt, & sucked sugar stick"<sup>4</sup> – too much suffering and sentimentality do not fit into Yeats's detached modernist aesthetics (Sychterz 2005: 3; Norris 2005: 143,144). To Yeats, like Keats, poetic beauty is truth; for Owen the truth is represented by the poetic witnessing of raw *horror* (Campbell 1999: 205). It is this *horror* that is rendered by British trench poetry, the verse of those serving on the front line, in its most horrific form, that of the *corpse* – the most vile by-product / waste-product of war. Zimmerman (2005: 106) argues that, as with the ghost in *Hamlet*, the corpse or spectre represents "an unfixable margin between life/death, process/stasis, partition/unity". War was seen by the literary British elite of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as Shakespearean theatrical melodrama (Fussell 1975: 198-9), and Hamlet, the archetypical tragic figure, must have struck a poignant cord. The abject fear of the corpse is graphically illustrated in the graveyard scene where Hamlet inspects the skull of Yorick, his father's jester:

[...] And

now how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge  
rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I  
know not how oft.

[...]

[...] Not one now to  
mock your own grinning? Quite chop-fallen?

[...]

Dost thou [Horatio] think Alexander looked o' this fashion  
i' th' earth?

[Horatio]: E'en so.

[Hamlet]: And smelt so? Pah!

[Horatio]: E'en so, my lord.

[Hamlet]: To what base uses we may return, Horatio!

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<sup>4</sup> Yeats quoted in Campbell (1999: 205).

(5.1.183-186,188-189,194-199)

The clever jests of the jester have been silenced forever; language does not exist in the grave (Barton 1979: 47). Yorick's skull – the most base raw material of war – and the father's ghost – “a palpable impalpable” (Zimmerman 2005: 106) – mix ominously into a Kristevan abject (1982: 1-13) that cannot be fully embodied in words, and which nauseatingly assaults all the senses. The abject's shadow shades the dead, who are only partly remembered through sensory and mental impressions, and this spectre is the horror which is echoed by the ghost and skull in *Hamlet*, and conjured in Brutus's waking nightmare:

*Enter the Ghost of Caesar.*

How ill this taper burns. Ha! Who comes here?

I think it is the weakness of mine eyes

That shapes this monstrous Apparition.

It comes upon me: Art thou any thing?

Art thou some God, some Angel, or some Devil,

That makest my blood cold, and my hair to stare?

Speak to me, what thou art?

Ghost: Thy evil Spirit Brutus!

(Julius Caesar, IV, ii)

It is this near ‘language-less’ embodiment of a limitless corpse that is to be found or ‘not-found’ in South African history and poetry on the war and which will be explored in this thesis. This study, therefore, builds on Anglo-American texts that have also focused on the ‘recalcitrant corpse’ within the genre of war poetry.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Examples include J.S. Sychterz's PhD thesis '*Though Their Bones Crunched, Their Shut Mouths Made no Moan*': *Speaking the Corpse in Twentieth Century Anglo-American War Poetry* (2005); and T. Christie's thesis *Modernism, the Metaphysical Poets, and the First World War* (2007).

Many literary scholars, therefore, do not agree with Yeats's 'clean' aesthetics. During the recent past, biographical studies on the most eminent British war poets have appeared.<sup>6</sup> The sheer physical and psychological impact of the war on British, and larger Empire society, has been felt beyond the Second World War (Goldensohn 2003: 31-32,36).<sup>7</sup> The poet Ted Hughes dubbed the war England's "National Ghost".<sup>8</sup> Ironically, it is this cataclysmic event that was one of the catalysts which sparked literary Modernism, whose war poetry the same Modernist literary establishment snubs as being parochial (Christie 2007: 2). If this is the situation in Britain, where the war had such a marked impact on the collective British psyche, then it comes as no surprise that the situation in South Africa, whose physical investment was less, is even bleaker for Great War poetry in particular and history in general. As recently as 1994, Geoffrey Hutchings (1639) stated that "The South African troops who endured the horror and discomfort of the Western Front have left no published record of their feelings". And what was written about the war are "[...] screeds of patriotic doggerel, but nothing of lasting value" - Yeats's "sucked sugar stick". War poetry written by South Africans who served in the African theatres receives not even such a cursory - and damning - mention. Interestingly, Canadian Great War poetry has suffered from the same lollipop criticism and has been judged as mere adjuncts to historical texts that only emphasise the jingoistic feelings rampant at the time and serve as examples of poetically simplistic outpouring of patriotic feeling (Baetz 2005: 9-10, 19). This study makes the claim that the South African war poetry of the Great War states that which is unsaid in the histories on the conflict, which focus on the

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<sup>6</sup> For instance see Stallworthy, J. 1974 (reissued 1998). *Wilfred Owen*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Roberts, J.S. 2005. *Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)*. London: Metro Publishing Limited; Wilson, J.M. 2008. *Isaac Rosenberg: the Making of a Great War Poet, a New Life*. London: Weidenfield & Nicolson.

<sup>7</sup> This psychological fallout of the First World War is also reflected in the publication of fiction on the war. Pat Barker's *Regeneration* trilogy of the 1990s, and Sebastian Faulks's *Birdsong* of the same decade are apt examples. The tradition of writing prose pieces about the war was firmly entrenched in 1929, with the appearance of Robert Graves's seminal autobiography *Goodbye to all that*. German's suffering beyond no-man's-land is most strikingly represented by Erich Maria Remarque's semi-autobiographical novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929). An Australian example of a First World War novel is David Malouf's *Fly away Peter* (1982).

<sup>8</sup> Hughes quoted in Christie (2007: 1).

military, political, social, and economic impact of the war, and the influence it had on race relations, and remembrance.<sup>9</sup> South African Great War poetry is, very similar to the Canadian example, relegated to footnotes and appendices as examples of propaganda material and of the torrent of Anglo-Saxon jingoism that appeared during the war. Although the historical studies have considerable scholarly merit, they generally negate the individual voices that state the communal horrors of modern warfare. It is, however, the poetry that most strongly conjures the “National Ghost” that still haunts South Africa’s collective memory of the war, and which is similar to the Canadian poetry instances of an early Modernism. As M. van Wyk Smith (1999), South Africa’s most eminent scholar of war poetry,<sup>10</sup> has stated: “[War] poems [...] serve not merely as dumbshows to the greater tragic act of world war, but also as meaningful statements about war in their own right. After the Boer War, war poetry could no longer be merely a sub-department of patriotic verse” (310).

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<sup>9</sup> (a) For the history of black participation in the war, see Grundlingh, A.M. 1981. *Die Suid-Afrikaanse Gekleurdes en die Eerste Wêreldoorlog*. Unpublished D.Litt et Phil thesis, University of South Africa, Pretoria; Grundlingh, A. 1982. *Black Men in a White Man's War: the Impact of the First World War on South African Blacks*. African Studies Seminar Paper, African Studies Institute. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand; Grundlingh, A.M. 1987. *Fighting their own War: South African Blacks and the First World War*. Johannesburg: Ravan Press; Clothier, N. 1987. *Black Valour: the South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916-1918 and the Sinking of the Mendi*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press; Gleeson, I. 1994. *The Unknown Force: Black, Indian and Coloured Soldiers through Two World Wars*. Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing; Grundlingh, A.M. 2011. Mutating Memories and the Making of a Myth: Remembering the SS Mendi Disaster, 1917. *South African Historical Journal* 63(1, March 2011): 20-37.

(b) For the history of white participation in the war see Uys, I. 1983. *Delville Wood*. Johannesburg: Uys Publishers; Uys, I. 1991. *Rollcall: the Delville Wood Story*. Johannesburg: Uys Publishers; Uys, I. 2006. *Devil's Wood*. Knysna: Fortress Books; Ambrose Brown, J. 1991. *They Fought for King and Kaiser: South Africans in German East Africa 1916*. Johannesburg: Ashanti Publishing; L'Ange, G. 1991. *Urgent Imperial Service: South African Forces in German South-West Africa 1914-1915*. Johannesburg: Ashanti Publishing; Digby, P.K.A. 1993. *Pyramids and Poppies: the 1st SA Infantry Brigade in Libya, France and Flanders 1915-1919*. Rivonia: Ashanti Publishing; Nasson, B. 1996. *Springboks at the Somme: the Making of Delville Wood, 1916*. Seminar Paper No 412, University of the Witwatersrand Institute for Advanced Social Research; Genis, G. 1996. *Delville Wood: Eighty Years, July 1916- July 1996*. *Militaria* 26(1, 1996): 4-21; Genis, G. 2000. *Recruitment for 1 South African Infantry Brigade for Europe during the First World War*. Unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of South Africa, Pretoria; Nasson, B. 2004. *Delville Wood and South African Great War Commemoration*. *English Historical Review* 119(480, 2004): 57-86; Nasson, B. 2007. *Springboks on the Somme: South Africa in the Great War 1914-1918*. Johannesburg: Penguin Books.

See Genis (2000: 1-3,193-199) for additional First World War sources.

<sup>10</sup> His seminal study on Anglo-Boer War poetry, *Drummer Hodge* (1978, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed: 1999), is still the most comprehensive and influential work on South African war poetry.

It is by looking into the empty sockets of Yorick's decayed and hollow skull that Hamlet, the archetypal afflicted soul, does, in the midst of death, stench and decay, remember a time when the court of Denmark was happily united in joyous laughter at the witty tales of the jester. Even in death, contentment does reside within fond recollections – as represented in Hamlet's recalling of Yorick's humorous antics. However, the appearance of the ghost most violently invokes the Kristevan horror of the abject corpse. Hamlet is both drawn to the spectre – on the outside it looks regal and heroic because it is clad in shining armour, and repulsed – whatever fleshy bits are rotting inside the steel remain a terrible enigma (Zimmerman 2005). The histories on the Great War in South African historiography have understandably focused on every *bit* of the societal dislocation it wrought and on the grandiose martial conflict, which was over-and-over again extolled in the press, official documents, church sermons, magazines, letters and memoirs of and on the war, and on which the histories are based:

At the time men wanted to do their '*bit*' or '*little bit*' [in the war] by serving in the [Union's and Imperial] armed forces. This was a peculiar expression of the period used to confirm one's desire to serve the Empire. Subsequently the Defence authorities received numerous such applications.<sup>11</sup> These men felt that it was their duty to volunteer as men of honour (Genis 2000: 146; my own emphasis).

It is these histories that claim to call on the memory of the men who fought, to recall their motivations and experiences. The writers are, like Hamlet, peering into the sockets of the empty skull, to remember. But this is a polished skull, devoid of any flesh. The bits-and-pieces that decay within the stone memorials of historical remembrance remain missing. This study makes the claim that it is the poetry that more fully reclaims the human story of war

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<sup>11</sup> For examples of these see South African National Defence Force Archives (hereafter SANDF Archives), DC GP2, Box 579, File DB127/9.9199, Correspondence regarding D.H.R. Lyon, Nov/Dec 1916; *Ibid.*, File DB141/9/9199, Correspondence regarding R.C.E. Nissen, March 1917; *Ibid.*, Box 690, File A48/a/958/9199, Correspondence regarding B. Lacey, Nov 1915; *Ibid.*, File A93/958/a/9199, Correspondence regarding C.W. Smith, 1 Dec 1915-19 Jan 1916; *Ibid.*, File a116/958/a/9199, Correspondence regarding B.J. Liebenberg, Nov/Dec 1915.

by flushing out and fleshing out, even though only partly, the '*bit-less*' corpse or *manqué*.

Poetry as historical text has not fared well in South African historiography. Van Heyningen (2013: 12-22) describes poetry as part of "the 'haze' of informal history" in her study of the highly contentious Anglo-Boer War concentration camps. The other 'hazy' elements include "music, commemoration, memorials and women's testimonies". According to her, all these have conspired to distort, displace and fracture the 'truth' about the history of 1899-1902. So much so that after the Anglo-Boer War, commemorations of the dead of the concentration camps were symbolically and emotively – and 'hazily' – "drenched in the blood and tears of the [Boer] nation" (14-15). However, it is in between the 'hazy' history of the war and scientifically founded renditions, such as Van Heyningen's, that the *manqué* slips further from view behind the casualty lists of the dead published as anti-British propaganda during and after the war, and the bibliographic lists of scientific history.

Hunt (2010: 100-101) advocates that history destroys memory in that it reconstructs and recollects the past as static truth, whereas "sites of memory" "hold... the past close and repeat... it". These "sites of memory" include "funeral eulogies [...] battlefield monuments, memorials and museums" (101). These constitute a people's or nations' collective memory, and include myth and folklore (106-107). He goes on to assert that "we have lost our sense of memory, replacing it with history and, because of our psychological need to remember, we create specific – perhaps artificial – memorials to use for commemoration" (173). The First World War has retreated into history as those who were able to pass down their experiences have since died and the war has subsequently been turned into history and fiction (104).

Poems written about the war remain dynamic "sites of memory", as they, through their powerful emotive content, bring the historical event emotionally very close to the reader. War poetry is individual emotive discourse focused on non-individual and 'objective' historical events. Its

subjectivity does not lessen its relevance as texts of history as the poet's memory of experience is valid in that it truthfully reflects her/his unique experience of real historical events. In this sense, individual poems on a particular war do reconstruct the collective memory of the event. Their narrative transforms "traumatic memory" into therapeutic "narrative memory" as it integrates the story into the individual's, as well as the nation's, story (118). Hunt's "Autobiographical memory" (116,119) is, in essence, poetry. This highly personal narrative is also influenced by "societal discourses" (see 120,198), which are based on cultural and social memory (121). He states: "A person traumatised by war is traumatised via the culture in which he lives [...]" (198). However, how the individual copes with it is universal, i.e. through trauma narratives (199), of which poetry forms part. Poetry gives suffering meaning; it is part of the narrative approach of assigning value to war trauma, and this process is a prerequisite for psychological healing (163).

The question that arises is how is it possible for war poetry, anchored within subjective memory, to achieve historical credibility. It is argued that it is biased and gives fractured information of historical experience and is, therefore, not objective narrative history (Ullyatt 1990: 62,63-64). Notwithstanding this supposed drawback, it is poetry that gives conflicts lasting historical importance and that serves as a receptacle for remembrance (Ullyatt 1990: 65). Lusty (2006: 200) asserts that poems are "historically grounded objects" and, therefore, tell us more about the historical *Zeitgeist* of any given era. Couzens and Patel (1991: 1) support this view: "We [the authors] ... press a claim for their [early poems by black South African writers] value as an historical record which can give insight into the changing patterns of black reaction [to white colonial oppression] through one medium (poetry)". More significantly, Stallworthy (1993: xix) notably states that "[...] there can be no area of human experience that has generated a wider range of powerful feelings than war: hope and fear; exhilaration and humiliation; hatred [...] [and] love [...]". It is precisely this Romantic deluge of "powerful

feelings” that is more loudly echoed in the South African poetry on war than in the historical and history texts. Stallworthy also observes that even the drum-and-trumpet poems of young soldier-poets such as Rupert Brooke and Charles Hamilton Sorley “move us, as human documents, more than many better poems [and histories]” (xxvii). It is war poetry – and especially the poetry written by combatants – that represents war by constructing its meaning (Campbell 1999: 211) as “human documents”, no matter how slippery its abject signification might be. Christie (2007: 231-239), in tracing the literary influence of the British trench poet Isaac Rosenberg on the Northern Irish poet Michael Longley, indicates that poetry to Longley is more than the act of remembering; it is “a re-membering of body parts” (237) as it gives voice and substance to the physical and psychological body that is missing – the abjected corpse as well as to those poetic voices absent in the literary canon: poets like Isaac Rosenberg and almost *all* the white South African Great War poets. Notable exceptions are the literary studies on Arthur Shearly Cripps<sup>12</sup> and Francis Carey Slater<sup>13</sup> that provide useful thematic references for the larger body of ‘white’ South African war verse.

Ironically, it is the black body that was politically and socially othered after the Great War, or even completely forgotten and buried, that has been more completely exhumed and ‘re-membered’ in the South African literary history of war.<sup>14</sup> Jeff Opland’s various studies on South African oral poetry or *izibongo*, which has in most cases been translated by him and other indigenous-language scholars, have led to the uncovering of a black body of

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<sup>12</sup> Cripps, A.S. 1976. *Arthur Shearly Cripps: a Selection of his Prose and Verse*. Gwelo: Mambo Press. (comp. Brown, G.R. & Chennells, A.J. & Rix, L.B.) Mambo writers series: English section, vol.1.

<sup>13</sup> Doyle, J.R. 1971. *Francis Carey Slater*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc. (Twayne’s world authors series: a survey of the world’s literature, Bowman, S.E. (ed.); South Africa, Joseph Jones (ed.), TWAS173.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in-depth historical research on black participation in the First World War was also conducted before any comprehensive archival study on the white’s role in the conflict was undertaken by Bill Nasson and Gerhard Genis (see footnote 9b). The South African historian Albert Grundlingh has led the way on scholarly studies relating to black sacrifice during the war (see footnote 9a).

poetical texts, although small, on the Great War.<sup>15</sup> Abner (M.A.B.) Nyamende is another literary historian who has re-assembled the textual limbs of the Mendi war hero Isaac Williams Wauchope.<sup>16</sup> The Core anthologies and individual volumes listed in the bibliography also yielded very relevant material.

This study situates the war poems collected and translated by these researchers within a First World War context, which was informed by both local and international concerns, and evaluates their cascading literary and psychological impact beyond November 1918. The ‘white’ poetry is also anchored to both home-front fears and larger Empire and colonial-settler anxieties. The soldier magazines, *The Nongqai*, *The Springbok Blue*, and the *The Springbok Magazine*, as well as various individual volumes of poetry<sup>17</sup>, have proven to be rich sources of ‘white’ war verse. Peter Digby, Ian Uys and Bill Nasson’s historical studies also include a few interesting poetic texts.<sup>18</sup>

Essentially, it is the poetry that indicates that the meaning of war is not to be found in the monuments and memorials of cold death-stones in which names are trapped – the stone is the abject antithesis of the body. These monuments’ seeming permanence only mirrors the abject fear of death and oblivion which is to be found – or ‘not-found’ or ‘partly-found’ – in the poetry of individual voices. It is the poetry that is in the abject, and it is an abject that is common to all humanity across all ages (Kristeva 1982). Crucially, the South African war poetry embodies an offshoot abject that is unique to this

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<sup>15</sup> Opland’s studies include: (ed. with Guy Butler 1989) *The Magic Tree: South African Stories in Verse*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman; (ed. 1992) *Words that Circle Words: a Choice of South African Oral Poetry*. Parklands: AD. Donker; (1998) *Xhosa Poets and Poetry*. Cape Town: David Philip; Nineteenth-century Xhosa Literature. *Kronos Southern African Histories* 30 Eastern Cape (November 2004): 22-46; The First Novel in Xhosa. *Research in African Literatures* 38(4, Winter 2007): 87-110; (ed. & tr. 2009) *Abantu Besizwe: Historical and Biographical Writings, 1902-1944, S.E.K. Mqhayi*. Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

<sup>16</sup> His works include: (2000) *The Life and Works of Isaac William(s) Wauchope*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, Cape Town; (ed. & tr. with Jeff Opland 2008) *Isaac Williams Wauchope: Selected Writings 1874-1916*. Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society Second Series No. 39; The Life and Times of Isaac William Wauchope (1852-1917). *Quarterly Bulletin National Library of South Africa* 65(1&2) 2011: 5-15.

<sup>17</sup> See Core anthologies and individual volumes (Bibliography).

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 9b.

country's literary history, and which will be discussed as reflected in the poetic rhythm and rhyme.

This study represents an in-depth exploration of the common themes and conventions inherent in South African Great War poetry, and how it serves as a barometer for then-held views of politics and society, and, more crucially, the timeless relationship between life and death, object and abject, suffering and loss.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The research is based on secondary historical and literary sources, newspapers, anthologies, individual poetry volumes, and archival documentation (See bibliography).

## Chapter 1: Making the Skull Speak Poetically

The underlying structure of South African First World War poetry is characterised by the almost complete absence of the corpse – the primary physical waste-product of war. For the theoretical contextualisation of this ‘corpselessness’, Haase and Large (2001: 33) revealingly quote the famous French philosopher and literary critic Maurice Blanchot:

Words, we know, have the power to make things disappear. [...] But words, having the power to make things 'arise' at the heart of their absence - words which are masters of this absence - also have the power to disappear in themselves, to absent themselves marvelously in the midst of the totality which they realize, which they proclaim as they annihilate themselves therein, which they accomplish eternally by destroying themselves there endlessly.

South African war poetry is haunted by this poststructuralist and psychological slippage of the ‘Word’, which is in this context the ‘corpse’, and which generates other words in its stead. De Kock (2004) has provocatively pointed out that South African history and literature are sutured in the bloody seam of colonial contact, which represents the physical, psychological, cultural and geographical space where black and white meet, and are contrasted, deferred, or displaced, and which represents an “other[ing] to itself”. In this poststructuralist context, the binary opposites of sublime-civilised and abject-uncivilised bodies, as well as living corpse and dead cadaver, become blurred: “What endures, it seems, is [...] that shadow of doubleness [...] a sense that identities can never be that singular, that our representations of ourselves will always carry the mark of the seam”(20). The space in which this double othering, or othering to the self takes place, is “a country that is neither here nor there [...], a country of thoroughly interstitial identities” (8). De Kock (12) gives a third dimension to this othering as the object or marginalised colonised other had to speak from within the bloody seam to be heard – the ‘native’ had to become westernised to be heard, first

softly calling out, before crying out for more humane treatment (13). This postulation on the slippery and bloody sign of signification is in line with Harrington's (1998: 152-153) reading of the French poststructuralist Julia Kristeva's work *The Powers of Horror: an Essay on Abjection* (1982):

The subject that is located in the wound, which must be kept open for the abject to be heard, is involved in the very activity of signification through the concatenating rhythm. The interpretive structure afforded by the analyst [...] involves giving to language the memory of the loss that constitutes the subject's being. Paradoxically, identification enacts again that primal affective moment in which one must sever oneself in order to be. The possibility of catharsis rests in the ability to speak in two languages (literary and theoretical) and also to speak as an other - to speak as the abject.

The 'other words' in South African history and literature have two implications. Firstly, the 'native' - the abjected body - had to speak in the tongue of the other - the coloniser - to be heard, and secondly, in literature, the abject corpse could only be 'heard' behind the poetics of carefully constructed rhythm and rhyme. Both daily language and poetics were, therefore, saturated in the bloody seam of abject othering.

Before the 'other words' for death and the abject in South African war poetry are described, in other words, the reason for the no-corpse, the theoretical, psychological, literary and historical reasons for the general 'corpselessness' in war writing in general need to be investigated.

According to Julia Kristeva (1982) "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection (4) [which is that] massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which [...] now harries me as radically separate, loathsome" (2). Significantly, during the First World War, god was crushed in the corpse-machines of war-science: both god and science failed as the saving grace of humankind. Kristeva's corpse has become or un-become the phobic object of the abject, and the subject's abjection.<sup>20</sup> In this

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<sup>20</sup> "The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one who confronts it as fragile and

nightmarish unbecoming of meaning, the only way for the subject to come to terms with the highly fluid corpse and to give existence any semblance of stable meaning is, ironically, through the just as problematic and unstable 'Word':

[Words are] always too distant, too abstract for this underground swarming of seconds, folding in imaginable spaces. Writing them down is an ordeal of discourse, like love [...] Laugh. Impossible. Flash on the unnameable, weavings of abstractions to be torn (Kristeva quoted in Harrington 1998: 141).

Here Kristeva alludes to the idea that – as Blanchot similarly suggests – words are unstable euphemistic metaphors that can never wholly name or give meaning to objects. In the trenches and on the front lines, life and existence appeared even more surreal as they were caught up in a deluge of “this underground swarming of seconds”: many soldier poets were not only literarily and psychologically submerged by war, but were also literally underground, living in dugouts. Today, the poetry of the war represents not merely “historically grounded objects” (Lusty 2006: 200), whose existence is part of a larger body of historical and archival material, but also the psychological and emotional traces of the bodies and objects that have been completely submerged by the soil of time. As all the Great War veterans have since died, trench archaeology has become the mainstay in recovering the objects and bones – the physical stories – of these silenced voices, which in

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fallacious chance. A wound with blood and pus, or the sickly, acrid smell of sweat, of decay, does not *signify* death...as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death [...] My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border [of my condition as a living being]. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit - *cadere*, cadaver. If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything [...] In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue's full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away" (Kristeva 1982: 3-4).

some cases led to the uncovering of their uniquely human narratives.<sup>21</sup> However, it is the poetry that more deeply excavates what lies behind these voices – that re-fleshes the dry skeletal remains, and which reconstructs the broken objects of signification. It is ironically only these unstable word-signifiers that can be used to name the unnameable object – the signified corpse. It is a doubling up of Derrida's *Differance*.<sup>22</sup> Kristeva indicates that this pursuit of naming, however flawed, can never be relinquished:

Let a body venture at last out of its shelter, take a chance with meaning under a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, broken up visions, metaphors of the invisible (Quoted in Harrington 1998: 141).

Not only the soldier poets, but also the civilian war poets wanted to assign a concrete word value to what it meant, physically and psychologically, to 'go over the top' – "venture out" of the trench-parapet into no-man's-land which resulted in the mass-production of corpses on the conveyor belt of modern technology. As a South African soldier in Europe explained: "one was merely a cog of the machine responding to the will of the machine".<sup>23</sup> It was only through concrete language that the decomposing corpse could be "re-membered", bit by bit – fleshed out by words: "word flesh". It was a "chance with meaning" that had to be taken, but it was a leap of faith into the void of naming that is fear itself:

[Fear] phobia does not disappear but slides beneath language, the phobic object is a proto-writing and, conversely, any practice of speech, inasmuch as it involves writing, is a language of fear. I mean a language of want as such, the want that positions sign, subject, and

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<sup>21</sup> The documentary *Trench Detectives*, aired by the 'History Channel', employs a multi-disciplinary approach to reconstruct the stories of the 'unknown soldier'.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida (1966: 385-407) claims that real meaning can never be determined because everything that exists is based on *Differance*. Everything is both differing (it is distinct, deviates, discerning) and deferring (it has detours, delays, relays, reserves) (398). Not even *Differance* can be put under the microscope because it "is *not*, does not exist, and is not any sort of being-present [... and] it has neither existence nor essence" (388).

<sup>23</sup> Ditsong National Museum of Military History, Johannesburg (hereafter NMMH), *The Springbok Blue*, I(3), June 1917: 52.

object [...] The one who tries to utter this 'not yet a place,' this no-grounds, can obviously only do so backwards, starting from an over-mastery of the linguistic and rhetorical code. But in the last analysis he refers to fear - a terrifying, abject referent [...] But the writer is permanently confronted with such language. The writer is a phobic who succeeds in metaphorizing in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs (Kristeva 1982: 38).

The corpse is missing in translation precisely because it too is part of the primal *manqué* – the site of quintessential loss (Harrington 1998: 146). The corpse is no longer nourished and held safely in the womb of “the archaic mother”, but is left exposed to the waste of decomposition. It is precisely this wrenching from the womb which creates the abjected subject with its nightmarish recollections of the ultimate loss of the mother and subsequent alien horror. The nourishing placenta has metamorphosed into a cancerous and degenerating shell outside the womb, which reaches its most abject object in the form of the rotting or leprous corpse (Zimmerman 2005: 107). Harrington (1998: 146) further nails the corpse down to a thorny cross:

The missing object, reproducible in Freud's system, is [...] not simply missing but instead unspeakable [in Kristeva's *lingua*]. Lacking an objective outlet for the impulse, the phobia becomes the object of the abject. The abject splits and becomes signifiable as phobia. The object of this phobia [the abject] is such that it cannot be spoken of as what it is – the most near – the self. It can be spoken only in a kind of ceaseless wordplay that does not mention fear, because recognising the thing one is afraid of would call into being the very loss that is repressed. If that object is unveiled, it would reveal in utterance the unspeakable: the primal *manqué* and one's own loss within it.

Writing is, therefore, a phobic activity as the subject whose being is saturated with the memory of abject loss tries to bridge the chasm of this “primal *manqué*” by metaphors that ironically and disturbingly also speak the abject. The silence of the abject echoes or shouts the loudest. In this instance, the most abject of abjects is the corpse – the skull whose “chop-fallen” jaw the soldier poet tries to ventriloquize by inserting words into its mouth through rhythm and rhyme. This process is even more complex for the war poet who

has not experienced war first-hand, as she/he needs to reconstruct the skull from afar. The 'reality' of the soldier poet becomes the imaginings of the civilian poet, but all are faced with the same abject death.

Sychterz (2005) has located this poststructuralist corpse that uncannily slithers between absence and presence within the Anglo-American war poetry tradition. Most of the Anglo-American war poetry of the Great War is patriotic and 'corpseless' (13). This 'corpselessness' started with the first modern war poet, the American Walt Whitman (1819-1892), who, even though he poetically and sensitively represents the fallen and wounded of the American Civil War, the first instance of total war and unprecedented slaughter, keeps the bodies or corpses intact in his poetry. He could not speak the corpse as its horror would silence his public voice as a proponent for the Union's democratic cause, which was symbolised by the bodies of men united in a just cause. He does not show us the gaping wound, but focuses on the transcendence of war through homoerotic elegy or by only partly lifting the gauze-veil on the wounded (15-43; Van Wyk Smith 1999: 16). Whitman, as a volunteer working in military hospitals, was confronted with the abject corpse, but his poetic eye could not reflect the true horror. Freud (1919: 160) revealingly states that "the feeling of something uncanny [-the unthinkable, limitless, strange, haunting and uncertain other or object-] is directly attached [...] to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes." Whitman had a political agenda of extolling the cause of the Union against the Confederacy and, therefore, had to keep his political and poetic eyes squarely fixed on this project, even though the terrible suffering of the dying did leave him with troubling private images, whose abject horror could not be made public to maintain a semblance of meaning in fratricide. It is Freud's "demon optician's spectacles" (1919: 160) which had to be cast aside in order for the war not to descend into abject meaninglessness.

By contrast, during the same war, Herman Melville (1819-1891) wrote poems that reflected the individual sensibility left aghast at the dehumanising



Full nakedness! All joys are due to thee,  
 As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be  
 To taste whole joys.

(John Donne, Elegy XIX. To His Mistress Going to Bed, 33-35)

This sexual scene is set by Donne in The Good-Morrow (ii, 8-14) within the bed chamber:

And now good-morrow to our waking souls,  
 Which watch not one another out of fear;  
 For love, all love of other sights controls,  
 And makes one little room an everywhere.  
 Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,  
 Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,  
 Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

(my emphasis)

Significantly, in Donne's metaphor, the bed chamber is also the grave:

When my grave is broke up again  
 Some second guest to entertain  
 (For graves have learned that woman-head  
 To be to more than one a bed),  
 And he that digs it, spies  
 A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,  
 Will he not let us alone,  
 And think that there a loving couple lies,  
 Who thought that this device might be some way  
 To make their souls, at the last busy day,  
 Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

(The Relic, i, 1-11)<sup>24</sup>

During the Renaissance it was believed that on Judgement Day – “the last busy day” – the corpse would be reconstructed and reunited with the soul in heaven (The Norton 1983: 215). The two lovers would then be reunited – body and soul – at the grave site for a sexual coming-together. The grave with the corpse inside is, therefore, a symbol, one which can be psychoanalytically read or interpreted through its symbolism – i.e. by means of words which both condense (metaphor) and displace (metonymy) meaning (Appignanesi & Zarate 2000: 64-66; Eagleton 1985; 157,180). Donne (1572-1631) uses euphemistic metonymy – the ‘clean’ bone crowned with the garland of the beloved’s hair – to soften the blow to both the perceiving senses and reflecting mind, which uncannily want to return to the stench and the image of the mouldering corpse. Clean white bone displaces putrid flesh, and the grave becomes a metaphor for the sexual meeting place of resurrected bodies. However, the image of rot is still present, even if it is at the back of the mind’s-eye, generated by the primal *manqué*. Christie (2007) has traced the trench poets Edgell Rickword and Isaac Rosenberg’s penchant for the metaphysical poets Donne and Andrew Marvell (1621-1678), whose strange metaphysical allure to the grave and to its rotting insides provided the soldier poets with a very powerful image and conceit. It was not a case of *on* or *at* the Western Front, but *in* the trenches and dugouts; it was subsequently only “the Metaphysicals’ trademark *mise-en-scène* of *eros/thanatos* – [...] *death-erotics* – [that could] tap(ped) [most] provocatively into the experience of soldiers at [in] the front...” (Christie 2007: 107; emphasis in original). It was an uncanny experience of penetrating death – literally living and dying in the earth, without the recourse to be buried properly – that could be rendered in a meaningful – and ‘sane’ – way by far-fetched, strange, witty and ‘the beautifully-eroticised-body’ figures of speech. Fussell (1975: 191-196) describes the Western Front as being more farcical, as a theatre of the absurd,

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<sup>24</sup> All Donne poems are quoted from *The Norton* 1983.

where stalemate became an instance of spectacle and "grotesque comedy", of the unreal and futile pantomime, echoing the mad and lewd sounds of the traditional British music-hall (200-201). Barton (1979: 47) observes in the graveyard scene in *Hamlet* that the failure of the language for death is "a revelation of the essential meaninglessness, the non-sense of human existence beneath its metaphoric dress". However, the horrid corpse had to be linguistically, metonymically and metaphorically 'mannequin-ed' to veil it in any semblance of signification. In this process, the Western Front becomes "the most Metaphysical conceit of all [...]" - and the Donneque poetry written in its digestive bowels precedes T.S. Eliot's post-war appropriation of Donne as an icon for Modernist poetry by a decade (Christie 2007: 150) as well as a surreal conflation of actors and props on a stage where both nothing and everything happens all at once (Fussell 1975: 191-203).

This Metaphysical conceit of the trenches in the war poetry is both a phallic and feminine semiotic construct. Men had to carry the phallic bayonet and flag into no-man's-land; this act by definition excludes women and is clearly a psychoanalytical reading (Campbell 1999: 209). However, the instinctive outpouring of strong feelings which marks the Romantic style and diction of the soldier poets also lends a strong 'hysterical' feminine or even homoerotic quality to the poetry (Campbell 1997: 828). The soldier both *enters* the war on a psychological and physical level, but is also *entered* by bullets, shells and illnesses and by subsequent post-traumatic stressors, and is, therefore, himself violated by phallic objects. This essential victimhood of the soldiers as passive victims (831) in especially Owen's poetry signifies patriarchy's assigned role to women. The resultant psychological fallout created by the tension between aggressive masculinity and female passivity inherent in modern warfare led to shell-shock - a form of male hysteria - which had been perceived to be a very feminine illness (828-829). Furthermore, trench poets like Owen became both mothers and lovers of their men (831), who were not the killers but who were being killed (Goldensohn 2003: 19).

The binary opposition of men as active agents and masculine combatants, and women as passive, weak and absent non-combatants thus becomes muddled. Women as caring others are replaced by male comrades (Campbell 1997: 831) and mothers vindictively produce sons to be sent out to the slaughter (Goldensohn 2003: 46,48). This theme led to Sassoon's and Owen's misogynistic poetry (Campbell 1997: 829); the male construct of war is appropriated as childbirth (Goldensohn 2003: 44-45) as it brings forth a homoerotic spilling of communal blood, valour and the creative act of dying and writing; the nurse tending to open wounds is not merely a passive observer but also an active participant in war (Acton 2004: 57), and her literary eye falls on the wounded male soldier who thus becomes the object of the female gaze (56), a definite reversal of the feminine as voyeuristic erotic map to be read by the male explorer.

This Metaphysical corpse and eroticised body in the poetry finds its most religious symbolic expression in Christ's near naked martyred body. Richard Crashaw's (1613-1649) depiction of the sacred-erotic nature of Christ's blood-suffering found resonance in the trench poets' verse, as they also viewed their comrades as veritable Christs (Christie 2007: 139-141). The heroic dead even displaced Christ on the cross as a symbol of the ultimate sanctified sacrifice (Bourke 1999: 249). As they bore Christ's wounds, they also shared his transcendental soul and body, whose missing parts would be restored in the afterlife, according to the popular spiritualism of the times (234-235). The eroticised self-sacrifice is evident in the poems of the mainstream soldier poets - Rupert Brooke, Robert Graves and Siegfried Sassoon amongst others - who gave meaning to the corpse through the beautification of the apotheosised dead, as was the tradition in the English pastoral elegy before the war (Sychterz 2005: 46-51). The beautiful dead serve as metaphor to dress the corpse in meaning. This is a body that is preserved in death as an elevated Platonic and Christian metaphysical construct (57):

And have we done with War at last?

Well, we've been lucky devils both,  
 And there's no need of pledge or oath  
 To bind our lovely friendship fast,  
 By firmer stuff  
 Close bound enough.

By wire and wood and stake we're bound,  
 By Fricourt and by Festubert,  
 By whipping rain, by the sun's glare,  
 By all the misery and loud sound,  
 By a Spring day,  
 By Picard clay.

Show me the two so closely bound  
 As we, by the red bond of blood,  
 By friendship, blossoming from mud,  
 By Death: we faced him, and we found  
 Beauty in Death,  
 In dead men breath.

(Robert Graves, Two Fusiliers, 1918)<sup>25</sup>

A stark contrast to this deification of the flesh is found in the work of a group of trench poets that include Sassoon, Owen, Rosenberg, Rickword, Gurney and Blunden, whose poetic bodies were graphically rendered as the horror of the trench war became an inescapable theme (Goldensohn 2003: 61). Owen, Rosenberg and Rickword were especially struck full in the face by thematic body parts (Christie 2007). Edgell Rickword dealt particularly graphically with Donne as an example of the physical messiness of death, rather than its beauty (109-122,126):

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<sup>25</sup> Published in *Fairies and Fusiliers* (1918: 9).

I knew a man, he was my chum,  
 but he grew blacker every day,  
 and would not brush the flies away,  
 nor blanch however fierce the hum  
 of passing shells; I used to read,  
 to rouse him, random things from Donne-  
 like 'Get with child a mandrake-root'.  
 But you can tell he was far gone,  
 for he lay gaping, mackerel-eyed,  
 and stiff and senseless as a post  
 even when that old poet cried  
 'I long to talk with some old lover's ghost.'  
 I tried the Elegies one day,  
 But he, because he heard me say:  
 'What needst thou have more covering than a man?'  
 grinned nastily, and so I knew  
 the worms had got his brains at last.  
 There was one thing that I might do  
 To starve the worms; I racked my head  
 for healthy things and quoted Maud.  
 His grin got worse and I could see  
 he sneered at passion's purity.  
 He stank so badly, though we were great chums  
 I had to leave him; then rats ate his thumbs.  
 (Trench Poets (published in 1921); Schyterz 2005: 81-82)

In the poem, not even Donne's erotic love poetry from Song, Love's Deity and Elegy XIX, or even the "greatest [High] Victorian lyric poet" (Sanders 2001: 354) Alfred, Lord Tennyson's (1809-1892) trumpeting of England's elevated colonial and moral cause during the Crimean War in Maud can raise the abject corpse and stop the rot. The trench poets wanted to

speak the corpse poetically, because only through the battered corpse could they manage to approach a representation of their privations. They endeavoured to bridge the chasm in war-time experience that existed between the soldiers and those back home. Strict censorship in Britain and the colonies muted the corpse at home: it was represented only in impersonal casualty lists, and cold and empty memorials and cenotaphs (Goldensohn 2003: 14, 16). The loss suffered by British civilians was death without the corpse – there were no dead bodies to bury (15-16) as it was decided that dead British soldiers would not be returned to their homes because of “demands of equity and economy” (Bourke 1999: 226)<sup>26</sup>; the dead and the living existed side-by-side in the far-off trenches, forests and deserts of the First World War battlefields. Cohabiting with the abject dead had a marked psychological effect on the soldiers. This horror of daily contact with the Kristevan waste-of-wastes was not only a permeating psychological everywhere – death and maiming remained a constant threat, but also a sickening physical presence, and led to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). South Africans were also immersed in this psychological no-man’s-land: “[...] Graveyards are blown up, and one sees the old vaults opened up and mummies all over the show. There are a good few Bosches still to be seen, gassed or bayoneted. A great many are still lying unburied in the dugouts [...]”<sup>27</sup>

War trauma’s symptoms are timeless and universal. Homer’s Achilles is the archetypical traumatised warrior, and could certainly be said to have suffered from what we now call PTSD after the death of his friend Patroclus at the siege of Troy (Hunt 2010: 14-15,162). In a similar way to Homer’s *Iliad*, Shakespeare depicts PTSD in *Henry IV, Part 1* (15). Later historical examples of PTSD are also to be found during the Great Fire of London in 1666, 19th century railway accidents, the Napoleonic wars, the Crimean War, and the American Civil War (15-17). Although the psychological origin for ‘soldier’s heart’ was beginning to be clinically laid bare during the late 19th and early

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<sup>26</sup> In contrast, American dead were returned to their country.

<sup>27</sup> National Library of South Africa, Pretoria Campus (hereafter NLSA), *The Springbok Magazine*, II(9), December 1918: 15.

20th centuries, soldiers were still being executed for cowardice during the First World War (17-19). Only after 1918 was the psychological origin of shellshock widely accepted (20).

Fussell (1975: 191-230) equates the shell hole and shellshock ridden "theatre of war" with Sassoon's wartime experience, which is staged as a melodramatic play in three acts; "preparation, climax, and release" (199). Similarly, the medieval and Renaissance spatial allegory of 'Here be dragons' could be written large over the Western Front's landscape which turned out to be a space ripe for "Victorian pseudo-medieval romance" (135-137), especially the allegorical quest of Christian as described in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1678) which was widely read by the literate volunteers and conscripts of 1914-1918, and its "Valley of the Shadow of Death" served as a potent metaphor for the fiendish no-man's-land (137-143). Hunt (2010: 163) interestingly observes that successfully dealing with war trauma and the stages of literary tragedy are very similar: "Effective processing of emotional traumatic memories is directly analogous to the model of tragedy. There is a traumatic event which involves suffering, and the individual who successfully processes the information gains knowledge and understanding of themselves [sic] and also of the 'true' nature of what it is to be human." Fussell's (1975: 131) reading of the dyadic of literature and the war further underscores the close association of literary texts, war and trauma: "war experience and its recall take the form of the deepest, most universal kind of [tripartite] allegory. Movement up the line, battle, and recovery become emblems of quest, death, and rebirth." Poetry and memoirs<sup>28</sup> were especially able to serve as narrative processors of these highly traumatic - and literary - experiences (Hunt 2010: 161-171; Fussell 1975).

This abject horror of modern war could not be accommodated fully by the trench poets within an outdated High Tennysonian and Georgian poetic diction of private and public rejuvenation that is achieved through conflict

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<sup>28</sup> Examples of these include Robert Graves's *Good-bye to All That* (1929), Siegfried Sassoon's memoir trilogy *The Memoirs of George Sherston* (1928, 1930, 1936), and Erich Maria Remarque's semi-autobiographical novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929).

(Sanders 2001: 354-356; Christie 2007: 117; Sychertz 2005: 84), and "Little Englandism" (Bergonzi 2001: 407) or the "idealization of rural England" (408). Trench poetry – Rickword's poem Trench Poets for instance – fleshes-out the corpse more realistically than Romantic poetic convention does, which was still very much in vogue during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Ivor Gurney's (1890-1937) To His Love, is a characteristic pastoral elegy of the war that bedecks the corpse in flowers:

Cover him, cover him soon!  
 And with thick-set  
 Masses of memorial flowers-  
 Hide that red wet  
 Thing I must somehow forget.  
 (Stallworthy 1993: 181)

He draws from the war poets' arsenal of "Arcadian Recourses" (Fussell 1975: 231-269), which includes roses and poppies, birds and pastoral images, to make sense of the war. Similarly, in Blunden's verse, the "Surrounding pastoral urged them [the battle wearied soldiers] to forget" (267).

At first, even the 'radical' Owen and Sassoon, in a similar vein to Brooke, tried to give voice to their wartime experiences within this 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century poetic framework. Saks (2008) has indicated through a psychological reading of Owen's and Sassoon's poetry that this harking back to more traditional literary forms and devices was an emotional coping mechanism: "The routine horror and brutality of the Western Front initially lay outside the realm of language and symbols and were thus highly concrete and unprocessed experiences" (ii). As identity broke down, traditional literary devices provided these poets with a semblance of normalcy and continuity, or even a poetic form of escape within a world gone insane (152,157). Fussell (1975: 235) agrees with this: "Pastoral reference, whether to literature or to actual rural localities and objects, is a way of

invoking a code to hint by antithesis at the indescribable; at the same time, it is a comfort in itself, like rum, a deep dugout, or a woolly vest". Subsequently, at first the abject corpse could not be processed, and Sassoon resorted to glorifying the war, while Owen escaped into Keats's "faery lands forlorn", which is devoid of war (Saks 2008: 81,84,85,88-89,158). Owen, in a letter to his mother, affirms this escapist poetics: "Do you know what would hold me together on a battlefield? The sense that I was perpetuating the language in which Keats and the rest of them wrote!"<sup>29</sup> But later during the war "it was Owen who was most able to capture and translate the isolating, nightmarish experience of Concrete Symmetry<sup>30</sup> into the symbolic and artistic medium of poetry. In doing so, he (and Sassoon) allowed for a degree of shared experience, connecting young men who had become fragmented and isolated. It allowed for those who had not been in the War to understand better the traumas of those who had" (162-163). The poetry permitted Owen and Sassoon to process and share their highly traumatic experiences symbolically, which is a prerequisite for psychological healing, and subsequently it served as therapy (iii, 164-165). Even Owen's Dulce Et Decorum Est that has traditionally been viewed by literary critics of war poetry as an example par excellence of the ironic and realistic texts of war, which is the mode of poetic expression preferred by these scholars, descends into a dream text of the visionary, similar to Strange Meeting (Campbell 1999: 211). Campbell (1999: 202,211,213) supports Saks's (2008) postulation that war's realities can be given a meta-meaning through symbolism or "dream vision", as is the case in Owen's famous poem, as well as in Strange Meeting. This is very similar to Fussell's (1975) assigning "romance quest", "war as theater", and "young shepherd" pastoralism to the war poets' literary arsenal.

The memory of the traumatic event is processed in Dulce Et Decorum Est by indicating what the psychological effects of war are on combatants, and by constructing a dream-like - or even nightmarish hellish - and partly

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<sup>29</sup> Owen quoted in Clausson (2006: 104).

<sup>30</sup> Paranoid-schizoid and anxiety laden psychosomatic symptoms as experienced in PTSD.

conciliatory meeting between the enemies in Strange Meeting. In Rickword's Trench Poets, the disturbing encounter with a corpse is, similar to that in Strange Meeting, psychologically and emotionally rationalised through a dream text, whose past tense retelling of the horror serves both symbolically to appropriate the suffering – and subsequently come to terms with its stressors – and to distance the self in time from the abject corpse. Additionally, Rickword employs sardonic irony to remove the corpse from reality, as the bizarre poetic description absorbs some of the grotesqueness of the constantly oozing corpse by deflecting the literary eye of the reader from the abject to the verbal shenanigans.

The reality of war is symbolically rendered by these poets to indicate to the civilian audience what the psychological affect of the war is on its combatants. This combat gnosticism disallows civilians from entering the trenches, as only the soldiers really know what it is like; however, Owen and Sassoon want to burden the uninformed public with the Pandora's box of psychological horrors that war unleashes on its victims – the soldiers. It must be noted that within this symbolically dreamlike meta-reality postulated by Saks (2008) and Campbell (1999), the disturbing corpse is still an all-consuming presence, even if it is dressed in dream fabric or symbolic cloth, and it points a crooked accusatory finger at warmongers:

If in some smothering dreams you too could pace  
 Behind the wagon that we flung him in,  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, -  
 My friend, you would not tell with such high zest  
 To children ardent for some desperate glory,

The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est

Pro patria mori.

(Wilfred Owen, Dulce Et Decorum Est, iii; Stallworthy 1993: 188-189)

However, for the majority of soldier poets, death remained beautiful, even if it represented only a skin-deep cosmetic veneer. They emulated the Alexander of British war poetry, Rupert Brooke, whose early death in the war immortalised his 'corpseless' poetry, which poeticises the beautiful, youthful body through Romantic diction (Sychterz 2005: 60). In his sonnet Peace, "swimmers into cleanness leaping", enlistment offers erotic freedom from the homefront's spiritual stalemate and bodily decay (Fussell 1975: 301). It is good to die young, as youth remains forever fixed beyond the grave; no broken and withering corpses are to be found there. The grave is like the Attic shape of Keats's Ode on a Grecian Urn<sup>31</sup> whose "marble men and maidens" (v, 42) never grow old, even "When old age shall this generation waste, / Thou shalt remain [...]" (v, 46-47). It is a "silent form" that "dost tease us out of thought / As doth eternity: Cold Pastoral!" (v, 44-45):

Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!

There's none of these so lonely and poor of old,

But, dying, has made us rarer gifts than gold.

These laid the world away; poured out the red

Sweet wine of youth; gave up the years to be

Of work and joy, and that unhop'd serene,

That men call age; and those who would have been,

Their sons, they gave, their immortality.

Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth,

Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.

Honour has come back, as a king, to earth,

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<sup>31</sup> The Norton (1983: 663-664).

And paid his subjects with a royal wage;  
 And Nobleness walks in our ways again;  
 And we have come into our heritage.  
 (Rupert Brooke, The Dead; Stallworthy 1993: 162)

Most of the literary British soldiers of the war wanted to gloss over ugly war in beautiful, abstract language (Christie 2007: 105), and the Romantic nature lyric of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was one of the most effective examples to copy in order to achieve this.

Claussion (2006: 109-112) asserts that it is the educated English soldier poets who gave voice to a poetic experience in the form of the Romantic nature lyric genre, which, during the war, had turned its impulsive, exuberant and sensitively expressive gaze towards the topic of war. However, the main theme was not the reality of war, but the emotively loaded and personalised “poetic occasion” that is offered by nature during war, and the lyrical beauty of and reflections on a personal wartime – and not war torn – experience. The poetry is still Romantic lyrical wonderings in nature, and personal reflections thereof – ugly war seemingly has no place in this Keatsian and Wordsworthian model. Nature, even in war, is a place that inspires poetic beauty. And as Keats reminded them “‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty’ – that is all / Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (Ode on a Grecian Urn, 49-50). The corpse is a too slippery abject; it was only the poetic and Romantic pastoral language that could chisel out a be-garlanded homoerotic effigy that could remain static for long enough to be infused with signification – the beautiful young body that signifies the transcendental truth or regenerative quality of death: Brooke’s “rich Dead”, who bring “Holiness”, “Love”, “Honour”, “Nobleness”, sweet “Pain”, and “immortality” to their sons and heirs. It follows in the tradition of Tennyson’s “proto-jingo [poetic] blood-lust” in The Charge of the Light Brigade, where the battlefield is picture framed as a heroic sweeping painting (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 12). It also builds on the homoerotic tradition in English Victorian poetry (Fussell 1975: 281-

286). Owen was essentially the poet of the "boys" and "lads", and their eroticised and frail physicality (291-299). Men fell in love with each other's bodies (280), because their aesthetic beauty contrasted so markedly with the waste all around them (277-279). The nearness of male bodies in the trenches stimulated strong emotions, especially in suffering and death (Bourke 1999: 133-137). In Victorian and Edwardian Britain, male bonding originated in the public schools, the boys' clubs and organisations, and physical training clubs (137-144). These organisations emphasised the narcissistic love of the body that evolved into the love of the communal male body, which was also a feature of army life (128-133).

These virile activities were a conscious effort to improve the poor physicality of Englishmen during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was a result of widespread illnesses, and which was further exacerbated by inadequate nutrition (Bourke 1999: 140). In contrast, the colonial Kiwis, Canadians and Australians were renowned for their perceived physical superiority, which they had 'proven' during the 1899-1902 campaign in South Africa (Nasson 2010: 306-307). During the Anglo-Boer War, more British soldiers died from preventable diseases than from bullets (306,314), and more than half of the British recruits were rejected because they were physically unfit for active service (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 43). To a large degree then, the bodies in Britain had to be primed in gymnasias and boys' scouting ventures to combat perceived physical degeneracy (Bourke 1999: 137-144).

This view of colonial superior physicality, notwithstanding efforts in Britain to harden men's bodies, was transferred to the poetry of the Great War. Canadian fighting men were depicted as "Weather-bronzed sons of the range", and "Brown-beaten men of the soil" with "brawny-limb[s]" (Baetz 2005: 33). Similarly, Australians were the larger-than-life, modern-day Herculeses (Hoffenberg 2001: 119-120). The British soldier did not stand a chance and was literarily dwarfed by these striking mythologised specimens. Both the Australian and Canadian soldiers were the quintessential "rag-time army" of the New World, who were drawn from all sections of the

community, which highlights both their brotherly communality and rugged individuality (120; Baetz 2005: 44-46).

Together with the Canadian and Australian poetry, the Irish experience of embodiment has interesting correlations with the South African experience. However, it suffices at this point to indicate that the Irish drew on a rich heroic tradition that elevates their warrior bodies to those of heroes. Irish war poetry claims an Odyssey and Gaelic tradition of myth, legend and heroism for its soldiers (Phillips 2008). However, ironically, the Irish martial body was othered by both the 'bronzed' colonials (Hoffenberg 2001: 120), and the English (Phillips 2008: 387), who were beset by the 'Irish troubles' during the pre-war years. Veterans returning to Ireland also found that their sacrifices were negated, the memory of the war repressed, and their physical and psychological wounds made light of by the anti-British nationalist sentiment in their home country (Bourke 1999: 69-70). Even in Britain, war enthusiasm quickly waned and the disabled veterans were soon deposed as hero-warriors and abjected as helpless bodies (74-75). This othering of bodies has a marked significance for South African war poetry and its depiction of death as will be illustrated in Chapter 2.

Essentially, the ugly corpse is always the absent or absented text. Acton (2004: 75-76) observes that "the absent text" in eyewitness accounts or narratives by frontline nurses in the First World War and Vietnam War represents "the place that the reader cannot enter, a place that represents an implied horror too terrible to be interpreted by the gaze and which the writer cannot or refuses to articulate. In directing the gaze towards a space outside the narrative, we find that for all the writers discussed [in her study] [...] the meaning inherent to the traumatic experience is located in the unseen text: 'all the rest that can never be written'". It is Campbell's (1999: 202) combat gnosticism or fraternity - or sorority in Acton's case - that shares a "secret knowledge [of war experience] which only an initiated elite knows", and then only partially. This traumatic experience can never be fully embodied and narrated as it is too fractured. War experience and narrative is a collection of

flashbacks and images that flickers on and off in a non-sequential manner (Acton 2004: 65). These narratives can, however, be carefully manipulated – like poetry – to give a semblance of normalcy by ‘wiping out’ or substituting the traumatic wartime gaze with images of wholeness (70). It is also crucial to note that Acton’s study of wartime frontline nurse-narratives has revealed that this war gaze is in some instances more influenced by what is physically seen and its subsequent psychological processing than by cultural parameters (62), but culture does remain a determining factor in what is revealed and what is not (75).

Claussion (2006) convincingly argues that even the radical trench lyric’s theme of the corpse’s abjection is to be found within the convention of the Romantic nature lyric – a literary tradition deeply engrained within the British literary establishment of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Poems, especially by Rosenberg and Blunden, and to a lesser degree by Sassoon and Owen, deal with war’s horrors in the characteristic Romantic nature lyric form of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries by adapting its discursive and reflective dealings with nature. The result is the trench lyric that addresses modern war through a traditional poetic convention, which is in accordance with Campbell’s (1999) view that even radical trench poetry does not represent a clear mirror image of the reality of war, but rather a shattered reflection of its psychological loss – where nature and dreams become metaphoric realms within which the abject corpse can be ‘realistically’ dealt with. The language used oscillates between traditional Romantic and ‘modern’ conventions:

Trenches in the moonlight, in the lulling moonlight  
 Have had their loveliness; when dancing dewy grasses  
 Caressed us passing along their earthly lanes;  
 When the crucifix hanging over was strangely illumined,  
 And one imagined music, one even heard the brave bird  
 In the sighing orchards flute above the weedy well.  
 There are such moments; forgive me that I note them

Nor gloze that there comes soon the nemesis of beauty,  
 In the fluttering relics that a first glimmer wakened  
 Terror - the no man's ditch suddenly forking:  
 There, the enemy's best with bombs and brains and courage!  
 - Softly, swiftly, at once be animal and angel -  
 But O no, no, they're Death's malkins dangling in the wire  
 For the moon's interpretation.  
 (Edmund Blunden, Illusions; Clausson 2006: 118)

The poetic persona creates a Romantic dream-world of “dancing dewy grasses”, “earthly lanes”, “sighing orchards” and a “weedy well” that is bathed in soothing “moonlight”, while a brave lone bird is singing. However, the second section of this sonnet is quickly transformed into a nightmare of corpses rotting on the wire-entanglements that criss-cross no-man’s-land. Although the corpse is metaphorized as “fluttering relics” and “Death's malkins”, it represents the perverse presence of the abject waste that is both an ambivalent and dichotomous “animal[istic] and angel[like]” presence, which leads to an unbearable uncertainty: “O no, no”. It is both the no-thing, and no-place, the empty “O” or zero, and the every-thing and every-place of the waste that has fallen through (*cadere* - *cadaver*) time and place. The full horror is not and cannot be sustained as the reader is reminded at the poem’s conclusion that it is the moon which guards the scene of death; its soft moon beams partly veil the *manqué* by touching it with shadowy hues of grey. Only the moon is able to approach the abject corpse; however, this is only a half-knowledge of the part-thing, as it is only partly mirrored in the moon’s half-light or part-darkness.

The trench lyric is, therefore, an example of a Modernist text with definite postmodernist tendencies, which in its essence also adapts and renews older genres to address very modern concerns (Clausson 2006; 125-126). The Modernist establishment, which was very critical of ‘unimaginative’ and ‘un-aesthetical’ war poetry, dabbled in the same art of the rejuvenation or

reworking of traditional genres: for example, during the 1920s and 1930s Modernist poetry was greatly influenced by the older 17<sup>th</sup> century Metaphysical poetic conventions of Donne and Co. (Christie 2007: 2,150), and the quintessential Modernist, T.S. Eliot, was "that inveterate adaptor and re-newer" of ancestral poetic sensibilities (Clausson 2006: 126). Essentially, it is both the *avant-garde* Modernists and the trench poets' quest to lift the thick individual-effacing industrialised veil on the individual:

Unreal City,  
 Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,  
 A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,  
 I had not thought death had undone so many.  
 (T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land, I, 60-63, 1922)

Although Eliot's persona grapples here with the significance of the meaninglessness of industrialised city life, Owen's poetic voice in Anthem for Doomed Youth loudly proclaims the "Unreal[ity]" of modern warfare in a similar vein:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?  
 - Only the monstrous anger of the guns.  
 (i, 1-2)

The image of city dwellers and soldiers who are forced like dumb cattle to "flow" through the narrow enclosure of restricted alternatives is clearly evident here. The individual is led to the slaughter on the altar of the technological and concomitant economic and social 'progress'.

The South African poetry of the war falls within a traditionalist/Modernist matrix of war representation. The abject skull is not as graphically metaphorically-metonymically rendered by gore as the trench-poets' adapted Metaphysical and Romantic nature lyric poetry, but it is still

ominously present in its absence, just as in those Anglo-American war poets writing in the 'corpseless' Romantic nature lyric and metaphysical mould. In Kristeva's and Blanchot's *lingua* and Blunden's in Illusions the corpse is both everywhere and nowhere, a something and nothing. It is thus also a representation of another thing that has fallen off the original - an abject leftover. This representation of the *other thing* in the war poetry of South Africa is psychologically, culturally and environmentally specific to this country. All subsequent metaphorical, metonymic or deconstructivist offshoots for this abject waste or *leftover* in South African First World War poetry fall within the "Shades of Adamastor".

**Chapter 2: Shades of Adamastor:<sup>32</sup> Cascading (*Cascare*) Abject Shadow (or) the Mimetic Other Thing (Leftover)**

On Receiving News of the War

Significance

Snow is a strange white word;  
No ice or frost  
Have asked of bud or bird  
For Winter's cost.

Yet ice and frost and snow  
From earth to sky  
This Summer land doth know,  
No man knows why.

In all men's hearts it is.  
Some spirit old  
Hath turned with malign kiss  
Our lives to mould.

Red fangs have torn His face.  
God's blood is shed.  
He mourns from His lone place  
His children dead.

O! ancient crimson curse!  
Corrode, consume.  
Give back this universe

The cunning moment curves its claws  
Round the body of our curious wish  
But push a shoulder through its straitened  
laws  
Then are you hooked to wriggle like a fish.

Lean in high middle 'twixt' two tapering  
points,  
Yet rocks and undulations control  
The agile brain the limber joints  
The sinews of the soul.

Chaos that coincides, form that refutes all  
sway,  
Shapes to the eye quite other to the touch,  
All twisted things continue to our day  
Like added limbs and hair dispreaded  
overmuch.

And after it draws in its claws  
The rocks and unquiet sink to a flat  
ground,  
Then follow desert-hours, the vacuous

<sup>32</sup> This title comes from the collection of poetry by M. van Wyk Smith (1988), *Shades of Adamastor: an Anthology of Poetry*, which traces the othering of the Titan of the Cape, Adamastor, in South African literary history.

Its pristine bloom.

(Isaac Rosenberg, Cape Town,  
1914)

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pause

Till some mad indignation unleashes the  
hound.

And those flat hours and dead unseeing  
things

Cower and crowd and burrow for us to  
use

Where sundry gapings spurn and  
preparing wings

And O! our hands would use all ere we  
lose.

(Isaac Rosenberg, Cape Town, 1914-1915)

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Isaac Rosenberg (1890-1918), arguably the most 'modern' of the trench poets and hailed by Siegfried Sassoon as a "genius" and by T.S. Eliot as the "most extraordinary" poet of the war (Wilson 2008, jacket-cover), echoes this abject othering of the other thing in both his private and poetic texts, written during his stay in South Africa. He visited his sister and other family relations in Cape Town from June 1914 to March 1915. Another reason for his African sojourn was that he wanted to escape the British class confines and elitism of the period, as he himself was an othered Cockney Anglo-Jew from lowly Whitechapel. Significantly, in the "cultural backwater" (Wilson 2008: 212) that was Cape Town he could find a more appreciative audience for his art and poetry than in England. He was a student at that epitome of culture, the Slade School of Art in London. Rosenberg did find a few attentive upper class South African disciples, but for the rest, English-speaking South Africans and Afrikaners, he had the following to say in a letter to an English friend shortly after his arrival:

I am in an infernal city by the sea. This city has men in it – and these men have souls in them – or at least have the passages to souls. Though they are millions of years behind time they have yet reached the stage of evolution that knows ears and eyes. But these passages are dreadfully clogged up; gold dust, diamond dust, stocks and shares, and heaven knows what other flinty muck. Well, I've made up my mind to clear through all this rubbish (Rosenberg quoted in Wilson 2008: 208).

Eventually Rosenberg decided to leave South Africa as his artistic sensibilities were muffled in the land of the white Philistines:

Nobody had an ounce of interest in art [...] Think of me, a creature of the most exquisite civilization, planted in this barbarous land (Wilson 2008: 243).

Rosenberg did not even consider giving the blacks such a textual rebuff; they were seen only as cheap sitters for his paintings (Wilson 2008: 200). Ironically, the object of British upper class ridicule and of the British artistic establishment's snub, Rosenberg, objectifies others, Cape Town citizens. It is an othering that also indirectly passes judgement on the literary worth of South African literature. A decade after Rosenberg's visit to South Africa, Francis Carey Slater (1876-1958), South Africa's most eminent poet of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, remarked:

In the course of conversation, some years ago, an English poet and critic remarked to me: 'We in England regard Dominion verse – especially Australian and South African verse – as devoid of literary merit. There is no sale for it here.' In reply to my inquiries the gentleman who made this somewhat sweeping statement admitted that he had read very little South African verse [...] [Sir Herbert Warren remarked that] 'Rudyard Kipling, in a sense the foremost English poet of South Africa, when asked what South African poetry there was besides his own, replied: "'As to South African poetry there's Pringle and Pringle [a British 1820-settler], and after that one must hunt the local newspapers.'" [Slater rejects this comment by asserting:] Whilst in nowise agreeing with the learned Professor's [Warren's] estimate of Mr. Kipling as 'in any sense' the 'foremost English poet of

South Africa,' I would also... gently question Mr. Kipling's qualifications as a critic of South African poetry (Slater 1925: xi-xii).

Rosenberg's private abjection of Cape Town is most evident in his two very public poems, On Receiving News of the War and Significance reproduced above, which he wrote in South Africa before returning to England. In the former poem "This Summer land" (ii, 7) is transformed into an icy hell by "Some spirit old" who is "malign", because the thing has "torn" God's face and God's children with "Red fangs" (iii, 10-11; iv, 13-16). The thing is an empty "O", the "ancient crimson curse" (v, 17), whose moral corruption has spilled over to "corrode" and "consume" (v, 18) its body, and those of others. The poem is interpreted in various ways as representing war's strange destructive power expressed through the unnatural mixing of the seasons, religious purification through the spilling of Christ's blood, and as illuminating the vampire-like Kabbalah-demon or "Female God", Lilith, and her vicious-erotic powers over god, man and infant (Wilson 2008: 236-238). However, both the temporal and spatial context of this poetic construction indicates that there is another, much more ominous reading to the text, which is also reflected in Significance.

In Significance, as in Wistfully in Pallid Splendour (Wilson 2008: 203-204), Coleridge's The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (II, 123-126) is evoked in which the "very deep [sea] did rot" and where "slimy things did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy sea". Similar to the "spirit" in On Receiving News of the War, a primal, permeating, forceful and untameable "chaos" is present in Significance that is a "Shape... to the eye quite other to the touch" (iii, 10), a "twisted thing..." (iii, 11), "dead unseeing thing..." (v, 17), or "sundry gaping..." (v, 19), with "added limbs and hair dispreaded overmuch" (iii, 12) and "claws" (i, 1; iv, 13). This "spirit" and "Chaos" are the "rocks" that reign high over Cape Town - the Titan Table Mountain, with its minions Devil's Peak and Lion's Head. It is both the Cape of Good Hope or verdant paradise and *Cabo Tormentoso* - a place of cataclysmic storms that are sent by the monster Adamastor and result in shipwrecks and even in the breakdown of

meaning (Van Wyk Smith 1998). This is echoed in the desperate “O!” in On Receiving News of the War, and the maddened “O!” in Significance, whose “mad indignation unleashes the hound” (iv, 16) – the beast Adamastor. This binary ambivalence is also evident in Rosenberg’s other writings. At first, he admired the Cape for its natural beauty, but soon it became a very threatening place (Wilson 2008: 216), where barbarism “Cower[s] and crowd[s] and burrow[s]” (Significance, v, 18) just below Cape Town’s thin veneer of civilisation.

The prototypical image of this othering of physical and psychological bodies in poetry written in and of South Africa by both visitors and South Africans themselves can be located in the shade of the monster Adamastor, the ominous metaphor for Table Mountain, the terrible Titan of the Cape. In the poem The Lusiads, published in 1572, the Portuguese poet Luis Vaz de Camoens describes Vasco De Gama’s rounding of the Cape in 1497 and his subsequent encounter with Adamastor, the Spirit of the Cape. This poem, together with preceding historical, ethnographical, literary and cartographical descriptions of Africa, and specifically of southern Africa, is steeped in mythical renditions of the dichotomous and ambivalent paradisiacal and hellish qualities of its natural landscape and its savage or monstrous, albeit occasionally docile, inhabitants (Van Wyk Smith 1998: 1-20; De Kock 2004: 10). Van Wyk Smith (1998) indicates that “Such readings of the Cape and its people echo through many a later account as Adamastor gradually becomes not just the barbaric spirit of the Cape but the barbarian himself” (22): it is Rosenberg’s “spirit” that evolves into a “chaos rock”. White settler poetry, from Thomas Pringle’s The Cape of Storms (1834), to Roy Campbell’s Adamastor (1930), is subsequently characterised by an ambivalent Cape that is both hostile and Edenic, but which is always shaded in Adamastor’s ominous presence (Van Wyk Smith 1998).

Although the analytical school of psychology of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) has been largely discredited today, his theory of the unconscious does provide us with a useful psychological concept to link Adamastor and

the poetry of the abject. Jung concludes that “The unborn work in the psyche of the artist is a force of nature that achieves its end either with tyrannical might or with the subtle cunning of nature itself, quite regardless of the personal fate of the man who is its vehicle [...] think of the creative process as a living thing implanted in the human psyche [...] an autonomous complex [...] the collective unconscious” (Jung 2003: 87,93). Various communal archetypes or “primordial” images are perceived by a common people which find expression in their literature in the form of a perpetually returning “daemon, [...] human being, or [...] process” (94). In Jung’s *lingua*, Adamastor becomes an archetypal mythological sign rising from a dark and formless primordial world in the collective unconscious - “a vision seen ‘as in a glass, darkly’” (113).

In a South African context, it is Table Mountain that serves as the physical manifestation or image of such amorphous pervasiveness (Van Wyk Smith 1998: 51):

A shade so sinister its coming wore  
 That through our [De Gama’s crew] quickened pulses terror spread,  
 The great waves thundered and we heard them roar  
 Crashing far off upon a rocky head.  
 I [De Gama] cried, ‘O heavenly Powers whom I adore,  
 What threat divine is this? What secret dread  
 Now stalks this dismal realm? It shows a form  
 Of something far more terrible than storm.’

While I yet spake, beneath that sombre cowl  
 A horrid form took shape before our gaze:  
 A figure huge and strong, with heavy jowl  
 And unkempt beard, whose sullen eyes, ablaze  
 From caves beneath the beetling forehead, scowl  
 With hate enough to frighten and amaze-

Grey and clay-matted was his shock of hair;  
 Yellow his teeth in his black mouth appear;

So vast his limbs and such a height he showed  
 He must be second only in his size  
 To that colossal statue of old Rhodes,  
 A wonder of the world to ancient eyes;  
 His voice vibrates and, quivering, forebodes;  
 From subterranean deeps it seems to rise.  
 To hear and see him there, upon that deep,  
 Made each scalp tingle and our flesh to creep.

(From The Lusiads, Canto 5, 38-40, Luis Vaz de Camoens; tr. by Guy Butler, 1987.)

Camoens's Cape, the threatening and gigantic primitive rock-form with Neanderthal physical features – “heavy jowl”, “unkempt beard”, “sullen eyes” set in “caves”, “beetling forehead”, “clay-matted” hair, and “Yellow teeth” – is unmistakably also Rosenberg's. Notwithstanding this pervasive threat, Cape poetry by white poets written during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was still self-assured in its proclamation of Adamastor's defeat in the face of white colonial encroachment (Van Wyk Smith 1998: 24). It was only Roy Campbell's Rounding the Cape (1930) that set up a problematic paradise un-gained topos in South African poetry, which reflects especially English-speaking South Africans' phobic-schizophrenic relationship with Africa (Van Wyk Smith 1998: 26-37) – today's ‘slide’ or emigrate ‘back’ to Mother England, or ‘stay’ debate.

Blacks and Afrikaners – the ‘white tribe’ of Africa – become, in the eyes of both English-speaking South Africans and the First World inhabitants, the leftovers of this Adamastorian othering. They are described in 19<sup>th</sup> century travel and fictitious narratives as alternatively noble Roman peasant soldiers, or lazy, fat, untrustworthy and illiterate barbarians (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 3-

18). This dark sway of Adamastor's shade prevailed, which led to the abject othering of living bodies which ironically intersected with the *fin de siècle* of decadence in Europe. For the blacks "[their] literary stock [...] fell rapidly, and [...] the second half of the nineteenth and early twentieth century [...] must be regarded as the dark ages of the literary representation of blacks in our [South African] literature. Almost nothing could redeem the 'Kaffir' [...]" (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 16). Similarly, by 1900, "In the more realistic [literary] mode adopted by [Olive] Schreiner [1855-1920] the Boer [Afrikaner] remained the indolent, corpulent, ignorant racist of [Sir John] Barrow's [(1764-1848) early 19<sup>th</sup> century] 'African peasant'" (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 15). This literary fallout also came to pass in the history. *Johnny Boer* was posited to be genetically inferior to *Tommy Atkins* during the Anglo-Boer War (Nasson W 1980: 124).

South African general history and literary history is a deadly game in this *ring-a-ring-a-roses*<sup>33</sup> of physical, psychological, socio-political and literary othering that plays out within the open wound of the Kristevan abjected corpse, and which leaves definite traces in the South African poetry of the Great War. 19<sup>th</sup> century British visitors objectified the English-speaking settlers – their literature, although not necessarily their bodies. These settlers, on their part, regarded the Afrikaners and the blacks as the abject object, both their cultures and bodies, and the Afrikaners in turn physically and psychologically othered the blacks. This open wound in South African history has subsequently become wider. Abject examples of this widening wound among the many instances of white-black and white-white/black-black

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<sup>33</sup> "Ring-a-ring-a-roses,  
A pocket full of posies;  
Hush! hush! hush! hush!  
[also "Ashes! ashes!, ashes!, ashes!"; or "Atishoo!, atishoo!, atishoo!, atishoo!"]  
We're all tumbled down."  
[also "all fall down"]

The poem's or nursery rhyme's origin is uncertain but there is a strong case for its being a playful playground reference to the very destructive bubonic or pneumonic plagues of the Middle Ages (The Phrase Finder. Martin, G. *The Meaning and Origin of the Expression: Ring a Ring o' Roses...* Available at: <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/ring-a-ring-of-roses.html>. Accessed: 10 March 2012).

fratricide that litter the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are the Xhosa cattle-killing of 1856-1857<sup>34</sup>, when approximately 40 000 Xhosa died of starvation (Keller 1978: 107; Peires 1987: 43; Mda 2004: 294) and possibly even more through incessant warfare with the British,<sup>35</sup> and the British internment-camp system of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902,<sup>36</sup> during which the bodies of black and Afrikaner women were abjected as filth in order to explain the death of more than 40 000 women, children and old men.<sup>37</sup> The philanthropist Emily Hobhouse's descriptions of the abject in the camps were contested by the British government through Millicent Fawcett's Ladies' Commission report on the 'true' state of affairs in the camps. Its findings have given sustenance to the 'filthy women' topos, and the belief that the women themselves were primarily responsible for the deaths of their children because of their lack of personal hygiene and primitive medicinal practices (De Reuck 1999: 75-78; Van Heyningen 2013: 195-196); the blacks' suffering was not mentioned in Fawcett's accounts and Hobhouse's texts (1902 and 1924) acknowledge their plight but do not discuss it in any detail (De Reuck 1999: 70-72). This silence implies a double-othering, an unspoken and unspeakable abjection - the great "hush" that has fallen beyond history. Warwick (1983: 152) depicts the blacks' suffering in the camps as even worse than that of the whites, who in contrast eventually received better living conditions through camp reforms.

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<sup>34</sup> This was an effort by the Xhosa to rid their country of British military encroachments by sacrificing their cattle and by destroying their crops to placate the ancestral spirits and to usher in an age of abundance (Keller 1978; Peires 1987; Peires 1989; Peires 1981; Zarwan 1976).

<sup>35</sup> During the Sixth Frontier War (1834-1835) between the Xhosa and British in the Eastern Cape, the corpse of the murdered king Hintsa was mutilated by British soldiers who were looking for military souvenirs in the form of bodily trinkets (Maylam 1989: 97-98; Morris 2004: 100-101).

<sup>36</sup> Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the leader of the British Liberal party, indicated during the war that the concentration camps and scorched-earth policy that Lord Kitchener employed in South Africa were "methods of barbarism" (Spies 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Mrs Henry Venter, a camp inmate, describes the Heilbron internment camp as "a living grave", and another interned woman, Johanna Rousseau, remarks that in the camp at Kroonstad "Sometimes there were two corpses in one coffin. They [British camp authorities] often put as many as eight coffins in one grave" (De Reuck 1999: 74,75). Even in Britain there were mass burials of paupers, which sometimes were unaccompanied by any official church service. The bodies of the unclaimed deceased poor were also considered fertile objects for medical experimentation (Bourke 1999: 216-219).

Pertinent or rather abject examples of the dehumanisation of the black body, and especially the 'military body', after the Anglo-Boer War are to be found in *The Nongqai*, the magazine for the armed services in South Africa. Shortly after the battle of Mome Gorge during the Zulu chief Bambatha's rebellion of 1906 against the Natal colony, his corpse was beheaded for identification purposes – his family had to own the head as that of their family member. The head was then reburied with the corpse. Soon after, the head was exhumed and taken to London where a taxidermist set it on a wooden frame with an identification plaque. This 'trophy' later found its way back to Pretoria. The execution of a group of 1906 Zulu rebels was also photographed, and published nine years after the incident – the first time a public execution was publicly documented in this fashion in South Africa.<sup>38</sup> The veracity of these incidents is not at stake here, but the way the black body was viewed is. However, exhibiting stuffed Bushmen or San heads and representing them as mannequin 'models' was a common practice in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and a fad in 20<sup>th</sup> century South African museum displays – the 'dummies' and not the heads (Skotnes 2004). Another example of this abjection is to be found in *The Nongqai* of July 1917. In this issue, the dead body of the hunted Ovambo Chief Mandume is arranged like that of a slaughtered animal, with his Union Defence Force<sup>39</sup> executioners striking a pose in an archetypal hunter's trophy-photo.<sup>40</sup>

An individual iconic instance of this othering and dismembering of bodies and texts in South African history, and which has also found resonance in the literature, is that of Sarah Baartmann or Saartjie Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus". She was an early 19<sup>th</sup> century Khoi woman of the Cape with accentuated Khoisan physical features. She was presented as an anthropological oddity in London and Paris, where she eventually died and became a museum 'exhibit' (Morris 2004: 86-87). She formed part of a

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<sup>38</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, III(5), 12 May 1915: 270.

<sup>39</sup> The Union of South Africa defeated the German forces in German South-West Africa in 1915, and took charge of this area, which included Ovamboland (L'Ange 1991). The Union Defence Force was established in 1912, shortly after the act of Union.

<sup>40</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VIII(1), July 1917: 53.

procession of exhibiting, poking, slaughtering and ‘stuffing’ of San, Khoi and other ‘exotic’ creatures’ bodies within the British Empire. These abject bodies were also sold as slaves and used as museum exhibits in Europe and South Africa (Skotnes 2004). In Zake Mda’s novel, *The Heart of Redness* (2000: 194), the main protagonist, Camagu, mentions at a party that the private parts of Baartman are part of a museum exhibit in Paris.<sup>41</sup> This terrible revelation leads to immediate conflict and horror among the revellers. The white Dalton admonishes Camagu: “That’s what you get when you dig out the past that is best forgotten” (194). Camagu’s reply to Dalton reveals the spiralling significance of Mda’s and South African texts on othering: “It is not the past [...] It is the present. Those trophies are still there [...] today [...] as we speak” (194; own emphasis). Camagu implies that the past is present in the here and now. There are traces (Saartjie Baartman’s private parts – the ‘trophies’) of the past in the present (modern day exhibition). They are there – a physical trace. However, this trace is a presence of absence; the parts do not represent the full text of what constitutes – or constituted – Baartman’s suffering. They are only part of the constantly flickering, varied and changing signifiers of what ‘really’ composes the historical personage Saartjie Baartman – the signified. This trace indicates the perpetual absence of the signified. It illustrates the poststructuralist nature of *The Heart of Redness* and its dealings with the corpse in that the signifier (history as text and text as history) is not fully present – as represented by parts of Baartman’s wholeness – and that the signified or the ‘true’ content of what actually happened – Baartman’s ‘real’ existence in time and space – is constantly changing because of re-interpretations and re-representations. Baartman’s body parts form part of her but are not her true self. She is apart from herself – twice removed from herself. And the viewer is thrice removed – a spectator of bits that once formed part of a whole being. Baartman’s dissected body is a symbol for the bloody seam of South African history and literature that “is the place where

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<sup>41</sup> Baartman’s dissected body parts were ‘housed’ at the Musée de l’Homme, Paris, and eventually returned to South Africa for burial in 2002 (Morris 2004: 87).

difference and sameness are hitched together – where they are brought to self-awareness, denied, or displaced into third terms” (De Kock 2004: 12; my own emphasis). It is this uncanny corpse that is thus thrice removed from reality; it is both itself and not itself, something else and nothing else, and this horror cannot be fully acknowledged by the viewer. However, the ‘living abjected corpse’ goes even beyond this; it is a living trace of something else, the other thing or leftover that should be dead: the zombie.

These abject attitudes concerning the living corpse were also held in England during the Great War as maimed, crippled and deformed civilian and military bodies were abjected. The sacrifices of soldiers, and their corporeal mutilation, were soon forgotten in Britain as amnesia and disgust set in – their deformities and deaths became synonymous with the ugly and horrible work-house life and death of the unclaimed pauper (Bourke 1999: 70,211-216,251). Britain was a society that publicly exhibited the “disgusting objects” of the neglected and ‘unnatural’ dead for the voyeuristic public gaze and that used unclaimed bodies as medical test dummies (216-219). This corporeal voyeurism was also transferred to living bodies, as Baartman and the well-known ‘Elephant man’ Joseph Merrick’s examples illustrate. To a certain degree, this attitude of the abjection of the other even exists today, as Isaac Rosenberg’s biographer illustrates:

Condescending in the extreme, Rosenberg’s reaction [to the uncivilised Capetonians as being soulless] may yet have had some truth in it (Wilson 2008: 208).

Early 20<sup>th</sup> century individual suffering, which is powerfully expressed through trauma narratives, of which poetry forms an essential part, has been negated or hijacked for political agendas in South Africa: firstly by early 20<sup>th</sup> century British imperialists to justify morally the Anglo-Boer war; secondly by the Afrikaner patriarchy after the war, to create a myth of the racially pure and masculine Afrikaner *volk*, a long-time suffering nation which had to provide moral credence for apartheid; and thirdly by modern scholars to

negate any comparisons with the Abject of abjects, the 1939-1945 Nazi policy (De Reuck 1999). In interviews conducted during the Anglo-Boer War documentary *Scorched Earth/Verskroeiende Aarde* (2001) two British historians indicated that the 'filthy' traditional medicinal practices of the Boer women directly led to the death of their children in the concentration camps. The only instance of an approachable Kristevan wholeness, the womb, has, therefore, been made a breeding ground for waste; the placenta has turned cancerous inside the womb. In the British concentration camps, it was and is still held today by some scholars that women were slaying their own children through ignorance - the other thing was conceived, or rather not-conceived:

Dark the room without a lamp (x2)  
And there lies the thing, O alla! *etc.*

My mattress, the blanket yours  
And there lies the thing, O alla! *etc.*

My wild goose and your wild duck  
They don't sing in tune, *etc.*

(*Chorus* from *We're Marching to Pretoria*, 1899-1902, tr. Afrikaans; Chapman 2002: 53)

The "thing" lies discarded and decaying in the corner of the room. One of life's most intimate and private of spaces has been soiled by the unclean aborted corpse.

However, this abortion of the little girl-child was relegated to memory when a white son was born in 1910 - the Union of South Africa; it was a patriarchal-political conception of English and Afrikaner parents who divorced the blacks and women<sup>42</sup> from their birthright. It was government

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<sup>42</sup> White women in South Africa only received the vote in 1930 (Davenport 1988: 304), and blacks much later, in 1994.

policy after the establishment of the independent Union to reconcile the Afrikaner and English-speaking communities in South Africa after the ravages of the Anglo-Boer War (Davenport 1988: 255). Prime Minister Louis Botha and his right-hand man Jan Smuts believed that co-operation between English-speaking South Africans and Afrikaners, especially in a war, would achieve this (Genis 2000: 5,7). Therefore, the *manqué* could not be spoken, especially not in the war poetry, as the deep wounds of the past and present had to be stitched together to form a united front against German expansionism. This one-stream co-operation also had to form a bulwark against the “black peril” - the perceived political, economic and physical threat that the blacks posed to white hegemony in South Africa (Scott Swart 1997: 2,13-14).<sup>43</sup> Much of the poetry of this period is, therefore, conciliatory. One of the major exponents of this one-stream policy in the war poetry is Francis Carey Slater.

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<sup>43</sup> This “peril” most probably hampered the recruiting of whites during the war, as men did not want to leave behind their womenfolk, who would then have been exposed to “black threats” (Genis 2000: 155).

### Chapter 3: The White(ned) Corpse, and the Call from across the Sea

The best known and most written about white South African war poet of the Great War era is Francis Carey Slater (1876-1958) (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 45), born in the Eastern Cape and a descendant of the 1820 British Settlers (Slater 1925: 229; Doyle 1971: 15). Roy Campbell (1901-1957), arguably the most eminent of South African poets, writes of him: "The Collected Poems [1905-1957] of Francis Carey Slater span a period which was almost barren except for his own and the almost equally fine poetry of Arthur Shearly Cripps". Campbell continues by stating that "I personally owe a great deal to their example...", and that "[Slater's 1929 poem] The Dead Eagle is as great as anything yet written by a South African" (Campbell 1957: vii). Slater has been more heralded than Cripps as an eminent poet (Van Wyk Smith 1990: 45) and, even more significant to this study, Slater's poetry is the lone South African voice ringing out in the forgotten literary no-man's-land of white South African First World War poetry. His "Wartime verse" is included in *The Collected Poems of Francis Carey Slater* (1957),<sup>44</sup> and briefly discussed in J.R. Doyle's literary study *Francis Carey Slater* (1971: 45-49). Revealingly, Slater does not include any of his own war poems in his *The Centenary Book of South African Verse, 1820 to 1925* (1925). He states in the preface that war poems, bar a few exceptions, have been left out. He explains that "Special attention has been devoted in some cases to the individual choice of poets as regards their own work, but for the final selection I must accept full responsibility [...] while generally following my own taste, I have endeavoured to make this anthology as comprehensive and representative as possible. Of course [...] my selection will be criticised by many - not excluding the poets themselves" (Slater 1925: xiv). War poems, even those by the most well-known of South African war poets, are rejected on two counts: firstly, by Slater the war poet himself, and secondly, by Slater, the literary scholar and compiler of the anthology. Apparently, his war poems do not fall within his "taste". In 1954,

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<sup>44</sup> It includes a preface by Roy Campbell.

he would qualify this sentiment by stating that his 1917 collection of war verse entitled *Calls across the Sea* is “a volume the slightest in size and probably in worth of all my books [...] It contains ten sonnets and seventeen lyrics; and of these twenty-seven poems, I have since rubbed out all but four” (Slater 1954: 201). Slater’s literary biographer, J.R. Doyle, agrees with this damning scholarly verdict:

It was in 1924 [...] that Slater] came to understand that the verse he had been publishing for some twenty years was not writing in which he could feel justifiable pride, was not even anything he wished to preserve. Subsequent events proved that he was absolutely correct in his assessment. His reputation when he died in 1958 was built almost totally upon what he did after 1924. Everything before that date could have been destroyed without damage to the position he was to hold in South African literature (1971: 168).

The only apparent worth of Slater’s war poetry, which Doyle briefly analyses, is that “it shows quite accurately the feelings and ideas of the times” (45-46). It, therefore, has, according to Doyle’s estimation, a greater historical and social than literary worth. The question that inevitably arises is whether this assumption has literary grounds and subsequently needs to be explored further, as Slater’s poems raise concerns and addresses themes that are core to South African war poetry of the era.

Slater is an archetypical colonial son of the British Empire. He described himself “as a Romantic by nature and a Victorian by up-bringing” (Slater 1954: 230). From an early age, he read the English classics, including Shakespeare and the Romantic poets, while working on his father’s farm on the Keiskama River, and participating in the sport of kings: horse-riding. Thus, Slater’s poetic consciousness matured in the shade of a Romantic Mont Blanc, and the ‘real’ shadow of the imposing Amatola Mountains, which he not only viewed from afar, but within whose natural landscape he was fully immersed, and his reflections on their majesty became his major poetic theme (Doyle 1971: 40-44). Significantly, within this Edenesque milieu, the indigenous Xhosa and Afrikaner cultural settings would dominate his writing

(Doyle 1971: 16-18). Slater was essentially a Romantic viewer of nature, but this poetic eye was not primarily fixed on the home-country of his English ancestors, as the creative gaze turned to the inner and outer landscapes shaded by the Amatolas:

Warrior-peak that, steadfast and unwavering,  
                   Dost from year to year thy vigil keep-  
 Gazing deep into the gates of distance,  
                   With proud eyes uncomforted by sleep.

[...]

Arm'd by these [natural features] thou watchest o'er the country,  
                   Peaceful now, where in the days long dead,  
 Warrior-chief, they namesake, royal Gaika  
                   Dusky legions into battle led:

(Gaika's Kop, 1910; Doyle 1971: 40-41)

Romantic diction and style are used to describe new phenomena which do not haunt the heights of Shelley's Alps, either geographically or literarily. A uniquely African warrior specimen is proclaimed by Slater. In a very similar vein to what the English poet John Masefield (1878-1967) did for the literary immortality of the mythologized Anzac soldier (Hoffenberg 2001: 113,119-120), Slater captures the same prototype of manliness in his poetic personification of the Xhosa warrior and later, of the white 'Springbok' volunteer of the Great War, as instances of the rugged topography, fauna and nature of the African *veld*. These 'natural' warriors represent the archetypal heroic South African soldier. Slater himself lived this ideal vision of masculinity by working the soil as a boy, and by engaging in sport such as cricket, tennis, athletics and polo as a young man (Doyle 1971: 20). He was, therefore, a model sportsman-scholar, who would have made any Victorian and Edwardian mother's heart beat proudly. However, Slater considered himself a South African first-and-foremost. This becomes clear in the preface

to his 1925 anthology (vii-xiv) and in his autobiography, which opens with the statement: “I am a South African [...]” (1954: 1). But this sentence is qualified within the ellipsis by “descended on both sides from the British Settlers of 1820” (1). It is evident that Slater was very proud of his British ancestry, so when war broke out in 1914, he was an enthusiastic advocate for the British cause. In his autobiography, Slater explains how the “dreadful news” of war was greeted with enthusiastic fundraising initiatives for War Funds and recruitment drives for volunteers. Even as late as 1954, when the war’s personal and psychological cost as well as military bungling had been revealed, Slater could still maintain that “young men [were] going off gaily to battle amid tearful farewells from their womankind” (201). He even acted as an *ad-hoc* recruiting agent at a recruiting meeting during the war: “My speech upon this occasion must have been more moving than I imagined, because, amongst others, *four* members of my staff [at the Barkly East branch of the Standard Bank of South Africa, where he was the manager] marched up to the platform to ‘sign on’” (201).

Slater simply acted out the spirit of the times. As in England, the war in the Union was greeted, especially by English-speaking South Africans, with a sense of righteous exaltation deeply embedded in the crusading ideal of ridding the world of evil and barbarism, i.e. German expansionism (Genis 2000: 15-16,146-147). One South African observer, R.W. Lonsdale, spoke for many by referring to the war as “the Great War of Christianity against the Devil [the German Kaiser] and his followers [...]”.<sup>45</sup> This othering and vilification of the German nation is a well-known theme in the patriotic

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<sup>45</sup> National Archives, Central Archives Depot: Governor-General, Box 674, File 9/93/164, R.W. Lonsdale – The Governor-General of South Africa, Idutywa, 17 September 1917: 1,2. During the war, the Union’s Department of Defence was inundated by letters – like Lonsdale’s – in which not only career soldiers but also individuals with professional skills, including medical practitioners, accountants, teachers, men of the cloth, pilots, mechanics and engineers offered their services in both military and non-combatant capacities in support of the Union’s war effort. True to the spirit of the times, these men wanted to do their “bit” for king and country (see Genis 2000: 145-160). The Union government was also very enthusiastically, and sometimes over vociferously, supported by the civilian Recruiting Committees throughout the Union that organized recruiting drives, tours, marches and meetings in order to recruit more men for active service (see Genis 2000: 70-99).



of Spring-lov'd lands!

(Footpaths thro' the Veld, 1905; Doyle 1971: 26-27)

Again, the ambivalent nature of the South African soil, veld and mountains is proclaimed. The "Monster" is terrifying in its scorched grandeur and vast *terra incognita*; it is the all-pervasive "Sunburnt South"<sup>46</sup> that is Adamastor by another name:

Mountains uncoil their folds gigantic  
 Before the sun's mesmeric eye,  
 And in False Bay the free Atlantic  
 Casts off night's cloak and clips the sky:

Pines start from Table Mountain's shoulder;  
 Swift silver-trees bedew his breast;  
 Forests of angry rock and boulder  
 Burst into bloom about his crest.

This sun that moulds a million 'koppies'  
 Out of the shapeless bulk of night,  
 Drugs men with fumes more fell than poppies,  
 Degrading white poor to 'poor white':

More potent than the spells of Circe  
 His rays – that with fierce beauty shine –  
 Sap up resistance without mercy,  
 Deforming humans into swine.

(African Sun (1935), *Collected Poems* 1957: 274)

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<sup>46</sup> This is a reference to Slater's 1908 prose-collection *The Sunburnt South*.

The sun Helios – the life-giving essence of a paradisiacal Africa – shines his light on Table Mountain – the quintessential fortress of nature, and an archetype for the South African topography. What is revealed in both poems is a schizophrenic ‘paradise lost’, a scarred desert landscape. The African Sun reveals a maddened Adamastor – “Forests of angry rock and boulder / Burst into bloom about his crest” – and the 1905 poem a tortured and “agonised” “Monster”. Under the searing African Sun’s degenerative heat, civilised white settlers are transformed into debased ‘poor whites’. The settler as the bringer of European civilisation to Africa is corrupted because of his proximity to the monster’s inherent moral darkness and destructive powers (or searing heat). The image of “poor white” is a potent one for the time during which African Sun was written. The adverse economic effects of the Great Depression of the early 1930s, which caused economic and social hardships to many (Davenport 1988: 302-303), were still fresh in the memory. Helios is implicated in this ‘degrading’ dawn of darkness as, ironically, it is his light that brings to birth the madness – “His rays [...] Deforming humans into swine” and excruciating suffering – “Throbbing in poignance of pain”, in Footpaths thro’ the Veld. Similar to his daughter Circe, the goddess of “degrading love” (NLEM 1989: 143), the “fierce” and merciless Helios in the poem African Sun casts evil spells with potent vapours that turn humans into beasts – just as his daughter had done to Odysseus’s band on the Greek island of Aea. It is up to the South African settler-hero to defeat, Odysseus-like, the unnatural forces of nature.

The allusion to Mr Shelley’s Mont Blanc (1817),<sup>47</sup> the ascent of whose “awful” beauty may lead to a descent into madness, finds an ambivalent echo in “Silence and solitude were vacancy?”. Further allusions to Mrs Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), in which the monster is encountered in “the awful and majestic” and “terrifically desolate” (Shelley 1994: 120-122) icy foothills of Mont Blanc, are unmistakable. Slater firmly situates this descent into an abject darkness or desert wasteland within a South African milieu:

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<sup>47</sup> The Norton (1983: 616-618).

Deep in the dim woods I wander like a wild thing,  
 Where the green leaves quiver, where the waters sing;  
 Where the glad birds carol, where the serpents creep,  
 Daily there I wander, nightly there I sleep.

Sometimes, monkey-like, among the boughs I bound,  
 Sometimes, a tortoise, I grovel on the ground;  
 Sometimes, an antelope, I couch among the fern;  
 Sometimes, a lizard, upon the rocks I burn.

Scorch'd by the sun or wither'd by the wind,  
 I wander among wild things, for wild things are kind;  
 Drench'd by the dew or smitten by the rain,  
 I wander in the wild woods and feel no pain.

Sometimes, suddenly, come glimmers of the days,  
 When I was human and walk'd in human ways;  
 Voices and echoes, and old unhappy dreams,  
 Visit my slumbers when the ghost moon gleams.  
 (Heard in the Woods, 1917)

Slater (1954) does not indicate what this poem 'means' in his 261-page autobiography. He only mentions that this poem, together with the other war poems in the collection *Calls across the Sea* (1917), was conceived "During some solitary walks [in the vicinity of Barkley East] at this time I wrote a number of poems - reflecting my feelings about the war [...]" (201). In the 'Prefatory Note' of the 1917 collection of poems, he indicates that the poems are "a few detached thoughts - mainly upon the war [...]" (Slater 1917). It is, therefore, not clear whether Slater conjured this poem as a direct response to the war; what is certain is that the wilds of Africa - as personified by

Adamastor's shade or searing sun – are a pervasive presence that leads to a psychological split, oscillating between the gates of Eden and Hell: “Where the green leaves quiver, where the waters sing; / Where the glad birds carol, where the serpents creep” (i, 2-3). The typical Romantic nature-lyric sounds of life-giving and exuberant water and bird are contrasted with the uncanny echoes of shaking leaves and slithering snakes. Even beautiful nature can lead to psychological breakdown; crucially it is where the “Monster” lurks. This ambivalent and even dichotomous convention is also characteristic of Romantic literature as is clearly evident in the Shelleys' texts.

Slater revealingly observes that South African poetry for the period 1820 to 1925 is “Almost all of it [...] out-of-door verse – open-air poetry” (Slater 1925: x). He qualifies this observation:

When visiting England, what most impresses the average overseas observer is Man and the works of his hands. The Country, beautiful and romantic though it be, is eclipsed by its swarming population, its cities, temples, towers, workshops, traffic, shipping, and so on. In South Africa, men and their works are insignificant in the vast background of the veld. There, a man may ride for hours – in some localities for days – without seeing a human habitation. In the circumstances it is not surprising that there are so many poems about the veld in this collection [*The Centenary Book of South African Verse, 1820 to 1925*]. To South Africans this very disproportion will be considered a virtue, because the love of the veld is, with them, not only widespread but universal, penetrating their daily life in a manner that English readers can hardly realise (x-xi).

Slater's description of England's inorganic physicality resonates with Wordsworth's “Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie / Open unto the fields... (Composed upon Westminster Bridge, 6-7).<sup>48</sup> As was mentioned earlier, Slater was influenced by the Romantic poets, including Wordsworth (Doyle 1971: 17), and this poet's eloquent description of London would not have been lost on Slater.

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<sup>48</sup> The Norton (1983: 550).

It is Slater's "Romantic [...] nature" (1954: 230) that permeates his poetic vision, which is like Wordsworth's "Open unto the fields, and to the sky; / All bright and glittering in the smokeless air" (7-8). In an earlier poem his reading of another Romantic, John Keats, becomes evident. In First Day in England (1905), Keats's "faery lands forlorn" (Ode to a Nightingale, vii, 70)<sup>49</sup> is echoed:

[...] and like a bird set free

I enter - Fairyland!

[...]

Of in my visions has it gleamed,

Of fancy painted it for me;

But neither dream nor fancy seemed

As fair as what I see.

Brightest sea-jewel! Fairyland!

Is it indeed not fit and meet

That from your breast should spring a band

Of singers true and sweet?

...

I hear them as I stand and gaze,

And swift my wayward thoughts have run

Unto a land, lit by the blaze

Of an austerer sun;

A barren land, bescarred and burned,

Barren, and silent, ah, so long!

Had *they* but seen it they had turned

Its silence into song.

(i 3-4, iv, v, vii, viii)

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<sup>49</sup> The Norton (1983: 660-662).

Slater's Romanticism, is, like Keats's, tinged with doubt. Where Keats's poetic "vision, or ... waking dream" (viii, 79) is ended by the nightingale's physical and choral disappearance "In the next valley-glades" (viii, 78), which causes the poet to feel "forlorn", Slater's vision of fair England evaporates in the cruel heat of a southern sun, where the poetic song of English bards is absent. South Africa is "bescarred and burned" by Adamastor's uncivilised presence; it is up to the white poet (i.e. the settler Slater) to give voice to an unnamed southern paradise:

For all who know his [Slater's] writing, his attitudes, and his actions, these words [of being a South African] are absolute in their accuracy. At a crucial time in the development of the literature of his country, Slater performed the task of offering that which was very much of South Africa. Where his work is to be placed as literature is not the initial concern here. The fact of importance is that it was necessary for literary efforts to become South African before any work would transcend locality and be identified as literature from a universal point of view (Doyle 1971: 23).

According to Doyle, an American scholar, it was, therefore, Slater's poetic light that broke through the night of a South African literary absence to place it squarely within the ambit of a rich Anglo-American and even colonial poetic tradition. But it also represents a dawning on the Adamastorian night; British settler civilisation had arrived in 1820 to save both African and Afrikaner from their inherent - and unliterary - barbarism, according to Slater's estimation, that is. This, however, has proved to be no easy task. The Romantic tradition of an English paradisiacal countryside of "White hawthorn [that] glimmers on that hedge... [and where] shining woods stretch out a hand, / That vale a radiant welcome smiles" (First Day in England, ii: 1; iii: 1-2) does not sit easily with the harshness of the starker South African climes. England has a more yielding beauty, because it is a "sea-jewel" that is "impearled" by the great works and literature of Englishmen. It contrasts with the uncut diamond that is the southern climes. A very similar instance

can be found in E.M. Forster's Modernist novel, *A Passage to India*, published in 1924, shortly after the end of the First World War. In the novel, the British administrators of this 'jewel in the British crown' see themselves as the subject – the measure of civilisation – and the Indians as the barbaric other. This otherness does not only refer to Indian 'inferiority' but also to India's alien strangeness: "On twittered the Sunday bells; the East had returned to the East via the suburbs of England, and had become ridiculous during the detour" (1957: 99). A case may be made that the Romantic diction in Slater's and other South African poets' work of twittering English nightingales in an African bush setting is just as "ridiculous". But as was indicated earlier, one of the tenets of Modernism is that it also employs old conventions for new subject matter. South African war poetry displays the Romantic presence of an Africanised nature in whose ambivalent shade is buried an uncanny corpse – the "Monster". The ominous shade of Adamastor, as is indicated in the sinister and mad nature of *Heard in the Woods* (1917), ironically becomes a site of psychological healing, where "the love of the veld" even overshadows its Adamastorian strangeness so that the *manqué* can be accommodated and hidden within its "vast background":

At the grey old farmhouse she is sitting on the stoep,  
     Amid the hiving shadows that around her softly creep;  
 While the cattle wander kraalward, a sleek and shining group,  
     And from the gloaming valleys comes the plaintive bleat of  
     sheep:  
 A lonely ostrich loiters beyond the darkling stream,  
     And from the orange orchard a wild-dove croons her lay;  
 One by one the stars begin to gleam;  
     But that brooding figure heeds them not, her thoughts are far  
     away.

For o'er the wind-turn'd furrows, abloom with flowers and foam,

Her eager thoughts are winging – while she sits as in a trance –  
 Swift sea-birds! They are winging to her boys who, far from home,  
 Fight for her and freedom on the battlefields of France....  
 O restless winds, that roam night's wildernesses,  
 Comfort her with whispers of a budding brighter day;  
 Desolate moon! O, shower soft caresses –  
 Each a bright dream of her loved ones far away.

(The Mother, 1917)

Slater hides the corpse deep within the shadow of the African bush. The first adapted *ottava rima* describes the Romantic setting in typical English pastoral diction of “hiving shadows”, “gloaming valleys”, “plaintive bleat[ing]”, “darkling stream” and “a wild-dove [that] croons her lay”. Slater does, however, assign a very local South African flavour to the natural setting by using words such as “stoep”, “kraalward” and “ostrich”. Unlike the traditional Romantic nature lyric, the mother does not contemplate the images that fall within the sway of her gaze; rather, she thinks of far off battlefields – her ‘waking dream’ is, however, very typically Keatsian. Crucially, the fourth line of the second stanza shades the corpse from view. The persona in the poem cannot contemplate the battlefields in France in any way; the corpse has fallen through its abject meaning; it has disappeared into the ellipsis that represents the open wound that is forcibly stitched closed. We do not know whether the mother thinks of the abject; all that the poetic persona can wish for is that the unspoken nightmare would transcend into “a bright dream”. The abject corpse is carefully covered in the shades of the African night-winds, stars and the moon, which, unlike that of the English war poets’ northern realms, rule over uniquely southern constellations, but which similarly lift the veil only partly: darkness hides the abject waste from full view. As was discussed earlier, Blunden’s, Illusions, Owen’s Strange Meeting and Dulce Et Decorum Est, and Rickword’s Trench Poets, also hide the corpse

in the moon's shadows, if not under her beams, within the dream-text engendered by her nightly wake – sleep.

Crucially, Slater's pre-war literary reflections on the "Monster" of the veld established a prototypical benevolent mother-moon, which could be appropriated for war-torn slaughter. In Footpaths thro' the Veld (1905) "Night" "comforts the vanquished" and "giveth surcease" to the "Monster[s]" "woe" by wiping "thy wounds with her tresses tired with / stars and with planets" and by shedding "tears of / compassionate dew" "on thy shuddering limbs" (Doyle 1971: 26). Similarly in *The Sunburnt South* (1908), the arid Karoo is described thus:

Quickly the darkness gathered. The sky still held some light; its pale-blue silken curtains still clung to the memories of day. But below, amongst the stunted bush, the bees of darkness swarmed thick and fast. A great silence held the plains, for Night was taking possession of her kingdom. Silently and breathlessly she clasped the scourged and blistered earth to her compassionate bosom, and shed the dewy balm of her healing tears upon its aching wounds and scarred visage (Doyle 1971: 35).

In the sonnet Peace and Strive (1917), Slater follows the same convention of contrasting the tranquillity of an African dusky nature with that of the sun-hell of war as in The Mother. In this poem, the dying day reveals the splendour of nature, and night ushers in reflections on the "flames of devastating war". The poetic persona cannot consider the true horror of war – the abject corpse – in the stark light of day; it has to be done under the dim lights of the stars that shroud the *manqué*. In Night on the Battlefield (1917), the bodies are completely swept from the battlefield in the first stanza, where the dead are alternately euphemized as the setting sun and "crimson seeds". In the second stanza, the moon again doubles as angel-nurse:

Now pale and sorrowing see the moon arise,  
Compassionate and minist'ring angel she,  
Touching with tender hands of healing love

The gaping wounds, kissing the glazing eyes  
 Of legion'd brave who ne'er, alas! shall see  
 That victory for which they proudly strove.  
 (ii, 9-14)

The abject flees the light of day and the desolation it unleashes and reveals, and finds solace in the dark's caress, which covers the wounds in near darkness:

Dawn comes with banners gleaming red,  
 And golden cannon belching fire;  
 Silent, before his onset dread,  
 The starry legions swift retire;  
 Entrench'd in the blue fields of sky,  
 They wait for Night - their sure ally.  
 (Dawn on the Battlefield, 1917, i)

The corpse is "Silent" in the wake of destruction. The "demon optician's spectacles" are darkened to hide the abject meaninglessness of wartime slaughter. The missing corpse's abject form could not be fully coffined within the existing poetic code of the Romantic nature lyric. Death could be contemplated as chaos, but it was a thorny bush described from afar; the poet's hand could not draw apart the jagged branches to dip and drench the quill in the abject's blood.

In Noon among the Hills (1917), the corpse is safely but painfully 'bramble(d)' within the thorny dash(es) of war:

[...]  
 Upon the sun-baked stone, while high  
 Circling thro' the quiet sky  
 An eagle sweeps - his shadow grey

Blots my peaceful thoughts away, -  
How does it fare in France to-day?

Sunshine and shadow around me play -  
How does it fare in France to-day?

(ii)

Although the poetic voice does answer the question, the corpse is lost in Revelation-styled diction of grandiose and generalised destruction – “Battle, murder, and sudden death [...] / Agonised groans and the pains of Hell [...]”. Typical to the Romantic nature lyric, the poetic consciousness focuses on one aspect of nature that is described – in this instance the eagle. Its dark shade casts the shadow of war and reminds the poet that it is raging, and he subsequently contemplates its destructive force. Although Slater does mention “Stiffening limbs and glaring eyes”, it is as if these body parts are still part of a living body, and not mere leftovers of a dead corpse. Again, the corpse is veiled in the “shadow” – now of an African eagle. The poem speaks war’s full volution; the corpse is too static to be accommodated; it is entangled within the prickly thorns of a poisonous bush.

Within a Southern African milieu, the corpse of war wanders in these ‘darkling’ woods, or wades in the ice-mirrored sea.<sup>50</sup> The epitome of these Romantic “wild woods”<sup>51</sup> that was appropriated by South African war poets is that dealing with the ‘Devil’s Wood’.

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<sup>50</sup> The quintessential Romantic description of the sea remains Coleridge’s poem of the ancient seafarer.

<sup>51</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Mont Blanc*, i, 8, in *The Norton* (1983: 616).

### 3.1 The Dreadnought's<sup>52</sup> Voyage to the Devil's Wood

The South African soldier poet whose poetry is the most lyrical and elegiac – and literary – is that of H.F.S.<sup>53</sup> He most memorably launches this dreadnought of valiant exploration. On a historical level, his poem The Last Voyage<sup>54</sup> narrates the outward passage of recruits from the various volunteer contingents – all forming part of the South African Oversea Expeditionary Force (Genis 2000: 38,42) from the mother city of the Union, Cape Town, to the spiritual fatherland of many of these men, England. This 'travel' poem is archetypal for the initial drafts and subsequent reinforcements that left the shores of the Cape to supplement the severe losses suffered by the South African volunteer forces on the western front in France and Flanders. This outward surge of bodies across the Atlantic lasted for almost the full duration of the war from August 1915 to September 1918 (42,202) – and made a lasting impression on all involved, including H.F.S., who used this experience as subject for his lyric poem in four quatrains.

The first stanza of the poem illustrates the mood of these quest-conquistadors when setting out on their sea-bourn journey:

Out of the winding harbour,  
                     Beyond the unlasting hail  
 Of countryman and fellow  
                     With a laughing cheer we sail.

The poet paints a joyful picture of excited men leaving the shores of an adoring country. The first stanza of this poem clearly depicts the thrill of adventure, as men set off to be bloodied on the anvil of heroism.

These volunteers wanted a piece of the action in, as Deneys Reitz the eminent South African politician and veteran of the Anglo-Boer War and the

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<sup>52</sup> British new-generation warships of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>53</sup> He only identifies himself with this pseudonym; his real name is unfortunately not known.

<sup>54</sup> Published in *The Springbok Blue*, I(2), May 1917: 33, (NMMH).

First World War states, “the greatest war in the history of the world” (Reitz 1944: 117), seemingly even greater than the second conflict, during which this autobiography was published. The “Great Cause” whipped up very strong bellicose feelings among loyalist South Africans (Genis 2000: 145-148,160). In the poem, the soldiers’ anticipation and sense of adventure is heightened by the troopship that is caught in a tempest characterised by “The deep wave [that] leaps between [...] and spray in our rigging.” This illustrates the adventure-ridden journey of recruits on the open seas; the threat of a German submarine attack was especially frightening and exhilarating to those who travelled from Cape Town to England (Digby 1993: 31,34).

Notwithstanding this un-stated threat in The Last Voyage, the men on the ship are set free as they “are quit of all care and sorrow, / And rid of the day that has been”. The exhilaration of war washes away the dreariness of an ordinary working-life existence – although, in reality, the routine kept and the discomfort endured on the troopships were indeed very tedious (Digby 1993: 28-31). But those bound on their last voyage are on the ultimate journey of exploration; it is precisely this lure of adventure that seems to weigh far greater than political motives to many of the men from South Africa who volunteered for service during the war. G. Lawrence (1978(2): 41), a South African veteran of the First World War, indicates that docking in Europe was “a thrilling adventure” to most of the men of 1 South African Infantry Brigade.<sup>55</sup> He also explains that arriving in the country “of our forebears [England] which so far we had only read about” was very exciting (Lawrence 1978(1): 11). In The Last Voyage the poet’s mind-forged ship is seemingly on its way to this sought-after port.

It must be kept in mind that the South African soldiers who left us poems and memoirs of the war were generally more educated and subsequently more well-read than their fellow countrymen. The Union’s school system used English as the medium of instruction and children, both

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<sup>55</sup> 1 South African Infantry Brigade, consisting of four regiments, was recruited in the Union for service in Egypt and France (Digby 1993; Genis 2000).

English-speaking and Afrikaner, were exposed to English culture and literature. The prestigious English private schools in South Africa were even more culturally chauvinistic and jingoistic (Randall 1982: 69; Genis 2000: 16). The majority of boys from St Andrew's College in Grahamstown volunteered for active service in Europe during 1916 (Genis 2000: 17). *The Star* newspaper predicted loudly at the end of 1917 "that very many [newly graduated matriculants] purpose joining the Army or the Navy".<sup>56</sup> A poem which encapsulates this bellicose schoolboy spirit expounded in the prestigious school magazines<sup>57</sup> is Follow the Spoor. The poet indicates that "Unsullied" South African "boys" will gladly volunteer as both Dutch and British South Africans "are of the races whom the spoor / Led always careless on [...] We go for that we must, not that we ought / We boys - whom always lured an open door." And in Europe this "open door" adventure was a magnificent "speeding [chivalric] pageant".<sup>58</sup> The cadet corps system, introduced to South Africa during the 1860s, with its insistence on outdoor wargaming, contributed considerably to militarising the youth (Genis 2000: 17-19).

The highly-educated white English elite in South Africa, men like H.F.S., regarded the war, as was the case in England, as "[...] a theatrical event of sombre magnificence" (Gooch 1975: 91). In Britain, the war was literarily conceived in *bellum-lettres* as Shakespearean tragedy, and melodrama (Fussell 1975: 198-199), and found expression in sweeping and heroic 'stage' poetry. This is similar to the South African experience; the theatre of war most closely allied to this noble crusading quest was Europe, and not the 'side shows' or the much smaller and less significant and heroic African campaigns (Nasson 1996: 2; Genis 2000: 16-17). To defend England was a righteous quest, as it is the home of the superior Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Celtic civilisation. War in itself was a noble pursuit as it enhanced strength, progress, growth and enjoyment, all of which are perceived to be

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<sup>56</sup> Reprinted in: NLSA, *King Edward VII School Magazine* (3441), VII(2), June 1918: 21.

<sup>57</sup> Magazines were published by St Cyprian's, Jeppe High School, Grey Institute, Diocesan College, Potchefstroom College, South African College School, Pretoria Girls' High School, Michaelhouse, Rondebosch Boys High School and Selborne.

<sup>58</sup> NLSA, *King Edward VII School Magazine* (3441), VII(2), June 1918: 21-22.

civic virtues (Genis 2000: 15) and it was “[...] a popular outlet for the nation’s energies” (Gooch 1975: 88). Although Gooch refers here to England’s response to the outbreak of war, the same is true of the English-speaking response in the Union.

However, even in extreme cases of war enthusiasm, there are sometimes traces of doubt. Although the mood of the first stanza in The Last Voyage is that of general cheerfulness there is an ominous ring to the line “Beyond the unlasting hail”. The heroic send-offs of successive drafts of combatants are cloaked in a temporary shroud. The cheering crowds disappear as soon as the ship sets sail for Europe. The war will never become a physical reality for the civilian population; it only remains a distant heroic struggle as mythologized in the literature, newspapers, schools and churches of the day. But unlike Owen and Sassoon, H.F.S. does not blame those at home for their miscomprehension of the horrors of the trenches and insensitivity to the soldier’s predicament. Civilian forgetfulness is of no concern to him. He mirrors the civilian’s general detachment from physical ugliness as a spiritual indifference to bodily injury in The Last Voyage. Similar to Thomas Hardy’s Drummer Hodge and A.E. Housman’s Astronomy of the Anglo-Boer War (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 146-147, 177-178), the soldier slips through the cosmic cracks of a limitless and unfixed horror, represented by the firmament in the 1899-1902 poems, and by the oceanic vastness in the 1917 poem. H.F.S. extracts the corporeal physicality of war, which he surely must have experienced in the trenches as a volunteer – either as a member of staff or as a convalescent at the South African Hospital, Richmond – as the poem progresses or descends into supernatural dream. The physical reality of departing drafts that will be replaced by new ones as casualties mount, quickly transforms, like Coleridge’s The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, into a tale of a journey to an outer-realm beyond the presence of cheering crowds or the physical world of existence:

[...] Beyond the unlasting hail [...]

[...] we sail [...]

We are quit of all care and sorrow,  
 And rid of the day that has been;  
 The past is unbound from its morrow,  
 The deep wave leaps between.

With stars and spray in our rigging,  
 With darkness before and behind,  
 We are turned to the realm of midnight  
 And a port out of time and mind.

Out of an earthly sunset,  
 Into no earthly morn,  
 Over the world's horizon  
 Our laughing souls are borne.

The poet foreshadows an inward journey “[...] to the realm of midnight / And a port out of time and mind.” It is the journey of the souls of fallen soldiers. The “realm of midnight” is the kingdom of the dead. It is a destination unbounded by worldly time and reality. It is an unworldly place – a spiritual port. The boat of the dead sails on a Styx-like watery mass of leaping waves, upward shooting spray, shining stars and enclosing darkness. The “deep wave” of death, which separates the “past” – body – from the “morrow” – soul, carries the dead from “[...] an earthly sunset, / Into no earthly morn”. This represents a rebirth, a bright new morning as opposed to a dying day. The saved or “laughing” souls sail “Over the world’s horizon” out of an earthly existence, into salvation, where they will be “[...] quit of all care and sorrow.”

Coleridge was popular in the trenches (Fussell 1975: 146,161,163) and H.F.S. was clearly influenced by this poet’s oceanic poem. The dead soldiers’

journey is restorative in nature, both like and unlike that of the Ancient Mariner whose wondrous but terrible tale has a marked impact on the Wedding-Guest: “[...] like one that hath been stunned, / And is of sense forlorn: / A sadder and a wiser man, / He rose the morrow morn” (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, VII, 622-625). Like the Ancient Mariner’s, the journey of the souls in The Last Voyage is supernatural and their story ends in the rising of the sun, which always brings new hope: hope of salvation for the soldiers killed on the battlefield, and hope of psychological restoration, even though this was only partially achieved by the Ancient Mariner. Unlike the Ancient Mariner, though, the soldiers do not encounter a hellish “[...] Nightmare Life-In-Death [fiend] [...], / Who thicks man’s blood with cold” (III, 193-194) on the high seas. Instead, their “laughing souls” are carried “Over the world’s horizon [...]” without incident. No mention is made of the horror of trench warfare that is such an important theme in the poetry of the trench poets.

H.F.S. does not indicate whether the soldiers have had a moral epiphany during their voyage on the high-seas. In contrast, the Wedding-Guest is “a wiser man” after the Ancient Mariner’s epic story of loss. The Last Voyage is, therefore, not a moral tale filled with lessons to be learnt – like that of sin and subsequent reckoning in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner – but one with an implicit message that fallen soldiers, that is British/Dominion soldiers – the inclusive “We” – share salvation based merely on their close association as comrades. In the true Romantic mould, no direct allusion is made to the world of the ordinary in The Last Voyage, i.e. the dangers and tedium that soldiers experienced on board the Union troopships bound for England. In fact, the souls are freed from the mundane and are now journeying to the realm of subliminal salvation.

Similarly, the soldier poet J.W. Ashmead, who served in the desert of German South-West Africa and in the trenches of the Western Front,<sup>59</sup> covers

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<sup>59</sup> SANDF Archives, *Military File*, J.E.W. Ashmead, 5486.

the sand and mud of physical circumstance in a spiritual deluge of regeneration:

Then think of those again who've fought and conquered,  
 But not as Dead, for after Death comes Life!  
 They've sailed their 'bark,' their 'craft' is safely anchored -  
 Within the 'Port' - where there is no more strife!  
 (Somewhere in France, iv)<sup>60</sup>

"Life" after "Death" is a mirror image of "Life" before "Death". The physical body or "'bark'" is discarded for the spiritual "'Port'" of everlasting life. *The Nongqai* also reported on this hopeful spiritual waterbound journey to its soldier audience:

And so for me there is no sting to death,  
 And so the grave has lost its victory,  
 It is but crossing - with a bated breath  
 And white, set face - a little strip of sea,  
 To find the loved ones waiting on the shore,  
 More beautiful, more precious than before.  
 (Ella Wheeler Wilcox, Beyond, v)<sup>61</sup>

It is evident that both Ashmead and H.F.S. had a thorough schooling in English literature, as the use of the popular ballad stanza form of the former, and the subtle contextual allusions to Coleridge's poem of epic voyage in the latter prove.

H.F.S.'s and Coleridge's poems deal with a ship which is on a supernatural voyage of discovery that is set on its way by a cheering crowd and that is beset by storms before reaching the port of destination. There are

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<sup>60</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(12), March 1919: 26.

<sup>61</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, V(5), May 1916: 413.

also stylistic similarities between the two poems. The Last Voyage is written in ballad stanza format, using the most common type of quatrain, as is the case with The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. H.F.S. also employs traditional rhythm and rhyme schemes utilised by 19<sup>th</sup> century English poets: lines of iambic tetrameter alternate with iambic trimeter within an abcb rhyme scheme - except in stanza two which rhymes abab.

Water also serves as a potent metaphor for those poets back home. The South African poet Daphne De Waal casts off on a water-bound vision in her martial poem The Fleet (1916), and joins Slater and H.F.S. in distinctive Romantic musings through nature, or rather across the seas:

There was a cold mist stealing over the waters  
                   And closing softly over the wind-swept sea;  
 Veiled was the moon, and the stars, the gold sun's  
                   daughters,  
 Were hid in clouds and wrapped in mystery;  
 And the night came darkly over the evening sky.

(i)

And it is Nature that raises the curtain on the coming of the fleet:

Slowly they came, and hushed was the wind of  
                   heaven -  
 Sweeping over the ocean grey they came-  
 Ships that have made a nation's name  
 Undying, and have raised a nation's fame -  
 From mist to pearly mist in silence driven.

(De Waal 1917: 18; ii)

It is, like H.F.S.'s ship, a ghost-like fleet that is wrapped in a mist of "Undying" metaphysical essence; in this instance it is that of everlasting fame and honour. First to appear in the poet's eye is the adventurous Raleigh and Drake - England's pirating heroes and Spain's scourge during Elizabethan times - on "Galleons strange" (iii, 13). Then, "a tall ship came a-sailing on the hushed and / darkened deep" (vi, 29) carrying the great Admiral Nelson and his sailors who defeated the French and Spanish fleet at the Battle of Trafalgar in 1805.<sup>62</sup> De Waal conjures their memory from the ocean's deep. Lastly, "came our iron greyhounds of the seas / In long procession steaming" (vii, 37-38); these are the modern dreadnaughts that, like the British fleets of the past, defend the honour of the British Empire. This poem, dated June 1916, was most probably written as a celebration of the British pyrrhic naval victory of Jutland at the beginning of June 1916.<sup>63</sup> The sea, the English fleet's baptismal font, baptises the British Isles' inhabitants in the name of the trinity of "Duty, faith, and bravery" (viii).

De Waal is unashamedly British in her allegiance to "England over all", as England and her colonies are one and the same. Her Afrikaans surname indicates that she was one of the Anglo-Afrikaners who was vociferously pro-British and unabashedly an Empire loyalist. British and Empire women were seen as the main cog in the war-machine, as they were the primary - or the only - assemblers of cannon-fodder: men. Women not only had to play this role of recruiting or incubating 'officers', but also as crucial instigators to ensure the constant flow of men, whose happy domestic lives, facilitated by doting women, would serve them as a coping-mechanism in times of battle (Goldensohn 2003: 46-47,50; Bourke 1999: 167-168). This ethos is clearly expressed by Miriam S. Walsh in her regular contribution, "Women's Whims", to *The Nongqai*. In an essay entitled *The Importance of the Baby*, she asks of her South African audience: "Have the women of the British Empire awakened to the fact that their supremest duty to the nation at present is to bring sons and

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<sup>62</sup> Pretorius (1993: 388).

<sup>63</sup> Gilbert (1995: 251-252).

daughters into the world [to support the war effort]?"<sup>64</sup> A year earlier she had stated belligerently that "We women must be prepared to say to them [South African soldiers demobilised after the conclusion of the German South-West Africa campaign] on their return, 'Well done. But go now, and help our brothers finish their appalling task'"<sup>65</sup> It is in essence these young men who are "our splendid boys", "full of happy confidence", who leave "a lovable record of unselfish heroism" while fighting in their "'shining armour'"<sup>66</sup>

The Spartan ethos of women urging their progeny to return either with their shield or lying on it, never without it, is echoed in De Waal's Soldiers Immortal (1917: 11); the soldiers "are not dead" but live forever in heroic memory in their exalted battle-gear of "no more the earthly guise"; the corpse is not returned home, but is buried on the far off battlefields, and 'seas', that are bedecked in a deluge of Romantic and sacrificial diction. As the archetypal "His Mother" echoes: "the [beautiful] spirits of hundreds of brave dead were there [alive on the field of battle] (Lomax 1918: i).

Another South African woman poet who explores the undead-baptised-soldier theme is the schoolgirl Amy Harvey.<sup>67</sup> In Our Boys, the poem concludes with a resounding "They sleep - They gave their all."<sup>68</sup> In the poem, there is a progression from "Lads" to "youth" to "soldier-boys", to "boyhood", "manhood", and back to "lads" and "sons". Fussell (1975: 282) indicates that the different synonyms for the soldier had varying "degrees of erotic heat" associated with them; the degrees of comparison follow as "men" more neutral, "boys" warmer, and "lads" the warmest. "Sons" may also be safely placed within the superlative, although it is more platonic-warm than sensual. The Victorian mother cult (Goldensohn 2003: 46-47,50) is very evident in Harvey's five-stanza-quatrain, A Dying Soldier's Farewell to his

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<sup>64</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, V(3), March 1916: 239.

<sup>65</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, III(6), June 1915: 387.

<sup>66</sup> Letter from "His Mother" to John Lomax, 30 November 1916, London (published in Lomax 1918: i).

<sup>67</sup> She attended the Diocesan School for Girls in Grahamstown.

<sup>68</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(1), January 1918: 50.

Mother.<sup>69</sup> Similar to Our Boys, this poem is very sentimental, and calls on "Mother, dear" and "little Mother mine" to also "cheer(ing) others on". However, both poems are heartfelt attempts by a naïve civil population to appropriate the war-*manqué*.

Our Boys encapsulates the soldier in a hot erotic embrace, a deluge of menstrual liquid poured out by the young and passionate maiden, e.g. Amy Harvey, who is secretly in love with, or 'wet' for the dashing soldier. In Soldier's Farewell to his Mother and De Waal's Soldiers Immortal the "sons" of the nation are covered in a platonic-heroic, and more familial natal-menstrual blood. In both instances, the semiotic feminine liquid serves as sanitising agent, as the corpse is flushed out beyond and behind the erotic and maternal gaze.

The war poet Owen Richmond Thompson dedicated his 1919 volume, *Salted with Fire: Poems for War Sufferers*, "To the mothers of the fallen and to all sufferers whose right it is to claim the title" (3):

The mothers who have suffered  
 In bringing us to life,  
 And joy at once recovered,  
 Will not despair in strife.

Maternity's sad hours,  
 Of misery and pain,  
 Eternity endowers  
 With life, and love again.  
 (3)

Birth and death are metonyms of the same womb; the mother after experiencing an orgasm of both sexual fluids and blood, gives birth to a son

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<sup>69</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(4), April 1918: 174.

who, after an ejaculation of blood, again returns to a protective womb or homoerotic grave:

He was dying, quickly dying,  
     Cut off when nineteen,  
 And in weakness there was lying  
     To face the things unseen.

And beside him was the chaplain,  
     So gentle, and so kind.  
 He was speaking of the Captain,  
     Who wounded souls would bind

But a love, though not supernal,  
     Had thrilled the patient through  
 It was like to the eternal,  
     So tender, and so true.

'I would like to see my mother  
     Before I hence must go.  
 She is dearer than a lover  
     For O! she loves me so.'

And the chaplain could not other:  
     'T'll take her place!' he said.  
 'Will you kiss me for my mother,  
     And love for her instead?'

And with tender love prevailing,  
     He bent above the bed,  
 And he kissed the lips now paling,

Till Life from death had sped  
 ('Kiss me for Mother', 4 October 1917; 40)

Denys Lefebvre's To His Mother (1918: 24) emphasises the Oedipal bond between mother and son:

[...]

She lay till sorrow merged into a dream. (ii)

She felt the man-child clinging at her breast,  
     Whose coming made it seem too hard to die;  
 She felt him warm, close-snuggling down to rest,  
     And rocked him as she crooned a lullaby. (iii)

However, the *Thanatos* is all-pervasive; it is the early 20<sup>th</sup> century cult of Duty, Honour and stoic Suffering:

Later - they came, and told her he was dead,  
     Dead on the field, as she had known he'd die;  
 Die for his country. All the neighbours said:  
     'Strange, that she sits so still and does not cry! (viii)

Slater (1917: 47) expands this cult of the Mother to encompass the geographical area of the British Isles. "Stalwart Mother" England is the "sheltering tree", "Rooted in the northern sea", who "Hath nourish'd many a valiant son", and in whose "strong boughs" her sons nestle, which is "The halcyon home of Liberty" (To England, 47-48). Mother England protects its young against the storms and winds at sea, like the halcyon bird of mythology. In The Pioneers (49-50) the industrious sons of the Empire who have gone over the seas to foreign lands to "scatter everlasting day" to

uncivilised natives are returning to their mother country to protect her against the vile rapacious German:

[...]

Thy children's children flock to thee;  
 Swift across the sobbing sea,  
 Fast across the fields of foam,  
 Canadian, Anzac, Springbok come  
 Unto thee, whose heart is home,  
 In this dark hour - they come, they come! (iv)

The sea is a passage of regeneration, the site of the rebirth of new heroes who are following in the footsteps of "Drake" (England and Liberty, 15) "Cromwell, Nelson, Wellington, / Sydney and Pitt," (To England, 48), knights who defended the British constitutional heritage against foreign and local foes. The new Dominion crusaders are filled with the same libertarian spirit (Freedom: Our Heritage, 17).

Thomas (n.d.: 61) builds on this chivalric theme in The Mother's Call. The new knights of the colonies are encouraged to defend the "Mother" on the plains of "Gaul", "'Where the flags of the free are unfurled, / And the stricken lie by the holy fanes, / Like leaves in autumn lanes!'" (i, 4-6). It is a magnificent pageant of warm autumnal colours, during which the fair maiden England should be claimed through "The derring-do of lance" (ii). In We are Coming!, the words of the Reuter's correspondent, Walter Long, are echoed; and indeed "they come!" from all corners of the British Empire to defend the "Mother" (63).

The soldiers on the various fronts were deeply under the sway of the Mother ethos. This cult was widely proclaimed in the soldier magazines, *The Nongqai*, *The Springbok Blue*, and the *The Springbok Magazine*. A poem which epitomises this umbilical cord between the life-giving feminine placenta and

her guardian foetus-sons is Mother's Lads, published in *The Springbok Blue* of September 1917 (I(5): 106):

THE Mother called for aid, and from across the sea  
 Came men in all their youth and pride to set their Mother free –  
 [...]  
 They who had 'gone over the Parapet' to help the Motherland  
 From Africa, with her skies of lovely blue;  
 From Australia, land of plenty, the home of the kangaroo;  
 From India, queen of mystery, of rubies and of pearls;  
 From Scotland, Wales, and Ireland, all noted for their Girls;  
 From Canada and the Yank Land, oh, how the Lads all came!  
 [...]  
 ('Auntie Ida', 28 April 1917)

However, doubt was also projected through the Mother cult. In *The Nongqai* of September 1917 (VIII(9): 157), Robert Blair of Fouriesburg, Orange Free State, claims in rhyming quatrains that the mother thinks of her son who is "Somewhere in France – my thoughts are ever turning / To somewhere there, although a place unknown [...]" (His Mother, i, 1-2). It is similar to Slater's some thing that lies stitched away in the dashes of The Mother (1917: 27-28); the aborted foetus is somewhere far away in France, but also present in the thorn-crowned memories of the guilt-ridden mother at home. The War Mother,<sup>70</sup> deals more directly with this trope of loss that was omnipresent during the war:

Oh! why must Mothers stay behind? Is not Mother's place  
 Beside the baby that must look in death's remorseless face?  
 The years have wrought a change in him that only others see –  
 For all his soldier uniform he's still a boy to me.

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<sup>70</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VI(4), October 1916: 302.

Sent forth to kill, nor reason why, grim war's insensate toy,  
While I must wait and pray at home – my baby, baby boy! (iv)

All that was left to do for the feminine soul was to pray for the male  
body and soul:

To Nation's call in Nation's cause,  
I gave my best.  
Lord, grant me strength to hide my grief,  
Within my breast.

The past is past, and THOU who knows  
What lies before,  
Oh, grant that once again we meet  
This side 'the door.'

This side 'the door,' and night come on;  
Then together we  
Shall see the heavenly daybreak –  
In Eternity.

(The Wife's Prayer)<sup>71</sup>

Ironically, this orison is published next to a lengthy list of South Africans who lost their lives or who were wounded during the Somme offensive of mid-1916, and the Central and East African campaigns.<sup>72</sup> Men's souls could possibly be saved, but not their marionette bodies, which were blindly manipulated like toy soldiers by the faceless HQ staff far to the rear.

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<sup>71</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VI(3), September 1916: 204.

<sup>72</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VI(3), September 1916: 205-211.

Similarly to H.F.S., and Ashmead, the soldier poet Arthur Shearly Cripps (1869-1952) mystically and spiritually explores what it meant for a soldier to cross the waters of the underworld. Campbell (1957: vii) considers Slater's and Cripps's poetry as the lone literary voices ringing out in the barren poetic environment of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Southern Africa. The English-born Cripps was an Anglican missionary in Mashonaland,<sup>73</sup> who served as a chaplain in the German East-Africa campaign from 1915-1916. Although he was not a South African, Cripps's poetry is very much African settler verse in the same literary mode as Slater's, who dedicated his anthology, *The Centenary Book of South African Verse* (1925), to the missionary. Slater considered Cripps a great African poet, and included fifteen of his poems in the 1925 collection. Another reason for appropriating Cripps's poetry in a study of South African war poetry is that Rhodesia, very similar to South-West Africa after the war, was seen as part of the Union where military matters were concerned.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, in East Africa, Cripps served under the South African, Lieutenant-General Jan Christiaan Smuts, who was the Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial forces in this theatre of operations.<sup>75</sup>

Rix (1976: 283-287) describes the missionary as a liberal Franciscan camp-fighter for Shona rights, with definite classicist literary tendencies. Cripps raises concerns in his war poems that are both similar to and more 'modern' than white South African themes on war. In his war poetry, similar to *The Last Voyage*, he appropriates water as a metaphor for a sacrificial spiritual journey and source of corporeal transformation within a war-worn milieu:

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<sup>73</sup> Today's Zimbabwe, formerly known as Rhodesia.

<sup>74</sup> The Union Defence Act of 1912 also included Rhodesia within the Union's sphere of military responsibility as Union citizens could legally be recruited for service in the whole of Southern Africa (*Statutes of the Union of South Africa 1912*, Act No 13 of 1912: 190). One of the regiments of 1 South African Infantry Brigade, which was recruited in 1915 for service in Europe, was named the Transvaal and Rhodesia Regiment (Genis 2000: 43). Men of 1 Rhodesian Regiment, who had served in the German South-West Africa campaign, enrolled in South African units bound for Europe. Similarly, South Africans were allowed to volunteer for Rhodesian units (49-51). The main purpose for raising a volunteer infantry brigade for Europe was the newly established Union's expressed desire to prove to London that South Africa, as well as Southern Africa, was a loyal son of the Empire.

<sup>75</sup> Ambrose Brown (1991).

Tree-feather'd headland there, and island green  
 Hung mirag'd splendours o'er the quiet blue;  
 I sailed that for the while had done with war,  
 And lo! the day being young, my port not far,  
 Life's venture, as I sail'd, came clear in view  
 A-poise 'twixt height reveal'd and depth unseen.  
 (Mirage on the Lake, Cripps 1917: 40)<sup>76</sup>

This poem, as is the case with his Romantic poetry in general (Rix 1976: 284-285), is seemingly weighed down by floral diction and outmoded contractions - "Tree-feather'd", "mirag'd", "o'er", "sail'd", "twixt" and "reveal'd". This is also true of his short stories in which he depicts "Africans as Arcadians" (Brown 1976: 177; Rix 1976: 287). However, similar to the poems of Slater, archaic diction is used to describe a very new phenomenon to white European settlers, the uncanny African bush milieu, the "depth unseen", which hides a very real fear: Adamastor's shade and the ancient shadow of the corpse:

The sun sets moody in a hazing sky  
 Clouded for trouble, ere the night be out.  
 Woods, marshland, meadowland - brood opulent  
 Above yon blue lake-levels affluent.  
 Here is Earth's waist with riches wrapt about, -  
 Ominous riches. Here may you or I  
 Behumm'd, bestung, in our brief night-sleep lie  
 And dream rare iv'ry dreams ere yet we die -  
 Storm-routed, fever-ambush'd, sunshine-spent!  
 (Near the Equator, 39)

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<sup>76</sup> All subsequent poems of Cripps discussed in this thesis come from his collection of poems, *Lake and War*.

Here, the characteristic Romantic, mystical, supernatural, dreamlike and visionary Cripps (Chennells 1976: 14-15; Brown 1976: 173) is very evident in the rhythmic alliteration. However, this dream-text in essence endeavours to shroud the nightmare *manqué* from full view. The prospects of a thrilling safari adventure, which campaigning in 'wild' "Darkest Africa" held for many white Southern African volunteers (Genis 2000: 160),<sup>77</sup> soon turned into a nightmare. Southern Africa was conceived as a more civilised space of European appropriation within the generally dark African landscape further to the north and east. The disease-ridden East African bush, alluded to in Cripps's poem, and where men served, was one of adverse climatic conditions, where the already inhospitable terrain was churned into mud flats by heavy rains (Collyer 1939: 31,274).<sup>78</sup> Living bodies wasted away, ravaged by unseen parasites, bacteria and viruses, and driven to the edge of starvation (Ambrose Brown 1991). East Africa, the "Utopia found" of abundant crops, fair game and pleasant weather<sup>79</sup> had become the breeding ground for "hollow-eyed", "fever-racked", emaciated near-dead and partly-decayed bodies (303-304). The frontier tradition of contemporary Rhodesian novels, wherein civilised Englishmen crusade in the rugged African bush in a quest for true manhood, was challenged by Cripps (Chennells 1976: 13-14), who witnessed the horror of racial oppression in Mashonaland and war in East Africa first-hand. In his novel *The Brooding Earth* (1911), Mashonaland is described as a vindictive Edenic earth-mother who exacts revenge for her violation by the white settler through diseases (like malaria) and by letting loose "the shadows and sounds of unspeakable things [... which lurk] behind

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<sup>77</sup> In *The Nongqai*, the East African landscape is described as a rich unspoiled Utopia, with rich wildlife (VI(3), September 1916: 202-203) and "pleasant" and captivating "aboriginal races" that vary from savage cannibals to "the most advanced" in Africa (V(5), May 1916: facing page 342. (SANDF Archives)

<sup>78</sup> From 20 March 1916 to 31 December 1917, a total of 12551 British soldiers and Belgians - who also fought in East Africa - were treated in No 1 General Hospital Wynberg, Cape Town. Of this total, 2094 were South African soldiers. The greater majority suffered from Malaria - 8313 in total (Ambrose Brown 1991: 338).

<sup>79</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai* VI(3), September 1916: 202-203, 'The firing line in East Africa: Lieut.-Colonel Kirkpatrick's adventures.'

her scenes", and also because her black children's military oppression is relegated to forgetfulness (Quoted in Chennells 1976: 19-20).

Within this abjected landscape, Cripps's war poetry also draws on the objectification of the abject black body. For instance in Peace and War, the poetic voice expresses the guarded wish that the German enemy in East Africa would hopefully be more merciful towards the British than the British had been towards the locals during the previous century. The first stanza then describes the murder of tribesmen on Bumbireh Island, Lake Victoria, in 1875 by the famous explorer Henry Morton Stanley.<sup>80</sup>

In witnessing these wartime privations, Cripps unmaskes East Africa as an Adamastorian dichotomous paradisiacal hell, the pagan heart of the earth:

Heart of our Earth I hold this lake to be.

[...]

Earth's heart so fever-sick, so scant of grace –

Here where such storms rush up, such tide-winds veer,

And laughing moods run weeping moods a race

Whose laps are light and gloom, clouds' frown and sunshine's cheer.

Hadst thou not pangs enough without our guilt,

Heart of our Earth, whose wounds unstanched I sing?

What fires were kindled, and what blood was spilt

In those old days of Hate's o'ershadowing

[...]

[...] Not thro' one Heart but twain,

Christ's Heart and thee, one spear at once we drove.

O heart, wherefrom that pulsing art'ry runs

Of thrice a thousand miles – the snow-flush'd Nile!

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<sup>80</sup> *London Review of Books*, Letters 29(10), 24 May 2007. Landau, P. 'Stanley in Bumbireh'. Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n10/letters>. Accessed: 17 February 2013.

Heart, whose green hopes as palms avert the suns,  
 Whose faëry dreams papyrus-plumag'd smile,  
 Fast, fast forget this fury and this guile  
 Of men!  
 Remember, heart, that herald sent before,  
 That wind, that prophet voice, which blew of yore  
 Up Nile to whisper peace and good-will when  
 Jesus in Egypt hom'd! Heart, evermore  
 Beat out His Own heart's tune in creek, on shore –  
 That plashing lilt of peace God learn'd thy lake-waves then!  
 (Prelude: Cor Mundi; xi-xii).

Lake Victoria Nyanza, the watery mass that permeates Cripps's poetic consciousness in *Lake and War*, is the centre of the earth, which has been raped by bellicose man:

Our time it is an evil time,  
 This earth of ours is outrag'd earth,  
 It was not giv'n to these to climb  
 Out of their ruts of use and birth:  
 Yet in those ruts they prov'd their worth.  
 (Trench-warriors, 80)

The 'rutting' and 'climbing' soldiers with their sharp instruments of war have 'misused' the earth by ripping open her womb, not only in Europe, but also in Africa. Cripps's literary ecological-moral sensitivity is similar to Blunden's; the sensitive English poet is also horrified by the rape of the earth, as represented by the entrenched Western Front, and the subsequent fleeing of the pastoral "naiads and hamadryads" in the wake of the destruction of their forest-homes – a juxtaposition of Romantic pastoral and modern forces of utter destruction and desolation (Fussell 1975: 258-259,261,264).

The meaning of the raped pagan earth in Cripps's poems rests on two foundations. Firstly, it illustrates Cripps's anti-war sentiments, and secondly, his role as camp-fighter for greater Shona rights. Although the African nationalism that Cripps proposed is, according to Chennells (1976: 17), rather "incipient", Cripps, however, did create a literary voice for the Africans by asserting their right to freedom, but then again only within an independent westernised Christian framework (16-17). He remained a believer in the colonial Empire throughout his life (15).

In Cor Mundi, Romantic "faëry" England and mysterious Africa are superimposed, as well as Christ's and Africa's suffering. Jesus is the bringer of peace, and Lake Victoria, the Nile River and the Sea of Galilee are the 'transporters' of the living water. Africa is both Romanticised and Biblicised in order to raise a "Black Christ", which is in Cripps's poetry, a liberal-classical Anglican construct:

[...]

There on the lake about me and around

You wrought and suffer'd.

[...]

That year is gone. Its Wounds remain. O set

To wrongs that linger - Love's allotted term!

Cover my fault, dark Patience, with a Sigh,

Accept, dark Wounded Hands, balms that may not amend!

(To the Black Christ: Native Troops neglected in my Ministry; 103)

Similarly, in Envoi, Cripps again conjures the black Christ:

If aught of worth be in my psalms

It in the Black Christ's Hands I lay,

In those Nail-groov'd, hoe-harden'd Palms

He holds to me now ev'ry day -

The Black Christ in Whose Name I pray,  
 Yet Who (O wonder!) prays to me  
 In wrong and need and contumely.

If any gift of sight of mine  
 Our land's veil'd beauty should reveal,  
 My reader, to those eyes of thine,  
 That gift to Him that gave assign,  
 To Him (Whose Feet unsandalled steal  
 Over the granite tracks I tread)  
 Head-haloed by our rose and gray  
 Of twilights, or our gold of day,  
 Who near my red camp-fire will spread  
 His reed-mat, or on rain-bless'd days  
 Hoe deep His pattern-work of praise  
 Full in my sight.

O happy eyes

Are mine that pierce the black disguise  
 And see our Lord! O woe of woe  
 That I should see, that I should know  
 Whom 'tis they use that use Him so!

(Written after return to Mashonaland Native Work, 119-120)

The living abjected black body is sanctified, because, like Christ's flesh, it too has suffered death, both physically through wars, and politically and socially through the dispossession of land. Cripps, the modern-day John the Baptist (Brown 1976: 174), baptises the black Christs in the font of his ministry.

The soldier as suffering Christ, drinking from the cup of despair in the Garden of Gethsemane (For Many a Headstone, 69) and bleeding from his wounded hands (Faith: I Bethlehem's Faith, 96) in Cripps, is a common theme

in First World War poetry (Volsik 2001; Christie 2007: 139-141; Fussell 1975: 119). However, the suffering “Black Christ” is unique to Cripps’s war poetry. This theme is also explored in Cripps’s fiction (Chennells 1976: 22-23). The image of the soldier as martyr is expanded to include both the black combatant and the colonised native.

Essentially, this tribal soldier is subject to Rhodesian “animality” (Brown 1976: 175), which, in Cripps’s poetry, also permeates the very act of war itself. The East African carrier, who was so essential in winning the war (Ambrose Brown 1991: 140), becomes the “beast of burden” (Supply and Transport, 72), whose sacrifice is quickly forgotten by the white authorities:

[...]

Who reaps the guerdon of their footsore pain,  
Of flies’, and suns’, fevers’ and fluxes’ drain?  
England – that must be snatching ere her time  
Fruit like to drop? Heroes – a few that climb  
On these poor bodies’ waste, and crow their day  
As cocks on dung-hills thron’d?

[...]

(The Dirge of Dead Porters, 73)

However, Cripps is not able to appropriate the black body fully. His invocation “He is your blood” in Orate Africanae, Pro Africanis! (79) rings hollow. The Latin orison in which westernised “African Saints” are called on to “Shine on them” from southern constellations is ironic, as it further distances the black body from any semblance of being real or uniquely African. This is an othering on two levels. Firstly, it indicates that not even Cripps, the philanthropist, could fully accept the black body on its own terms, as he has to “pierce the black disguise / [to ...] see our Lord!” (120). Secondly, it again highlights the unquantifiable corpse. Although he comes close to its full sensory horror in The Dirge of Dead Porters (73) as the “poor bodies’

waste" of killed black carriers is trampled "dung-hills" and in the black "Carrion Corps" of Gloria (101), the corpse is again quickly hidden from view within 'home' musings (*Homings*, 49-65), in nature wanderings, and wonderings, and similar to Slater's caring night-nurse, shaded by a kind moon:

By the hill-road we wind, and down and down.  
 Here 'twas a few chance lives away were thrown,  
 There goods and gear were wildly made away.  
 Waste here! Waste there! We've won a town this day,  
 And who's the better? Seek a place to lie  
 In some moon-glorious stoep – the lake-palms by!  
 At least you have won sleep, so lay you down!  
 (The Night of Victory: July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1916. Muanza captured; 22)

In the cool moonlight, the soldier is able to "dream rare iv'ry dreams" (Near the Equator, 39). Francis Brett Young, a British soldier poet who served on the Western Front, employs the same reworked Romantic nature lyric convention by turning away from the battlefield through a flight of fancy and his senses are subsequently assaulted by nature's gifts which are bestowed by a benevolent moon:

All through the day of battle the broken sound  
 Of shattering Maxim fire made mad the wood;  
 So that the low trees shuddered where they stood,  
 And echoes bellowed in the bush around:  
 But when, at last, the light of day was drowned,  
 That madness ceased... Ah, God, but it was good!  
 There in the reek of iodine and blood,  
 I flung me down upon the thorny ground.  
 So quiet was it, I might well have been lying

In a room I love, where the ivy cluster shakes  
 Its dew upon the lattice panes at even:  
 Where rusty ivory scatters from the dying  
 Jessamine blossom, and the musk rose breaks  
 Her dusky bloom beneath a summer heaven.  
 (After Action; Clausson 2006: 109)

Another British soldier poet who darkly hides the corpse is Maurice Baring in August, 1918 (In a French Village): "And many a thousand men to-night must die, / So many that they will not count the Dead" (iv, 13-14; Clausson 2006: 116). Although Baring does not divert his thoughts from the battlefield, the corpse is everywhere, but also nowhere to be found in the dark – the abject leftovers are so abhorred through dismemberment that a body-count of the dead is futile. The waste, which is every-thing, is an undistinguishable blob of nothingness. It is not only the minor British poets who, like Slater and Cripps, draw the moon's canopy across the abject. In Blunden's Illusions, as was seen, the moon softens the blow of the corpse, by misrepresenting it first as a quivering object, possibly of natural origin. Under the moon's half-light, it quickly degenerates into a grotesque effigy of death, a near-thing, but not the corpse itself (Clausson 2006: 118-119). Blunden, however, does speak the corpse more clearly than Cripps, Slater, Young and Baring do.

In Peace and War (9), Cripps mirrors the destruction wrought by the British campaign against the Germans and their black *askari* allies on Lake Victoria with the controversial murder of locals on Bumbireh Island (Lake Victoria) in 1875 by the well-known explorer Henry Morton Stanley.<sup>81</sup> In the second stanza, Cripps turns his reflections away from the horror, and disappears into the dreamscape of the East African landscape:

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<sup>81</sup> This incident is described in the *London Review of Books*, Letters 29(10), 24 May 2007, 'Stanley in Bumbireh', by P. Landau. Available at: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v29/n10/letters>. Accessed: 17 February 2013.

May we find more of mercy than we gave!

[...]

Now we'll go sailing on the self-same bay:  
 On that side writhes the smoke-waste, but on this  
 All is unspoilt. The green hill's elvish cone  
 Peers up from a deep thicket's richer green  
 Lining that lake-shore, whereby slips a tide  
 Thro' a strait channel shoal'd mysteriously.  
 Past the white sail's drawn curtain I may view  
 Both forest glows and glooms, and bright spray flung  
 Where the tide falters, and the rocks look out;  
 Here on my lips as in a dream come true  
 Lingers old music - 'foam of perilous seas  
 In faërylands forlorn.' What faëryland!  
 And how forlorn!

“Forlorn!” The very word

Is like a bell to toll me back.’

My fate

Bends with that omen

[...]

The reality of war cruelly blows away his dream-cloud, and the poem ends in customary wartime despair, which is encapsulated by the word “Forlorn”, which tolls in anguish, echoing Keats’s Ode to a Nightingale. This is an expression, the use of which “suggests the unparalleled literariness of all ranks that fought the Great War” (Fussell 1975: 156). Although Fussell refers to the British soldiers’ penchant for appropriating Keats’s archetypal “faery lands forlorn”, the same erudite nature is claimed for the literary soldiers of the Union.

In *The Nongqai* of March 1915 (3(III)), it is confidently proclaimed that “There are few men who as a class are such readers as the men of the South African Uniformed Services, and no class of people read so widely of the works of South African writers”. As evidence for this the writer adds: “a proof of which statement is quite easily to be found by examination of the Librarians’ markings in the Services libraries from the Cape to the Zambesi” (157). The histories on South African participation are also confident in asserting that volunteers for Europe were mostly well-educated (Nasson 1996: 2; Kerton-Johnson n.d: 18). These assumptions have not been quantitatively tested. The military files of these volunteers, which contain important personal information, and are housed at the Military Archives have never been closely scrutinized and analysed. However, the majority of volunteers hailed from the English-dominated cities in the Union, which generally had better schooling facilities (Genis 2000). The publication of soldiery magazines like *The Nongqai* and *The Springbok Blue* lends credence to this assumption.

It was these educated men who wanted to give metaphysical meaning to the unreality of war’s reality. However, this metaphysical anguish in Cripps does not descend to the same horrific depths of corporeal representations of the trench poets:

The scythe-song of the bullets in the air,  
 Their lead or steel threshing the water’s face,  
 The shell-torn thickets of a lakeshore fair,  
 The bloodstains on a deck! These all have place  
 In my remembrance of that fated day –  
 When our sane glad World grop’d her crazy way  
 Entranc’d (each booming gun – War’s minister –  
 A belle dame sans merci enchanting her).  
 (In Action: St. Nicholas’ Day, 1915; 8)

Rix (1976: 284) perceptively observes that the poem shows initial promises of evolving into a "savage" trench lyric, but peters out into an impersonal flower-patterned reflection on wartime experience. However, Cripps's incorporeal images of war do raise terrible phantoms in his poetry. The Lake (earth) has fallen under the scourge of the biblical four horsemen of the apocalypse (3-4); East Africa and Lake Victoria is an ominous paradise lost (33-35,40) and wasteland (39); a place of disease (11,56), inhabited by "Men fever-sicken'd" (28). The lake, with its environs, is essentially a dark Angel of death (41):

A cold fresh height, a green rain-sodden plain

A grey soft-clouded sky!

And these are yours –

Brown Afric of my blue and golden hours?

Yet here your curse leers grim, your old oppression lours,

Yet here your troubled self, task-mistress, you remain!

(Equatorial Africa, 35)

It is Adamastor whose cursed horsemen have swarmed across the African plains to exact revenge for its rape by cutting down the settler through wars, pestilence and famine. Cripps's only defence against this physical and psychological threat is to metaphorise Lake Victoria Nyanza as Jesus' Lake of Gennesaret or the Sea of Galilee (85). Galilee and Nyanza are superimposed; they are religious metaphors for the battle between heaven and hell (115). The lake is inhabited by the German Gadara devils – the exponents of Bismarck's 'blood and steel' philosophy (7) and a metaphysical interspace of spiritual crises, an African Gadarene (85,88,115), an ambivalent place where, disturbingly, Christ is asleep or absent (85), yet also present in calming the storm (115).

Cripps's juxtaposition of the waters of two lakes has a deeper allegorical meaning; the key lies in Mark (5: 1-17) and Luke (8: 26-37) in the

New Testament. The battle between life and death, spiritual salvation and damnation also resonates in the beating heart of the living:

And when he [Jesus] was come out of the ship [after crossing the Sea of Galilee], immediately there met him out of the tombs a man with an unclean spirit [...]" (Mark 5: 2).

Cripps cannot speak the corpse that horrifically rises from the grave. Cripps acts as a religious-phobic writer who has to allegorise and metaphorise "in order to keep from being frightened to death; instead he comes to life again in signs" (Kristeva 1982: 38). His symbolic crutch is the mythical cross. He does not fear so much the German enemy as the unclean corpse. This is again, as is the case with Slater's poems, the reason why the *manqué* is displaced and quickly removed from the battlefield.

In A Way Out (61), Cripps speaks "The mood of a dead man", and hides his corpse in the wood and veld. The deceased is King David, who finds solace in God's presence only in Nature. In Homing Song (62), the "things" are hidden in the "O" of night-time forgetting (62). The "sandal-wings of Venture's charm" are donned to escape from the battlefield in Via Mystica (65). The corpse is also hiding behind the "Screen" of "War's Shrine"(69), a stone/brick ruin (71), and is essentially the brave, moral, 'well-smelling' and clean, memorised, better-off and fortunate dead soldier or living soul (70,71,81-82). Death is "war's forc'd loan" (74), the great "honour sleep" (75, 77), and the "unvext repose" (81). Death is, similar to the Anglo-American poetry of the war, an apotheosis of the corpse through sacrifice (76). The corpse is, bit by bit, reassembled as saints to dispel the 'bit-less' *manqué*:

Perpetua, Saint, and Saint Felicity,  
Souls that were once, souls that again will be  
Embodied joy, embodied constancy!  
(Orate Africanae, Pro Africanus!, i; 79)

However, the black corpse is doubly missing, as it is also absent from the 'whitened' rolls of honour: "Remember now to count the sparrows' fall - / Our roll, no papers print, of porters dead!" (Change of Trumps, 5-6; 27). Cripps is faced with a predicament. The heart of the noble Englishman goes to Christ when it dies, but at the same time, it is the same heart that hates the "Black Christ", the disenfranchised (19) "colour-bar" (20) stained corpse. This doubt also spills over into the righteousness of, if not the British cause, war itself (46,47,69), the "evil dream" (87) that unleashes "Hells on earth" (113). There are, however, even tinges of doubt in the just cause of the English war effort, as adversaries pray to the same gods:

Dragons are we to Michael of our foe?  
Is he the dragon our St. George would slay?  
Ask those fierce Saints who hate our hatred so -  
Those Saints so deaf when we for vict'ry pray!  
(Hagiomachy, 95)

Ironically, the warrior-angels are invoked by both the English and Germans to slay the dragon-enemy and to protect their souls. This act is sacrilegious as it slanders the good name of the saints who stand for righteousness; they cannot condone a war between brothers, as they battle only evil - the devil.

The sun rises and the rain falls on both Englishman and German in this unholy war: "In heav'nly folly large, that laughs to scorn / Our talk of 'holy war' [...] when will we understand?" (Faith: III The Mount's Faith, 98). Both sides reject Jesus' all-inclusive message of love by making war. There is even an element of resentment in Cripps' poetry: regret for taking part in the war:

And after all these years to come to this!  
Having rush'd my rapids, rac'd my reaches past -  
To find in waters almost damm'd my bliss,

And there outlag my days, my weeks outlast –  
 Drifting with hope (half dread) to reach the calm  
 Of seas myrrh-bitter with remorse's balm!  
 (Unto this Last: In a slack time, 100)

This rhyming sestet in iambic pentameter ominously points to the “half dread” of war, which, in The Vulture (15), is ingested by human scavengers:

There may be carrion on this cruise, I trow:  
 There may be trouble on this voy'ge, I fear.  
 And why? I saw them perch aboard but now –  
 Both harbingers.

I knew him by his wear –  
 Him of the tabs and red-cross, also him  
 With shoulder-crosses bright (or rather dim;  
 He keeps them ill). I know these vultures twain  
 That sight our toll of death or wounds afar –  
 The leech whose firm hand salves our bodies' pain,  
 The priest who fumbles o'er the unseen stain.  
 Ominous fowl are both in time of war.

The general, red-cross man and priest all feast on the broken bodies and minds of the men. The general sends men to the slaughter, the medic temporarily and perpetually stitches wounds only for them to be ripped open in future battles, and the priest's orisons are not able to heal the psychological scars of war. In Lycanthropy (112), all soldiers ominously and terrifyingly metamorphose into werewolves that prowl the dark woods:

[...]

But we – War's wehr-wolves – we than wolves more fain  
 (Grace-hardened, deaf to Gospel, blind to Rood,)

Fain to seek night-long horrors of the wood  
 Where the blood-trail is red, the blood-scent high,  
 Shall we return in time?

God, were it not  
 Best for Thy world we should not come again?

Cripps had access to a collective European psyche whose nightmares were hounded and haunted by the animality of the dark and cold woods. An English contemporary of Cripps writes: "the werewolf is a hybrid of the material and immaterial - of man and Elemental, known and Unknown" (O'Donnell 1912: 7); it is an anomaly that scavenges the dark and dank European forests (O'Donnell 1912); it is the limitless half-thing, part-man, the walking corpse. The soldier becomes a werewolf, which is a deeper psychological wound than the beastly possession of the maddened King Nebuchadnezzar (*Daniel 4*) referred to in Cripps's poetry, as the king came to his senses, in contrast to bellicose man who only perpetuates wars and madness.

The wood, veld or lake-sea is southern Africa's metaphysical conceit for the horrific corpse and the suffering during war. Cripps's verse and Slater's poems, especially Heard in the Woods, refer to this underlying madness, which could not be fully accommodated in words, and only partly through metaphors and metonyms. The reader's mind's-eye is diverted somewhere else, beyond the *manqué*, to wander in the Edenic African veld, or wade in the East African and Middle Eastern lake-sea of spiritual and martial regeneration. The epitome of the corpse's horrific sub-text in a white South African First World War milieu remains that sector on the Western Front bloodily stitched together by the river Somme.

### 3.2 Devil's Wood:<sup>82</sup>

*"What a theme for some painter's brush or some poet's inspiration!"*

This quote comes from a letter, written by an unnamed member of the Headquarters Staff in London and published in the *Cape Times*, in which the "glorious memories" of the "South African heroes" at Delville Wood are honoured (Delville Wood Letters 1916: 45-46). This 'poetic painting' was indeed commissioned, many times in fact, in which the theme *Ecce Homo* is drawn in thick red brush strokes of blood across a blank canvas of an empty grave.

The Battle for Delville Wood took place from 14 July to 20 July 1916, during the bloody Somme offensive on the Western Front. 1 South African Infantry Brigade was part of the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division that attacked Longueval Village and Delville Wood, which borders the village (Genis 1996: 4,7,8). The South Africans, as did all other British units during the Somme offensive, suffered crippling casualties.

The ethos of a distinct white South African martial national identity, founded on a blend of mythical-classical valour, Protestant-Scottish courage, tribal African ruthlessness, especially Zulu martial prowess, and colonial-settler fearlessness, was bloodied and consummated within the collective white English South African and Anglo-Afrikaner psyche at Delville Wood, and loudly proclaimed in the jingoistic press during and shortly after the war.<sup>83</sup> Similarly, South African historians,<sup>84</sup> soldier poets and civilian war poets have all been struck by the poetic destruction that was visited on the wood. Significantly, in the poetry, Devil's Wood is transformed into an

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<sup>82</sup> A month after the battle, *The War Illustrated* used the term "Devil's Wood" in a report on the battle for Delville Wood. *The Galway Express* (28 October 1916) and *The Times* (1917) also used the term (Quoted in Uys 2006: Title page). This name has come to represent the nightmare and suffering associated with the Battle for Delville Wood. Other names include "Death Wood" and "Nightmare Wood" (Kerton-Johnson, n.d.: 37-40; Nasson 2004: 195).

<sup>83</sup> See Nasson (2004). There was, however, not a blanket white support for the war effort. The majority Afrikaners and the minority Marxist, South African International Socialist League opposed the war on alternatively nationalist-republican and anti-capitalist grounds (63-64).

<sup>84</sup> See footnote 9b for a list of the Delville Wood sources.

offshoot African metonymic sylvan veld wherein the corpse is once again foliated in a natural setting.

H.F.S., the most accomplished South African soldier poet of the First World War and one of the Delville Wood poets, has a particular feel for the dramatic and Romantic. His poem April, together with Delville Wood, is published in the Poets' Corner of *The Springbok Blue*, the magazine of the South African Hospital at Richmond Park, Surrey. April sets the theme for a poetic turning away from the horror of trench warfare, which H.F.S.'s wounded and battle-scarred and weary readers would surely have appreciated. *The Springbok Blue* published various nature lyrics, which have as their main themes flowers, the moon (Life is Red Wine),<sup>85</sup> escapism in "luxuriant bowers" (Lines on James Thomson: the Poet of Nature),<sup>86</sup> and the exuberant-brave bird (Vibrations, The Swallow's Haunt, The Thrush).<sup>87</sup>

April<sup>88</sup> is cast in the same form-and-content-mould as the Romantic nature lyric which Clausson (2006) convincingly argues provided the preferred poetic genre form for both the soldier-poets and trench-poets of the First World War. This lengthened sonnet with an aabbccddeeffgghh rhyme scheme is a Keatsian celebration of Nature, and in particular of spring. It is similar to Keats's dreamy and sensuous visions "of nature observed at ground level, of thicket and glade and 'Rain-scented eglantine'" (Lamont 2001: 305). A sensitive, observing, poetic consciousness describes a natural setting bathed in "mirth":

Spring's abundant blossoms now  
Throng the once snow-ridden bough;  
Ripples on the pond run blue  
As the sun strikes lightly through  
Valley, wood, and muddy lane,

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<sup>85</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(4), July 1917: 75;

<sup>86</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(5), August 1917: 91.

<sup>87</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(6), October 1917: 123; I(8), November 1917: 54; NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, I(12), March 1918: 50.

<sup>88</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(2), May 1917: 38.

Newly wet with drifting rain.  
 Gorse is yellow on the hill;  
 Blackbirds whistle with a will;  
 Tenderly the weak lamb cries  
 Where the faltering curlew flies.  
 In the morning's airy mirth  
 A million leaves are brought to birth.  
 [...]

(1-12)

Nature is not a passive object for the poet's gaze, but a dynamic life-force. Blossoming nature is both forceful – it has “abundant blossoms” that “Throng the once snow-ridden / bough;” in rustic places where “Blackbirds whistle with a will;” and “A million leaves are brought to birth” – and delicate – the wind gently “Ripples on the pond [...]” where the sun “[...] strikes lightly through / Valley, wood, and muddy lane / Newly wet with drifting rain”. In these pastures “Tenderly the weak lamb cries / Where the faltering curlew flies”. Fussell (1975: 239-243) observes in the British Great War poetry that the intimately known pastoral “sheep” and “birdsong” provide ready-made images to come to terms with the highly alien battlefield. In April, Nature gives unconditionally and fills the poet's creative imagination. And this is the only truth, for beauty – maturing spring – is truth. Like the daffodils in Wordsworth's I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud or Daffodils, the birth of the leaves in April brings joy to the poet. The “Joy is born to us again” (13) in April mirrors “And then my heart with pleasure fills, / And dances with the daffodils” (The Norton 1983: 556-557; iv, 23-24) in Wordsworth's poem.

Like the daffodils in Wordsworth's I Wandered Lonely As a Cloud, the lark in Shelley's To a Skylark, and the nightingale in Keats's Ode to a Nightingale, the leaves that he witnesses in April and which have caught the poetic pensive gaze, focus the poet's reflective eye inwards as he meditates on

the significance of the natural phenomenon. Spring brings abundance, the warm sun and rain. It is the time when nature blossoms and animals awaken after the winter's snow. Essentially, the fruits of spring bring joy to the soldier:

[...]

In the morning's airy mirth  
 A million leaves are brought to birth.  
 Joy is born to us again  
 Out of cloud and soil and brain.  
 Soldier, turn you home once more,  
 April's hand is at your door.

(11-16)

The budding of new spring leaves rejuvenates the mind tired of soldiering as they remind the soldier-poet and his fellow wounded combatant audience of a new beginning and of home. The poet exhorts the soldier to "[...] turn you home once more, [...]", to remember home and the beautiful vistas of nature, which are to most of his audience, paradisiacal South Africa: a thematic golden thread that binds the war poems which refer to the South African landscape. To the soldier, spring's regenerative quality is forcefully brought to bear in the lines: "Joy is born to us again / Out of cloud and soil and brain. / Soldier, turn you home once more, / April's hand is at your door". In this remembering of home, far away to the south, and its Edenesque qualities that are mirrored in a northern English spring, the hellish trenches and dugouts dug deep into the wasteland of no-man's-land – the "cloud and soil" – can be temporarily transcended. Keatsian-like, the poem is anchored within a deep appreciation of the present moment and its joys: the past's cold has melted, the corpse has safely been buried and covered in budding blossoms, and the future awaits the full blooming of spring as it knocks on the mind's door to be let in as summer.

The genre of the Romantic nature lyric does not allow the soldier poet to explore fully the 'new nature' of trenches unnaturally dug beneath the earth's bounty. It only provides H.F.S. and English soldier-poets of the period (Clausson 2006: 105-115,124) with the poetic experience of the oneness with nature. War is not the central focus of these war poems, but nature is. It would be the trench-poets who would more fully grapple with this new unnatural nature of the trenches in their trench lyrics.

H.F.S. was not only influenced by the Romantic poets of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, but also by eminent war poets of the 1914-1918 conflict. The poem Before,<sup>89</sup> published a month before April, has undoubtedly been influenced by Rupert Brooke's The Soldier. Brooke's '1914' sonnets were very widely read (Bergonzi 2001: 416; Fussell 1975: 156-157), and H.F.S., who would most probably have surveyed Brooke's work, was also influenced by its themes of heroic death and remembrance. Brooke had a public-school upbringing, which was, in its pedagogical approach, similar to the Anglophile school system in South Africa that also influenced South African volunteers such as H.F.S. Young men were taught to see war as a glorious sport, steeped in the classical warrior tradition of Greece and Rome (Stallworthy 1993: xxvi-xxvii). Subsequently, the British poets during the early stages of the war dealt with conflict in a detached classical manner and as a heroic theatrical event; it was only the later poets who immersed their pens more completely in the blood-pot of martial victimhood, and the theme of the sinned-against soldier (Goldensohn 2003: 6; Stallworthy 1993: xxviii). Interestingly, early Homeric descriptions depict battle wounds in great detail, whereas later classical historians do not (32). They rather focus on the heroism of the army or the moral commander (Anderson 2003: 32-33). Brooke and other early war poets, therefore, write in the later classical tradition of the heroic and patriotic soldier, who remains apotheosised and woundless, and the later trench poets seemingly draw more inspiration from the earlier and more gruesome Homeric tradition.

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<sup>89</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(1), April 1917: 7.

In The Soldier, Brooke expresses a sensitive nostalgic jingoism:

If I should die, think only this of me:

That there's some corner of a foreign field

That is for ever England [...]

(1-3)

(Stallworthy 1993: 163)

Before, unlike The Soldier, is more ironic in its dealings with heroic sacrifice. Whereas the poet in The Soldier addresses an audience that does listen to the poet's exhortations to be remembered in likely death, H.F.S. indicates that it is possible that his soldierly sacrifice may be forgotten:

If to the fronting anadem of Death,  
Blind king of Nothing, I must bow my head;  
If with that bannerless company, the dead,  
I, too, in sleep no cannon wakeneth  
Shall lie, never more taking any breath  
Of trouble and delight, of blue hills spread  
Oh far beyond the limbs so well abed  
They will forget the word this sonnet saith -  
[...]

Likewise, Before also frames patriotism in a more tempered fashion than The Soldier does:

Then may there lie within your shallow grave,  
Poor sinful body, at least a deathward brow  
As close beside the first rank of the brave  
As pride and understanding bid you now -  
This, even though you rot upon the sod

That lies the way to glory and to God.

If the poet has to kneel and be crowned by the king of death, then he is only redeemed in being interned “close beside the first rank of the brave”.

Before, true to its later publication of 1917, therefore deals with war in a more sober estimation of heroism as compared to The Soldier, which was written early in the war when battle was still very much viewed as a triumphant affair. The later generation of British trench-poets, like Owen and Rosenberg, depicted war as horrifically absurd. Echoes of this are to be found in Before, in which the horrors of the trenches, whose soil and mud swallowed and drowned men or froze their bodies in cold earth and where the heat amplified the stench of decaying limbs, are graphically revealed as flesh that “rot upon the sod”. The heroism inherent in the act of soldierly sacrifice is significantly toned down by the reference to the “shallow grave” in which the bodies “rot”. This reference has a marked and horrific impact in the context of trench warfare. During battle, soldiers had to be hastily laid out in shell-holes or buried in shallow graves. Under severe bombardments, these corpses were thrown into the air and had to be reburied once more. It was a Godot-like cycle of absurdity – of never ending burial and reburial. The poet envisions – through the more personal “I” and the “you” that gives his experience an inclusive quality – a future scenario when he too – the sinful body – and soldiery in general may be regurgitated or rejected by the earth. His consolation is that “at least” his soul or “deathward brow” will be part of the brave host.

In contrast, The Soldier in softer melancholic tones refers to the battleground as “rich earth” in which the even “richer dust” of the fallen English soldier, who is a culturally blessed creature, is buried. This sanctified “body of England’s, breathing English air” shall purify the earth; the images of wholesome nature hark back to Georgian poetry’s heralding of the English countryside. The dead in The Soldier and Before, even though more circumspectly expressed by H.F.S., are renewed or regenerated. In The

Soldier, the soldier lives and gives eternally through “A pulse in the eternal mind, no less / Gives somewhere back the [blessed] thoughts by England given....” These themes of purification, renewal and self-sacrifice are characteristic of Brooke’s poetry (Lessenich 1999). In the same vein, the dead soldier in Before, through “pride and understanding”, is made whole in a glorious association with the noble host and God. The corpse decays, but the soul lives eternally with God.

Significantly, doubt is even inherent in regeneration, as expressed in the uncertain conditional “If” that introduces Before. Lessenich (1999) asserts that even Brooke’s “'Five War Sonnets' (MS 1914) contain too many subtle satirical lunges at established rites of war to be read as pure confirmations of man's vital regeneration by England's landscapes and England's wars”. He goes on to argue that Brooke may have written more anti-heroic poems, as Owen did, if he had not died prematurely during the war. Although Before is not an outright condemnation of the war, it does raise some deeply troubling aspects – to the soldier that is. The reversion of remembrance and the horrific earthly – and earthy – death have already been explored. In the first part of the poem, Death is depicted as utter loss; it is a kingdom of nothingness, where the regiments of the dead have lost their banners – the symbol of their prowess and glory on the battlefield. The vibrancy of life – both its positive and negative aspects – has left the entombed bodies. In the end, however, the poet finds solace in the fraternity of combatants and in Christ.

The collective martial brotherhood in Before is also referred to as the “Poor sinful body”. This allusion is in line with the soldier-irony of the poetry at this time (Goldensohn 2003: 17). It was not the dead soldier who has sinned but rather society that has forgotten his sacrifice and the enemy who has dealt the death-blow. The pity lies with the soldier and his ultimate sacrifice. There are, therefore, resonances of Owen’s theme of the soldier as a victim of society. Owen’s poetry encapsulates this brotherhood of the pitiful, as the soldiers in his poems are not the aggressors, but the aggrieved victims (Goldensohn 2003: 48,53,60,76). As Owen states in Apologia pro Poemate

Meo,<sup>90</sup> "These men are worth / Your tears". Owen, in the same poem, states that he "too, saw God through mud [...]". In Before, the soldier found "glory" and "God" only by entering through the "sod" or mud-graves of the trenches. In contrast, Owen's vision of God is not a redemptive one. To Owen, the war is "Where death becomes absurd and life absurder", and a place where hopes are dashed against the barbed-wire of no-man's-land. It is where:

[...] you share  
 With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,  
 Whose world is but the trembling of a flare,  
 And heaven but as the highway for a shell,  
 (29-32)

The preceding eras' battle-plains of heroic cavalry charges - The Charge of the Light Brigade by Alfred, Lord Tennyson springs immediately to mind - had become the static trench-lines of the western front, in which soldiers were interned in alternating states of aggression in order to combat external danger and inertia or routine boredom which generated internal peril (Ashworth 2000). Life in the trenches was overshadowed by the *Thanatos*, a repetitive cycle of ritualistic violence which could lead either to physical or psychological death. It could be argued that it is a Freudian Death Instinct (Appignanesi & Zarate 2000: 150-152) that compelled men, driven by an unseen force, to volunteer for service. Eminent poets including Owen, Rosenberg and Sassoon were among those who volunteered instinctively (Lessenich 1999). But then again, this "deathward brow" of irresistible death is also fixed to notions of unit *esprit de corps*, masculinity, nationalism and camaraderie as expressed through intimate and reciprocally motivated "primary groups" or the 'buddy' system in the trenches,<sup>91</sup> and a strong

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<sup>90</sup> Poet Seers. Available at: <http://www.poetseers.org/the-great-poets/british-poets/wilfred-owen-poems/apologia-pro-poemate-meo/>. Accessed: 21 September 2013.

<sup>91</sup> See Ashworth (2000) for a detailed description of these phenomena within the dynamics of the "live and let live system" on the Western Front.

historical tradition deeply indebted to the classics, as is evident in H.F.S.'s poem After,<sup>92</sup> which forms a thematic unit with Before. The two poems were subsequently published side-by-side in the April 1917 edition of *The Springbok Blue* magazine. In Before, the poet muses about war and death before they have become a reality. In After, the poet reflects back on his wartime experience (in the past tense).

This instinctive drive of the soldier to kill or get killed is consciously stated in After: "That last command [to go over the top] / Now came, thank God, and out we climbed [to surge into no-man's-land] -". The poet welcomes the arrival of zero hour, that terrible 'unleasher' of chaos and death, with a sense of relief. It is almost as if he were waiting for the predestined moment - to kill or be killed - the *Thanatos*.

This death drive leads to battlefield animality, when the soldiers, in Cripps's (1917: 112) poetic metaphor of the reversal of personification, become werewolves, which are driven by the beastly passions of the preying wolf (O'Donnell 1912: 7). In After, the poet's blind instinctive fate does not degenerate into an involuntary beastliness, but is played out on a dramatic and elevated war-torn stage, accompanied by the warlike music from Ciro's band:

The smoke-drift spanned  
And sickened the curve of summer sky,  
But the glory of our bayonets gleamed  
As bitterly pale to my bright eye  
As to my ringing memory seemed  
The tune of Ciro's band.

(i)

The usual dramatic props are provided for the theatrical event: the drifting smoke and gleaming bayonets; the glory is in the war and this is in

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<sup>92</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(1), April 1917: 7.

keeping with Edwardian attitudes to war (Gooch 1975), and the literary transformation of no-man's-land into a "Theater [sic] of War" (Fussell 1975: 191-230). Significantly, reference to bayonets instead of rifles or canons evokes images of hand-to-hand combat set in the classical mould:

Conspicuous as the evening star that comes,  
 amid the first in heaven, at fall of night,  
 and stands most lovely in the west, so shone  
 in sunlight the fine-pointed spear  
 Achilles poised in his right hand [...]  
 (From The Iliad of Homer; Stallworthy 1993: 3)

There were still some vestiges of noble warfare, even in the very modern industrialised conflict that was the First World War, e.g. the spear-like bayonet that was used at close quarters during combat. This is a reversal of death visited impersonally from afar by weapons of the machine-age, or by the very unheroic sniper's bullet. To H.F.S., war is still a very personal – and splendid – affair, similar to the mythologised heroic Anzac struggle against the primordial elements at Gallipoli (Hoffenberg 2001: 120-123).

The presence of *Ciro* reinforces the classical view of conflict as postulated poetically in After. The *Ciro* mentioned in the poem most probably refers to the Centaur Chiron of Greek mythology. Significantly, the poet's memory of war is closely allied with "Ciro's band" of heroes. Chiron protected and instructed various mythological heroes including Peleus, Achilles and Jason, who were all famous warriors (NLEM 1989: 95,146,161-163,170,179,194,195,196). Furthermore, Chiron also taught the more war-like sports of horse riding and hunting, as well as the finer art of music (NLEM 1989: 195). H.F.S. therefore situates his mythical heroic war ethos squarely within the British tradition of conflict as a noble yet violent sport and art, and within the classical tradition of Roman and Greek writers, which markedly influenced British war poetry of the period.

However, After also questions then-held rational and metaphysical certainties. The regenerative metaphor of the lark, as expressed by the Romantic poets Wordsworth and Shelley, is overturned. Larks, symbolising morning stand-to, and nightingales, evening stand-to in the trenches, flew from the pages of the pastorals to infuse the war poets' work (Fussell 1975: 241-243). They reminded the soldier of homefront comforts, provided for literary continuity, and their song brought the realisation that life was somehow still worth living, even in the trenches. To the Romantics, the lark was a font of the rapturous outpouring of Nature and poetic inspiration: "There is madness about thee, and joy divine / In that song of thine; / Lift me, guide me, high and high / To thy banqueting place in the sky" (Wordsworth's To a Sky-Lark, ii, 12-15);<sup>93</sup> or: "Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! / Bird thou never wert, / That from Heaven, or near it, / Pourest thy full heart / In profuse strains of unpremeditated art" (Shelley's To a Skylark, i, 1-5).<sup>94</sup> The South African war poet John Lomax also recruits the lark as a literary muse and angel of metaphysical certainty:

Or even as one – belated 'mid the dark  
 And death-fraught fungus of some foreign fen,  
 Where stealthy shapes emerge from ditch and den –  
 Well knows that o'er his body stiff and stark,  
 With wonted wonderment, will lilt the lark,  
 I know that peace will come; but when, oh when?  
 (When?, ii, Lomax 1918: 23)

The lark's playful rhythmic song submerges the *manqué* in verse – the pleasant aural music drowns the disagreeable tactile trench experiences – although doubt still lingers; war's destruction still continuous to conjure "stealthy shapes" or "death-fraught fungus" from "some foreign fen". The

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<sup>93</sup> Wordsworth: *Poetical Works* (1973: 126).

<sup>94</sup> *The Norton* (1983: 624).

civilian poet Lomax, similar to Slater, only approaches the corpse “mid the dark” in profusely floral diction. The soldier poet did not always have that escapist luxury. In the trenches, the larks’ song could also be a symbol of tragic absurdity, as their singing contrasted eerily and farcically with the sounds of death (Fussell 1975: 242). In *After*, the sublime pastoral lark is made profane by its close association with destruction visited by modern weapons; it is Wordsworth’s ambiguous “madness”: “The song the lark and the bullet sang / As we made [across no-man’s-land] for the [enemy frontline] wire rent and grimed” (ii, 9-10). The life-giving song of the lark in Wordsworth’s and Shelley’s poems becomes the cacophony of death in the no-man’s-land of torn bodies strung out on dirty barbed-wire. In *After*, the sacred lark is figuratively reeled in from its elevated flight to participate in the funeral song that accompanies the death march of the damned; its melodious song now turns into the death-rattle of modern weapons. In Private H.L. Shaw’s *Ypres*,<sup>95</sup> the lark ironically now sings in iambic tetrameter, alternating with iambic trimeter where men lie dead – within the heroic ballad stanza:

“In No Man’s Land the lav’ rocks rest  
 And sing their matin-song  
 Where once at zero-hour went west  
 The stripling and the strong.” (iii)<sup>96</sup>

However, in the poetry, the lark is still an object, although a menacing one, of poetic inspiration as is the case in the trench-poet Isaac Rosenberg’s bitter *Returning, We Hear the Larks* (1917), wherein the larks’ song brings sinister tidings to soldiers returning from the battle-raid:

But hark! joy-joy-strange joy.  
 Lo! heights of night ringing with unseen larks.

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<sup>95</sup> The South African Brigade also fought, bled and drowned in the mud of Flanders (See Digby 1993: 221-261).

<sup>96</sup> Published in Digby (1993: 249).

Music showering our upturned list'ning faces.

Death could drop from the dark  
 As easily as song –  
 But song only dropped,  
 Like a blind man's dreams on the sand  
 By dangerous tides,  
 Like a girl's dark hair for she dreams no ruin lies there,  
 Or her kisses where a serpent hides.  
 (iii, 7-9, iv, 10-16; Stallworthy 1993: 187)

Ominous poetic visions come dripping death-like, in the guise of the larks' song. Clausson (2006: 122) observes " [...] the 'strange joy' of Rosenberg's larks is darkly ambiguous, like a 'blind man's dream', or the potentially ruinous beauty of a girl's 'dark hair'". Like the lark's song and the whizzing of bullets that are juxtaposed in *After*, the song of the invisible larks in Rosenberg's poem could be the screeching made by falling artillery shells. The object of the poet's attention – the lark – is not cast as an angelic "scorner of the ground [*terra firma*]" in the traditional Romantic role, but as an uncanny familiar that visits death on earth in the wake of its singing. Rosenberg is consumed by this dark uncertainty within which danger prowls. By contrast, H.F.S.'s poetic persona is 'saved' from the darkness without and within.

In *After*, the lark's cry of death, a metaphor for the sounds of battle and destruction, is drowned in the first person narrator's ear by music emanating from an imaginary *Ciro's band*. Importantly, the Centaur Chiron was not only an instructor in the bellicose arts, but also in the finer pursuits of pipe and lyreplaying (NLEM 1989: 195). "*Ciro's band*", therefore, also refers to a musical and even poetic ensemble of heroes. The poet's imagining of *Ciro's* epic spectral waltz has blotted out the death-sound of lark and projectile: "I heard it not for the waltz that rang / From a phantom *Ciro's band*" (ii, 11-12).

Through *Ciro's* compositions, the poetic consciousness in *After* gradually descends into a dream-text. The lustrous flashes of bayonets in stanza one, which bring back images of epic Homeric duels between heroes, quicken in the poet's mind's-eye or ear through what the poet likens to "The tune of *Ciro's* band". The poet is still in control of his faculties. In the second stanza, the poet's lucid recollection of events turns into a phantasm of *Ciro's* orchestrated sounds, which blot out the sounds of death. In the last stanza, the soldier-poet completely loses contact with reality:

In bloody sand  
I lay at length with an aching head,  
Till the filmy brain-stare lost its ray.  
And life became a dance where the dead  
And I reeled round with the men in grey  
To the drone of *Ciro's* band

Thus, the poet, the dead, and the enemy – the Germans wore grey uniforms – all dance "To the drone of *Ciro's* band". *Ciro's* heroic strands have gradually become something more physical, or audible; the melodious "tune" that is remembered in the first stanza becomes the more aural-enveloping "waltz" of stanza 2, and ultimately turns into the all-encompassing "drone" of the third stanza. The noisier the music becomes, the more reality is blotted out. In the first stanza, the poet still coherently re-experiences what happened through a "bright eye" and "ringing memory", i.e. clear thinking or remembering. The experiences seem real, but by the last stanza, the music from *Ciro's* band has devolved from a more ethereal "phantom" score (stanza 2) into an all pervasive cacophony that guides the poet's, the dead's, and the enemy's actions. They are all caught up in a deadly dance, whose steps are discordantly tuned by the Centaur's musical company of heroes. Normalcy has broken down; post-traumatic stressors are evident in the "aching head" of wartime experience, when "the filmy brain-stare lost its ray". In the war,

soldiers' actions are 'tuned', 'waltzed' and 'droned' out by what society and the contemporary readers of the poem require – a hero's conduct and death. Like musical marionettes, their actions are controlled by historical tradition – the example set by Chiron's heroic Greek charges – and psychology – the 'play up' theme of contemporary Anglo-Saxon jingoism. Significantly, Ciro's band of heroes is not an exclusive company, as the enemy also dances to their tune – that of heroic action on the battlefield. Ciro's dance, therefore, also represents the act of war, in which the poet – a British soldier – the Germans and the dead are all equally and tragically involved.

Similarly, Blunden depicted his disturbing recollections of the war as a deadly dance with the foe in The Midnight Skaters (1925):

Then on, blood shouts, on, on,  
     Twirl, wheel and whip above him,  
 Dance on this ball-floor thin and wan,  
     Use him as though you love him;  
 Court him, elude him, reel and pass,  
 And let him hate you through the glass.  
 (iii, Fussell 1975: 258)

In both poems, the corpses are resurrected to take part in this war dance between friend and foe; they are not hidden from view, but drawn into the ambit of wartime experience and memory. The poet is able to consort with and even touch the corpses by descending into a dream-text, very similar to that which Owen achieved in Dulce Et Decorum Est. The horrid corpse, and its traumatic effects and affects, can be processed through a symbolic dance, which appears to be a complete break with reality. It is only this descent into literary madness that allows the poetic persona to deal with the horrific 'real' experience of corpsification, in a similar fashion to other therapeutic "symbolic narratives" of creative expression (Saks 2008: 165-166), in which the

sharing of combat experience with other walking-wounded minds dispels the fear of wartime and post-war isolation.

Before and After are, thus, cast in an Edwardian mould of the high appreciation of classical heroism, but with definite residues of doubt and a more sobering depiction of the horrors of war; the Romantic and pre-war Georgian, which is Neo-Romantic in nature, rendering of the regenerative qualities of Nature, i.e. the beauty and abundance of earth and sky/bird, are tinged with ambiguity in Before and After, i.e. the rotting soil of decay and the death-cry of the lark respectively. According to Lessenich (1999), even the pre-war Georgian poetry and the late Victorian and Edwardian world-view displayed some elements of doubt concerning the true nature of existence. A case in time is the war poetry of the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902), during which the broad-based literate soldiery were able and willing to pen unpleasant personal experiences of combat, which by this time was seen as more brutal and tragic than during previous conflicts (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 4-5; 156). Van Wyk Smith raises Thomas Hardy's Drummer Hodge as the "masthead" for his seminal thesis on a new kind of poetry that was being written at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South Africa, and which was the precursor of the bitter trench lyrics of 1914-1918 (ix):

They throw in Drummer Hodge, to rest

Uncoffined – just as found:

His landmark is a kopje crest

That breaks the veldt around;

And foreign constellations west

Each night above his mound.

Young Hodge the Drummer never knew –

Fresh from his Wessex home –

The meaning of the broad Karoo,

The Bush, the dusty loam,

And why uprose to nightly view  
 Strange stars amid the gloam.

Yet portion of that unknown plain  
 Will Hodge for ever be;  
 His homely Northern breast and brain  
 Grow to some Southern tree,  
 And strange-eyed constellations reign  
 His stars eternally.  
 (147)

The “foreign”, “Strange”, “unknown” and “strange-eyed” Adamastor is present to cast an even more evil and uncanny shadow across the limitless “Uncoffined” corpse, which like a terrible leech, has attached its oozing bits to an African tree. This poem’s echoes of the dark shade cast by the Titan of the Cape even caught the imagination of the editors of the armed services magazine, *The Nongqai*, and Hardy’s poem is published in the June 1917 edition (VII(6): 340). In the January 1916 issue of this magazine, poetic expression had already been given to this abject fear. In four rhyming quatrains primarily in iambic pentameter, Table Mountain is described as the “Grim Guar’ian” of the “Cape of Storms”, which hides terrible “knowledge”, and where man’s fate is “Bound up in that great wilderness of veldt. / Stretching so far beyond our narrow ken, / From thee to past the Earth’s Encircling belt.” Adamastor merely looks on as it bides its time to avenge its rape by the settlers: “But thou in silence, tense / Forbidding, frowning, keep’st for ever still” (C.J. Lever, *To Table Mountain*; V(1): 53). The “Grim Guar’ian” does serve as innuendo not only for the “black peril”, but also for the darker shade of the corpse. But again, in the poetry the *manqué* can only be viewed through the moonlit eye of the caring night-nurse, or embowered in an Edenic harbour, or appropriated from a distance within a dream-text.

The war poetry of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century is, therefore, not only adventure-heroic “Kiplingisms”, and “prettify[ing] war” ramblings, but also pity-horror narratives (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 34-35,146-154,199-201), with bodies a “Rotting [as] they lay” (150). Similarly, European military paranoia, alarmism and preparedness after 1902, as reflected in the poetry of Kipling, Laurence Binyon, George Barlow and Marshall Bruce-Williams, was rife, but tempered by war pity and horror poets like Alfred Noyes (307-308). H.F.S.’s poetry is, therefore, an amalgamation of traditional thematic elements of the Romantic and Georgian poetic forms and literary conventions, and the more modern concept of the expression of existential doubt, although in a more discreet manner than in the outright disillusioned trench-poems of Rosenberg and Owen. In waltzing with the dead, H.F.S. also creates an outlandish deceit in the Metaphysical mould by dancing the corpse back to life again. The grave becomes a Donnesque meeting place of, if not lovers, men who intimately share the same blood-sacrifice.

It must be kept in mind that H.F.S. was very close to the deep wounds of war – both physical and psychological – as either a convalescent or orderly at Richmond Military Hospital. He most likely experienced frontline service first hand, and does not merely imagine death from afar as Slater does.

H.F.S.’s rendition of the heroic-masculine blood-bond reaches its apex in his poem Delville Wood (1917).<sup>97</sup> He is one of many who has contributed to the considerable body of Delville Wood war poetry. The battle of Delville Wood, together with the sinking of the SS Mendi in 1917, the battle for Tobruk during the Second World War and the Cuito Cuanavale campaign of the Angolan/Namibian Border War of the 1980s, looms large in the mythical-heroic warrior ethos of South Africa. ‘Devil’s Wood’ has consequently been deeply engraved in the historical memory of white South African war poets during and since the First World War. The battle has all the elements of a

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<sup>97</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(1), April 1917: 11.

Unfortunately, it cannot be established if H.F.S. did take part in the battle as he only writes under a *nom de plume*, and subsequently his personal military file cannot be traced.

tragic Greek Thermopylae: it was a battle against the odds, fought by a “noble few”<sup>98</sup> in a landscape of physical and emotional scars against a numerically superior enemy (Genis 1996: 4-20). H.F.S. briefly explains in two rhyming quatrains:

Gold cannot rival their reward  
 Who rendered all that blood can give  
 That Honour might not cease to live  
 Nor Right turn lacquey to the sword.

They'll ride the blue-bounded veld no more  
 Nor tread that whiter-sanded shore  
 But unto Doomsday they'll receive  
 The glory of the memory they leave.

(Delville Wood)

This poem is accompanied by a dark pencil sketch depicting Delville Wood after the battle. Its presence on the same page of *The Springbok Blue* magazine as the poem is significant, as its content visually draws together the different strands of the battle's varied psychological synapses of South Africa's historical and poetic imaginings of the conflict: half-torn wooden stumps lean precariously and are scattered under a dark sky, with only a hint of sunlight that gradually breaks through the cloud-cover. A ruin forms the focal point of the composition. On this corpseless theatre-stage of death, H.F.S. dramatically positions “Honour”, “Right” and “glory”, the main actors who are pitched against injustice – the servant of the sword. Interestingly, from the history pages of the actual battle, a Leonidas and his noble 300 step to the fore. Lieutenant Colonel E.F. Thackeray and a small ‘band of brothers’ of 1 South African Infantry Brigade held out against successive waves of enemy attacks until they were relieved. Cornwell (1977) sums up this Spartan

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<sup>98</sup> Quoted from: Wynne, E.L. 1916. The Heroes of Delville Wood (vii, 27).

feat: “The casualties inflicted on the Germans on the 19<sup>th</sup>, followed by Thackeray’s successful defence of Buchanan Street [situated within the wood] that night were achievements which may well have saved the entire flank of the British front [during the Somme offensive of July 1916]” (53-54). “Every detachment of 3<sup>rd</sup> S.A.I. carried out instructions to hold on at all costs + [sic] not a single detachment retired from their positions, either in the perimeter of the wood or from the support trench”.<sup>99</sup> Thackeray spoke thus of his hoplites, who, unlike Leonidas’s Spartans, were not decimated, but retained around half the number of the original ‘indestructibles’ at Thermopylae (Genis 1996: 11). Soldiers’ periodicals like *The Springbok Magazine*<sup>100</sup> and *The Nongqai* (1916-1918) carried articles on the fighting and casualties suffered at Delville Wood and beyond, and the subsequent commemorations. These magazines, similar to the poetry in the British and American army newspapers *The Wipers Times*, and *The Stars and Stripes*, steer clear of the depiction of the corpse, as soldiers who died are portrayed as still roaming the no-man’s-land of the Western Front (Sychterz 2005: 51-54). The South African war memorization, with its concomitant poetry, was prosaic and lyrical elegies of the “bright young lives” that essentially had “to keep fragrant [their ...] memory”.<sup>101</sup> The Springbok encapsulated a perpetual fighting spirit, stretching back to classical times, consummated in the trenches, and kept alive in the collective memory of future generations of hoplites.

It was not only soldiers who had a high estimation of the courage displayed by their comrades at Delville Wood. This view of Springbok valour was also firmly held by the public during the war. *The Times* of London concluded in 1917 that “No battlefield on all the Western Front was more bitterly contested than was ‘Devil’s Wood’ [...] It was in the first week of the struggle that the South African forces won their imperishable fame – grimly

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<sup>99</sup> SANDF Archives, WOI DA, Box 5, War Diary, 3<sup>rd</sup> South African Infantry Regiment July 1916, Operations on the Somme, (Attached: Appendices 143-157): 31-32.

<sup>100</sup> *The Springbok Magazine* (November 1917 – March 1919) was *The Springbok Blue’s* (April – October 1917) successor.

<sup>101</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, ‘Delville Wood Anniversary’, II(6), September 1918: 14-16; SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, ‘The Glorious SAI Brigade: How They Fought to the Finish’, IX(9), September 1918: 425.

hanging on against overwhelming odds and repulsing counter attacks by troops five and six times their number” (Quoted in Uys 2006: Title page). The South African public, and especially English-speaking citizens, also took up this standard of fame in the press, on church pulpits and by enthusiastically organising Recruiting Committees in larger urban centres, like Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban (Genis 2000: 14-99,143-160).

Consequently, ‘Honour’, ‘Right’, ‘Duty’, ‘Noble’ deeds, ‘Crusade’, ‘Bravery’, ‘Self-sacrifice’, and ‘Glory’ are common themes in poems dealing with the battle. John Lomax’s poem In Delville Wood (1918) sums up this Herculean effort to the bitter end:

Till none remain, we said, in disdain  
                     Of the fatal fume and the iron rain,  
 Though the branch may wither and fall the fruit,  
 Steadfast in earth, resides the root,  
 We’ll hold the Wood and our word maintain.

We’ll hold the Wood; we’ll plant amain  
 Therein our banner of fair repute,  
 Our to establish and ours retain,  
                     Till none remain.

What though our ranks might waste and wane,  
 We saw through the scathing hurricane  
 Many a stalwart, stern, recruit  
 Leap from our country, resolute  
 To deal our death to the foe again  
                     Till none remain.

(Lomax 1918: 4)

Probably the most insightful text that elucidates this crusading spirit and the “glory of the memory” (H.F.S., Delville Wood, 8) of the white Africans who fought in Europe, which permeates the poetry of Delville Wood, was written by Captain Eustace St. Clair Hill – the chaplain of the First Regiment of 1SAI Brigade and a larger-than-life veteran of the war. He was fully immersed in the triune world of the trenches, where war was waged in threes – preparation, battle and reflection (Fussell 1975: 125-131). His wartime trinity consisted of being wounded in 1916, being awarded the Military Cross in the same year, and being taken prisoner of war by the Germans during their ‘great push’ of March 1918 on the Western Front.<sup>102</sup> Digby (1993: 139) concludes that “it was as though Christ walked with Captain The Rev Eustace St Clair Hill [...]” before considering the findings relating to the padre’s unselfish acts of caring bestowed to his men during the Delville Wood battle (139-143). In an article written by Hill and entitled *Why Delville Wood had to have a Cross* (1926: 7),<sup>103</sup> the fighting men in Delville Wood metamorphose into ‘Christs’ on their way to Golgotha: “The road up to the Wood was in fact the Way of the Cross....” This is similar to Wilfred Owen’s suffering soldiers who become Christ figures (Volsik 2001), and also analogous to Cripps’ For Many a Head-stone (Cripps 1917: 69) and Faith: I Bethlehem’s Faith (96), in which the soldier takes on Christ’s spiritual and bodily suffering. In Cripps’s Under-studies (111), a benevolent Christ blesses the poetic persona’s eyes: Christ views the terrible corpse so that the believing man does not have to. As opposed to Owen’s depiction of battlefield suffering as being absurd, and Cripps’s sometimes searing doubts “Of seas myrrh-bitter with remorse’s balm” in, for instance, Unto this Last (100), Hill’s ‘Christs’ do not have to be pitied for their suffering is redemptive: “... the Cross of Christ [the symbol of the crusading spirit] has given Christians of all sorts, in all campaigns, and on both sides, an inspiration to do their duty, even unto death” (Hill 1926: 7). The war poet John Lomax provides a South African poetic context for this

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<sup>102</sup> SANDF Archives, *Military File*, E. Hill MC, 91572.

<sup>103</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*, file 2: no 1 – Copy of supplement to ‘The African World’, 16 October 1926.

‘Christification’ of the soldier. There is almost a pornographic fascination with the suffering of the Christ-soldier, whose orgasmic endurance on the phallic cross leads to victory. It is the final act of bodily release that concludes in martyrdom, when the soldier becomes The Eroticised Martyr – Christ Himself:<sup>104</sup>

South Africa! While swirls the tawny fray,  
                   While dear dead lips no words of love can send,  
 While ones beloved lie bleeding far away,  
 God grant that thou endure unto the end.  
 Yea, suffer, shaming not the noble dead,  
 Within thy side the spear, upon thy brow  
 The crown of thorns – yea, purple-raimentéd  
 Surmount the crag where beetles Calvary bough.

Surmount the crag; and thence behold afar,  
 Toil, torture, trial, tribulation done,  
 How triumphs He whose glory lurked in loss:  
 And lo – unscreened the scorn, the scourge, the scar –  
 The victor verdict of the wounded One  
 Acclaims the cruel kisses of the cross.  
 (South Africa and Sacrifice, Lomax 1918: 17)

According to Hill, physical and spiritual victory lie not in death eroticism, but in the very homely qualities of “Penitence and Assurance of Forgiveness” (7). This is the Christian faith in an omnipotent god and the humanist belief in self-redemption through suffering, affirmation and regeneration (Dollimore 1985: 199). Although many of the men may not have

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<sup>104</sup> See Christie (2007: 104-219), for a detailed discussion of “Death Erotics” in the poetry of the Great War.

been overtly religious, or not even adherents of the Christian religion,<sup>105</sup> or even morally 'humane' according to the tenets of the age, the military authorities ensured that Christ's cross remained a very visual symbol throughout the war; it was a tangible and propagandistic sign of the brotherhood of suffering, and, together with the religious ceremonies conducted before battle, was a reaffirmation of this spirit of redemptive belonging and duty. Hill (1926: 7) explains: "All men had some religion, and I am sure were getting from it what helped them most. Clearly, still closer touch with the Great Christ was needed, and so at dawn [before the battle of Delville Wood] the chaplains all did their best to supply this need. What happened in one regiment is typical. At dawn an altar, made of two bales of forage, screened by three stretchers up-ended, stood in the middle of one regiment, and the strength of the Great Crusader passed into many and left them determined to do their best and bear the worst with minds peacefully active". Nature, in the form of reaped grass, and Death, whose image is carried by the stretchers, are the agents of sacrificial regeneration. This trinity of Nature's conspiring with Death to bring about Glory is affirmed repeatedly in the poetry: "Till none remain, we said, in disdain / Of the fatal fume and the iron rain, / Though the branch may wither and fall the fruit, / Steadfast in earth, resides the root, / We'll hold the Wood and our word maintain [...] / Till none remain" (*In Delville Wood* (1918: 4), i; ii, 9). These lines, penned by the civilian John Lomax, illustrate the logos of humankind's expulsion from paradise and the subsequent Armageddon, and the spatial parallel with the war milieu. Before the environmental significance of the wood is further explored, it is first necessary to identify who or what is the catalyst of noble death as postulated in the poetry.

Hill (1926) casts both friend and foe as tragic protagonists in this play of dutiful sacrifice. He does not identify the Germans as the real enemy, but reserves this role for "the deadly spirit of worldliness" as represented by the

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<sup>105</sup> For instance, the Delville Wood veteran Joe Samuels was a Jew and never felt part of the very Christian remembrance pathos of commemorative Great War ceremonies (Nasson 2004: 203).

devil (7). The German prisoners, who only did their duty, even evoke feelings of pity in the chaplain. The enemy is, therefore, similar to Owen's interpretation in Strange Meeting, an adversary who is equal in death, and even the brother-enemy. It is this spirit of inclusive suffering that is evident in H.F.S.'s poems; the German enemy is not vilified but is, as in After (1917), together with the British, duty-bound in a sacrificial dance of death. The restoration is in the sense of duty; initially it is in the killing, but ultimately it is in being killed: the initial "But the glory of our bayonets gleamed [...]" in After (i, 3), becomes the "[...] life became a dance where the dead [both friend and foe] / And I reeled round with the men in grey [Germans] [...]" (iii, 16-17). They are similar to Owen's "Fated Boys" (Goldensohn 2003: 18), or sacrificial victims, but without his intense pity. This poetic consciousness is closely associated with Greek mythology, with the Classical heroes instructed by Chiron. H.F.S.'s estimation of heroic duty is, therefore, firmly rooted in the Classical example of detached sacrifice. Similarly, in Delville Wood (1917), H.F.S. does not refer to the Germans as the enemy; the battle is instead cloaked in terms of duty and honour - friend and foe are task-tied in their striving for a selfless subliminal death. As Hill (1926: 7) observes regarding the spirit of the times: "Men wanted something fairer than this vision of very ugly death and bigger than their rapidly diminishing selves [...] It is thoughts of death for self that force themselves into the mind, and, despite all propaganda of the offensive, killing spirit, leave the soldier facing the call to die, rather than to kill, for his country". This vision of dutiful sacrificial death is eloquently expressed by the civilian poet Denys Lefebvre (1879-1946) in Delville Wood (1918):

Beneath the shadow of the trees,  
                     With bomb and gun and gleaming blade,  
                     They drove the foe from copse to glade;  
                             And then his swift return withstood  
 Through noontide heat and evening breeze...

Fought, until death itself seemed good,

In Delville Wood.

(Lefebvre 1918: 11; i)

As in H.F.S.'s poem After, the heroic flashes of spear-like bayonets that have a more classical appearance and, therefore, heroic utility in addition to modern weaponry that represents the spirit of the offensive - to kill - gradually evolve into a sacrificial death-wish. To be killed transcends the "very ugly death" of brutal killing, which is senseless and leads to guilt and sin - the "diminishing selves". Again, in Lefebvre's poem "ugly death" is concealed within the "shadow of the trees", almost unseen under the day's quickly dusking night, and festooned beneath falling leaves: "Man after man fought on and fell, / Falling as leaves in autumn fall" (ii). Blood is the sanitising detergent that further destroys any evidence of fleshy decay, as it "Crimsoned" (v) the field of battle. Death is physically hidden from view but its spectral presence hovers like "an unseen blight / [that] Hung[s] like a noisome pall" over the battlefield (v). It is present in its metonymic guise of mechanised warfare and is keenly felt through its ultraviolet metaphysical radiation.

Lefebvre, however, does not only have his mind's-eyes fixed, as Hill does, on Christ's Cross as a symbol of a first and only death that leads to everlasting life. His elevated vision is also played out on the sports field:

Shouting the old, old Springbok cry

That, on the playing fields of yore,

Had spurred the players on. Once more

They played the game. To win or die.

(vi)

Similarly, Lomax pays tribute to a school relationship in the following way:

Dear comrade of the days at school,  
     Who never veered from virtue's path  
 In playfield or in vestibule,  
     In ruth or wrath;  
 Whose heart to mine in kindness clove  
 Kindness surpassing woman's love,  
 (Vale, i; Lomax 1918: 12)

Boyhood intimacy on the school ground spilled over onto no-man's-land, as men's only salvation in the trenches lay in the physical nearness of the other, who, ironically, while taking part in manly war and in the absence of women, became caring feminine objects, whose similar suffering gave some physical and emotional comfort (Christie 2007: 112; Bourke 1999: 133-137; Fussell 1975: 277-280). It was through the conventions of religious and love poetry that this homoerotic bond between Christs and lovers could be expressed in the war poetry.

However, Lomax's love is definitely not reserved for the "German Jezebel", who with "A painted face", wearing "a scarlet robe", [and] a crown":

Peered forth the casement of her citadel  
 A woman - rang the fiat: 'Throw her down!  
 And throw them down unto their kindred hell  
 The livid lust, the rape, the lewd renown  
 The whoredoms of the German Jezebel!  
 (Is it Peace?, Lomax 1918: 8)

Here, Lomax is not so much a misogynist as virulently anti-German. Indeed, he lauds "that sublime self-surrender of womanhood which is the most wonderful and glorious feature of the War" in the foreword to his

collection *Songs of Strife* (1918). Simply put, a bad-woman archetype is used to describe a worse-man prototype.

In both poems are echoed the early 20<sup>th</sup> century British imperialist public-school mantra of “Play up! play up! and play the game!”<sup>106</sup> that resonates in British Empire rhetoric, and which made any ‘scrap’ “all great fun” (Fussell 1975: 25-29), “a very fine show” indeed<sup>107</sup> and where death is euphemised as a game.<sup>108</sup> This refrain runs through *The Nongqai* magazine for the duration of the war in an effort to keep the Union’s fighting men focused on the task at hand.<sup>109</sup> Lefebvre, a British-born South African journalist (Chapman (ed.) 2007: 307), uses this metaphor not only because his schooling ‘back home’ would have instilled in him this sense of superior British sportsfield showmanship, *à la* Newbolt, but his new home also preached the schoolboy soldier ethos of always being willing to go on ‘sporting adventures’ (Genis 2000: 16-17).<sup>110</sup> The same applies to the English-speaking Lomax. In this context, the enemy is seen more as an opposing team than a devilish enemy, although the Germans’ association with menacing birds of prey in Lefebvre’s poem does tinge them with a more predatory and less noble hue. But generally, in sport there are rules which regulate the gentlemanly conduct of competition; this is similar to Hill’s egalitarian Christian code of conduct, and H.F.S.’s inclusive comradeship in that the Germans are also recruited into the ranks of the brave. On the other side of the scale is to be found the Delville Wood poetry that is virulently anti-German in the mode of Lomax’s wanton and man-devouring Lilith-demon Jezebel.

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<sup>106</sup> This refrain is quoted from Sir Henry Newbolt’s (1862-1938) *Vitai Lampada* (published in Stallworthy 1993: 146); he is the arch-schoolboy-imperialist.

<sup>107</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(9), September 1918: 425.

<sup>108</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(2), February 1918: 72.

<sup>109</sup> See for example, *Play the Game* by A.R.S.F., *The Nongqai*, II(3), September 1914: 170; *Play the Game* by R. Baden-Powell in issue IV(5), November 1915: 309; Newbolt’s “Play the Game” poem in issue V(2), February 1916: 111; *Sermons in Stone*, XXII *Take your Licking*, V(3), March 1916: 216; Charlotte Brook’s *The Call*, VII(2), February 1917: 124; *Do Thou the Right* by N.H.G. Breek, IX(9), September 1918: 413; and *Carry On* by George Northam, IX(10), October 1918: 469. (SANDF Archives).

<sup>110</sup> See for instance: SANL, *King Edward VII School Magazine* (Johannesburg) 1914-1918 (3441), in which statistics of sporting achievements on the cricket, soccer and rugby field mix seamlessly with reports on ‘old boys’ battlefield heroics.

The poetry on Delville Wood is influenced similar to First World War British war poetry by the idea of warlike sacrifice, both Spartan and Golgotha-like, as well as by Rudyard Kipling's allegory of the war as the final apocalyptic Battle of Armageddon, during which good, Britain and her allies, battles evil Germany: a view which was commonly held in Britain during the war (Lessenich 1999) as well as by English-speaking South Africa. Some Delville Wood poems are subsequently outspoken in their rejection of German bellicose culture. E.L. Wynne, in The Heroes of Delville Wood (1916),<sup>111</sup> refers, in Revelation styled diction, to the "wily Hun" (iii, 10) and "deadly foe" (vii, 25) who were the allies of "the Evil One" (iv, 12). And like Wynne's wood, O'Neill's infernal forest is inhabited by demons: "[...] though the fiendish Huns / Rained fire incessant from their devilish guns[...]" (To Honour the Men of Delville Wood, 15-16),<sup>112</sup> and "Those demon forces from the Wood they cast" in Kate Rawlins's version of O'Neill's poem (Delville Wood, v, 28).<sup>113</sup> In Kultur, Denys Lefebvre describes German soldiers descending like "wolves" on a defenceless "simple [French] village maid", violating and maiming her frail body (23). It is these "savage wolves" that inhabit a "bleak and bare" landscape, saturated in "shame" (War, 7).

Crucially, it is South African courage and justice that receive divine sanction in the face of such animality:

Nobly they fought - and fell - all undismay'd  
 Though God alone knew what the price they paid  
 And only the recording angel's pen  
 Can write with justice of those glorious men  
 (Driver O'Neill, To Honour the Men of Delville Wood, 17-20)

and:

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<sup>111</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A48, *Poetry, Battle of Delville Wood*, no. 11.

<sup>112</sup> Published in Uys (2006: 90).

<sup>113</sup> This poem by Driver O'Neill of 1SAI Brigade is also attributed to Kate Rawlins, who made minor alterations. It was found in the Delville Wood veteran Arthur Betteridge's private correspondence, written in his own hand. South African National Museum of Military History, Pamphlet A48, *Poetry, Battle of Delville Wood*, no. 7.

And the deep wounds of Delville Wood  
 For e'er on our Scroll shall flame,  
 With sacrificial light that fades  
 Old scars of bygone grief and shame;  
 So for all time shall Delville Wood  
 Stand unto us as Holy Rood.

(B.M. Bromley, Delville Wood, v; Uys 2006: 91-92)

The South Africans' noble deeds can only be given true justice if recorded in the Book of Life, the quintessential source of all righteousness, and emblazoned on the scroll of perpetual honour. O'Neill goes on to assign a timeframe to the Springboks' sanctified suffering: "through the eternity of seven long hours" (21). Their sacrifice is an act of biblical creation during which order is maintained in the face of chaos; the "fiendish Huns" are driven from the wood, which is a new Eden representing glory and honour. The poet also uses the number three to cloak the actions of the "gallant Springboks" (2) in a shroud of godly approval:

And e'er the third day's sun in glory set  
 The fiery Brandenburgers these heroes met  
 And gathering up their failing strength at last  
 Those demon forces from the Wood they cast.<sup>114</sup>  
 (25-28)

Apart from the above example, the number three is repeated an additional three times in the poem: "Three times the sun in splendour rose and set" (5), "Three times the sacred silence of night / Fled from the discords of that ghastly fight" (7-8), and "Three deep they dropped asleep - their last long sleep" (30). The close association of the number of the holy trinity with

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<sup>114</sup> Line 28 is present in Kate Rawlins's version of the poem and not in Driver O'Neill's. This may play on the theme of a more virulently anti-German public, as opposed to the serving soldier.



('Ou Kerel', His All: -In memory of Private Ronald Lock – Jagersfontein)<sup>115</sup>

Through gas and blinding, shrieking shell,  
 Man after man fought on and fell,  
 Falling as leaves in autumn fall [...]

Still, amidst dust and smoke and glare,  
 With crackling throats, clothes stained with blood;  
 In that foul, reeking, death-fraught air,  
 They stood and stemmed the Prussian flood.

Great branches crashed and lay around  
 Stripped of their leaves; an unseen blight  
 Hung like a noisome pall; the ground  
 Crimsoned and wilted at the sight  
 [...]

(Lefebvre 1918: 11; Delville Wood (1918), ii 9-11, iv, v)

There - in a garden overgrown  
 With havoc lies he - not alone;  
 And though within it soul and shell  
 Are rankly sown, and gun and yell  
 Alternate o'er the turmoil sound,  
 While foul miasma hugs the ground,  
 [...]

(Lomax 1918: 1, They Held the Wood (1918), ii 13-18)

In the war poetry, Adamastor metonymically metamorphoses into both setting and character. The battlefield becomes a living hell, and the soldiers – the enemy and sometimes even comrades – the devil's minions, which forms

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<sup>115</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VII(6), June 1917: 330.

the major Adamastorian theme in this chapter of the Springbok book of the dead, i.e. Delville Wood.

This collage of an unworldly inferno of fire, smoke, screams and death, visited by non-worldly devils from above, the “shrieking shell”, unavoidably elicits images from Revelation (16, 18): “And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great”. Lefebvre assigns a predatory quality to this destruction: “While overhead, from out the blue, / Hovered great whirring birds of prey, / Waiting to see this stubborn few / Swamped in a surging sea of grey” (*Delville Wood* (1918), iv). The birds are like the ravenous red Dragon – Devil – of Revelation (12; 3, 4) that “appeared [...] in heaven [...] And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth [...]”. Malevolent and destructive supernatural forces look approvingly on from above as the Germans stand poised to overpower the South Africans, but alas they stood their ground. Although Lefebvre does not assign the role of Devil or anti-Christ to the Germans in this poem, they are doing the bidding of unnatural forces.

The Germans and the corpse become the same representation of an Adamastorian nightmare – the unknown *manqué*. Denys Lefebvre’s *War: and Other Poems* (1918) is primarily bloodied orgasmic sacrifice on the Western Front, but also a site of base animality. As already indicated, German soldiers are cursed “savage wolves” roaming a “bleak and bare” landscape (*War*, 7). But more disturbingly, they roam a ‘shamed’ no-man’s-land where worms, “Some shrivelled thing”, and “A naked scarecrow with stiff arms distorted / [and who] Points at a grinning skull and scattered bones” (*To our dead*, 9) keep abode. The soldier poet Serowe (1919),<sup>116</sup> refers to “The vast hordes of a brutal breed, / In conq’ring madness came” (7). The Germans bring “abject terror” (7) – the *manqué* – in his *War Memories*. These “Teuton hordes” “herded

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<sup>116</sup> Similar to H.F.S., his real name is unknown. The only biographical fact that could be ascertained is that he served in the South African Heavy Artillery (Serowe 1919: 6). This unit formed part of the South African Oversea Expeditionary Force, which embarked for Europe from August to December 1915, and represents South Africa’s contribution to the British war effort in Europe (Genis 2000: 42).

slaves" (14), and, much like Lomax's Jezebel, are the "lust-filled enemy" (15). Boustany's (1915) bellicose war poems, *The Quatrains of War*, rhymingly smite the enemy, who is cast not only as the enslaver, but also as "thy Foe's - a Slave" (7), as an abject referent.

The corpse is the most perverted leftover of this animality. The corpses "Are rankly sown" and "hug... the ground" like "foul miasma" (Lomax, They Held the Wood), whose stench also pollutes the "reeking, death-fraught air" (Lefebvre, Delville Wood). This becomes clearly evident not only in Lomax's and Lefebvre's verse, but also in Slater's *Calls across the Sea* - and especially in Heard in the Woods (1917), and Cripps's *Lake and War* poems (1917) wherein veld and animal images are used as metaphor-mannequins to dress the corpse in meaning.

Nature metaphors, leaves and bowers, animals and the moon, and abstract discursive diction are not able to speak fully the complete horrific corporality of the corpse, although the language used does create a cascading psychological presence of the leftover-thing:

Where gallant Springboks loiter, and Aeroplanes they fly,  
O'er the stricken fields of Flanders, midst shrapnel bursting high;  
Our 'Comrades' sleep in safety, and round their weary heads,  
The 'Angel Sentries' ever guard their longest night a-bed.

Their graves are graced by daylight with the kiss of early dew,  
And homeless peasants wander where the hissing bullets flew;  
And for the hearts that love them still, that wait on Afric's shore,  
Many souls are praying amidst the cannon's roar.

No Boche now need fear them, no more their hearty cheer  
Will echo down the firing line, or at 'Roll Call' answer 'Here,'  
For a grave in France has claimed them in a tender, long embrace,  
There they rest beneath a cross, their final resting place.

In Nature's hallowed keeping safe, no need there be to mourn,  
 For the Guard dismounts at sunrise, and sentries watch the dawn;  
 Yet Africa thro' the watches of the long, calm night serene,  
 For 'Them' in thine own honour bound, Oh! keep thy memory green.  
 (C.F.C., To the Memory of those who fell in France)<sup>117</sup>

In the burnt soil of the wood also reside the seeds of regeneration: Hill's altar of duty and redemption. It is interesting that this seed of hope is planted by those with first-hand experience of battle, men like C.F.C., and who have not, like De Waal, Lomax and Lefebvre, written from afar. W.A. Beattie, who definitely fought in the wood,<sup>118</sup> writes in his poem Delville Wood:<sup>119</sup>

[...] the living  
     stream of khaki flowed,  
 Through land laid waste and seared  
     and torn by ruthless giant guns -  
         (i, 3-6)

And thus they entered Bernafay<sup>120</sup>  
     Through fire and fetid fume,  
 While every tree atrembling stood, as  
     if it sensed its doom;  
 And in that avenue of woe they  
     paused to count their dead,

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<sup>117</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Magazine*, I(8), November 1917: 54. Again the soldier's real name cannot be traced. However, he indicated that he served in 2 South African Infantry Regiment, attached to 1SAI Brigade. He is, therefore, also a soldier poet with first-hand experience of trench warfare.

<sup>118</sup> Private (later Lieutenant) W.A. 'Alf' Beattie served in 4 South African Infantry Regiment (South African Scottish) (Digby 1993: 116).

<sup>119</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*, file 1, no. 7: 'The Battle of Delville Wood' by W.A. Beattie (*Indaba* 8/61, August 1961: 7).

<sup>120</sup> Bernafay Wood was in the same operational area as Delville Wood and formed part of the greater battle for Longueval.

Then grimly on to Delville [...]

(iii, 17-23)

From hour to hour the battle raged

and fearful tumult reigned, [...]

(v, 33-34)

Earth has been raped: “seared and torn” by cruel and powerful guns. Technology has phallus-like rent asunder the womb of the earth. This violation is further perpetrated by the digging of trenches, dug-outs and tunnels deep under no-man’s-land. This is Isaac Rosenberg’s maddened vengeful earth in Dead Man’s Dump (1917) in which men are “[...] flung on your [the earth’s] hard back” where “[...] wheels lurched over sprawled dead / [...] their bones crunched [...]” (iv, 23; ii, 7-8; Stallworthy 1993: 185). Earth’s sacred womb has become a violated stewing cauldron where the limbs of the dead are deposited as mere rubbish. Beattie, however, goes on to portray a much more forgiving earth than Rosenberg’s vengeful soil, which is “Fretting for their [the soldiers’] decay” (iii, 16):

And as their stricken comrades fell,

the shattered boughs dropped down

In pity on their mangled forms

and made their laurel crown.

(v, 37-40)

Even in this wasteland of destruction, there is hope; those who are reaped too soon by death – the “tragic toll of vivid youth” (iv, 29) – are blessed by nature because they have done their duty. Beattie’s description both resonates with Owen’s poetic “visions of golden lads nobly lost” (Goldensohn 2003: 18), and differs in that Owen’s depiction of death is futile and grotesque. Beattie’s vibrant youths who “had but life to give” (iv, 30) have not decomposed beyond the grave, but are forever mummified in their

sacrifice so “that you and I might live” (iv, 32); they live through others in embalmed memory. Similar to Lefebvre’s (1918: 10,11) soldiers whose autumnal bodies eddy like falling leaves at Delville Wood, to lie as “the huddled dead” underneath “the grass” at Mons, Beattie’s sacrificial young are garlanded by “shattered boughs” (v, 37-40). Analogous to this is C.F.C.’s fallen comrades, who are crowned by “The ‘Angel Sentries’” in “memory green”, as well as ‘Ou Kerel’s’ apotheosised “His mem’ry sweet, and honoured name” in His All.

It is almost as if the war poet wanted to muffle the death-reek by piling perfumed memory bouquets onto the abject corpse. A poem, although sentimental and arguably not timeless poetry, which movingly encapsulates this “Oh! keep thy memory green” metaphysical plea is The Bandage (1918):<sup>121</sup>

Flowers, give me flowers,  
     Now I'm laid a'bed;  
 Blue scented cornflowers,  
     Poppies dyed with red,  
 Give me flowers, sister,  
     Crimson, blue and white;  
 Flowers for each morning,  
     Flowers for the night.

Flowers, only flowers,  
     So my eyes have rest.  
 Sister, bring me flowers,  
     Give me of your best,  
 Poppies for each star-shell,  
     Roses for the glare.  
 Only bring me flowers,

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<sup>121</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(2), February 1918: 63.

Beautiful and fair.

Stunned and doubtful-minded

With a thousand bells,

For my eyes are blinded

With the bursting shells,

Blue and green, and burning,

Flash a myriad light.

Bring me then the flowers,

Cooling to my sight.

But when they are round me,

Cool and damp and fair,

Will you lift the bandage

So I see them there?

So that I may see them

For a moment brief,

And, perhaps then sister,

I may win relief.

So the sister brought them,

Stacked within her arms,

Crimson, white and violet,

Full of perfumed charms.

Very sweet was sister

And her voice was kind,

But - she left the bandage

For his eyes were blind.

('Mome', *Johannesburg Star*)

The soldier's repetitive plea for flowers is tragically pathetic as well as ironic; he will not be able to see the flowers as he lost his sight either through a bullet or shrapnel wound, or due to the severe after-effects of a gas attack. South African soldiers suffered considerable discomfort because of gas at the battle of Delville Wood (Genis 1996: 18-19). One of the most iconic photographs of the Great War is that of the men of 55<sup>th</sup> Division, standing in a queue, with groping hands on the other's shoulder (Simkins 1997: 191). They are all blind or nearly blind because of gas poisoning, and like helpless children are being led by others. The soldier in The Bandage is the victim, as a veteran of the Delville Wood battle asserts concerning the use of gas in war, of "the ingenuity of [the] perverted human brain, fertile in the invention of the vile implements of scientific warfare" (Lawson 1918: 13). However, if visual sense is lost, that of the olfactory is "Full of perfumed charms" emanating from the fragranced flowers. The Romantic nature lyric is grappling to come to terms with a too stark reality by resorting to 'darkly' images of sensory impressions which have to hide the corpse – both the half-living walking-wounded, and the fully dead.

Beattie's poetic recollection of the fiendish battle written "A few years after the war" mirrors his oral account of almost half-a-century after the event.<sup>122</sup> The unnatural peace and quiet just before the battle "was an ominous quiet, which filled us with foreboding", and the battle that followed is described in stock phrases: the South Africans marched through villages reduced to "a mass of rubble" by "terrific bursts" of shelling, while "our lads were mown down in alarming numbers" and "ceaselessly battered".<sup>123</sup> The reminiscences of South Africans of the Western Front battles are littered by these descriptions of utter destruction and desolation, whose grandiose orgasmic surge of blood almost completely submerges the corpse from full view.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Beattie was interviewed by the SABC during a radio broadcast aired in July 1961.

<sup>123</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*, file 1, no. 7: 'The Battle of Delville Wood' by W.A. Beattie (Copy of *Indaba* 8/61, August 1961: 6-7).

<sup>124</sup> See *Delville Wood Letters* (1916), Digby (1993), Kerton-Johnson (n.d.: 37-57).

In this hell on earth, Beattie's South Africans stoically captured and defended the wood; they have "trod with courage high / that dark Gethsemane" (vi, 43-44) in true Kipling-like imagery. They have drunk from the cup of suffering - as Christ did in the Garden of Gethsemane, as Cripps's Christ-soldier in For Many a Head-stone (1917: 69), and Lefebvre's (1918: 17) soldiers in "The blood-tryst of Gethsemane" (A Litany) - and are now crowned by nature, by the wood itself, which is a sacred space of "epic fame". Death and its minion the corpse has been swept from the battlefield, which has metamorphosed into a new heavenly earth through heroic sacrifice, where only apotheosised bodies are to be found:

Now Delville is South Africa - blood-  
     drenched with manhood's bloom -  
 Our heritage from heroes brave, our  
     temple and our tomb.  
 (Beattie, Delville Wood, vi, 45-48)

and:

Somewhere within the wood his tomb,  
     No cross to mark the place;  
 Hidden he sleeps in Delville's womb,  
     His monument its space:  
 For love of country he laid down  
 His life, his all, for its renown.

('Ou Kerel', His All: In memory of Private Ronald Lock - Jagersfontein, v)<sup>125</sup>

The body of the fallen soldier is rebuilt in memory-bricks which represent the physical memorials and gravestones scattered far, at home and abroad. This theme of corporeal-masonry, which also resonates in spiritual remembrance, is also explored by Cripps:

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<sup>125</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VII(6), June 1917: 330.

[...]

War hath unbuilt our builder. Christ, rebuild

Him in Thy Day! Now light perpetual gild,

And rest eternal wrap his ruins dim!

Now build we better – as remembering him!

(On a Fellow-missionary, Cripps 1917: 71)

This figurative rebuilding of the body's "temple" and "tomb" in Beattie, and "His monument" in Ou Kerel – the spiritual glory of the memory they have left – found physical manifestation in 1926, when the South African National Memorial at Delville Wood was unveiled.<sup>126</sup> The memorial is a collection of headstones, arches, walls and crosses and, of course, the wood itself, which is meant to give remembrance a shrine in which to rest. The earth has, therefore, given her rock and stone, and also her vegetation to form an altar on which to dedicate the sacrifices of the dead. Earth's more delicate gifts – the altars erected from "bales of forage" before the battle as described by Hill (1926: 7) – have now been sealed in a more durable rock covenant. It was as if the Delville Wood Memorial Committee wanted the South African dead to live beyond the rock in the eternal mind of a collective sacrifice, also heralded in poetic rhythm and rhyme. Significantly, the foreign wood and the memorial is part of the native country, South Africa; her blood has confirmed the bond – they died Christ-like on a South African Golgotha. It is a South African myth, similar to that which Hoffenberg (2001: 123) assigns to what being Australian entails: "The Anzac myth authorizes the Australians' taking hold of Gallipoli, that 'sandpit', claiming its physical and imaginative

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<sup>126</sup> It was dedicated as a shrine and altar to the sacrifices made by South Africans not only at Delville Wood, but on all fronts – Boer, British, and black, although the latter gesture rang hollow as blacks were excluded from white wartime sacrifice. The politicians, clergy (including Captain Hill) and reporters went to great lengths during and after the ceremony to emphasise the unity that existed among South Africans from British and Dutch descent who died as comrades during the war. NMMH, Pamphlet A4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*, file 2, no. 1 - Copy of supplement to *The African World*, 16 October 1926. See Nasson (2004) for a detailed discussion of the memorial's historical importance in white South Africa's nation-building efforts.

landscape as sacred land.” Just as Gallipoli has become part of a collective memory of the birth of Australian nationhood, Delville Wood has been claimed by a white English and Anglo-Afrikaner South African national consciousness through Delville Wood commemorative day celebrations. The graves and monuments at both Gallipoli and Delville Wood are physical manifestations that the soil no longer belongs to the Turk and Frenchman, but to the Australian and South African buried there.

In this, Delville Wood represents a new Eden, a New Earth, the discovery and reclaiming of a paradise lost:

Three years ago, the leaves were green  
 In Delville Wood, and sweetly keen  
 The linnet’s note rejoiced the ear  
 And rabbits ran without a fear  
 And lovers wandered through the trees  
 (For woods are made for lovers’ ease)  
 Remote and quiet, fair and good  
 Deep peace abode in Delville Wood.

(i)

But Delville Wood knows peace no more [...]

(ii, 9)

While whelmed in dust and flame and blood  
 The wrecked trees groan in Delville Wood.

(iii, 23-24)

These lines come from H.K. Read’s poem Delville Wood<sup>127</sup> that was written on 27 August 1916 when the protracted Somme battle was still raging. Interestingly, the poet assigns the battle to Anzacs and does not refer to 1 SAI Brigade’s involvement. Notwithstanding this omission, the poem, in the

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<sup>127</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.48, *Poetry*, no. 5: Poem-Delville Wood by H.K. Read, 1916 (Photocopy of *Springbok*, September 1983).

diction of the Romantic nature lyric, does express an Eden-like paradisiacal wood before its destructive fall that is mentioned in many South African reminiscences, both poetic and autobiographical, of the battle. This fall of a sylvan Eden did have a marked psychological impact on the men who served there:

When we went into the wood the growth was so dense you could hardly see ten yards in front of you, but before long there was neither a bough nor a leaf left; the bare trees stood out riddled with lead, and the wood a mass of dead and wounded – it was awful! <sup>128</sup>

Suffocating gas and huge shell-holes filled with water in which men muddied themselves further increased the soldiers' suffering (Genis 1996: 16-19). And within this space of destruction chaos ruled:

Here [inside the wood] things were terribly confusing, for fighting was going on there at the time, and no one seemed to know just what direction to fire, and fellows in trenches in the centre of the wood did not know which direction from which to expect an attack. <sup>129</sup>

The destruction of the wood and the trials faced by the men are, therefore, not mere poetic musings, but historical fact. Poets who were in the wood, like Beattie, did face these trying circumstances. The psychological perversion of calm Eden into bedlam-hell, which was a form of reversion and deconstruction of established binary opposites of order and chaos, evident in the radical trench-poetry of Owen and Rosenberg (Lessenich 1999) is evident in Read's poem:

To-day the battle's endless roar  
Engulfs it [the wood] – and the scream of shells  
Bursts its calm heavens into hells [...]  
(ii, 10-12)

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<sup>128</sup> Corporal H. Bloom in *Delville Wood Letters* (1916: 44).

<sup>129</sup> Private J. Simpson in *Delville Wood Letters* (1916: 41).

In these lines, Owen's poetic voice rings in duet, as is evident in Apologia pro Poemate Meo:

Nevertheless, except you share  
 With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,  
 Whose world is but the trembling of a flare,  
 And heaven but as the highway for a shell,"  
 (viii, 29-32).

It is also heard in Owen's profane choir music:

The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells [...]  
 (Anthem for Doomed Youth, i, 7)

In both Read's and Owen's lines, heaven and hell have become the same. But unlike Owen's soldiers, Read's "find their souls" (ii, 16), where "At rest they lie - they sleep in peace [...]" (vi, 45-46) and "For them all evil turns to good / In Delville Wood [...]" (vi, 47-48). In contrast, Owen concludes with an open-ended sense of loss:

You shall not hear their mirth:  
 You shall not come to think them well content  
 By any jest of mine. These men are worth  
 Your tears: You are not worth their merriment.  
 (Apologia pro Poemate Meo, ix, 33-36).

The soldier in Read's poem finds "a glorious grave" (v, 40), whereas the tired soldier's mind in Owen's Dulce Et Decorum Est sees through the lie that it is heroic to die for the fatherland; he realises that it is in fact absurd and

horrendous. Unlike in Read's poem, paradise has not been regained in Owen's poem:

[...]  
 And watch the white eyes writhing in his face,  
 His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;  
 If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood  
 Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,  
 Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud  
 Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues, -  
 [...]  
 (iii)

Read's view is starkly contrasting:

[...]  
 Beneath the greening trees they rest  
 Old earth enfolds them to her breast  
 English and Prussian - there they lie  
 Together - men who dared to die  
 Anzac and Brandenburger sleep  
 Together in the silent deep  
 And find brave friend and foeman brave  
 In Delville Wood - a glorious grave.  
 [...]  
 (Delville Wood, v)

Owen's corpse is grotesquely mannequined in full view of the voyeuristic onlooker, whereas the corpse in Read's poem is poetically ingested by a nurturing Mother Nature.

Delville Wood is indeed “[...] a theme [worthy] for some painter’s brush or some poet’s inspiration!” (Delville Wood Letters 1916: 46). The poetry is of grandiose destruction and chaos, as was discussed in W.A. Beattie’s and E.L. Wynne’s poetic accounts, and in the others, including HK Read’s Delville Wood (1916), The African Brigade<sup>130</sup>, written by an unknown comrade in the 9<sup>th</sup> (Scottish) Division, To Honour the Men of Delville Wood by Driver O’Neill – and Kate Rawlins’s version Delville Wood (n.d.), Delville Wood (1918) by Denys Lefebvre, They Held the Wood (1918) and In Delville Wood (1918) by John Lomax. Delville Wood is, therefore, the quintessential Armageddon, in which lies the foundation for a New Jerusalem:

Die – sepulchred by dead. Each sod,  
     Each naked stump, each tortured stone,  
     Tells, while the passing winds make moan,  
         How, having done what brave men could,  
 They [the Springboks] wait the long, “Last Post” of God –  
     Where Nature smiles, in summer mood,  
         On Delville Wood.  
 (D. Lefebvre, Delville Wood, vii)

In the wood, the re-blossoming of Nature “in summer mood” figuratively points to this second coming of the Saviour and redemption. Nature is gradually blooming over the traces of destruction – burnt trees and seared ground. H.K. Read explains in Delville Wood:

But in the days for which we yearn  
 Perennial quiet shall return  
 To Delville Wood: left far behind  
 The battle line ... all out of mind  
 Forgotten – lost in later fights

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<sup>130</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.48, *Poetry*, no. 8.

Cool shadowy days, warm silent nights  
 Shall follow on the battle's air  
 But what of those who sleep therein!

(iv, 25-32)

Beneath the greening trees they rest  
 Old earth enfolds them to her breast  
 English and Prussian - there they lie  
 Together - men who dared to die  
 Anzac and Brandenburger sleep  
 Together in the silent deep  
 And find brave friend and foeman brave  
 In Delville Wood - a glorious grave.

(v, 33-40)

Oh! you who mourn your gallant dead  
 Be comforted - be comforted!  
 The nightingale shall sing for them  
 A sweet soul piercing requiem.  
 At rest they lie - they sleep in peace  
 For them all wars and tumults cease  
 For them all evil turns to good  
 In Delville Wood - in Delville Wood

(vi, 41-48)

The fallen - both friend and foe - are reclaimed by nature; they become part of the newly sprouting trees and their memory will live on in the nightingale's elegiac mass. This poetic vision is Keatsian: the nightingale that "In some melodious plot / Of beechen green, and shadows numberless, / Singest of summer in full-throated ease" (*Ode to a Nightingale*, i, 8-10). The nightingale is the harbinger of a new life without "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" (iii, 23). It is the symbolic "evening stand-to" in the trenches (Fussell 1975: 241-243) when large scale frontal-suicidal attacks are absent, an

Owenesque “drawing-down of blinds”, a time of night-time - ‘darkly’ - release. Those interned in Delville Wood shall never experience war and evil again. They are inheritors of the New Earth, which has become the wood itself. The blood-sacrifice has sanctified the wood; heaven has come to earth:

And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God *is* with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, *and be* their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away (Revelation, 21, 2-4).

An earthly hell has been transformed into an earthly heaven; the blood sacrifice has bought redemption. On poetically revisiting the wood almost two years after the battle, Lefebvre observes this change:

Out from the bosom of this hallowed sod,  
       Souls, rudely stripped of that dull flesh they wore,  
 Have passed. But now, cleansed in the fires of God,  
       Return once more.

They, too, loved life; but loving dared not save  
       Themselves, lest those they loved should pay the  
               price.

Sunshine and youth and laughter – all they gave  
       In sacrifice.

To them amid bare heaps of blistered ground  
       That hold no blade of grass, no living thing,  
 Comes, through the desolation all round,  
       A breath of spring.

For where the blackened tree-stumps brave the skies  
     Their old-time comrades kneel in silent prayer –  
 The while, deep threnodies to heaven rise  
     And thrill the air.

The roll of muffled drums booms overhead;  
     The bagpipes skirl their dirge; the bugles keep  
 Watch where, beneath the White Christ's cross, our dead  
     Sleep their last sleep.

(The Return – Delville Wood, February 1918; Lefebvre 1918: 16)

The nightingale's requiem has become a ceremony of remembrance. The comrades of the dead have returned to honour them in a commemorative memorial service held at Delville Wood on 17 February 1918 (Digby 1993: 262-266). The wood is ritually reclaimed for the dead through the cross, an elegiac song and prayer in a landscape that will recover from the scars of war through the coming of spring. An altar – a pile of drums (263) – and a cross is again the focal point of sacrifice as before the battle – Hill's earthy altar. The cycle of regeneration is completed – the sun has set and is now rising again in Delville Wood. It is paradise regained. The dead have shed their cancerous Kristevan bodies, and are now beautifully transformed souls.

As in H.F.S.'s April, The Return heralds in "A breath of spring" that represents the promise of warmth in the stark wintry landscape of a European winter. The new sun will stir desolated Nature into life. Spring ushers in both a literal and figurative sun that rises in splendour. It refers to a rejuvenated northern hemispherical sun and the subsequent healing of old wounds, both physical and psychological. In April, the warming northern sun will reveal vistas of balmy Africa that will help the soldier retain his faculties.

In The Return, Lefebvre lists the loss of "Sunshine" as one of the sacrifices that the South Africans have made in volunteering for service in the colder northern climes of Europe. The survivors will be able to return and

reclaim the sunny climes of South Africa, but the dead will not. Similarly, in Delville Wood, H.F.S. asserts: "They'll [the dead] ride the blue-bounded veld no more / Nor tread that whiter-sanded shore..." (5-6). But this physical loss is negated by a spiritual gain: "But unto Doomsday they'll receive / The glory of the memory they leave" (7-8). The worldly Eden is sacrificed on the altar of a spiritual paradise. And it is exactly this memory of the 'sunny' dead that is reinstated through a commemorative service in The Return. It is a figurative sun of remembrance that has returned to the wood, and which has brought an early spring that is embodied by the men of the land of the eternal sun, who are entombed within the wood.

It is these men "from South Africa / That favoured land of the sun" (E.L. Wynne, The Heroes of Delville Wood, ii, 5-6), the "sunny land so bright" (Emma Creswell-Knütsen, The Battle of Delville Wood, i, 1)<sup>131</sup> who are "lean and lithe and tanned" (W.A. Beattie, Delville Wood, ii, 10), "sun-kiss'd" and possess "youth and strength" (D.L. Tull, To the South African Brigade - God Speed, i, 1-2).<sup>132</sup> They are the "Lions of the veld" (Slater 1917: 24; To the Springboks, 14). For both men of Dutch and British extraction are reserved these "manly" and "sunny" dispositions (The African Brigade, ii, ix; W.A. Beattie, Delville Wood, ii, 9-10; E.L. Wynne, The Heroes of Delville Wood, x, 37-40).

These descriptions of physical prowess bear a striking resemblance to the British poet John Masefield's texts on Australian soldiers' superior physical and manly attributes as opposed to other Dominion soldiers (Hoffenberg 2001: 119-120). White South Africans and Australians were the larger-than-life tamers of wild interiors, filled with hostile natives. The settler existence in a rugged Australian Outback and the desolate Karoo were instances of a similar social and historical memory, which found physical expression in the heroism of sun-bathed Anzacs and Springboks at Gallipoli and at Delville Wood respectively. The 'empty' spaces of Australia were

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<sup>131</sup> Published in Uys (1991: 150); this is a poem from the 1920s "Dedicated to the memory of our Springbok boys - Honour the Brave".

<sup>132</sup> NLSA, The Springbok Magazine, II(11), February 1919: 32.

claimed by the early settlers (113-114), just as the Mfecane wars between indigenous black communities of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century were claimed to have 'opened' up the South African interior for white settlement during the Great Trek (Davenport 1988: 12-21). It was precisely into these 'empty' spaces of no-man's-land, where everything had supposedly been destroyed by war, that the Australian and South African marched to claim or make history. Hoffenberg (2001: 118) argues convincingly that "Australians could claim Europe [the First World War battlefields including Gallipoli] because its historical space had been returned by combat to abstract, pre-historical, physical space, like their [empty Antipodean] continent." It was up to the Australians and South Africans to write their own history in Europe. The physical proof of Europe's cultural superiority - its towns and historical monuments - had been damaged or destroyed during the war. Hill's simple altar and the later South African National Memorial at Delville Wood were physical traces of the 're-civilisation' of Europe by South African forces. Again, they have moved into these allegedly 'emptied' spaces that were created by war's destruction, as during the Great Trek, to reclaim it for civilisation - it is the New Earth. As a South African soldier serving in Europe stated: "In the old days, people set out for Darkest Africa to civilise the country. Well, it is high time somebody from South Africa set out here to civilise Prussia's Darkest Europe" (Quoted in Nasson 1996: 2).

The heralding of Australian Outback ruggedness was appropriated by the Union's armed services, and Australian poems were published in *The Nongqai* magazine. Examples include the heroic 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Horse at Gallipoli,<sup>133</sup> a 'cockney' Australian poem Passing by: a soldier's poem<sup>134</sup> and the celebratory and humorous The Australian.<sup>135</sup> All these poems celebrate the free-spirited, rough and ready Herculean Australian soldier. The Anzacs returned the favour. In The New Zealanders' Farewell to the South Africans, written by a New Zealand officer, the "Springboks" battlefield heroism is

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<sup>133</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, May 1916, V(5): 359.

<sup>134</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, June 1917, VII(6): 357.

<sup>135</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, October 1918, IX(10): 492.

matched by their rugby-field prowess. Anzac and Springbok are essentially "brothers in arms".<sup>136</sup>

South African war poets also conjured Aussie ruggedness as examples of their own manliness within a hostile environment:

Absolutely free from swank,  
From private to the highest rank,  
And fearless as the iron tank -  
The Aussies.

Thro' fear-filled nights of wav'ring lines,  
Where Verey-light and star-shell shines,  
They fought right into Fritz's lines -  
The Aussies.

The Prussian Guards, - the Teuton's best,  
Could not their laurels one time wrest,  
They'll ne'er forget them in the West -  
The Aussies.

No word of mine that I could pen,  
Could praise enough the gallant men ,  
Men - the very best of men -  
The Aussies.

(The Raiders; Serowe 1919: 17)

The egalitarian and "fearless" Aussie soldiers' heroic exploits were considered worthy subjects for versification in rhyming quatrains by a South African soldier poet. Serowe extols this New World *esprit-de-corps*: "They

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<sup>136</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, February 1917, VII(2): 73.

fought, and died, with hero zeal, / And true Colonial vim" (The First Brigade ii, 15-16; 11). Serowe gives voice to this new-world bellicose spirit:

South Africa on to the fore  
 In true Colonial style,  
 The louder that the Germans roar,  
 The broader you may smile;  
 The cheery sun o'er veldt and vlei,  
 O'er kopje, dorp, and sea,  
 Imbues a spirit naught can stay -  
 Egamilio Gshee! (i)

This colonial vigour is characterised by "the manful ways / Of 'Springboks' bold and free, / In games, in war, life's ev'ry phase' (ii, 13-15). Springbok colonial vigour led to the conquest of German South-West Africa in 1915, the first German colony to be defeated. The poem ends with the heroic battle cry of the Springboks, which, similar to the Maori *haka*, imbues the men from Africa with a uniquely southern valour:

Egamilio Gshee!  
 Egamilio Gshee!  
 Egamilio Gshee!  
 Waah! <sup>137</sup>  
 (iii, 24-27)

The sun in Delville Wood has risen on a new white African chivalric code:

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<sup>137</sup> Digby (1993: 55) gives a slightly different version of the Springbok war cry: "Gobalaio Ghee!, Gobalaio Ghee!, Gobalaio Ghee!, Wah!". Today, it remains King Edward VII School's (Johannesburg) war cry, which bears testimony to the perpetuation of "little England on the veld" ethos in prestigious English schools in South Africa. I also remember singing very similar 'Wah' refrains during sports' events at school – at an Afrikaans-language school that is.

You have seen some splendid Regiments and heard their  
praises sung,  
In banquet halls and palaces you have seen their banners  
hung;  
But the noblest, most courageous, that e'er stepped on  
parade  
Was that band of splendid heroes – the African Brigade.

(The African Brigade, i)

The poetry is a reaffirmation of the romance of a wild and breathtakingly beautiful Africa, whose “sun-tanned” Springboks – “brave as lions” – have slain the Hunnish beast. The term Springbok, like that of the Anzac in Australia (Hoffenberg 2001: 123), has come to encompass all that relates to white South African martial prowess – battlefield valour, monuments of remembrance, and even prowess on the sports field. Consider the rugby union team which is called the ‘Springboks’. The coining of the term was an effort by the South African civilian population to appropriate emotionally the glory and chivalric experience of the men fighting in far-flung theatres of operation. The very local term of an indigenous antelope had to bridge the gap between language and experience; loss and desire. Similarly, where, for the British soldier, John McCrae’s poppies in In Flanders Fields became the physical manifestation of courage (Goldensohn 2003: 16), for the Springboks, the gazelle which they wore on their uniforms and caps was the focal-point for an archetypical white Africaness. It was these swift antelopes of the African veld that staked a claim in the ancient corridor of valour within Europe’s heart, where brutal wars have raged almost constantly for centuries. The South Africans, the heroic “white Zulus” (Nasson 2004), are now also the heirs to this rich European military tradition. Driver O’Neill also situates the Springbok’s valour within the time honoured tradition of European war poetry:

And in their deaths those noble lads excelled  
 All that the bards have ever sung or poets said.  
 (To honour the men of Delville Wood, 35-36)

Their story is sung alongside those of King David, Achilles, Leonidas, Aeneas, Roland, King Arthur and others by minstrels in the stately banquet halls of ancient Europe. But more importantly, the Springboks' achievement is even more remarkable than their European predecessors'. This African chivalric code has indeed outshone that of Europe.

What makes the Springboks' feat so remarkable according to the poem, The African Brigade, is that the South Africans served in an egalitarian army consisting of the "farmer from the veld, the millionaire / from town, / The parson and the miner [...]" (ii, 8-10). The South African war poet O.R. Thompson indicates that all men, notwithstanding their class or even race, are equal in death:

[...]  
 Employers and employed, in ranks,  
     Have fallen with the slain,  
 What war, and death, and danger joined  
     Shall Peace dispart again?

The lord who came from yonder hall,  
     Found friendship in the pit,  
 And ploughmen joined with artizans,  
     In closest bondage knit.

If rich and poor, are closer drawn,  
     And yellow, black, and white,  
 The wrongs that Peace has fostered long

The scourge of War may right.

(Fellowship Recoined, 25 August 1917; Thompson 1919: 26).

It was a citizen army of the New World, like that of Canada and Australia, unlike the class stricken British army (Bourke 1999: 146-149), bringing freedom to besieged Europe. "Men lie in layers. The South African heroes lie underneath" was how the battle was reported in England.<sup>138</sup> This resounds with the archetypal message of the victory of freedom over tyranny, which was engrained in the hearts and minds of the young men of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century British empire:

Go tell the Spartans, thou that passest by,

That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

(Simonides 556-468 BC, Thermopylae; Stallworthy 1993: 9)

During the 1920s, the British historian John Buchan would entrench the image of the Springboks in Europe as an elite colonial force, whose volunteers had been bled by incessant frontier wars against the indigenous African communities, and who were endowed with a classical warrior status that evoked images of ancient heroic battles like Thermopylae.<sup>139</sup>

In the poetry, the South African soldier is generally depicted more as a 'play the game' Greek hoplite, who preferred short but sharp pitched battles, than as a practical Roman legionary, who was an expert in protracted siege warfare. Greek battles were more heroic and traditional ritualistic affairs, than the Roman wars in which soldiers had to resort to more static and drawn-out tactics in colonising their empire (Ober 2003: 188).<sup>140</sup> However, the trench poets see trench war as an almost stationary slaughter in the trenches, where

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<sup>138</sup> Quoted from *The Times* in D. Lefebvre (1918: 11).

<sup>139</sup> Buchan, J. 1920. *The History of the South African Forces in France*. London: Thomas Nelson & Sons.

Nasson (2007: 205-218) discusses Buchan's Springbok myth-making in great detail.

<sup>140</sup> Interestingly, if this logic is applied to the Anglo-Boer War, then the Boers were the Romans who applied siege warfare and later guerrilla strategy, while the British represented the Greek phalanx, preferring open-battlefield warfare.

death is a slow dragging down into the mud of circumstance in contrast to the patriotic verse that emphasises the communal glory, instead of the individual wound. Late-Victorian and Edwardian neo-imperialists likened the British Empire to majestic imperial Rome (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 103), while the Boers were compared to the more rural and culturally simplistic republican Rome (103), and the noble rural warrior (133-4).

Notwithstanding, both Briton and Boer, similar to the egalitarian Greek Spartans, who withstood the invading force of the despotic Persian king Xerxes, remained true to their democratic laws through sacrifice. The English-speaking South Africans are the proud inheritors of an ancient English parliamentary tradition, and the Afrikaners had, only a decade before, died for their republican principles.

The poet John Lomax firmly situates this distinctive brand of white African courage within the military history of the Lower Countries and Britain, as these two cultures are the cultural antecedents of the Afrikaner and English-speaking sections of South African society respectively. The Dutch-speaking<sup>141</sup> South Africans are exhorted to rise against the despicable and enslaving enemy to secure freedom:

Brood of the burghers of Ghent!  
 Scions of spurners of Spain!"  
 [...]
   
Up! prestige-proud, teach him that ye  
 With liberty's lustre elate  
 Have the faith to defy a detestable fate,  
 And the will to be free.

(Union Battle Hymn, i, 1-2, 11-14; Lomax 1918: 5)

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<sup>141</sup> During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Afrikaans was a mixture of Dutch and 'pure' Afrikaans as spoken today.

They are the proud descendents of the founders of the small Protestant Dutch republic who bravely fought against the mighty and tyrannical Catholic Spanish empire during the Eighty Years War of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, during which time the Netherlands entered its golden age of economic, colonial and cultural expansion and prosperity.<sup>142</sup> The poet also likens the Afrikaner volunteers' sacrifice to that of the French Protestants who were cut down by their Catholic brethren during the St Bartholomew's Day Massacre of 1572.<sup>143</sup> "Whose assassins dared conceive / Bartholomew's lethal eve" (i, 5-6). Being Protestant signifies being on the side of justice and right, as the Dutch Protestants are perceived to be in their struggle against Catholic Spain, as well as the Protestant Afrikaner volunteers, who are set against the "dastardly" Germans. Ironically, the role of evil Catholic is reserved for the Germans, although many were Lutheran themselves. Importantly, it was the same Catholicism against which the English king Henry VIII rebelled to form an independent English Protestant church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>144</sup> The poet in particular and English-speaking South Africans in general are, therefore, also inherently partisan with Protestantism, and especially the Anglo-Saxon version thereof, which is, according to its adherents, a practical and self-sufficient religion as opposed to the inclusive, stagnant and individual-effacing Catholicism.

It is precisely because of this that the poet also encourages the freedom-loving English-speaking South Africans to battle against the contemptible enemy so as not to fall under their oppressive yoke:

Ye, too, whose sires spake  
 With the spirit of Hampden and Pym;  
 Who spoiled and sacked with Raleigh and Drake,  
 [...]  
 To arms! and strike until

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<sup>142</sup> See Fick (1993 189-192).

<sup>143</sup> See Boucher (1993: 68).

<sup>144</sup> See Harington (1993: 97).

On bended knee, they discern  
 Your hearts as your father's staunch and stern  
 And untameable still.  
 (ii, 15-17, 25-28)

They are just, resolute and independently minded as the British politicians Sir John Hampden and John Pym, who resisted the autocratic government of King Charles I during the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>145</sup> and as brave as the martial and adventurous Sir Francis Drake and Sir Walter Raleigh of Elizabethan times.<sup>146</sup> According to Lomax, English-speaking South Africans can be rightly proud of their parliamentary tradition, which is firmly rooted in the conception of English common law<sup>147</sup> and the charters and decrees of the Medieval Angevin kings who enshrined the ideas of individual rights and freedom against oppression.<sup>148</sup>

Lomax's poem can be read as a conciliatory text. It was government policy after the establishment of the Union of South Africa in 1910 to reconcile the Afrikaner and English-speaking communities in South Africa because of the ravages of the Anglo-Boer War (Davenport 1988: 255). Lomax focuses on the best qualities of the two language groups as a barometer for the way forward for the newly created state in the face of adversity:

The poisoned pits in the sand  
 Of the desert, the deadly thirst,  
 The famine, the fever, hand in hand,  
 Have ye suffered, to sink immersed  
 In baptismal brotherhood  
 Of blood in Delville Wood.  
 As one into the grave

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<sup>145</sup> See Harington (1993: 115, 118, 119, 121).

<sup>146</sup> See Harington (1993: 102, 103) and Pitcher (2001: 95-98).

<sup>147</sup> See Painter (1968: 264-265).

<sup>148</sup> See Painter (1968: 184, 263-264, 269-270).

Have ye faded, as one defied  
 The vaunt of the foeman to shackle, enslave,  
 Dutch prowess and British pride.  
 From sepulchred mountain and mere,  
 From trench and tent and tide,  
 To your brothers ye call, ye who dared and died!

O, South Africa, hear!

(Union Battle Hymn, iii)

Lomax's sonnet expounds a new South African patriotism that has been shaped in a European past, and in a present war that rages in the desert sand of German South West Africa and North Africa, the fevered forests of German East Africa, and the muddied trenches of the Western Front of France and Flanders. Dutch practical ingenuity and Anglo-Saxon-Celtic cultural superiority all combine to sanctify and justify the Springboks' efforts.

Similarly, a SAMR Acrostic,<sup>149</sup> confidently proclaims:

Sons of the Empire are we,  
 Of no matter what race we may be;  
     United we stand  
     To keep our fair land,  
 Holding out till at last, Victory!  
 [...]  
 English blood keeps some going,  
     Dutch blood too is showing  
 Resolution to fight to the last  
 [...]  
 (F.E.U.S., Kokstad, i, iv, 18-20)

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<sup>149</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IV(1), July 1915.

The South African Mounted Riflemen (SAMR) was part of the Union Defence Force's Permanent Force.

The soldier poet who wrote under the pseudonym Serowe, and who served in Europe with Afrikaners, shares these sentiments:

Out where the vast veldt broadens brown,  
 To stretch from sea to sea,  
 Where buck may roam the country down,  
 And men, like men, be free;  
 And men they are, as men they stand,  
 In Britain's direful need,  
 Ready, aye ready, hand in hand,  
 Thro' country fair, or desert sand,  
 The blood traditions of their land  
 Displayed in ev'ry deed.

The darkest hour shews forth the friend,  
 The valiant and the true,  
 On these may Britain well depend  
 To bear her prestige through.  
 To Europe, then! to Europe, men!  
 The Africanders cry,  
 If might-of-arms be the test,  
 By God! the Huns shall know our best,  
 In Europe, as in German West,  
 We triumph or we die.

(Semper Fidelis ca. 1915-1918, Serowe 1919: 9)

“The Africanders cry” echoed particularly loud in the odes to Louis Botha, the Afrikaner general of the Anglo-Boer War, who became a staunch supporter of the British war effort during the Great War. In Slater’s (1917: 22) sonnet To General Botha (Upon His Return From His South-West African Campaign), Botha, the “sturdy son of Afrikanderland” (1), is lauded because

he had realised that resistance against the mighty British Empire was futile, and he consequently made peace with the stronger foe. At the end of the campaign in German South-West Africa in 1915, which he commanded, he returns as a conquering British hero:

[...]

The desert won, foes conquer'd – with thy band  
Of gallant heroes thou returnist (8-9)

The poem is conciliatory: Botha after the Anglo-Boer War “gav’st a hand / Of fellowship and friendship, without guile, / To generous foes – hail!” (5-6). In South African politics “None but thee / Can weld us into perfect unity” (13-14) in a country where racial dissent simmered near the surface:

Another desert waits in which intrude  
Blind ignorance, and mean ingratitude,  
And venom’d spite: these shalt thou overthrow – (10-12)

The English-speaking community considered Britain’s financial assistance to Afrikaners after the Anglo-Boer War as very thoughtful; they could not understand why the staunch republican nationalists among the Afrikaners had considered it expedient to start a civil war in 1914 (Genis 2000: 5-13). They had the highest respect for Botha because of his reconciliatory policy after the 1899-1902 war. The Botha ethos, together with J.C. Smuts’s, loomed large in South African politics (145). Botha became a larger-than-life figure who could unite Boer and Briton.

In General Louis Botha, E.W. Thomas (n.d.: 11) describes the burly and rustic ruggedness of the Union Prime Minister:

Warm sympathy with man and brute

The great farm-tutored heart informs,  
 And faith that bears the brunt of storms  
 Unshaken, resolute.

(ii)

The very traditional English ballad stanza with iambic tetrameter and trimeter is not able fully to accommodate the “farm-tutored” Afrikaner general. In sonnet form, B.N. Swemmer (1920: 81) refers to the “great name” of the leader who lives on in memory, after “His bones are interred”. Essentially “he rests in the grave” because “His mission is fulfilled” (General Botha). There were also some Afrikaners who followed Botha’s lead in the war. An Afrikaner in the Union’s Permanent Force exhorts his fellow Afrikaners not to isolate themselves from the politics of the day, and to affirm their culture and language: “U moet niet gaan rebeleren, / Doch kweek uw taal goed aan” (W.J. Kotze, Een Afrikaner Fout, iv). He bemoans the fact that articles and poems in “Hollands” are so scarce in *The Nongqai*, which, according to the poet, is due to the Afrikaners’ apathy towards the Union’s political and military affairs.

General Smuts does not appear to have been such a popular leader. This was mainly because of his hard campaigning in German East Africa. The following satirical poem, characterised by irony and wit, is evidence of this:

A healthy general was Smuts or Jannie  
 Whose feverish troops did not find him funny  
 That was left to wily Lettow-Vorbeck<sup>150</sup>  
 Who hit the deck before he got it in the neck  
 Yet through it all slim Jannie kept sunny  
 (Published in Nasson 2007: 252)

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<sup>150</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck was the tenacious commander of the German forces in East Africa.

Crucially though, for the Anglo-Afrikaners, both Boer and Briton are baptised – together – in the sacrificial blood spilled at Delville Wood and elsewhere. Significantly, the two sections of South African society become one, as Afrikaners of Dutch descent are drawn into the ambit of epic British military history. The description of Boer and English-speaking South African battlefield valour in terms of the ultimate religious sacrament of the baptism in blood – Christ’s cross-sacrifice – harks back to one of England’s finest hours, that of the battle of Agincourt, so memorably described by Shakespeare in *King Henry the Fifth*:

So did he [York] turn, and over Suffolk’s neck  
 He threw his wounded arm, and kiss’d his lips,  
 And so, espous’d to death, with blood he seal’d  
 A testament of noble-ending love.

(4.6.24-27)

The bond that binds all Englishmen – as is the case with York and Suffolk at Agincourt – also marries Boer and Briton at Delville Wood. As Goldensohn (2003: 43-44) explains, a final blood-orgasm shared by chivalric knights is testament to a perpetual brotherhood. This coming together of comrades’ bodies takes place in the eroticised Donnesque grave, which serves as a metaphysical conceit for the horrific physicality of the festering open grave:

When my grave is broke up again  
 Some second guest to entertain  
 (For graves have learned that woman-head  
 To be to more than one a bed),  
 And he that digs it, spies

A bracelet of bright hair about the bone,

Will he not let’us alone,

And think that there a loving couple lies,  
 Who thought that this device might be some way  
 To make their souls, at the last busy day,  
 Meet at this grave, and make a little stay?

(John Donne, The Relic; i, 1-11)

In the war poetry, the communal blood is spilled as a sacramental offering, similar to the wine poured during Holy Communion, which transforms all celebrants into one body of faith and purpose:

Death is the 'Saki': ah, beware! to shrink  
 Is vain: for in His Wine, no doubt, y'll sink  
 Intoxicated! Tell him to His Face:  
 'See! to the Health of Countrymen I Drink'.  
 (*The Quatrains of War*, Boustany 1915: 16)

and:

And no-man's-land, with British blood,  
     Ran red as wine that summer's day -  
 [...]  
 But Boer and Briton steadfast stood,  
 For Freedom's sake - in Delville Wood!  
 (Lieut. F.C. Cornell, A Soldier's Song, i, iii)<sup>151</sup>

as well as:

Comrades in arms, blood brothers side by side  
 (Beattie, The Passing of the 'Scottish')<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Published in Uys (1983: 243).

<sup>152</sup> Published in Digby (1993: 389-390).

At Delville Wood, for evermore,  
 They fought, they bled, they died.  
 (Serowe, The First Brigade; i)

The grave ushers in a new age of perpetual brotherhood through the  
 baptismal deluge of blood:

They're gone to the War's dread encounters  
 Till the Earth its blood disgorge.  
 [...]  
 But churches are buried in trenches,  
 [...]  
 'Be baptized for the dead'.  
 (Who will fill the Gap?, i, iii, vi, October 1917, Thompson 1919: 27)

and:

[...]  
 Have ye suffered, to sink immersed  
 In baptismal brotherhood  
 Of blood in Delville Wood.  
 As one into the grave  
 [...]  
 (Lomax, Union Battle Hymn; iii)

This blood-bond is an exclusive rite of passage that is vehemently set  
 against the enemy:

The Fire of Hatred that some Nations Feed  
 On Love and Peace - the Substance of our Creed -

That Fire, Red - Hot, is Thirsty - I presume -  
 Shed Blood, Hot - Red, and quench this Blasting Greed.  
 (19)

and:

In Delville Wood they took their stand,  
 Briton and Boer - a noble band  
 Of glorious Springbok boys.  
 [...]  
 They charged into the cruel fight,  
 Bayonetting, stabbing, left and right,  
 (Creswell-Knütsen, The Battle of Delville Wood, i, iii)

Boer and Briton rest together in a communal grave of brotherhood - a  
 homoerotic earthy bedchamber:

For a grave in France has claimed them in a tender, long embrace,  
 (To the Memory of those who Fell in France)

and:

The sunset flushed fruit-laden branches swaying  
     Above the grass that hid the huddled dead;  
 Pools, in whose depths green, subtle lights seemed playing,  
     Were changed to mud-holes - sticky, shining red.  
 (Mons, iv; Lefebvre 1918: 10)

This is a homoerotic covenant between men who adore the other who  
 is immersed in the same bloodied wound of circumstance. The love between  
 men is warmly expressed in Brave but Tender: A Wounded Officer's Story

(October 1917), in which an officer lies wounded and bleeding with his “lads”:

For thirteen hours, I wounded lay  
 By sixty hill in awful pain,  
 And groaned, and moaned, by dark and day.  
 'I'm sorry lads! I'm scarcely sane.  
 Your captain is ashamed to call,  
 When you are silent, one and all.'

Then answered one from out the dark;  
 'O Sir! – it eases you to groan –  
 Go on – and none to you will hark.  
 'For us, 'tis easy not to moan.  
 Though hardship hindered all our life  
 It helps us through the deadly strife.

Then something touched me, something warm  
 And someone kissed my whitened face:  
 The boys in pain, and deadly storm  
 Had closer crept with crippled pace;  
 And, dying, gave a tender kiss;  
 And wonder grew at love like this.  
 (Thompson 1919: 41)

The civilian war poet is only able to approach the “lads” in the dark. This ‘darkly’ revelation cuts two ways; firstly, the love between men is dangerous in a heterosexual ‘manly’ colonial culture; love for the same-other could only be expressed “from out the dark”. Secondly, the “dying boys” can only be approached in the dark; the “something” and “someone” is the *corpse-manqué* whose terrible wounds are hidden in the soothing darkness of

the moon-nurse. The sexual undertone of the poem is strengthened by the semi-language sounds made by the officer in the throes of orgasmic suffering and near death.

In 'Kiss me for Mother' (October 1917), the same poet depicts the love of a padre for those in his spiritual care; the metaphysical passion soon transcends into physical loving:

And the chaplain could not other:

'I'll take her place!' he said.

'Will you kiss me for my mother,

And love for her instead?'

And with tender love prevailing,

He bent above the bed,

And he kissed the lips now paling,

Till Life from death had sped

(v, vi, Thompson 1919: 40)

This fatherly, or motherly, compassion is reminiscent of Father Eustace Hill and his unselfish service to his men during the Battle of Delville Wood (Digby 1993: 139-144). Hill worded the "great spiritual elevation" he experienced "at it (Delville)" after the battle, "and rejoiced at being able to prove God's protecting love" (143). Men became the lovers and mothers for their men in the absence of women in the trenches (Campbell 1997: 828-829, 831). Hill, the archetypal caring figure, would lose his arm at the Butte de Warlencourt during October 1916 while attending to the wounded and the dying (Digby 1993: 168-169); he thus became one of the thousands of "Broken Dolls"<sup>153</sup> smashed by the war. After the war, many veterans sank deeper into abject insanity (Hunt 2010: 22), and millions of the walking-maimed littered

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<sup>153</sup> This expression is taken from a popular Great War soldiers' song, which ends "For I gladly took my chance, / Now my right arm's out in France, / I'm one of England's Broken Dolls" (Bourke 1999: 58). Ironically, Hill was also wounded in the right arm.

the streets of post-war Europe (112). They were the walking dead, things to be ashamed of, just like the pornographic corpse (Bourke 1999). The collective memory could only accommodate the apotheosised dead through memorialisation (Hunt 2010: 112), as “the men who were maimed are not the ones who are remembered” as they had not paid the ultimate price through the blood sacrifice (178).

### 3.3 The “Broken Doll” adjacent the Open Grave

We come not rushing forth with dash,  
 Nor heralded with Clarion blast,  
 Nor come we ‘neath compulsion’s lash.  
 But knowing that the die is cast,  
 The Future calls as calls the past –  
 And Freedom stands aghast.

The counted cost: the wife, the child,  
 and she  
 Whose lingering lips still sweetly spoke  
 the  
 call;  
 The soft-eyed mother praying anxiously;  
 Let them the laurels wear – to them  
 must fall  
 The happiness or gall.

No boast is ours – but kindled by the fire  
 Of those who high along the Walls of  
 Fame  
 Have ‘Springbok’ hung – may we, too,  
 yet  
 aspire  
 To ‘do our bit’ – our *all* – and for that  
 name  
 Stiff-lipped ‘to play the game.’<sup>154</sup>

While war with all its infamy,  
 And red blood, strife, and care,  
 And strained with tense anxiety,  
 The years in longing wear;  
 While men with might, and men  
 with right,  
 In savage orgy strive,  
 And vice, and shame, with brutal  
 claim,  
 In ghoulish feastings thrive.  
 And bent beneath the crushing  
 load,  
 The best may oft despair;  
 And hope but seem a witless  
 goad,  
 And even God unfair!  
 But there's love still, on old  
 Crouch Hill,  
 In old-time grandeur set,  
 The old, old ways of good old  
 days,  
 The things we can't forget.<sup>155</sup>

<sup>154</sup> Forward! ‘Springboks’ on the High Seas September 1917; published in Digby (1993: 34).

<sup>155</sup> Holly Park, Crouch Hill, Serowe (1919: 18).

The last line of each poem succinctly encapsulates the two binary views of war on the opposite sides of the bellicose scale held during the war. The first poem, published as a postcard, accompanied drafts for 1 South African Infantry Brigade<sup>156</sup> to Europe. This is the 'to buckle to', 'dig in your heels', 'keep-your-chin-up', 'stick it' and 'just do it' philosophy of stoic duty and suffering that permeates the memoirs, letters, popular press and poetry of the time.

In contrast, Serowe (1919), who served in the South African Heavy Artillery<sup>157</sup> on the Western Front, expresses disillusionment with his wartime experience in some of his poems, which "were written at various times during the war" (5), and published as *War Memories*: "To-night I feel crushed in the ubiquitous tentacles of circumstance. Ever swayed by some unknown force, darkness hangs about me [...] The world, clinging unthinkingly to the traditional ideals of a superstitious age, has arrived at the nowhere from which it started [...] The romance that so grandly coloured our lives has been shivered to its roots, and it can never be restored along the same filmy lines; to attempt it would be to breed more offensive unreason" (34-35). Already on the second page of the volume, he poetically expresses this loss of faith in the romanticised spirit of war, and a belief in the new reason:

The clouds are spent,  
 The mirage rent,  
     The shores of reason rise;  
 The peaceful land  
 Of understand,  
     Where untouched treasure lies.

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<sup>156</sup> This volunteer Brigade, consisting of four regiments, was recruited in the Union of South Africa in 1915 for service in Libya, France and Flanders. The initial strength of the Brigade was 5808 men (Genis 2000: 42).

<sup>157</sup> The South African Heavy Artillery, with an initial strength of 670 men, formed part of the South African Oversea Expeditionary Force, and embarked for Europe on 28 August 1915 (Genis 2000: 42).

This sestet, with rhyming couplets in iambic dimeter (lines 1-2, and 4-5), and iambic trimeter (line 3) accompanied by dactylic diameter (line 6), fires off a short but sharp salvo of, firstly, disillusionment with “superstitious romance”, and then hope in a rising tide of reason.

This existential crisis was also noticed among South Africans serving in Europe by a perceptive observer: “One unexpected side of the soldier comes out in the Crocks’ Camp.<sup>158</sup> This is the metaphysical crave to know the why and wherefore of the war, apart from its mere national and mundane aspect. ‘Why,’ he asks, amid his bitter memories of friends and favourites blown to atoms before his eyes – ‘why was all this permitted by the All-Wise Ruler of the Universe?’ Slowly, perhaps through nights of unquiet thought, he may arrive at a new comprehension of life as a spiritual affair [...] The soldier is much more than an ‘absent-minded beggar,’ with a talent for beer and pontoons; he is often a rugged philosopher, slow to express his feelings, little accustomed to self-analysis, but deeply appreciative of fine thought aptly expressed. These days he ponders much on what has been the greatest crisis of his life, as it has been the biggest event in all history.”<sup>159</sup>

This extract from an article in *The Springbok Blue* on the South African training camp at Bordon in Hampshire indicates the presence of a real metaphysical crisis in the ranks, notwithstanding the often repeated military mantra at the time “to do as much damage as possible to the enemy and to hold my part of the line at all costs”.<sup>160</sup> It was especially the verse of the fighting soldier, men like Serowe, and those writing for the Springbok magazine while training and convalescing in England, H.F.S. and Co, which was closer to the raw wounds of war – both physical and psychological – than the patriotic odes and hymns poured out by the Union press, school

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<sup>158</sup> The South African Discharge (training) Depot (camp) at Bordon, Hampshire.

<sup>159</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(2), May 1917: 35.

<sup>160</sup> SANDF Archives, WOID, Box 7, File 47/1: Miscellaneous, Pamphlet no. 408: *Some of the many questions a platoon commander should ask himself on taking over a trench, and at intervals afterwards*, 11 January 1917.

magazines<sup>161</sup> and civilian poets. The Springbok soldier, similar to all those of the British and Dominion armies, was fully and bloodily immersed in the perpetual cycle of 'going over the top', becoming a 'stretcher-bearer case', being evacuated by motor-ambulance, then by train, and by hospital ship across the sea back to "Blighty", and finally being released from hospital as fit for active service, only to become a casualty statistic once again.<sup>162</sup>

By May 1917, the time that the above quoted article was written by a *Springbok Blue* "Correspondent", the South African Oversea Expeditionary Force, consisting of infantry, artillery and various auxiliary units, had already been bloodied on the Western Front in Europe. Epic battles such as Delville Wood, Butte de Warlencourt, Arras and Fampoux have become synonymous with unprecedented bodily wastage in South African military history (Digby 1993: 121-214). In South West Africa and East Africa, men had to battle not so much against the enemy, who remained elusive, as against the deserts, swamps, wooded terrains and tropical diseases (L'Ange 1991; Ambrose Brown 1991). On all fronts, however, the 'bloody infantry' were canon-fodder and mere pawns in the "high-rolling" British General Staff's "ponderous offensives" to break through the German positions (McManners 1994: 82).

Interestingly, this metaphysical crisis had already been expressed early in the war, before the casualties took on monstrous proportions. At the beginning of 1915, an unknown poet penned the following poem in the generally warlike and war-romance soldier's magazine, *The Nongqai*:

The Vultures (1915)

(Dedicated to certain Newspapers)

They sicken with false hope,

They torture with false dread,

They interview the wounded,

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<sup>161</sup> These include magazines published by King Edward VII School, Jeppe High School, Grey Institute, Diocesan College, Potchefstroom College, South African College School, Pretoria Girls' High School, Michaelhouse and St Cyprians.

<sup>162</sup> See the cartoon entitled 'Back to Blighty: by one who has made the trip' in *The Springbok Blue*, I(3), June 1917: 55 (NMMH).

They photograph the dead.

They manufacture victory,  
 They improvise defeat,  
 And they coin the tears of women  
 To copper in the street.<sup>163</sup>

This poem, written when the Afrikaner Rebellion and German South-West Africa campaign were still raging,<sup>164</sup> illustrates how traumatised soldiers felt about the war on all fronts. It is a reversal of the *Ecce Homo* motif of much of the Delville Wood poetry. Where most poems and prose memories cry out for the reader to view their heroic regenerative suffering, this poem angrily condemns the macabre voyeuristic intrusion into the humiliating animalistic suffering of the soldier. No one expressed this pornographic picturing of the dead more tersely than that arch-schoolboy imperialist Henry Newbolt, who also came marching and trumpeting into *The Nongqai*:

The War Films

O living pictures of the dead,  
     O songs without a sound,  
     O fellowship whose phantom tread  
 Hallows a phantom ground –  
 How in a gleam have these revealed  
     The faith we had not found.  
 [...]
   
 Brother of men, when now I see  
     The lads go forth in line,  
 Thou knowest my heart is hungry in me  
     As for thy bread and mine;

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<sup>163</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, III(1), 12 January 1915: 61.

<sup>164</sup> See Official History (1924: 13-25).

Thou knowest my heart is bowed in me

To take their death for mine.

(i,iii; the *Times*)<sup>165</sup>

The voyeur shares in the orgasmic death in the trenches through a necrophilic urge to bathe in the blood-surge of the eroticised and Christ-like “lads”. In the poetry, praying and preying united in the creation of a Springbok cult-of-the-dead. In The Vultures, the emphasis is on the predatory and scavenging nature of colonial society and their newspapers that officiated as the nation’s necromancers. The vulture, as will be seen in Chapter 4, was a very potent animalistic metaphor for the removal of the abject corpse from the battlefield in the indigenous South African *izibongo*. In essence, the poetic voice in The Vultures postulates that, by intruding on the open and mangled body of the soldier, the public have robbed the corpse of all dignity. After being publicly displayed, the corpse is even deprived of its abject signification:

Afterwards (1915)

When this so bitter tide

Shall turn and ebb to the waste whence it came

The world, like a wrecked ship shorn of her pride,

A battered ship, tipped on a riddled side,

A shattered ship, shall ride

From storm to port, bankrupt of all but shame.

In that dark dawn all we

Like lost mariners shall reel crazily

On a new earth, grown stranger than the sea.

As drowned men shall we come,

All pale, all sick, all dumb.

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<sup>165</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VII(1), January 1917: 7.

(But some, oh some  
 Shall come not even thus, so dumb they be).  
 We'll have no words to string, no tales to tell  
 O' the unutterable  
 Black dreams dreamt in the drifting deeps of hell.  
 But little things of earth  
 Shall make us mirth -  
 Street lamps, each like a new-sprung celandine,  
 White daisies and red wine,  
 And small wise stars that shiver and blink and shine.

So, bankrupt of hope, and blind  
 To faith and love, we'll find,  
 We, even we, joy in things small and kind.  
 Though it lie drowned, the world we dreamt we knew,  
 Yea, though no dream be true,  
 We shall cry and laugh, as sailors and children do.<sup>166</sup>  
 (by E.R.M.)

It is revealing that none of the more cynical war poems already discussed can be linked to a face, as each poet uses a *nom de plume*. Opposition to the war was not exactly preached from the pages of the keep-your-chin-up-spit-and-bull rhetoric of the South African armed forces' magazine, *The Nongqai*. Apart from wanting to remain anonymous because of possible retributions from pro-jingoistic readers, the unnamed poets want to speak the "unutterable" "shame[ful]" "waste" of the animality and madness of war and death. The ponderous dreadnought of modern war has been scuttled, as its 'civilising' moral mission has proven to be "bankrupt". After this realisation of a higher purpose gone awry, only Romantic joy in lyrical "little things" can be achieved. The corpse's absence echoes a loud "O'" of a horrific

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<sup>166</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IV(5), 12 November 1915: 316.

psychological presence. The conceit of a “wrecked ship” lying on its side is used for the corpse in war, with the terrible water-things of the Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner being conceived in the process. Most ominously, these creatures of the sea have made a landfall, and have been ensconced deep within the no-man’s-land of psychological loss. Ironically, E.R.M. trusts in the faith revealed by “sailors and children”, which is nothing more than a blind faith that resides in fairytales and the astrological reading of the stars.

Serowe is more wary of these “filmy lines” of poetic “romance” and superstitions, since, during the war, the "golden mist", "mystic pleasure", "grand castles in the air", "fool-thought", "maddest dreams", "unreason", "fancy" and "jade" triumphed over "reason" and "real truths" (*War Memories* 1919):

[...] And yet there's none to blame for this,  
 'Tis strange, but also true,  
 The God-lent way to reason this  
 Is always shunned by you.  
 The myth-filled dreams of long-gone men,  
 And roguish sophistry,  
 Enslave our minds, and dull our ken,  
 And fill the world with mystery.  
 (Life, 41)

Cold truth will not with fancy bide,  
 Nor is it half so grand,  
 Like all that's true, 'tis prone to hide –  
 Unostentatious stand;  
 In fragments small 'tis apt to give  
 Fair fancy cause to sigh,  
 When a man has learned how to live,  
 He's just about to die.

(iii, Ideals, 37)

In these poems, Serowe criticises both the pre-war Romantic and Georgian poets' floral poetics, those "myth-filled dreams of long-gone men", and also the new-imperialism of Kipling and its glorification of war:

And now the war is nearly past,  
 The Central Powers are beat at last.  
 And I no longer can control  
 The thoughts that flame within my soul;  
 And not the thoughts that fancy breeds  
 When golden mist to want succeeds;  
 Where fools may walk in high estate,  
 While lords upon their table wait,  
 And filled with all this mystic pleasure,  
 They wake disgusted with life's measure;  
 And rankling in their hearts within,  
 The truths of life seem worse than sin.  
 But fact it is, they ill compare  
 With such grand castles in the air.

What muddled brain will tell me then  
 That such fool-thought is good for men?  
 And who will vote that life is meant  
 To live in pain and discontent?  
 And yet, what better fate will ours,  
 While reason fades and fancy flowers;  
 The brain depending on each sense,  
 Excels itself at their expense,  
 Until the maddest dreams on earth  
 Seem but the only things of worth.

And once they grow within the mind,  
All sense and reason's left behind.

Why wonder, then, at all our woes!  
While such unreason daily grows!  
And who so foolish to believe  
That words or laws can such retrieve?  
As well might woodman chide the tree  
That baulks his well-meant energy;  
And far more foolish, men to try  
The laws of nature to defy,  
For looks may not define the use  
Of things we favour or abuse;  
So better, then, that we reserve  
The judgment they would seem deserve;  
And knowing each his weakness best,  
Will have compassion on the rest.  
Then let our hopes in fancy fade,  
Let reason triumph o'er the jade,  
And for our few short years on earth,  
Let real truths bring peace and mirth.  
(An Outburst, 42-43).

The poem echoes the modernist insistence on real everyday circumstance; here the poet is 'modern' in his grappling with the technology and complexity of a nightmarish and unreal new world in which the old has proven to be "From aether-fashioned" (Ideals): only the "Extreme activity" of angular and dynamic Vorticism and Futurism could "prove the uselessness / Of curiosity" (Ideals); Serowe is, however, very un-modern in his continuation of the traditional poetic forms, rhythm and rhyme of versification; he was especially fond of the eight line *ottava rima*, with varying

rhyme schemes. He also believes that “real truths” do exist, although arriving at these, he concedes, is a modernist mazy mountain to climb:

[...] The road to knowledge, cold and stern,  
 In thorny lab'rinth lies,  
 And of its fruit a man may learn,  
 When real wants arise.

(ii, 5-8, Ideals, 37)

However, in the end, in reason and truth still reside "peace and mirth". In Holly Park, Crouch Hill, he finds, “love” and “good old days”, “In old-time grandeur”, which is Blighty. His verse also includes High Victorian patriotic outpourings on the brave "Grand Celtic" Scots tradition of Robert the Bruce fame at Bannockburn and the Napoleonic Peninsular War battles of Barossa and La Coruna (13),<sup>167</sup> which are perpetuated in his "true Colonial style" poems (11,12,15) and the heralding of the "fearless" Aussie soldier (17), and in his ode to the South African Scottish Regiment. He praises his comrades' blood sacrifice in The First Brigade (11). It is this blood that has bought freedom from oppression, and ushered in a new chiliastic age of practical reason that will dispel war, and bring joy:

'Tis not enough that we shall win,  
 And praise the arms that stayed  
 The proud mad hosts of vice and sin,  
 That revelled in degrade.  
 We, too, must hold the knowledge wrought.  
 Let proud tradition die,  
 And raise the truths our blood has bought  
 From fallacy and lie  
 (iv, Afterwards, 40)

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<sup>167</sup> See BritishBattles.com. Available at: [www.britishbattles.com](http://www.britishbattles.com). Accessed: 17 August 2013.

In proclaiming this new reason, Serowe does not deal so much in "mem'ries' flowers" (19) diction, as in melancholic reminiscences of "Afric's" beauty:

A leaden sky o'erhangs the town,  
 The camp is white with snow;  
 'Twere meet the flakes in falling down,  
 Should hide the dirt below.  
 The long, cold shed - the stony floors,  
 The dirt, the damp, the gloom;  
 An icy blast invades the pores  
 Of this forbidding tomb.

Oh! God, 'tis now we think, and think  
 Of Afric's golden shore,  
 As steel-shod boots resounding clink  
 Upon the pavement floor.  
 Our hearts are sad, who'll blame us now,  
 If great ideal fades?  
 Indeed, what thoughts can such allow  
 In dark and gloomy shades?

(Le Havre, 24)

Le Havre, on the north coast of France, was the port of disembarkation for many South Africans during the war (Digby 1993: 150). Cold and wet conditions were a feature of camp-life and trench warfare, with trench-feet a particularly irksome condition (183-188). The snow-covered landscape was alien to the South Africans, as it contrasted so markedly with "Afric's golden shore". The European landscape became an abject Adamastorian offshoot smothered "In dark and gloomy shades", which hid the corpse. In Serowe's

verse, the dead corpse is superimposed on the living *manqué*, the bestial German enemy, "The vast hordes of a brutal breed, / In conq'ring madness came" (*War Memories* 1919: 7). The abject remains a psychological presence as "The things we can't forget" in Holly Park, Crouch Hill (18).

While the far-away Western Front could be partly reclaimed from the sinister Adamastorian shade through a baptismal deluge of sacred blood, the terrain in German South-West Africa and East-Central Africa still fell securely within its sway. The poem German S.W. Africa (1917)<sup>168</sup> describes the campaign of "burning sand", "cruel heat", "veld-sores", "blisters", and ever-present "flies", where water was always lacking and food insufficient. It is a forbidden land: "If Satan wants a second Hell, Lord give him German West". The Union's Official History (1924) states grandiosely that "The actual German South-West campaign [...] is one of the most clear-cut and ideal campaigns of history" (3). In actual fact, the campaign was by all accounts more a struggle against sand and thirst than against any serious threat by the inferior numbers of the enemy (Nasson 2007: 63-86); the landscape was "terrible" and "incomprehensible", with cold winds blowing at night; "dust and desert" was all around, with intermittent "Hillocks and valleys", and an enemy that was just as elusive as the water and food reserves; the situation was further worsened by "bad logistics".<sup>169</sup> Within this god-forsaken wasteland, the soldier did and had reason to "grouse" but did ultimately "stick it" out (German S.W. Africa).

This complaining rough, but still courageous, soldier marches from the pages of Trooper L.M. Hastings's *Ballads of Botha's Army* (n.d.),<sup>170</sup> a collection of his German South-West Africa experiences. He also refers to the hardships;

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<sup>168</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai* IX(4), April 1918: 182; 'Khami', from South Africa, 24 November 1917.

<sup>169</sup> Dagboek van David Lens: ervaringe van 'n offisier tydens die Eerste Wêreldoorlog 1915, compiled by L.J. Eksteen, Fort Amiel Museum Newcastle. Translated from the Dutch-Afrikaans. (Original manuscript - 25/2046 - in the Utrecht Museum.)

<sup>170</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.483 HAS, *Ballads of Botha's army*, by Trooper L.M. Hastings.

General Louis Botha, the Union Prime Minister, was the General Officer Commanding in South-West Africa.

Hastings's Military File could unfortunately not be traced.

the constant hunt for “shimmies” or lice (Comforts), “And the everlasting dirt! / Dust that bit and choked and hurt, / Dust in boots and dust in dixies – dust in swirls inside your shirt” (The Last Trek: Any Old Unit). The stoic soldier, with his “old chum”, bears all like an “old sportsman”, carrying his bat in this innings that “passes like a play” (The Last Trek). The themes of a sporty and literary war are very evident.

The poet also humorously satirises the inadequate rations, the “sick of ration ranges / Dud tomato – coloured pumpkin – in the [sempiternal] jam” (Pozee), the misplaced charity of the ‘home-comfort’ drives (Comforts), and the general tediousness of “Camp Fatigue”, which included pitching camp, polishing kit, standing guard and all the mundane chores associated with campaigning in a sandy wasteland:

Deutcher or Turk they matter not –  
 A blow for a blow and a shot for a shot.  
 We love them not, we hate them not –  
 We hold old Seitz in his narrow gate –  
 We have but one and only hate,  
     We grouse as one, we hate as one,  
     But not our wily foe the Hun –  
     We do not care, we do not care  
     If Hans and Fritz have lost their hair –  
     For Kultur we’ve no hate to spare,  
     But hark to the Sergeant-major’s gloat!  
 This is the stunt that gets our goat –  
     It’s Camp Fatigue!

(i, A Hymn of Hate)

The non-commissioned officers, who enforced these dread chores, were not only unpopular, but could also be unscrupulous: “My number one [Sergeant] is awful keen on prowling round for loot” (Says the Sergeant).

Serowe also refers to the less-than-gentlemanly conduct of some officers whose discourse rings with the "haw-haw twang" of "blandishments / With weak sarcastic sneer" (The Major, *War Memories* 1919: 25), and the non-commissioned officer who struts round "As proud as a cock" (The Bombardier, 26).

Similar to Serowe's Holly Park, Crouch Hill (18), whose "men with might, and men with right, / In savage orgy strive, / And vice, and shame, with brutal claim, / In ghoulish feastings thrive", and An Outburst (42-43) , wherein "While lords upon their table wait" (i), "And who will vote that life is meant / To live in pain and discontent(?)" (ii), Trooper Hastings also has it in for a naïve and morally blind society that condones the slaughter by their outspoken support for the war through hollow gestures like knitting and sewing shirts and socks for the war effort:<sup>171</sup>

[...] There is Susie sewing shirts - never gads about or flirts;

Dainty Kitty's knitting nothings for the dashing R.L.I.<sup>172</sup>

All the bellybands are Dottie's that are tied around the Scotties

And we wear Matilda's half-hose in the Composite M.I.<sup>173</sup>

*All the girls are grafting for the soldiers -*

[...]

Tho' we're rigged so nice and dapper by the fingers of the flapper

Yet the wan and whiskered wowser he has smelt the sinful bowl -

Every Thursday after stables blokes foregather round the cables

Read the weary news of nothing - pass along to chat or snooze -

(Comforts: 1<sup>st</sup> Sand Shovellers)

Where H.F.S.'s soldier has to waltz to the societal music of the jingoistic times in After (1917), the soldiers in Comforts are manipulated like

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<sup>171</sup> Not only conceiving canon-fodder sons, but also knitting and baking were South African middle class women's contribution to the war effort (Genis 2000: 16).

<sup>172</sup> Rand Light Infantry.

<sup>173</sup> Mounted Infantry.

finger-puppets to do their bit by the homefront belligerents, who know “nothing” of the scars of war. Their comfort-drives, newspaper articles and letters to the men ring hollow with these “nothings”. Trooper Hastings also has a literary swipe at the faceless military command structure, with its headquarter staff ensconced in safety far to the rear:

In the midst of Tschaukaib<sup>174</sup> blizzards, oft it thrills us to the gizzards  
To think of all the high-brows who invent each brainy stunt.

(Comforts)

The troops had to dance to the “long-drawn bugle-call” of military expediency; the loud noise of imminent death ringing out across the battlefield since the *salpinx* instrument made its appearance on the Greek and Roman fields of war (Krentz 2003: 110-118).

Similar to the German South-West African campaign, the East African campaign was considered to be “A music-hall of war”,<sup>175</sup> an enjoyable *laissez-aller*, a side-show to the real war raging in Europe. The war authorities in London complained about the “wasted” bodies in the “side-shows” or colonial backwaters; they wanted more colonial men to be deployed on the ravenous Western Front (Turner 1988: 42-43). The bodies of these men were somehow less noble than that of the crusaders in Europe, and became abject waste in the bungling campaigning in “Afric”; dreaded malaria exacted a lion’s share of the casualties in this theatre (Stratford & Collins 1994: 69).

However, the civilian poet, E.W. Thomas, does assign a more heroic role to the pale African warrior, although it is in a toned down music-hall cavalcade:

What of the glory of German East!

What of the carnival and carouse,

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<sup>174</sup> Tschaukaib is a mountain in the south-west of Namibia.

<sup>175</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(11), November 1918: 505, “In a Theatre of War”.

What of the song and the civic feast,  
 What of the bays for the victors' brows?

O, the travail of German East! –  
 Blistering suns and the pelting rain;  
 Merciless thorn and the prowling beast,  
 Where the warrior waged his grim campaign!

O, the crosses in German East! –  
 Set in the derelict bush or swamp:  
 Only the firefly, like mystic priest,  
 Flits through the gloom with his eerie lamp!

Never procession from German East!  
 Mute are the cymbals and fifes and drums!  
 Greatly achieving where glamour was least,  
 Lo, how they strove in those battle slums!  
 (The Glory of German East; Thomas n.d.: 57)

In contrast, The Slur (1918),<sup>176</sup> is a very angry poem written in response to "Someone in a certain paper [that] said that ex-soldiers were hiding behind the fever plea as an excuse for not going to Europe" and as a retort directed against those who thought that campaigning in tropical Africa was more of a holiday safari than a bloody war.

What do you ask of men to do?  
 Starve and parade as fit?  
 Crosses denote that some did their all;  
 None of your blooming 'bit'. (vi)

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<sup>176</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(8), August 1918: 357; 'The Dusty Duke', from *Rhodesia Defence Force Journal*.

The poet, 'The Dusty Duke', does not specify which paper it was, but the anglophile newspapers, especially the *Cape Times*, were "redolent of the glory-in-death" poetry of the times:

[...]

And you, will you not heed our call  
 from lonely grave where we lie low?  
 Come! Carry on, while comrades fall,  
 Pro Rege et Imperio.

(T.A.A., A Call to Slackers; Ambrose Brown 1991; 312-313)

'The Duke' indicates that East Africa was definitely not a place where, according to civilian poets like T.A.A., soldiers "rest content", and where "a cross / Pro Rege, pro Imperio" was "meed" enough. It is an Adamastorian hell, where "fevers rot", where "Green sores" preyed on flesh, and where "prowling beasts", including the crying "hyenas" and barking "wild dog", stare while "Circling slowly round and round" from out the dark. Again, the corpse cannot be fully 'mannequined', and is covered by the dark bush: "What of the wounded eaten by night / Or dropped in the bush to rot?" Essentially the dead are "sleeping". However, they still remain an Adamastorian fear, a hidden but psychological presence in "the staring dead", and "the mangled horses grown". The evil eye is always present in its absence, and it stares hysterically out from the sunken eye-sockets of the "Broken Dolls":

What of the days when men looked grave,  
 Who, pulling their waistbelts in,  
 Feebly said through their aching lips,  
 'Gee mates! But I'm getting thin!' (iv)

[...]

What of the chaps who struggled back?  
 What of your silence then?  
 What of the fellows who went out boys,  
 And came back mere broken men? (xiv)

What of the homes within this land?  
 The mothers who watch and pray?  
 Watch, while the fever our vitals tear;  
 Yes, what do you think they say? (xv)

'What have you done up East, my boy?'  
 Our mothers don't ask us this.  
 Their eyes exempt us from taunts and slurs,  
 Our 'Silver Badge' – their kiss. (xvi)

Similarly in *If* (1918),<sup>177</sup> Lieutenant Harold Turle, who served in Nyassaland, Central Africa,<sup>178</sup> describes the tedious African campaign as a no-man's-land, a place of "heat", "ceaseless trekking", "marshy swamps", "malaria mosquitoes", "ants", boredom, and the "filthy dirty" locals. He concludes in biting satire that if the warmongers are drawn by such campaigning:

THEN

You're a ruddy marvel, and the place for you's out here;  
 So come along! I'd simply love to swop with you, 'old dear!  
 But, stay! What of your keepers (or whatever I'shd style 'em);  
 For you are obviously an inmate of a lunatic asylum!

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<sup>177</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, IX(1), January 1918: 8.

<sup>178</sup> SANDF Archives, *Military File*, Lieut. Harold Turle, 5629.

In a similar vein A Central African "Alphabet" (1918) by the same soldier poet also refers to the bestiality of a wasteful and protracted campaign, but less acerbically and with a certain degree of stoicism. He asserts in rhythmic alliteration closely packed within rhyming couplets:

A is Assigned to the African Ants,  
 Which Amble About in your shirts or your pants.  
 [...]  
 F is the Fever that Few can Frustrate;  
 Even I have had more than my share up to date.  
 G is, of course, the deGenerate German,  
 We'd all be delighted to preach him a sermon.  
 H is for Haig - it's Van Deventer Here,<sup>179</sup>  
 Who's Holding the cards for a victory this year.  
 [...]  
 K 's Kibambawe - not suited at present  
 To men who are sick, or e'en convalescent.  
 L is the Loneliness not infrequently felt  
 When you are banished away mid the bush or the veld.  
 [...]  
 N are the Noises disturbing the Night  
 From hyenas that laugh to mosquitoes that bite.  
 O is the Office Or Origin whence  
 Springs a fount of behests re attack or defence.  
 P are the Pessimists, found in all climes,  
 But we've no earthly use for such men in these times.  
 Q is Quinine, Quite the Quickest thing out  
 To ward off attack when malaria's about.  
 R are the Rations just now Rotten Rare;

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<sup>179</sup> Lieutenant-General J.L. Van Deventer was the Commander-in-Chief in East Africa after General Smuts stepped down in 1917 (Official History 1924: 89).

It's Really quite time we Received better fare.  
 S Simply must be aSSigned to the Sun;  
 They Say that this country's the hottest but one.  
 T is The Terribly Tedious Trek,  
 With the sweat running down from your face and your neck.  
 [...]
   
 Y are the Years taken out of your life  
 When you've given a dozen (?) to this miserable stripe [...] <sup>180</sup>

The lot of the soldier serving in the difficult and alien Central and East African environment is bemoaned; he suffered from malaria, heat exhaustion, and trauma, which was exacerbated by flippant military orders and a lack of adequate sustenance; however, the eventual moral and physical victory against the “deGenerate German” was never in doubt.

In a lighter vein, Ou Bles and the Terrible Ten (1917),<sup>181</sup> by the soldier poet with the curious pen name ‘Old-receding-hairline’, refers fondly, in protest satire and irony, and in distinctive South African slang diction to the rough, working-class “Scallywag” South African volunteer in East Africa whose sacrifices are made light of:

When this business is over, what then  
 Of those that are left of the ten?  
 When you've used them, confused them, and damned well abused  
 them,  
 You'll sling out the sloppy old ten,  
 We'll go back to the Rand once again,  
 Smelting-house, cyanide, chesa, stick dynamite,  
 Pambele lappa lo ten.  
 Cheers for the derelict ten – unhappy, unholy old ten.

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<sup>180</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai* IX(1), January 1918: 18.

<sup>181</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VIII(4), October 1917: 251, ‘Ou Bless’, 5 Mounted Battery, South African Mounted Rifles, German East Africa.

Cheers! God save them! Amen.

Ach, sis, man, I'm one of the ten! - OU BLES. (iv)

The glory would soon be forgotten after the war. Men went back to their dreary slave-labouring deep under the earth in the gold mines of the Transvaal Rand.

Kipling's "Tommy Atkins" poetry, which is the poetry "of the soldier as lovable rogue" genre (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 23,27), is very evident in both the South-West and East/Central Africa poetry. The soldier is generally thought of as an undesirable in civil society, but becomes very sought-after indeed when the stakes are down. Kipling wrote of the soldier from below as in *Barrack-Room Ballads* (1892), wherein the focus is on "soldierly pathos, humour, camaraderie, and behaviour under stress" (Van Wyk Smith 1999: 100). There was a Kiplingesque outpouring of Tommy Atkins poems on the South African veld during the Anglo-Boer War (109-110). These were vehicles for "satire and social comment" (111); in essence it was writing from below. The music-hall tradition of sentiment, patriotic and melodramatic outpourings and cockney humour found a welcome literary home in the Tommy verse (76-77), and the music hall jingles became part of campaign life, for both Britain and Boer (79):

You talk o' better food for us, an' schools, an' fires, an' all:

We'll wait for extry rations if you treat us rational.

Don't mess about the cook-room slops, but prove it to our face

The Widow's Uniform is not the soldier-man's disgrace.

For it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' 'Chuck him out, the  
brute!'

But it's 'Savior of 'is country' when the guns begin to shoot;

An' it's Tommy this, an' Tommy that, an' anything you please;

An' Tommy ain't a bloomin' fool -you bet that Tommy sees!

(v, Tommy (1890), *Barrack-Room Ballads*, Rudyard Kipling; The Norton 1983: 868)

Examples of general war poems in this rogue tongue-in-the-cheek genre are Tempe Tootlings by B. Regius,<sup>182</sup> Bully, Biscuits, and Coffee by 'Old Bles',<sup>183</sup> and "What we want to know"<sup>184</sup>.

Regius claims this characteristic ironic satire for all soldiers, who according to him, are "'doing it'":

Oh! to be in Tempe<sup>185</sup>

Now the sun's up there,  
And all the little dust-storms  
Invigorate the air.

When the temperature's a hundred  
(Quite a hundred) in the shade,  
And the chief debating question  
Is where the beer is made.

We've a cheery little depot,  
All built of wood and tin,  
And very nice and warm it is,  
But the devil to live in.

[...]

We do our very best for them ,  
They [new recruits] suffer not from chill,  
The best of living, a L'hotel,

<sup>182</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, V(1), January 1916: 51.

<sup>183</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai* VIII(5), November 1917: 300; the almost unpalatable food of the army is humorously bemoaned in this poem. Other poems in this genre are The Army Biscuit. NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(11), February 1919: 18; and Commentary on Rations. SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VI(5), November 1916: 341.

<sup>184</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Magazine*, I(8), November 1917: 45.

<sup>185</sup> A military-training camp at Bloemfontein, Orange Free State.

A top-hole Regimental.

'Breathes there a man with soul so dead'

Who can't this picture fit?

O, we're grousers all; in ragtime phrase,

'Everybody's doing it.'

(i-iii,vi-vii)

In Bully, Biscuits, and Coffee 'Old Bles' again, this time in Afrikaans, humorously bemoans the stinking, fatty bully beef from Cumberland and New South Wales that leads to runny stomachs, the hard uneatable biscuits, and the coffee that is either too bitter, too sweet, too thin or thick. However, the bully beef at least is sometimes tasty, the biscuits filling, and the coffee varied:

[...]

Bully wat is baja oudt,

Bully maak ons voette kout.

Maar dit's bully hier, en bully daar,

Bully maak ons leeuwe zwaar. (i)

[...]

Maar dits biscuits hier en biscuits daar

Dits biscuits bully deur-ma-kaar.

Biscuits wat ons hier moet vreet,

Biscuits wat ons veel laat zweet. (ii)

[...]

Coffee biter, coffee zoet, coffee zonder melk,

Coffee dun, en coffee dik, een half beker-elk.

Coffee wat ou Vorster maak, coffee zonder smaak,

Coffee vroeg en coffee laat,

Coffee maak on tog zoo kwaad, (iii)

[...]

In a topical article “What we want to know”, published in *The Springbok Magazine*, the writer ends with a poem in which it is unequivocally proclaimed to the nurse audience: “You could nurse me up for life, / And I’d marry you to-morrow -/ If it wasn’t for my wife!” The randy, rough-and-ready soldier is always “up for life”, whether on the battlefield or in the *boudoir*.

Humour according to Kristeva (1982: 8) “is a way of placing or displacing abjection”. This was true not only for the men serving in Africa who resorted to this defence-mechanism against the corpse, but also those in Europe as the ‘nursie’ poem illustrates.

The grousing soldier lout is also to be found in the much more ‘exciting’ European campaign, as The Lament of the SAMC’s<sup>186</sup> by an unknown soldier testifies:

We aren’t in the fighting line,  
 We don’t use swords and guns,  
 We don’t do any chasing  
 When the Hun in terror runs.  
 But at picking up bits of paper,  
 Cleaning drains, or scrubbing a floor,  
 We’re simply ‘it.’ We’re doing our bit  
 In the S.A. Medical Corps.

[...]

When he digs and digs a rubbish pit  
 Till he can’t dig any more,  
 He ‘cusses’ himself for joining  
 The S.A. Medical Corps.

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<sup>186</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Magazine*, I(8), November 1917: 43.

We're working on sanitation,  
 We're 'righting' a stopped-up drain,  
 We're boiling in the sunshine  
 Or dripping in the rain;  
 We're cleaning the hospital windows  
 Or scrubbing the big front door;  
 It's eternal graft and no canteen  
 In the S.A. Medical Corps.

The 'barrack room' banter by the "deject", "The one by whom the abject exists", is an endeavour through language to set himself apart, to come alive through the sign (Kristeva 1982: 8). The deadening chores carried out by the 'dejected' soldier are being resuscitated by laughter in a more than mundane, but still less than heroic, existence.

By all accounts,<sup>187</sup> 1 South African Infantry Brigade, with the associated units in the SAOEF, was an elite fighting force, although a quantitative analysis of the tacit "live and let live" 'truces' between combatants existent on the Western Front, and analysed and interpreted by Tony Ashworth (2000), has not been rigorously tested with regard to the qualitative heroism of the South African units. The South Africans had, similar to the Australians, a 'proud' record built up during the war, and this medic-poet would not have been unaware of this; his lowly role in the war would have further increased his feelings of dejection. However, even elite units suffered during times of inertia:

The S.A.I.<sup>188</sup>

We are no use for lorries and we never rides or flies,  
 But plods along the ditches for the sake of exercise,

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<sup>187</sup> See footnote 9b.

<sup>188</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(9), December 1918: 71.

And when we ain't a-slipping in a shell-hole or a trench,  
 They finds us little jobs, of course, to keep us in the stench,  
     'Cause why?

I'll tell you: we're the slogging S.A.I.

"We pushes R.E.<sup>189</sup> trollies, and we salvage heaps of duds,  
 We does a bit of digging, and we plants savoys and spuds,  
 We load the trucks and waggons, and entrains the transport mules,  
 And we 'scrounge' around for timber (which is quite against the rules).

Oh my!

We're handy in the blinking S.A.I.

We outs on rest and spends our days practising for a 'stunt,'  
 Then starts at night a-planting stakes on someone else's front,  
 And when we've cleaned our rifles, and got nothing else to do  
 We trim and weed the garden at Divisional H.Q.

They're fly -

At clicking - the poor old S.A.I.

They bungs us down in billets that's become a total wreck,  
 And when we've got 'em 'cushy,' sends us off again on trek,  
 But sure, we never grumble, be the job however strange,  
 'Cause if we don't get 'boucoup' rest, we get a heap of change.

You try!

You'll get it - in the Grand Old S.A.I.

(T.C. Ridsdale, 2 South African Infantry Regiment)

The bloody infantry has to take not only the brunt of the fighting, but also the lion's share of 'debasing' menial tasks. Ridsdale, for instance, suffered

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<sup>189</sup> Abbreviation for Royal Engineers.



[...]

My title's just a number,

And I ain't no bloomin' rank:

My hopes in that direction

Sergeant says is blanky blank.

[...]

The drudgery of military dress and drill is described in a light-hearted and humoristic vein: "I ain't no good at dressing [...] When I brings my heels together there's a yard between the toes". Death is euphemised as a generic hell, the dead as an indistinguishable "mangle(d)", and the battlefield hidden in a deluge of blood. The *manqué's* minions are also divested of some of their sting by cockneyisms: "where the big Jack Johnson<sup>194</sup> fell. / (I calls 'em undertakers, they do the job so well; / They flatten you and stiffen you and bury you in one. / 'Tis over in a jiffy, 'whizz, bang,' then 'Kingdom come.'"

Trench humour, however, only partly veils the *manqué*; the pathos in the last balladic stanza of this narrative poem is unmistakable:

My title's just a number,

Painted on a piece of plank,

I'm half sections with the sergeant

In the files that know no rank.

The emphasis at the end of the poem is on death as the great leveller, where neither rank nor religion matters; what does, is the inescapable tragedy of war for all concerned. Near the end of the poem, the dead sergeant gives the following advice to the fallen private:

[...]

Nor funk it at the portals where Peter stands inside,

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<sup>194</sup> The British nickname for artillery shells.

'Cos he's got a heap of crosses piled up agin your name.  
 There's not a mother's son of us but's in the mud the same.  
 And it ain't a-going to count much if you're Christian or Hindoo,  
 Or a Gawd-benighted sinner just the same as me and you,  
 If you get bowled at the wicket while a-ousting o' the Hun,  
 You played the game of cricket, and He'll say, 'Pass, friend; well done!'  
 So mind you keep's your dressin', and when I says 'Eyes front!'  
 Come smartly to attention; try to do it right for once't.'

The "heap of crosses piled up" is reminiscent of the famous First World War artist Stanley Spencer's painting *The Resurrection of the Soldiers* (1928-1929), wherein soldiers are engulfed in a sea of crosses (Christie 2007: 143-144). Some soldiers are depicted in sensual poses with the white crucifixes. The cross symbolises the physical, religious and sexual nature of battlefield death, where freshly killed bodies were covered in make-shift wooden crosses, under which men lay down together in a heavenly paradise after an orgasmic blood-spill; they "played the game" together on the battlefield, similar to the days of the schoolyard, when they took part in boyish sports, like cricket, and coquettish banter.

Coquetry was one of most popular ways in which the soldier could deal with battlefield trauma. Among South African soldiers, it seems that the song Mademoiselle from Armentieres was especially popular:<sup>195</sup>

Mademoiselle from Armentieres, parlez vous,  
 Mademoiselle from Armentieres, parlez vous,  
     Mademoiselle from Armentieres,  
     Never been kissed for forty years,  
     Ninky, pinky, parlez vous.

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<sup>195</sup> See *Reminiscences of a gunner in the SA Heavy Artillery in the First World War 1914 to 1919: war reminiscences of Daniël Petrus van der Merwe (1888-1976), written in 1964, Pretoria*. Private collection of Izak van der Merwe, Pretoria; NMMH, Pamphlet A.412(68), *1<sup>st</sup> SA Infantry Brigade*, file 1, no. 13, newspaper article.

The Jocks are having a hell of a time, parlez vous,  
 The Jocks are having a hell of a time, parlez vous,  
     The Jocks are having a hell of a time,  
     Kissing the W.A.A.C's<sup>196</sup> behind the line,  
     Ninky, pinky, parlez vous.<sup>197</sup>

This love of a woman was regularly expressed in the songs and parodies of the Great War. Bourke (1999: 144-170) indicates that the close bond between males was actually not as tight and lasting as that of the domestic connection. The warrior ethos exacted a too severe strain on the civilian men who longed to return to their women folk, both lovers and mothers:

I want my discharge, to leave the Army,  
 I'm fed up, and it drives me balmy;  
 I want a civvie suit upon my shoulder,  
 For the Khaki suit, it makes me feel much older.  
 I want to go and marry Rosie,  
 She's a sweet Girl, and loves her Fighting Mosey.  
 She's so sweet, it is a treat,  
 When our lips together meet;  
 I want my ticket then I'll beat,  
     That's all.

Many similar songs are also to be found in the South African soldier poet, Private Sam Naishstad's<sup>198</sup> *The Great War Parodies* (1919),<sup>199</sup> in which the

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<sup>196</sup> The Women's Auxiliary Army Corps was established in July 1917 to assist with administrative tasks relating to the war in Britain and France (Gilbert 1995: 345).

<sup>197</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.483 TRI, *Triple Eleven Club Johannesburg*, 1914-1918: 17.

<sup>198</sup> He served in Nyasaland, Central Africa, and was attested to 1SAI Brigade four months before the end of the war. SANDF Archives, *Military File*, Simeon Naishstad, 7009/22189.

above poem, 'I Want a Man', (Chorus II, 8), was published.<sup>200</sup> His parodies were very popular and the volume saw five editions, the first four being sold out. Copies were available in theatres in Johannesburg, and the proceeds went to soldiers' charities (1-3). Similarly, the Johannesburg Triple Eleven Club sold copies of popular war songs.<sup>201</sup> 'Girlie' songs abound in this volume. By all accounts, it appears that both women and humour did play a significant role in dispelling the *manqué*:

Brother Bertie went away to do his bit the other day,  
 With a smile upon his lips, and his lieutenant's pips  
     Upon his shoulder bright and gay;  
     As the train moved out he said:  
     'Remember me to all the birds.'  
 Then he wagged his paw, and went away to war,  
 Shouting out these pathetic words:  
     Good-bye, good-bye-ee,  
     Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee:  
     Tho' it's hard to part I know,  
     I'll be tickled to death to go,  
     Don't cry-ee, don't sigh-ee!  
     There's a silver lining in the sky-ee,  
     Bon soir, old thing, cheer-i-o chin-chin,  
     Nah-poo, toodle-oo, good-bye-ee.  
 (Good-bye-ee, Chorus; Triple Eleven Club 1914-1918: 8-9)

Naishstad wrote two Africanised parodies on this poem. Version No. 2 reads:

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<sup>199</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.483 NAI, *The Great War Parodies on the East, Central African and Flanders campaigns*.

<sup>200</sup> Other parodied songs in Naishstad's volume that have as their theme domestic bliss are 'Freedom's Defence' (10-11), 'Maryland' (25), 'They're Wearing 'em Higher in Hawai' (37), 'The Parting Day' (54), 'My Little Girl' (57), 'My Little Grey Home in the West' (62), 'Letter from a Lonely Soldier' (71), 'The Laddie of 1919' (72), 'Hello, My Deary!' (78).

<sup>201</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.483 TRI, *Triple Eleven Club Johannesburg, 1914-1918*.

At the Roberts Heights,<sup>202</sup> it's true, oh there were some boys in blue,<sup>203</sup>  
 And the Matron, old thing, to the boys did sing  
 All the old, old songs she knew;  
 Then the old girl gushed with pride, when the boys all came inside,  
 Said now the old Miss, I'm going to give you all a kiss,  
 Then they grabbed their hats and cried:

*Chorus II*

Good-bye-ee; Good-bye-ee!  
 Wipe the tear, Sister dear, from your eye-ee,  
 Oh, it's hard to part I know,  
 Sorry, but we all have to go,  
 Don't sighee, don't cryee,  
 We will all be back here by-and-bye-ee,  
 Bon soir, old thing, cheerio chin-chin,  
 Napoo, todaloo, good-bye-ee.  
 (42)

These music-hall verbal shenanigans or nonsense verse had to hide the *manqué*, which was mazed from view in humoristic repetitions. Naishstad's parodies echo this laughter especially loudly in the face of death: "When I killed one German, ha, ha, ha, ha! / And I killed the other one, ho, ho, ho, ho! / Then they run, you should see the fun, [...]" (On the Good Ship 'Yacki Hicki Doo La', i, 1-3; 9). A South African soldier observed the following regarding the spirit of the men: "There is [...] an almost childlike longing for laughter, and the atmosphere [...] of buoyant, happy heedlessness".<sup>204</sup> This whimsical recklessness had a definite survivalist value: "the casual, happy-go-lucky, smile-it-down heroism that beats old Fritz in the trenches, and is now beating

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<sup>202</sup> The Union Defence Force's headquarters near Pretoria.

<sup>203</sup> Wounded soldiers wore blue uniforms.

<sup>204</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(3), June 1917: 53.

those twin imposters, Pain and Despondency [...]”.<sup>205</sup> For the poet, the raging corpse could be restrained within jocose, parodied, and sentimental verse:

Somewhere in France, I’m sitting in a trench,  
 Writing to some one who’s waiting for me,  
 Amongst the bodies of our murdered soldiers,  
 From whom the hearts were stolen away,  
 And someone is mourning far away.  
 (‘Hiawaain Butterfly’, Naishstad 1919: 61)

It represented an act of writing-into-existence the physical and psychological body in an environment dominated by the abject corpse. The female form, the perfumed and dressed-up doll (The Laddie of 1919; 72) represents the binary opposite of the rotting corpse.

It was especially the “Matron”, “Sister” and “Nursie” who kept the “Broken Dolls” bits from coming apart completely, both their physical and psychological cogs:

Nursie, Nursie, dear little Nursie,  
 Often I’ll think of you,  
 For attention and care, and devotion  
 so rare,  
 You’ve bestowed on me, ‘tis true.  
 [...]  
 An angel of exquisite neatness,  
 A vision in grey and white,  
 Who gave me a smile of ineffable  
 sweetness,  
 And tucked me in cosy at night.  
 And when you’ve given me lotions,

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<sup>205</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(6), October 1917: 129.

To make me fit and well,  
 [...]
   
 And the short time that I was at  
     Richmond Park  
 You made it a heaven for me.  
 But I've reached the end of my tether,  
 And will now have to wish you adieu.  
 Where'er I may be, at home or at sea,  
 My thoughts will return to sweet  
     Richmond - and you.  
 (The Patient's Sweetheart, 1917)<sup>206</sup>

This poem was written by Private Harry William Heaney,<sup>207</sup> who like Winterbourne and Naishstad, served in 1SAI Brigade in Europe. He was a Scotsman by birth, a "truck fitter" by profession, and was living in the Transvaal at the outbreak of war. He spent two-and-a-half months at the South African Military Hospital, Richmond Park, while suffering from Nephritis.<sup>208</sup> His poem is sentimental and suggestive of blue-collar origins, but it is sincere in its heartfelt appreciation of the angelic apparition "in grey and white". Another poem by a member of the South African Brigade, written in the popular ballad stanza form, is The New Lass of Richmond Hill (1917):<sup>209</sup>

You've heard of the Lass of Richmond Hill,<sup>210</sup>  
     Immortalised in song;  
 Who lived and was loved on this pleasant spot  
     Before the world went wrong.

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<sup>206</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(1), April 1917: 8.

<sup>207</sup> SANDF Archives, *Military File*, Private H.W. Heaney, 9272 X383.

<sup>208</sup> A kidney disorder that causes fever, nausea and complications with the brain's functioning.

<sup>209</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(1), April 1917: 7.

<sup>210</sup> An English folk song from the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Well, it's not of her I would tell to-day,  
     For another has taken her place,  
 A new Lass who's answered her country's call,  
     Determined her share to face.

We all know her here on Richmond Hill,  
     And although she may wake you at four,  
 And tell you it's time to sit up and wash  
     You'll forgive her for that and more.

For, in many cases, to 'do her bit,'  
     She has travelled over the seas,  
 To lighten and lessen the pains of us all,  
     To replace, for our suffering, ease.

So it matters not what our Regiment is,  
     On one subject we're all agreed –  
 That the Lass of Richmond Hill to-day  
     Is a Lass worth loving indeed.

The poet, Sergeant Herbert Lister of the South African infantry, was wounded in the head and foot during the Battle of the Somme and Delville Wood during July 1916. He spent almost nine months at Richmond, from 13 August 1916 to 5 May 1917, and was shortly thereafter discharged as "being permanently unfit for general war service". In a sworn statement during his official discharge he stated: "Having received a G.S.W.<sup>211</sup> to the right foot, which will partially permanently incapacitate me, I consider I am entitled to compensation or pension [...]"<sup>212</sup> He would have stared into the eyes of many

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<sup>211</sup> A serious wound.

<sup>212</sup> SANDF Archives, *Military File*, Sergeant Herbert Lister, 3096.

a lass from the South African Military Nursing Service, who served in England and France (Stratford & Collins 1994: 45-67).

Lister's poem, dedicated to the angel lasses in uniform, was written for a concert at Richmond Hospital. The South African Hospital had its own Concert Hall,<sup>213</sup> where humoristic "British workman" "sketches" and melodramatic music-hall songs like Take me back to dear old Blighty (1916), were performed, as well as more serious numbers including Miserere from Verdi's *Il Trovatore* and Crucifixion by Sir John Stainer were sung.<sup>214</sup>

Women played the role of not only nurses, but also of performers and hostesses during these concert parties. They also entertained men during their time out of the trenches:

#### You Visiting Springbok

Now the days are brighter and the sun appears  
 Take the bus to Richmond. 'Aren't the Springboks 'deers'!  
 Take a box of matches. Likewise take your 'pass.'  
 Note the hours 'permitted' and do keep off the grass.  
 'By One who Goes.'

#### Springbok Visiting You

Just a cup of 'Koffie' and a cosy chair,  
 Just a chat on 'Africa' and the Boys 'Somewhere,'  
 Serve a lekker Bredie, mealie fritters too,  
 And another Springbok 'springs' his heart on you!  
 'By One who Knows.'<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>213</sup> The South African Discharge (training) Depot (camp) at Bordon, Hampshire had its own theatre, where comedies were part of the performance repertoire. Similarly, the Springbok Club at the Inkerman Barracks, Woking, held concert parties every week. NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(6), September 1918: 41,48.

<sup>214</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(2), May 1917: 32-33.

<sup>215</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(3), June 1917: 63.

The kind 'Auntie' who wrote this poem indulged the South Africans in the aromatic dishes of their home country. The Afrikaans words used further enhance the very indigenous and unique African quality of the Springbok soldiers as opposed to their British and colonial comrades. Just what "chat on 'Africa'" would entail can easily be conjectured. Nature would have been a major topic of discussion amongst South Africans in England and Europe. *The Nongqai*, *The Springbok Blue* and *The Springbok Magazine* are laced with poems and references to the natural beauty of Africa and South Africa. The South African poet, A.D. Keet (1888-1972), features in *The Springbok Magazine* of April 1918. The Keet poem chosen by the editors of the magazine speaks for itself:

My African Farm [in the Karroo]<sup>216</sup>

There's a wonderful charm  
 In an African farm,  
 It casts its spell from the start,  
 For its life is as free  
 As the boundless sea  
 And that is the joy of my heart. (i)  
 [...]  
 When the day is born  
 In the early morn  
 And the dewdrops wash my feet,  
 I'm out in the veldt  
 With my gun and my belt  
 In the air so bracing and sweet. (iii)  
 [...]  
 Then Oh! for the charm  
 Of an African farm  
 And the joy of a living still,

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<sup>216</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(1), April 1918: 53.

When every day  
 Is bright and gay  
 And the sunbeams drink their fill! (vii)

An article entitled 'Sunset in the Cape Karroo', also in *The Springbok Magazine*, encapsulates this nostalgic longing:

Then the Great Silence. For abdicating Day [...] is become merely a Memory - a thing dead and impalpable; a sand-grain on the strand of Time and measureless Eternity.<sup>217</sup>

In this extract, Adamastor still lurks ominously in the scorching desert of the Karoo. It is the "thing" in the daylight, the "Despised; ignoble. An illimitable melancholy waste - a soulless, inhospitable thing, useless to God or to Man", which is hidden among the bowers of Romantic diction and romanticised Africa. Similar to 'Auntie', women poets also contributed in veiling the *manqué* from view. Amy Harvey's cult-of-the-mother poetry in *The Nongqai* has already been discussed. In *The Springbok Magazine*, Mina A. Hallifax, employed at the South African workroom at Richmond, and Helen K.B. Gillmer, working at the hospital laboratory, wrote 'carry on', moralistic homilies.<sup>218</sup> Poems by the authoress of *Empire Songs and Other Poems* were also quoted<sup>219</sup> in which the grave is metaphorised into a perfumed bouquet of brave soldiers.

As George Eliot wants us to believe: "In every parting there is an image of death".<sup>220</sup> In many instances women were there to lighten the physical and emotional burden suffered by men in parting with house and hearth. Those who chose to move nearer to the wounds of men, by volunteering for war

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<sup>217</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(8), November 1918: 24.

<sup>218</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(1), April 1918: 56,60; II(12), March 1919: 12.

<sup>219</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(6), September 1918: 24; II(8), November 1918: 58; II(11), February 1919: 28; II(12), March 1919: 48.

<sup>220</sup> This Eliot quote is found at one of the exhibition entrances of the Imperial War Museum in Lambeth, London.

work, took the place of those 'back home'. They were subsequently cast as female Christs, the saviour of man, who had to dispel the "image of death":

In past dark days, what should we not have suffered,  
 But for her presence, near our shattered frame?  
 When our dry lips – one single name – just muttered  
 She held our hand, and wiped our brow again! (iv)

Nurses the soul of woman now have proved,  
 With mighty force, the power, and plan;  
 The love, which God to them endued,  
 In rescuing the soul of man. (v)

(Woman)<sup>221</sup>

The writer, John Ashmead of 1 SAI Brigade, suffered both from physical and psychological wounds during 1916.<sup>222</sup> His deeply felt appreciation for the nurse is, therefore, based on real experiences in military hospital. Another poem written in the same tone is The Sister:

Flitting about from bed to bed,  
 A ray of light in a dreary shed,  
 And music in her lightsome tread,  
     Along the ward;  
 Oh! hope of all the wounded men,  
 Her beaming smile, a treasure then,  
 Her winsome face, her able ken,  
     In grand accord.

Her dark-blue eyes pathetic shine,

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<sup>221</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(11), February 1919: 22.

<sup>222</sup> SANDF Archives, *Military File*, John Edward Walter Ashmead, 5486.

Beneath a veil of quaint design,  
 In earnest mood she seems divine,  
     So serious;  
 And yet withal, 'twere surely shown,  
 In greater stress she'd stand alone,  
 Brave, defiant, – regal grown,  
     Imperious.  
 (Serowe 1919: 16)

Especially to the convalescing readers of the *The Springbok Blue* and *The Springbok Magazine*, women represented comfort. Whether they were the caring nurses, the female entertainers, women visitors to their wards, or those who welcomed them into their homes, they were indeed angels. All these tributes to women can be traced back to the Victorian cult of the mother. D.P. Harber of 1SAI Brigade encapsulated this longing for the womb in his very sentimental and floral poem Mothers of Africa:

Mothers of Africa! the poppies are laughing;  
     And painting the graves where your dear ladies sleep;  
 The skylark is trilling a melody gladsome –  
     Mothers of Africa! why do you weep?

Mothers of Africa! He's sleeping softly,  
     The corn flowers mingle there, blue with the red;  
 And clusters of daisies, like little white pillows,  
     Bloom at the head of his soft, earthly bed.

Mothers of Africa! I'll whisper a prayer for you,  
     When on the march I shall pass by his grave.  
 Mothers of Africa! your eyes should be shining,

Your sons died like heroes because you were brave.<sup>223</sup>

This Oedipal hunger is expressed much more seditiously by X in Songs to Shirkers V. True Pluck:

Darling Mother, oh the hissing  
     Of the bullets is too plain,  
 So would I be rather missing,  
     But no, never with the slain;  
 For I care not for such quarrels  
     Or rich laurels on my brow –  
 I would rather see the laurels  
     In your kitchen garden now

Would I were a periwinkle,  
     Or a minnow in a brook,  
 So that I might get a wrinkle  
     Of the way to take my hook,  
 For not am I fond of dying,  
     As my comrades seem to be,  
 With the missiles round me flying,  
     I would missile home to thee.

Softly steals the night, dear Mother,  
     Gently slopes the battle plain,  
 As I steal from sight, dear Mother,  
     Gently sloping home again;  
 For if I return, dear Mother,  
     Never from your side I'll roam,  
 But I'll whack my younger brother

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<sup>223</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, X(2), February 1919: 55.

In tranquillity at home.<sup>224</sup>

This poem is very much tongue-in-the-cheek anti-heroic, and it does indicate that some men, like X, did have reserves about going off to war, and would have wanted to return or remain safely at the “Mother’s” nurturing side. Ironic humour is used to express doubt in the value of battlefield valour and to hide the true horror of the *manqué*.

The poem Red Cross Way succinctly summarises the feats of women on behalf of the fighting and dying men for the readers of the South African Military Hospital magazine at Richmond:<sup>225</sup>

As my mother drew me close,  
 [...]
 ‘Davie, boy, look up, and try  
 Brave to live, and brave to die!’  
 [...]
 Of a thoughtful sewing band;  
 Fighting just as hard as we,  
 ‘Gainst a foe they cannot see.  
 Daily thinking of us boys,  
 Sure the knowledge brings us joys!  
 Stirs us when the battle’s hot,  
 Soothes when we are badly shot;  
 Buys from time we first enrolled ,  
 Clothes when ‘battle front’ is cold;  
 Tends our wounds by proxy neat,  
 Her ‘gift car’ [donated ambulance] such a royal treat,  
 [...]
 Bless the women! one and all,

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<sup>224</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, II(3), September 1914: 212.

<sup>225</sup> NMMH, *The Springbok Blue*, I(6), October 1917: 139.

Who, like us, just heed the call;  
 To sew; collect; or devise means;  
 [...]  
 (Ilausten)

Conversely, many men in the training barracks and in the field experienced women as absence; especially in the face of the mounting male battle casualties, this absence became a burning sore, an abject dejection and rejection of the female:

The Love of a Man<sup>226</sup>

The love of a man is great, dear lads,  
     His love is strong for his gal;  
 But the greatest love in the whole wide world  
     Is the love of a man for his pal.  
 Women don't count in the face of death,  
     With the fear of Hell in your soul;  
 And there ain't no time in the firing line  
     For the love that a woman stole.

When it's hand to hand in a broken square,  
     And half your troops laid out,  
 You can thank the Lord that your pals are there,  
     And there are no gals about.

When it's red blood red, and your horse is dead,  
     And it's 'Wheel,' 'Retire,' and 'Trot,'  
 You can bet your boots on the price of your head,  
     On the love of the pals you've got.

And there ain't no doubt of the love which is best,

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<sup>226</sup> SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, VI(4), October 1916: 281.

For faith; 'tis written plain:  
 That a man will ride to his death with a jest,  
     Though he knows that his ride is in vain.  
 For the way of a man is a man's own way,  
     And a man to a man is true –  
 Women don't know, when it's touch and go,  
     What a man for a man will do.

This poem is loudly misogynist with definite homoerotic undertones in which it is 'proven' that a man's love for his fellow is greater than any affection coming from a woman. In dealing with the open wound, the soldier had to put all his trust – and love – in the hands of his comrade. This poem is published as a footnote to a long list of names listing "South African Losses" in Europe after the Somme, and the long drawn out malaria-infested East Africa campaign. The waste of men's bodies could only be rationalised or re-fleshed within a M2M ode to manliness in a war where "Women don't count in the face of death", neither as companions nor as battle casualties. It must be realised, however, that this poem was published in the very masculine *The Nongqai*, relatively early in the war, when South Africans were just beginning to suffer the abject casualties that the other allies had already been accustomed to since 1915; this was due to the Union's relatively late entry in the European war. The angel nurse had not yet had time to spread her healing wings over the maimed. This would follow in 1917, as severe South African casualties became a regular occurrence and were diligently published in magazines and newspapers such as *The Nongqai*.

Attaching a low price-tag to this suffering also led to considerable discontent within the ranks. The Imperial rate of pay for a soldier was one shilling (bob) per day. The Union rate was three shillings, and that of other Dominions, five shillings. The South Africans serving in German South-West Africa and East Africa received the higher Union rate, while those volunteers fighting in Europe, the lower Imperial rate, which led to a heated debate in

the Union and in the trenches during the war (Genis 2000: 110-115; Serowe 1919: 31). British soldiers in Europe were understandably dissatisfied with being remunerated less for doing the same or even bloodier tasks. South African pro-war politicians, especially in the South African Labour Party, high-ranking officers in the Union's Defence Force and the civilian Recruiting Committees were petitioning for the raising of the rate of pay, first to the Union rate of 3 shillings, and once this had been granted by the British Government in January 1917, to the five shilling Dominion pay (Genis 2000: 110-115). However, the rate of pay remained at three shillings for the rest of the war, which considerably dogged recruiting efforts for Europe. It was even speculated that higher rates of pay would have led to the formation of a full South African division for service overseas during the war (111,115), which would have consisted of three infantry brigades as well as auxiliary units, approximately 20 000 bodies strong (Ashworth 2000: 9).

To the men in the trenches, the lower pay meant that their bodily sacrifices and wounds were worth less than those on other fronts. This led to an angry outcry which also found expression in the war poetry:

Three Bob a Day

Tho' poverty isn't a crime,  
 It certainly causes a lot,  
 And nature once steeped in the grime,  
 Isn't easily cleared of the rot.  
 Few may be what they wish to be,  
 Chance, as they call it, rules,  
 Old Circumstance in his spiteful glee,  
 Makes cowards, rogues, and fools.  
 Three paltry bob per day is not  
 The way to make men good,  
 It's apt to change their way a lot,  
 Not always as it should;

It's not beyond all bounds to say,  
 'Twill change their kits as well;  
 The raffles and swindles of yesterday,  
 The loss of a tunic and pants to-day,  
 Is a premonition of ill.  
 (Serowe 1919: 31)<sup>227</sup>

The poem was written after the increase of January 1917, which, as evident in the poem, was still not satisfactory to the South Africans serving in Europe. Serowe acts a clairvoyant as he predicts “The loss of a tunic and pants”. Although demobilised men were not required to hand in their army greatcoats at the end of hostilities, the Union authorities after the war did little to perpetuate the memory of their sacrifices made while wearing these “raffles and swindles” (Digby 1993: 415-421). On the demobilisation form that veterans had to complete after the war, it is evident that soldiers had to ‘sell off’ or discard their military regalia as soon as possible: “I have been warned not to wear my Uniform after the expiration of my 28 Days’ Furlough and have received a Cash Payment with which to purchase a Suit of Civilian Clothing.”<sup>228</sup> South African soldiers’ discontent with their treatment in England after the end of hostilities boiled over at the South African Reserve Brigade camp at Perham Downs, when they went on strike as a result of “Demobilisation delays”. They demanded improvements in their daily work schedules and food rations. “Passive resistance” was employed by the discontents, which even escalated into the gutting of one of the bungalow huts.<sup>229</sup> Although this incident could be contained, it indicates the general sense of wartime loss that permeated the ranks. This loss was already expressed early in the war. Robert Ernest Vernède, who was wounded at the Somme in 1916, and killed in action in 1917, expresses doubt in the perpetuation of the wartime memory of soldierly sacrifice:

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<sup>227</sup> Naishstad regularly refers to the “meager pay” (71) issue in his parodies (1919).

<sup>228</sup> SANDF Archives, *Military File*, Private H.W. Heaney, 9272 X383.

<sup>229</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(11), February 1919: 40.

Those Sergeants I lost at Delville  
 On a night that was cruel and black,  
 They gave their lives for England's sake,  
 They will never come back. (vi)

What of the hundreds in whose hearts  
 Thoughts no less splendid burn?  
 I wonder what England will do for them  
 If ever they return? (vii)  
 (At Delville)<sup>230</sup>

Sam Naishstad's parodies in "grousing" irony, summarise this general discontentment, not only on the Western Front, but also in the better paid African theatres:

When soldiers' eyes are smiling - of the hardships they've been  
 through,  
 Of bully-beef and biscuits and of 'skilly' so-called stew,  
 But though the crippled soldiers - they've lost the life in view,  
 That's all now they can earn - Is a Dixie full of stew.  
 (When Irish Eyes are Smiling', Chorus IV; 1919: 14)

The "Broken Dolls", "our boys", the "sunny" Springboks, stuck it out in the "rotten" no-man's land, pervaded by "stench", and in the "smell" holes caused by shell fire, and in the wild beast and insect and disease infested East Africa, where bodies, similar to those in the trenches, "fight, and fall, and ooze". It is not only the physical suffering that is remembered by the soldier, but also the psychological war-things - "God knows I tried to forget". Naishstad appeals to the public to remember their sacrifices:

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<sup>230</sup> Available at: <http://www.delvillewood.com/poems.htm>. Accessed: 6 November 2012.

We stuck in the trenches, in waters that freeze;  
 The enemy we faced, as all true Britons;  
 We were fed on hard biscuits, skilly and cheese,  
 While our blood has been sucked by misquitos. (iii)

So welcome us now, and give back our 'jobs,'  
 Help us to earn a living;  
 Sack all the slackers, and consider the 'mobs'  
 That have fought while you were profiteering. (iv)  
 ('Conquerors to Profiteers'; 1919: 29)

The war divested the men of their manhood. They were no longer the heroic warriors marching off to war to defend their kiln and kin, but "A Broken Doll" (Naishstad 1919: 64), who had lost all sense of self-worth and manliness:

[...]  
 The day has come to land in France,  
 All the lassies won't miss a chance,  
 They all now stared at Percy Lee,  
 Whose kilts were up above his knee.  
 Percy looked at them and smiled,  
 But blushing awfully like a child,  
 He pulled his kilt down in the length,  
 By doing so he taxed the buttons' strength.

[...]  
 Where he was wounded I will not recite,  
 As you girls may take a fright;  
 It is bad enough for me to know,

Good luck to him he got the D.S.O.<sup>231</sup>

(Percy Lee; 66)

The various odes to the men and their sacrifices that were published in *The Nongqai*<sup>232</sup> and military awards and medals handed out soon rang hollow with forgetfulness. England definitely did more for its men than the Union government did for theirs. The wound of loss was deepened when the National Party tried to sweep clean any vestiges of British military traditions from the Union Defence Force after it came to power in 1948 (Digby 1993: 419-420). This represented a double loss for the veterans: that of the comrade and that of memory:

Glorious? (1950s)

In the days long gone by when the 1<sup>st</sup> S.A.I.  
Took part in a battle arboreous,  
Mid Delville Wood's trees with a vertical breeze  
I don't recollect feeling glorious.

When the battle was o'er and we counted the score  
We didn't feel very victorious.  
With most of our band in a far better land  
Not one of us said it was glorious.

When a pal fell down dead with no top to his head  
We may have used language censorious,  
But whatever we said as we looked at our dead  
I'm certain we never said glorious [...]

(Published in Uys 1983: Epilogue)

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<sup>231</sup> The Distinguished Service Order medal.

<sup>232</sup> See Welcome Back, SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, X(1), January 1919: 7; Peerless, January 1919: 16; The Last Salute, X(2), February 1919: 72; A Tribute, X(3), March 1919: 119; Lest We Forget, March 1919: 154.

Harold Goodwin's<sup>233</sup> loss of comrades as a young man is mirrored by his traumatic recollection of war during a time whose generation had largely forgotten his sacrifice because of its obsession with apartheid's race-politics.

It was especially the minority English-speaking community and Anglo-Afrikaners who tried to keep the spirit of the war alive in South Africa; this was in stark contrast to the Afrikaner-dominated National Party government that wanted to cut all ties with the British government, and especially with British military traditions in the South African armed forces (Jooste 1996: 113-127). Through the 1<sup>st</sup> South African Infantry Brigade Association, veterans were re-united with each other after the war. Yearly Brigade-Day re-union dinners were held,<sup>234</sup> as well as annual Delville Wood commemoration services.<sup>235</sup> Additionally, special social events were organised for the 50<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the formation of the Brigade in 1965 and 1975 respectively.<sup>236</sup> Delville Wood has also come to represent the stuff of mythical legend, as the "Weeping Cross of Delville Wood" in the Pietermaritzburg Garden of Remembrance testifies. Since the end of hostilities in 1918, on 14 July, which marks the start of the Delville Wood battle, the cross weeps resin.<sup>237</sup> Today, the tradition of holding memorial services in South Africa and in France at the Delville Wood Memorial are kept alive.<sup>238</sup> However, these are mainly South African National Defence Force initiatives. Similarly, veteran magazines, including the *Springbok* and *Home Front: The Moth Magazine*, try to keep the memory alive by printing articles and even some poems on the battle. Notwithstanding these efforts, the general public has largely forgotten the war as those who served in it have since died and every year, their sacrifice is becoming a more and more distant memory.

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<sup>233</sup> Harold Goodwin fought at Delville Wood where he suffered a head wound. SANDF Archives, *Military File*, Sgt. H. Goodwin, 995.

<sup>234</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.412(68), *1<sup>st</sup> SA Infantry Brigade*, file 1, no. 9.

<sup>235</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet 4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*.

<sup>236</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet A.412(68), *1<sup>st</sup> SA Infantry Brigade*, file 1, no. 20.

<sup>237</sup> NMMH, Pamphlet 4272, *Battle of Delville Wood*, file 2, no. 17.

<sup>238</sup> *South African Soldier*, XI(9), September 2004: 24; XII(9), September 2005: 18-19.

The poems discussed in this section may be rightly termed protest poetry as they question, subtly or more overtly, the established military and societal norms and values of the day. However, these verses' themes of protest are expressed in traditional poetic conventions and forms of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century pastoral lyric and Barrack room ballad. The South African war poet who comes closest to exemplifying the trench poets' depiction of the faceless animality of war in both content and form is Denys Lefebvre:

Sand dunes  
Stretch white and silent  
To the horizon

A speck overhead  
Averted, motionless,  
Like a stone drops -  
Down.

On his back  
A man lies gasping;  
A bright stream oozes from his tunic.  
His hands -  
Brown, strong hands  
Clutching ...  
The nails, well trimmed and shapely,  
Make crimson furrows  
In his palms.

Blinding sunlight  
Stabs -  
Sharp fangs of flame  
Shoot at him, scorching,

From molten sky.

Thirst

Claws at his throat;

His tongue,

Grown black and swollen,

Protrudes a little.

See! the palm-trees!

Clear, cool water!

Listen!

The sound of rivers

Coming near -

God!

Coming nearer!

Listen again!

Was that a laugh

Inhuman, twisted?

Great, yellow eyes

Glare obscenely;

Lean talons quiver;

A long, hooked beak opens,

Closes;

A naked head

Cranes slowly forward -

Waiting.

(Waiting; Lefebvre 1918: 26-27)

The free verse, in unrhymed lines, “Stabs –” at the reader in short bursts. The vulture with its sharp claws and beak hovers “motionless” and “drops” ominously over the delayed but imminent moment when the *manqué* is conceived as the corpse. It is the “Inhuman, twisted” thing of Cripps’s Lycanthropy (1917: 112), and Slater’s Heard in the Woods (1917: 33), but more abject because of the uncertain poetic form in which the *manqué* further slips from view. Meaning has completely broken down as all that the dying body and reader can do is “Waiting”, which represents a continuous deferral of real ‘knowing’. Lefebvre repeats this modernist feat in Trees.

Bent low and creeping along the ground,  
 Slowly, painfully;  
 With hunted look,  
 Pale staring eyes and pallid lips;  
 Dragging a broken foot,  
 He cranes his head –  
 Crouching,  
 Listening.

There, through the tall arched branches of the wood,  
 The blue sky peeps;  
 And the boughs sway softly in the sunshine.  
 All is hushed;  
 Till a twig  
 Snaps in the silence.

Again. Then a long, low rustle.  
 A wild cat stalking its prey?  
 Or a wolf  
 That has scented blood?

He tries to run,  
Dragging his foot;  
Sharp, grinding pain  
Damps his forehead;  
And his eyes,  
Large, brown soft eyes,  
Start from their sockets.

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Lightly, swiftly,  
With lithe, swinging footsteps,  
A grey-clad figure  
Leaps into the clearing;  
And pauses -  
Listening.

A startled hare,  
With ears turned back,  
Bounds past him panting;  
And on the man's face  
Comes a grim look;  
In his eyes,  
The hunter's signal.

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When he comes back -  
Stretching himself on the sward,  
With deep contentment,  
He lights his pipe;

And watches the blue smoke curling  
To the sky.

And, as he sleeps,  
His rosy, boyish face relaxes;  
His pipe slips down -  
A hand, firm, white and supple,  
Flecked with soft golden hairs,  
Clutches his bayonet  
Whose long blade stains the grass -  
Red, sticky, shining.

And, as he dreams,  
His full red lips,  
Moist, dribbling slightly,  
Curl like a petal  
Touched by the dew of early morning -  
Move as he murmurs:  
'Gretchen.'

The trees around him  
Stand, still and silent,  
Listening.

(1918: 27-28)

In the first four stanzas of the poem, the hunter - the German soldier - becomes the hunted. He metamorphoses into the meek hare that has to be on the lookout constantly because of predators lurking in the woods. Similarly, the soldier finds himself in a physical wood filled with dangers, but more disconcertingly, his fear roams a metaphysical wood or no-man's-land of horrors. The poet can only approach the *manqué* within an Owenesque dream-

text wherein he can, in stanzas five to seven, again claim his rational role of the courageous hunter within a dream landscape before the war, when he again walks the forests of pre-war Germany, as a free man – a hunter of others. However, the war has turned him into the hunted as he assumes the role of the fleeing hare in the first part of the poem. He metonymically becomes part of the Kristevan (1982) “deject” and “abject, who is slaughtered and who butchers the other, which is in essence the same human body, and his only escape is to become one again with the feminine womb – “Gretchen” (viii-x).

His death and the other’s death becomes the similar instance of the same retching *manqué*: “[...] I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself* [...] I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit” (Kristeva 1982: 3; emphasis in the original). Kristeva’s description of the “symbolic system” (3) of the *manqué* is turned very physical through the corpse in the trenches. The sanitised bodily fluids – blood and semen – that are so characteristic of the Delville Wood poetry, is actually the defiling ooze of nervous tears, piss and puke of the crouching soldier before zero hour, and the “turn... [ing] [...] inside out, guts sprawling” (3) during the attack. It is the uncertain and anxious “Waiting” and “Listening” on which Lefebvre’s two Modernist poems hinge.

*The Springbok Magazine* of November 1918 (II(8): 12) summed up this sense of apprehensiveness in a world that had changed forever in a love poem gone sour:

### Changed

We met. ‘Twas by a river side,  
     The sunbeams seemed to cling  
 About her form in glorified  
     Dewed lilies of the Spring.  
 And all around and everywhere

Were birds. We heard them sing.

Again we met. 'Twas in a street,  
 The rude crowd hurried by;  
 Above the din in discord harsh  
 Her laugh rang coarse and high.  
 There were no dew-tipped lilies there,  
 Nor bird nor song nor sky.

The pre-war lyrical pastoral had forever been replaced by the angular and violent modernity of an industrialised war. The singularly beautiful had been swallowed up by the madding, faceless crowd. This poem, although not strictly a war poem, is reminiscent of Owen's Anthem for Doomed Youth and Eliot's The Waste Land in its expression of the stark 'Unreality' of the modern world, whether on the battlefield or in the city's streets.

The physical and psychological 'getting sick' of the deject was brought very close to the homefront during the dying days of the war, when Adamastor's wounded smile was at its broadest. The final acts of the war were dominated by the abject Spanish Influenza of 1918, when Adamastor metamorphosed into plague. The Spanish influenza epidemic of 1918 was "South Africa's greatest natural disaster", during which 300 000 South Africans died, or 6% of the population, within six weeks (Phillips 2008: 34). The war increased the suffering as many doctors and nurses were on active service away from home which led to a shortage of medical personnel to treat patients (Phillips 1990: 204). It was a "tornado of plague" (2008: 34-35) that killed between 50 and 100 million people across the world, with sufferers turning a terrible blue while vomiting blood.<sup>239</sup> It also affected the fighting men. *The Nongqai* of November 1918 (IX(11): 508-509) published "melancholy lists of [influenza] deaths of our

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<sup>239</sup> See Rosenberg, J. 1918 Spanish flu pandemic. *About.com 20th Century History*. Available at: <http://history1900s.about.com/od/1910s/p/spanishflu.htm>. [Accessed 17 September 2013].

comrades of the three [armed] Services in South Africa [...] Among them are many dear, true, and stalwart friends and correspondents of *The Nongqai*." Reports from England also indicated that the South Africans, together with all combatants, stationed there were hard hit by the epidemic.<sup>240</sup>

The civilian war poet, Owen Richmond Thompson, wrote the following poem on the effects of the plague on South Africa:

A cloud has settled o'er the land,

Impalpable! Unseen!

From Table-Mount to Durban strand,

From South to tropic scene.

[...]

Tis charged with tears of grief and pain,

Its gloom the death-knell rings.

It poisons Afric's lucid air,

And lays the folk abed,

Its deadly breath is everywhere,

Its shrouds o'er all dispread.

[...]

And men are falling down

[...]

And eyes are closed of thousands more,

With pestilential seal.

(The Pestilence - The Influenza Epidemic of 1918 in South Africa, October 1918; Thompson 1919: 43)

Adamastor's revenge and the poetry of the war are metonyms for the *manqué*. Both have been consummated in a bloody circle of loss: for Adamastor, the Spanish Influenza was the crowning moment; for the poetry, it is Lefebvre's verse.

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<sup>240</sup> NLSA, *The Springbok Magazine*, II(8), November 1918: 40, 56.

Adamastor's revenge had come full circle; the *manqué*-reaper did not claim white bodies only in its dark home of "Afric", but also in the trenches of far off Europe. As minds, both white and black, were eagerly turning to the prospects of peace, fever dealt the final unexpected blow. It became evident during the war that Adamastor could not protect his 'dark' kin.

#### Chapter 4: The Black(ened) Corpse, and the Cross from across the Sea

The Cross; a symbol of that faith,  
     That points to Calvary;  
 A living token of that Death  
     That sets the guilty free.

Long hath it stood, so silently,  
     Where Algoa's rock-bound shore  
 Beats back the waters of the sea  
     With angry sullen roar.

It tells of man's belief in God;  
     Of Diaz and his band,  
 Who braved the waters and the flood,  
     At Christian King's command.

It speaks of Freedom's flag unfurled,  
     For Christianity;  
 A beacon light, in this dark world,  
     To God and liberty.

On Santa Cruz, long may it stand,  
     As emblem, may it be  
 The cheer of Good Hope; in the land  
     Peace and prosperity.

(A.K. Soga, Santa Cruz: The Holy Cross, originally published in *Imvo Zabantsundu*, 1898; Van Wyk Smith 1998: 86 and Couzens & Patel 1991: 18-19)

Allan Kirkland Soga's poem is characteristic of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century poetry written by the small class of black educated elite (Couzens & Patel 1991: 1-3; Van Wyk Smith 1990: 38). This elite, including Soga, hailed primarily from the Xhosa mission students of the 19<sup>th</sup> century eastern Cape, who were the first indigenous group to be profoundly literary and who published widely in mission and independent Xhosa newspapers (Opland 2004). The germination of a poetry of reaction – an indigenous war poetry – can be traced back to this literary school. Similar to the white poetry on strife, black poetry of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was also conceived in the shade of Adamastor, but with very different cascading thematic shadows. Like white poetry on the Titan of the Cape, Soga's Adamastor is the lord of "this dark world" of savage ethnicity that is tamed by the white god of "liberty" and Christianity. In the same era, Thomas Mqanda also wrote of the sinister presence of Adamastor:

Let me say to you,  
 Always lounging in Cape Town  
 On the white woman's mountain:  
 Go, black snake  
 Cleaving pools,  
 Back to the homes we're slaughtered in.  
 Study the white man's ways  
 And a musket will study you,  
 You strong-winged hawk.

(Published in *Isigidimi*, October 1884; republished in Opland 2004: 41; tr. Xhosa)

This is an adaptation of a traditional Xhosa *izibongo*, or praise poem, and the first published example thereof (Opland 2004: 42). In the poem, Mqanda blames John Tengo Jabavu, the editor of the Lovedale mission newspaper *Isigidimi*, for taking part in white politics (41). Here, the important

leader-figure, Jabavu, is not extolled, but criticized – which were the dual purposes of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century *izibongo*<sup>241</sup> – for his betrayal (26-31). Table Mountain serves as a metaphor for this treachery; it belongs to the “white woman”, a very potent symbol for the untouchable. The “black peril” debate that raged at the time, and which was discussed earlier, metaphorised women’s bodies as unspoilt white preserves that had to be protected against possible black sexual encroachments. The mountain serves as a bastion of colonial exclusion and concomitant oppression with which Jabavu is accused of being in collusion as well as Adamastor’s curse, which would be visited on the white colonial encroachers, as Adamastor had warned in De Camoens’s The Lusiads three centuries earlier:

[...]

Rapacious, cruel, savages shall strip  
 The mother’s garments from her fair white form.  
 They’ll watch her body wilt beneath the whip  
 Of wind and frost, of cruel sun and storm –  
 All this when she has dragged her naked feet  
 Through leagues and leagues of sand in blistering heat.  
 (47, Published in Van Wyk Smith 1998: 53)

This is a description of the noble young Portuguese knight, Manoel de Souza de Sepulveda, and his beautiful wife, Dona Lianor de Sa, who were shipwrecked near the Transkei Wild Coast during the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century. It is, in essence, a medieval allegory of a quest through a savage wasteland and alternating paradise, filled with both treachery and faith, and ending in death and resurrection (Van Wyk Smith 1998: 19-20), as the lovers meet in “A last embrace; each soul escapes a cell / Of wretched flesh which once was beautiful” (53). It is a quest to be liberated – literally and figuratively – similar

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<sup>241</sup> For an example of a 20<sup>th</sup> century *izibongo* that admonishes a leader for his collusion with whites, see Solomon Son of Dinuzulu (Opland 1992: 233-234).

to John Bunyan's (1628-1688) The Pilgrim's Progress (1678). The latter work, which was translated into Xhosa by Tiyo Soga, A.K. Soga's father, had a marked spiritual and literary influence on the Xhosa mission-school intellectuals of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Opland 2004: 23,26,32,42). Bunyan's protagonist, Christian, is on a quest to find heaven, and in the process gains self-knowledge with which he is able to overcome death and sin (Vickers 2001: 205-207). For many of the black intellectuals of the *fin de siècle*, this race to salvation was not merely spiritual and religious, but was also political and cultural. Where The Pilgrim's Progress focuses on a virtuous salvation of the individual, black writing is attuned to a reassessment of communal cultural traditions and political loyalties. Mqanda's Adamastor is female, powerful – possibly Queen Victoria, the female ruler of the world – and dangerous, and threatens the communality of black resistance to white rule by seducing a fellow African, Jabavu. It brings to mind Isaac Rosenberg's Kabbalah-demon Lilith in poems such as The Female God and On Receiving News of the War: Cape Town (Wilson 2008: 233-238). As Wilson explains: "In the beautiful but savage, rather threatening scenery of South Africa, in thrall to a real-life, fickle woman<sup>242</sup>, the Female God emerges as a true rival to the male" (234). Interestingly, in Mqanda's poem, the savage black male Adamastor of white iconography metonymically becomes the white female vampire usurper who slays her victims through seduction. This is the iconograph of colonialism through which the fruits of western civilisation are represented by religion and education.

A.K. Soga, although he seems to be mesmerised by the spoils of white culture in Santa Cruz: The Holy Cross, was no mere colonial marionette. He was a prominent member of the first African organisation with any political bite, the South African Native Congress (SANNC), which was established in 1898. Although it was a political jaw with primarily blunt teeth, the SANNC

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<sup>242</sup> Margueretha Van Hulsteyn. Rosenberg had a romantic liaison with this vivacious South African actress during his stay in Cape Town at the outbreak of war. Ironically, she was from Dutch/Afrikaner descent, and had even been the wife of J.G. Strijdom, one of the later architects of Apartheid in South Africa (Wilson 2008: 217-222).

represented a nascent black reaction to white oppression, although not through reactionary armed resistance as the later African National Congress (ANC), through co-operation with whites within a constitutional framework. Soga was also the editor of the body's mouthpiece, *Izwi Labantu*. In this newspaper, and in petitions to the colonial rulers, the educated African leaders strove to end racial and political discrimination (Grobler 1988: 20-21; 28-30). Soga was later to become a member of the executive committee of the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) – the ANC's forerunner – which was founded in 1912. Like the SANC, the SANNC wanted to end legislative discrimination against blacks within the Union of South Africa; again words and not the spear would be the prime means employed by these educated African leaders, who saw tribalism as a threat to the new Africans, with their newly-acquired civilized and Christian sensibilities (Grobler 1988: 35-40).

True to his Christian-mission upbringing, Soga does employ traditional English literary devices in the poem Santa Cruz: The Holy Cross, which is written in the ballad stanza form of four rhyming lines in iambic tetrameter alternating with iambic trimeter. This common meter form was employed by such leading lights in English literature as Samuel Taylor Coleridge in The Rime of the Ancient Mariner and Emily Dickinson in I taste a liquor never brewed, and in popular English ballads and hymns (The Norton 1983: 74,567,804,1414). The poem, however, falls within a unique social-political milieu, where the first soft cries of resistance were echoed through the abjected skull, which would later escalate into the full-scale cry of civil strife during the 1960s – 1990s. However, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was barely audible.

Soga's 1898 poem extolling Christian virtue is actually laced with binary ambivalence, which is a feature of black writing of the period: "freedom" is both a Bunyan concept of salvation, and a political reaction; "darkness" refers to both traditional ethnic *manism*, and colonial oppression; and "liberty" is a spiritual as well as a social liberation (Attwell 1999: 269). In

the poem, Calvary, *calvaria*, the Christian skull, serves as the binary opposite to Adamastor, the uncivilised monster. But more than this, golgotha metonymically becomes the rock Adamastor. And this skull is “A living token of that Death / That sets the guilty free” (i, 3-4). It speaks of freedom from both spiritual and politico-social tyranny, which also absolves the “guilty” – those who sin, and those who oppress others. Soga’s poetry is conciliatory, like those of Slater’s and Lefebvre’s texts discussed earlier.<sup>243</sup> Soga argues that the Soul is colour-blind, and so should politics be as well.

As is crucial to black war poetry, Soga’s depiction of physical death is still highly apotheosised, in a way similar to English poetry of the pre-war and war eras. Death and beauty were mirror images in the English poetic canon before the war (Sychterz 2005: 46,49-50). In a traditional sonnet form, Soga’s Death and Life (1898) first bewails life’s submission to death’s yoke, before affirming ultimate deliverance:

Enchained in dungeons dark are freedom, liberty,  
 What hope have we – poor weak and frail humanity?  
 ‘Oh death where is thy sting, O grave thy victory? –  
 Thy gates wide open fling. The Soul can never die.  
 (11-14, republished in Couzens & Patel 1991: 18)

The last couplet is a reaffirmation of a faith in the Christian conviction of the resurrection of a “spiritual body” and of redemption after the demise of the “natural body” of sin, as postulated in Hosea 13: 14 and 1 Corinthians 15. The second last line is a direct quote from the latter text (15: 55). Soga euphemises the abject skull from view as “Light hides her eyes” (4) from the grotesque horror. As in Shakespeare’s seven ages of man, which end in “sans every thing” (*As You Like It*, 2.7.141-168), the cycle of decay crosses all cultural

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<sup>243</sup> Sol Plaatje’s (1876-1932) novel *Mhudi* (1920) is a well-known example of such a conciliatory work in which cross-cultural dealings overshadow racial prejudice (Attwell 1999: 282-283). Plaatje was very active in the early history of the ANC, as the first general secretary of the SANNC (Saunders & Southey 2001: 133).

and religious boundaries – in Kristeva’s *lingua*, it falls through and beyond all known borders. However, Soga conjures the beautified soul in order to drive away the abject corpse, similar to what Shakespeare has done in Sonnet 146, where the soul “feed[s] on death, that feeds on men” (13), and Donne in Holy Sonnet 10: “One short sleep past, we [our souls] wake eternally / And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die” (13-14).

Significantly, Soga’s deliverance is not only a spiritual one, but also political. Christianity and education will set the living abjected black corpse free from the Adamastorian “cell” of “wretched flesh”. The soul is a metonymic offshoot of the political body.

One of the earliest poems that refers directly to armed resistance and which proclaims this liberated black-political body was written by Isaac William Wauchope (1852-1917). In the Lovedale mission station’s newspaper, *Isigidimi samaXosa* (1870-88), of 1882 he gives voice to an irate battle cry (Opland 2004: 37, tr. from Xhosa):

There go your cattle, compatriot!

They've gone! Compatriot,  
Chase them! Chase them!  
Lay down the musket,  
Use pen to chase them;  
Seize paper and ink:  
That's your shield.

There go your rights!  
Grab a pen,  
Load and reload it with ink;  
Sit in your chair,  
Don't head for Hoho:  
Fire your pen.

Impress the page,  
 Engage your mind;  
 Focus on facts,  
 And speak loud and clear;  
 Don't rush into battle:  
 Anger speaks with a stutter.<sup>244</sup>

The war against white oppression was not fought with the breechloader at this stage, but with the pen, as the most powerful African chieftaincies – the Xhosa, Zulu and Pedi – had been utterly defeated by this time. This poem was published shortly after the Xhosa had finally been subjugated by the colonial authorities during the Ngcayechibi War of 1878-79 (Opland 2007: 89). Wauchope wrote the poem to encourage fellow Xhosas to send written petitions for the release of captured Xhosa chiefs. The poem forms part of this appeal (Opland 2007: 91); it clearly illustrates a moderate political embodiment of black reaction to colonialism at the time, which could not be defeated militarily. So, in a sense, it was an enforced pacifism. However, Wauchope, who became a minister of the Free Church of Scotland during the early 1890s (Nyamende 2011: 9), was, like Soga, also influenced by pacifist Christianity, which he incorporated into his politics. In 1882, Wauchope was one of the founders of *Imbumba Yamanyama* in Port Elizabeth, the second oldest formal black political organisation in South Africa (Opland 2004: 37-38). It "came to represent a political ideal in which diverse black groupings might be welded together into one nation" (38). Wauchope's poem A Ball from Scrapings (1884) represents this vision of unity: "The time has come to tend our wounds, /animosities and grudges; /we're all related, common stock, /we all speak a common tongue." (38) In the poem, the famous early 19<sup>th</sup> century Xhosa prophet Ntsikana exhorts his fellow Xhosa to

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<sup>244</sup> There are two slightly different translations published in Couzens & Patel (1991: 15) and Opland (2007: 91-92).

"Rouse yourselves and stand erect"(38). It was, however, not a call to arms, but, like There go your cattle, compatriot!, more a cry for liberation through education. Wauchope strongly believed in the unifying power of black education (Nyamende 2011: 8-9). In the poem, he encourages his charges to take up the pen for liberty, rather than the sword, and he invokes Ntsikana's pro-Christian preaching in doing so. The politico-religious body is present, but the abject corpse is still absent:

All the village wailed and fasted  
 on the day Ntsikana left us;  
 he was buried, covered over,  
 left there when we journeyed homeward.

White they lie beneath the earth,  
 the bones of Gabha's offspring,  
 grass arose upon his grave,  
 a great champion of the nation.

Yet he lives and keeps on speaking  
 in a voice rich with experience,  
 sounding sonorous and lovely,  
 talking of 'A Ball from Scrapings'.

(*Isigidimi*, March 1884, A Ball from Scrapings, ii-iv, reproduced in Opland 2004: 38-39; tr. Xhosa)

The covering of the corpse and the whitening of the bones was a common deceit of the war poetry and songs at this time to hide the abject. In the Sotho war song Oxen for the Vultures (1891),<sup>245</sup> the dead warrior-corpses are also covered or hidden from sight by "the tall *seboku* grass" that grows on

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<sup>245</sup> Originally published in the Sotho newspaper *Leselinyana la Lesotho*, 1 February 1891; republished in Opland (1992: 129-130).

the battlefield, and by the birds of prey and vultures that quickly whiten the bones (i-ii, Opland 1992: 129). In a Zulu war song, the bones are also quickly stripped of rotting flesh:

You who know not come and see.

Here are white bones.

Do not force me to shed tears.

The bones are white at Nkandhla.<sup>246</sup>

(The Bones are White at Nkandhla, ca. 1906, republished in Opland 1992: 130)

Another convention employed by the *imbongi* or praise poet to hide the corpse from view is ingestion. In a version of the Praises of King Shaka<sup>247</sup> recorded by Chapman (2002: 26-28), the Zulu warlord disposes of his enemies by “devouring” or “eating” the corpses. Furthermore, these abject objects are euphemised by assigning non-specific pronoun values to the othered thing or the some-thing:

He who while devouring some devoured others,

And as he devoured others he devoured some more;

[...]

As it was still eating others it destroyed some more;

Still eating some it destroyed others<sup>248</sup>

(Tr. Zulu by Daniel Malcolm; republished in Chapman 2002: 26-27)

The “it” is the “Bird”, the bird of prey that rules both earth and sky; this “it” is also Shaka whose metaphoric metamorphosis into ferocious

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<sup>246</sup> This song refers to the slaughtering of Bambatha's rebels at Nkandhla forest in 1906, during the Zulu rebellion against the white Natal Colony (Opland 1992: 130).

<sup>247</sup> Shaka ruled over the Zulu from 1818 until 1826.

<sup>248</sup> In the praise poem Shaka Son of Senzangakhona (ca 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century), Shaka again “devoured” his enemies. This time, each enemy is identified by a proper noun, but the martial blow is again softened by assigning animalistic qualities to Shaka’s massacring of enemies (See Opland 1992: 186-189).

hunters – hawk, leopard, lion and viper<sup>249</sup> – further distances the corpse from decomposing, as the act of killing and being killed becomes part of the natural cycle of life. By droning out this repetition of the corpse-by-other-names, mantra-like, the *imbongi* conjures away the abject thing.

Similarly, in Praises of King Dingana,<sup>250</sup> recorded in Chapman (2002: 31-32), the king “consumed” his enemies, whose humanity is blunted by non-human metonymic nouns or praise-names:

He consumed Pregnancy-of-a-rat, at Mashobana’s place,<sup>251</sup> he consumed Mouth-of-the-fortress, at Mashobana’s place, he consumed Civet-cat-with-a-long-tail, at Mashobana’s place, Beast-that-sleeps-with-difficulty, at Mashobana’s place,

(Tr. Zulu by Daniel Malcolm; republished in Chapman 2002: 31-32)

In Matiwane Son of Masumpa, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Chief Matiwane<sup>252</sup>

is transformed into a vampire-devourer by the royal praise poet:

Matiwane, our royal bird with the red knees

Red-eyed, and red on the lips

From drinking the blood of fighting men.

(Opland 1992: 192)

Matiwane, by spilling his enemies’ blood, grows stronger, vampire-like, as he, “The Seizer-of-everything,” “seized both peanut and husk [the enemy chief’s life-blood and praise-names]” (195). The bellicose chiefs, who

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<sup>249</sup> Animal metaphors permeate the *izibongo* of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and include the beast, elephant, rhinoceros, ox, buffalo, bull, bull calf, cow, buck, hyena, vulture, cock, egret, kite, eagle, swallow, monitor, crocodile, snake, python, frog and butterfly (See Opland 1992: 129-135, 181-234; Chapman 2002: 26-32).

<sup>250</sup> Dingane was Skaka’s successor as the king of the Zulus.

<sup>251</sup> Mzilikazi was the son of Mashobana, and Dingane’s arch-enemy.

<sup>252</sup> The Ngwane chief who fled Zululand in the wake of Shaka’s wars of aggression against neighbouring chieftaincies (Opland 1992: 192).

are “Slasher[s]”, “Chopper[s]”, “Slicer[s]” and “Stabber[s]” are provided with almost serial-killer status (See Opland 1992: 208,211,214):

[...]  
 you men of Mokopana Mapela,  
 now that you’ve seen the Slasher fighting,  
 the Slasher with the bloodstained horn?<sup>253</sup>  
 The Brave One<sup>254</sup> pokes and pokes again;  
 he then draws out the victim’s entrails [...]  
 (The Mokopana War, 209).

The *petite mort* is unmistakable, and alludes to the close relationship between blood, regenerative death and birth, and sexual arousal – the phallic “horn” that “pokes and pokes” until blood is drawn. Heroic warriors are depicted as horned bull calves, bulls, oxen, buffalo or beasts in the traditional South African war poetry.<sup>255</sup> The central place of cattle in the economic, religious, social, political and cultural cosmology of indigenous South Africans (Potgieter 1960: 81) is also evident in the military sphere as the horned beast becomes a symbol of martial prowess. The archetypical African warrior, Shaka Zulu, even named his devastatingly successful battlefield encircling strategy after the curved-horned head of the bull. The “long-horned ones” (Chapman 2002: 31) also refers to the *Patria potestas* of the male within the traditional social structure (Eloff 1960: 94). Politics, clans and cattle could not be divorced: “government is of cattle and people” (Moshoeshoe, Opland 1992: 204). The horn, therefore, becomes a metaphor for manliness and sanctioned male authority in all spheres of social life. He even rules over death, as it vanishes in the shadow of his great phallus:

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<sup>253</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century *izibongo* Seepapitso Son of Bathoen, the chief of the Ngwaketse of Bechuanaland is praised for having “sharpened his horns” against his enemies, which “are red” with their blood (Opland 1992: 230).

<sup>254</sup> Referring to Kgamanyane, the 19<sup>th</sup>-century chief of the Kgatla, who allied himself with the Transvaal Boers in the war against the Mokopana (Opland 1992: 206-207).

<sup>255</sup> See Chapman (2002: 26-27); and Opland (1992: 129,185,188,191,200,214,216,217, 219,220,222, 225,227,230,231).

[...] Black-arouser of the house of Sikhakha, who aroused men to be slaughtered, Thief-of-the-long-staff of Bayeka, he bears a fighting-stick on his shoulder, he struck with it among the foreigners, Rain-water-pool of the house of Ndikidi, it covers the cattle of the Swazi and they vanished and there vanished the long-horned ones and there vanished Ngwane son of Zikode and there vanished the one who shortened his gaze there in the shadows of the mountains;

He was like the hunters of Nonginya's place who hunted flying-ants [...]

(Praises of King Dingana; tr. Zulu; republished in Chapman 2002: 31)

The enemies' bodies are transformed into lowly insects; this euphemism not only illustrates Dingaan's omnipotence and power over his insignificant enemies, but also softens the impact of the act of killing by shrinking the grotesque cadaver to the size of an immaterial bug. It is a literary act of chicanery.

In Home Affairs,<sup>256</sup> the "absent dead" inhabit "the ruins of the ancestor gods" (Opland 1992: 212). They have vanished and roam the phantom streets of a lost city. There are no grotesque decomposing body parts to shock the onlooker; these oozing bits have metamorphosed into non-threatening and inorganic brick-ruins.

The first spiritual intermediary between the political and socially absented and abjected but living colonised African and the ancestors is the white-boned Ntsikana, the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Xhosa prophet. This diviner established a Christian community in the Eastern Cape before the white missionaries could erect their mission stations (Opland 1992: 109). He was, in contrast to his competitor Nxele, the nationalist war-doctor who preached

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<sup>256</sup> This oral poem was transcribed by the *imbongi* Hendrik Molefi in 1930, and is based on the *izibongo* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chief Kgamanyane of the Kgatla who lived in the Transvaal (Opland 1992: 206-207).

adherence to African beliefs and culture, a pacifist Christian who preached obedience to the western god (Peires 1979). Ntsikana's Great Hymn has permeated the Xhosa religious creed, and his disciples were the inheritors and exponents of a nascent African literature in South Africa (Opland 2004: 31-32; Opland 1992: 111-112). As an exponent of this religious-literary tradition, Wauchope's There go your cattle, compatriots! and A Ball from Scrapings are heartfelt efforts to reassemble and conjure back to life the black socio-political corpse that was badly mutilated through the process of acculturation.<sup>257</sup> This is achieved through words fired from the pen in the former poem, and a praise poem to Ntsikana, whose words keep on echoing from the grave. Essentially, Wauchope, who was a patriotic South African, believed in the possibility of the peaceful coexistence between the races (Nyamende 2011: 13).

However, poetically, Wauchope, like the other praise poets, summons the "White... bones";<sup>258</sup> the corpse could not be spoken as it would have represented a loss of political and spiritual faith. The literary eye had to be diverted to the project at hand, and the "demon optician's spectacles or spy-glass" (Freud 1919: 160) discarded. It represents a writing-into-existence of a politico-spiritual body; the abject corpse, which is in essence an abject writing-out-of-existence of meaning and subsequently faith in transcendence, had to be euphemised. Juxtaposed to this is the whitening of the natives' didactic body – according to the black educated elite, the only solution to South Africa's racial problems lay in western education.

A.K. Soga also invokes the prophetic and literary quality of Ntsikana's sacred vision:

A Vision? Yea! That presence once had shone

Upon the man of Tarshish, down from the heavenly throne,

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<sup>257</sup> Acculturation is an anthropological term that refers to the process of cultural change that takes place when two different cultural entities are in close contact over a sufficiently lengthy period of time. Social-cultural change may take place in one or both cultures (Els 1992: 19).

<sup>258</sup> This poetic 'whitening of the bones' of the dead continued post-1918: "The ridges were white with the [Xhosa] nation's bones. / The inadvertent holocaust [of 1856] claimed its thousands" (The cattle-killing, J.J.R. Jolobe (1902-1976); published in Butler & Opland (1989: 55-60)).

And in the holy light of His mysterious Word  
The proud Barbarian bows and worships God, the Lord!

Hark! 'Tis the sound of prayer, of savage melody –  
Untutored voices raised to Him who sits on high;  
Those hills and dales around fair Gwali's stream  
Repeat again Ntsikana's sacred Hymn!

Wake, Gaika, wake! I see the gathering storm  
By Debe's plains; Gcaleka's horse and Ndlambe's legions swarm;  
Behold thy tribesmen scattered, thy warriors' doom is sealed –  
The word of God rejected – by prophecy revealed.

(Ntsikana's Vision, iii-v, 28 October 1897; republished in Couzens & Patel 1991: 17)

The “mysterious Word”, the God-particle of St. John's Gospel, the epiphany of St. Paul on the road to Damascus, and the all-encompassing “Flash” of Kristeva's “Word Flesh” is here not only a regenerator of meaning, but also a demolisher and divider. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Xhosa royal house of Phalo was divided into the Gcaleka and Rharhabe chieftaincies (Saunders & Southey 2001: 195). The Rharhabe further split into the followers of Ndlambe and Ngqika or Gaika (Maylam 1986: 37). Soon afterwards colonial encroachment during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century started to swallow up the land of the Xhosa in what is today's Eastern Cape. “Gcaleka's horse” is a reference to the capture and eventual murder and mutilation of Chief Hintsa of the Gcaleka-Xhosa by British soldiers after he was thrown from his horse (Peires 1981: 111; Morris 2004: 100). “Ndlambe's legions” pens the civil war between the independent Ndlambe, and British-allied Ngqika (Peires 1979: 58). Soga's father, Tiyo, was a disciple of Ntsikana's prophecy, which was one of coexistence with the whites. He was the sage attached to Ngqika's royal house. Revealingly, Soga conjures Ntsikana's conciliatory philosophy through

the latter's "sacred Hymn", and not the nationalistic mantras of the prophet Nxele, the court-sage of the defiant Chief Ndlambe, whose example later 20<sup>th</sup> century Africanist nationalists would follow, instead of Ntsikana's. However, Ntsikana does represent the early stirrings of a proto-nationalism, as his Christianity is firmly rooted in an African experience of misappropriation (Peires 1979). In Ntsikana's Great Hymn, which is a Xhosa *izibongo* praising Christ, God is also the mighty protector of the black communities (Opland 2004: 31-32). Significantly, it is a "proud Barbarian" who worships God, one who is defiant in claiming an African Saviour. Essentially, it is Ntsikana who is the voice of this politico-spiritual regeneration after the ravages of acculturation, and not the white missionaries. It is essentially a black(ened) Christ.

The most Christ-like figure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is Chief Hintsa (ca. 1790-1835), who is appropriated as a black saviour in his *izibongo*, Hintsa Son of Khawuta (Opland 1992: 221). He is "easily the most impressive figure in the whole history" of the Xhosa people, according to Peires (1981: 62). He provided sanctuary to those fleeing from Shaka's wars of aggression, and was also favourably disposed towards the white missionaries. He also resisted white colonial encroachment, which caused his ultimate demise (Opland 1992: 221). His physical description goes far to dispel the colonial abjection of black bodies:

He's Most Respected, the sweet tall grass of Khala,  
 Whose movements are a blessing,  
 Who stares without blinking,  
 Whose eyebrows reveal his anger.  
 The one with shapely legs, a better mote than others,  
 Who's always set to move.  
 The dusky little bushbuck,  
 Acclaimed for stabbing before it stabs.  
 [...]

(Published in 1906; republished in Opland 1992: 221)

He is a beautiful physical specimen and symbol of African pride. He is a champion of righteousness, and the protector of his people. His altruistic life and abject death and mutilation echo Christ's suffering on the cross:

[...]

He, who amalgamates flocks rejecting each other.

He, the leader, who has led us.

He, the great blanket<sup>259</sup>, which we put on.

Those hands of thine, they are wounded.

Those feet of thine, they are wounded.

Thy blood, why is it streaming?

Thy blood, it was shed for us.

This great price, have we called for it?

This home of thine, have we called for it?

(Ntsikana's Great Hymn; republished in Opland 1992: 111-112, and Chapman 2002: 34, tr. Xhosa)

In a similar vein, Robert Grendon<sup>260</sup> appropriates the white body of Julius Caesar in his poem Tshaka's Death (1901),<sup>261</sup> and superimposes it on Shaka Zulu, one of the most mythologized African warrior-kings. Shaka is paired with the all-conquering Roman general and first emperor of the Roman Empire. Similar to Julius Caesar in Shakespeare's play, Shaka's seemingly constant star eventually falls from heaven, as both men are murdered by those very close to them. Similarly, both groups of murderers are cursed by the ghost or shade of the murdered kings, which ultimately ends in their defeat and death. Shaka can, therefore, rub shoulders with one of the most renowned leaders in European history. He was, like Caesar, a great

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<sup>259</sup> The traditional Xhosa kaross.

<sup>260</sup> Grendon was of mixed Herero and Irish descent and a teacher (Couzens & Patel 1991: 3).

<sup>261</sup> Republished in Couzens & Patel (1991: 19-26).

general and military reformer and strategist. African history is reclaimed; Shaka, like Caesar, may have been a psychopathic murderer, but, either genius or evil, he was just as great – or bad – as anyone in western history and mythology. He is the archetypical “proud Barbarian”. Thomas Mofolo’s novel *Chaka*, written just prior to the establishment of the Union in 1910, also reclaims the black ethno-political body by placing it firmly on par with western literary examples. Shaka is a very modern protagonist who, Faustus-like, chooses worldly omnipotence and eventual damnation over spiritual redemption (Attwell 1999: 279-281). But similar to Grendon’s Shaka, Mofolo’s protagonist represents a communal body of black reaction against white oppression, and is not merely a symbol of the expression of individual modernist sensibilities. The revolt by Bambatha, the chief of the Zondi-Zulu tribe, against colonial taxation, and the treason trial of Dinuzulu, the successor to the Zulu throne (Maylam 1986: 141), most certainly influenced the writing of *Chaka* (Attwell 1999: 279). Bambatha’s rebellion was a last-ditch effort by a traditional leader to throw off one of the many yokes of colonialism (Saunders & Southey 2001: 17). This demise of the Zulu royal house led to a potent rallying cry harking back to Shaka’s glory days in the time of Zulu independence. AEK’s poem, The Spirit Song of Mehlokazulu (1906), succinctly captures this spirit of revolt:

The crash of the rifle, the whizzing of spears.  
 No longer I hear their sweet sound in mine ears!  
 The war cry, ‘Usutu’ my warriors yelled  
 Like hounds, as they leapt from the leash where I held  
 Them straining and eager, to fly at the foe;  
 All now is hushed in this Valley of Woe!

We thought in our fury with hate on the white,  
 Who lay in the darkness enveloped by night!  
 Each warrior clutching his spears and his shield.

Eager for daylight to rush to the field!  
 Yet, now we are vanquished! I gaze on the slain.  
 Who never shall brandish the war-axe again!

In the bush where we fell, our bodies do lie.  
 And faint from the Upper World, sounds the weird cry  
 Of wailing and weeping! Our women are they  
 Who mourn for the fighters who fell in the fray!  
 Weep on, O, ye loved ones; yet tears are in vain!  
 We never shall march in the sunlight again!

As into the Shadows my warriors came,  
 Fording the river, I called each by name.  
 And now I've an impi of spirits to lead.  
 Yet nerveless our arms, and no valorous deed  
 In this Kraal of the Mist shall ever be wrought,  
 No war-cry be chanted, nor battle be fought!

O, Chaka! Where art thou? We call thee in vain!  
 Thy kraal of the Blest in this Valley of Pain?  
 The brave ones, our sires, who fell long ago.  
 Where are they, O Great One, thy children would know?  
 O, take us, enrol us, we wait, King, for thee!  
 To march in thine impis, 'thy warriors to be!

(The Spirit Song of Mehlokazulu, AEK, *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 29 June 1906;  
 republished in Couzens & Patel 1991: 38-39)

The stanzas are traditional sestets of combined rhyming couplets, whose lines are written in anapestic tetrameter, alternating with iambic rhythm. The correlations with Alfred, Lord Tennyson's The Charge of the Light Brigade are unmistakable. The grandiose "Valley of Woe" echoes

Tennyson's "the valley of Death" (i, 3,7). The diction is also traditional English Renaissance - "Where art thou?" Attwell (1999: 270) refers to this borrowing of conventional English conventions and diction by 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century black South African writers as *belletrism*, a concept coined by the South African literary theorist Leon de Kock. This poem also exhibits *bricolage*, which represents pastiche-writing. AEK's poetic collage mixes canon-conventions with the traditional *izibongo* or praise poem; it celebrates the spirit of rebellion - the rebel Mehlokazulu's in particular, and the Zulu nation's in general. Bambatha and many of his Nguni rebels were killed at Mome Gorge (Maylam 1986: 141) shortly before this poem was published. It is precisely this theme of personal reflection, together with the novel combination of canonical and traditional structure and form, which lends this poem a modernist stance. However, unlike in the detached aesthetics of modernism, the poet immerses himself in the battle; he becomes one with the black body of warriors, past - through Shaka; present - through Mehlokazulu and Bambatha; and future - the coming struggle, by unambiguously allying himself with the black cause through the first person pronouns. Again, this body is an assemblage of abstract socio-political limbs: the concrete-fleshy parts are absent. Although the poetic persona "gaze[s] on the slain", he diverts our gaze to the image of nobly-slain warriors who are mourned by their women. When the gaze does stray back to the battlefield the "bodies" are safely tucked away "In the bush"; the dead warriors are hidden in "the Shadows", or in the "Kraal of the Mist". It is in essence "an impi of spirits" whose enveloping in darkness does not represent a moral blackout; that role is reserved for the white oppressors "Who lay in the darkness enveloped by night!" It displays a clever and conscious inversion of the English-colonial canon. It is now the whites who are the shades who deal only in Adamastor's sinister darkness. They are both physically and morally covered in the shadow, which represents colonial oppression.

Even at this early stage it is fascinating to note that there are elements in Mehlokazulu's song that correlate with what Frantz Fanon (2001: 179)

refers to as “the fighting phase” of black anti-colonial and liberation writing. The apostrophe in the last stanza is a direct call to arms. Shaka’s spirit must come and lead the modern-day impi in a revolution against white oppression. However, this battle is still waged by men like AEK only – the African educated elite in “Bantu belles lettres” of the period (Attwell 1999: 271) – and sporadic ethnic-based outbursts of violence, like that of Bambatha’s, which were savagely put down by the white colonial authorities.<sup>262</sup>

However, the body of late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century black poetry of war falls within Fanon’s “second phase” of bellicose *lettres* where “we find the native [intellectual writer] is disturbed; he decides to remember what he is” (2001: 179). This emphasis on re-memorizing the past is also employed in Wauchope’s A Ball from Scrapings (1884) and Soga’s Ntsikana’s Vision (1897), wherein black unity is imagined through Ntsikana’s prophetic voice speaking from the skull in the grave. But in essence it is still a pen-mightier-than-sword approach, although AEK’s response is a more direct appeal to arms, through having Shaka’s warlike skull chant a battle-cry. This poem and Wauchope’s There go your cattle, compatriots! (1882), in which the poetic voice states “Don’t rush into battle: / Anger speaks with a stutter”, desperately try to appropriate all the black limbs which were hacked off by the colonial authority’s insistence on ethnicity as a potent divide-and-rule strategy, by a call to arming the re-assembled black corpse. Wauchope refers to this coming conflict by alluding to the gun’s onomatopoeic effect of stammering rage, whereas AEK is much more overtly seditious by assigning the role of recruiting agent to Shaka.

But still, reaction has not evolved into full-out resistance. AEK’s war cry remains a “Spirit Song” wherein the appropriated black consciousness

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<sup>262</sup> Shortly after the battle of Mome Gorge, Bambatha’s corpse was beheaded for identification purposes – his family had to own the head as that of their family member. The head was then reburied with the corpse. Soon after, the head was exhumed and taken to London where a taxidermist set it on a wooden frame with an identification plaque. This ‘trophy’ later found its way back to Pretoria (SANDF Archives, *The Nongqai*, III(5), 12 May 1915: 270). The execution of a group of 1906 Zulu rebels was also photographed, and published nine years after the incident – the first time a public execution was publicly documented in this fashion in South Africa (270).

“thought in our fury with hate on the white” (7). Intellectual reaction – “thought” – has not evolved into a physical resistance; first-person soldier-poetry is still absent. The black writing-elite does not join their ‘less-cultured’ fighting brothers in armed resistance, but endeavours to appropriate the struggling black socio-political body through constitutional means – petitions to the colonial authorities – and by employing literary conventions borrowed from the oppressor. They are, in essence, arm-chair revolutionaries, who speak through memory – conjuring the glory days of Ntsikana, Hintsisa and Shaka in conceiving from afar present-day wars of resistance, i.e. the Bambatha’s rebellion, through educated Christian glasses. Attwell (1999: 271-272) refers to this predicament of the black writing-elite as the burden of “accelerated time”. The Christian and ‘civilised’ present had to be married with the traditional past, which Attwell (271) refers to as “auto-ethnographic representations” of the past. Within this confluence, the poetry becomes timeless and borderless. The present falls beyond understanding and is a constantly shifting reality, wherein the past is constantly reshaped to make sense of an open-ended present and future (273), similar to Blanchot’s and Kristeva’s slippery signified or corpse. Significantly, place and culture, in the colonial milieu, also fall beyond time as different societies in different geographical localities are on different levels of the ladder of civilisation (273). This kind of modernity is, in H.I.E. Dhlomo's words, the "endless Now" of "Timelessness" (273) – thus, the boundless corpse.

Crucially, the political body of blacks was also an ever-fracturing organism and did not act in unison; tribalism was still an active dividing agent of colonialism. It was colonial-induced political schisms that led to the end of Xhosa independence. Similarly, the divide-and-rule policy of the British authorities after the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 led to the political and economic destruction of Zululand through the civil war between the Usuthu and Mandlakazi factions, and land encroachments by the Transvaal Boers and the Natal English colonists (Maylam 1986: 78-83).

The war poem that most closely resembles Fanon's (2001: 179) "third phase" of resistance against colonialism that "shake[s] the people" into cohesive action, or more precisely, evokes a horrid reflection and rejection of colonialism by speaking the corpse to a certain extent, is Amagunyana's Soliloquy, published<sup>263</sup> when the Bambatha rebellion was still raging. The anonymous poet<sup>264</sup> ventriloquizes the skull of a traditional Usuthu chief who tries to verbalise the loss of Zulu independence. He first reasserts his ancient and noble lineage as descended through the house of Sheba, his heroism and regal power as a lion slayer, and his battlefield prowess as the conqueror of the treacherous "hyena", Zibhebhu's Mandlakazi impis, before lamenting the loss of independence as a result of colonial encroachments. The poet-cum-chief visits the most vehement retribution on the Mandlakazi brother-foe:

[...]

When with a mighty rush of men we came  
 Upon them unaware and charged them in  
 Our crescent form when in a trice our spears  
 Were drinking human gore, nor did a man  
 Escape. Their carrion carcass fouled the air  
 For months for miles around – a banquet fine  
 For many a foulest scavenger of night.  
 They came not more. One lion's lesson taught  
 Enough.

[...]

The abject corpse is present in the disembodiment of the body. The visual – "human gore", "carrion carcass"; and olfactory – "fouled the air", senses are clearly evident in the conjuring of the abject. But although death's abhorrent odour lingers, the source of the stench is quickly hidden from the

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<sup>263</sup> First published in *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 18 May 1906; republished in Couzens & Patel (1991: 35-38).

<sup>264</sup> One source ascribes the poem to Robert Grendon (see Attwell 1999: 274).

voyeuristic gaze; it is hurriedly buried under the darkness of “night”, as it is precisely then that the “foulest scavengers” come out to erase the evidence of the abject’s existence. Death must have represented a complex predicament for the educated black Christian elite writing poetry on war. Biblically, the corpse is seen as impure waste, and, therefore, needs to be covered, buried or disposed of as soon as possible in order to dispel this impurity from the earth (Kristeva 1982: 109). In indigenous South African cosmology, the corpse was also seen as impure, so much so that the family of the deceased was subject to purification rites (Schoeman: 455; Peires 1979: 56). The Zulu refer to this state of infection by association with the abject *umnyama* or *umswazi* (darkness) or *umlaza* (filthiness) (Schoeman: 455). The corpse thus wielded a powerful stabbing-assegai which could cut through any philosophical shield held aloft in defence at the time – it had to be hastily buried, if not deep in the unconscious, within words at least.

Another aspect which is initially hidden in the poem is violence against the real oppressors – white colonialism. Logically, the brunt of corporal hate in the poem should be directed against the British and colonial authorities, but instead it is reserved for fellow Africans. Fanon (2001: 42) classifies this phenomenon as “patterns of avoidance”. According to Fanon, the indigenous psyche is so traumatised by colonialism that it hits out against its brother in an effort to reclaim its self-worth. The colonial mechanisms of power are usually so entrenched that physical resistance seems futile. The pent-up “muscular tension”, strung tightly by desperation, is released on the brother; the real threat of colonialism is ignored or circumvented as the final show-down is put off until a later time. The powerful colonial corpse-machine is ignored in order to achieve a semblance of normalcy and meaning. This becomes very evident in the poem where the defeat of the brother takes place in an accommodating cosmology that offers continuity in the face of forced acculturation:

These were the days when I was king

And had power to make and end a war.

And they were grand!

Within this milieu, the fellow black body is vilified as animalistic, a hyena “carcass” – an evil, loathsome, treacherous and opportunistic creature of the night, associated in death with the cowardly jackal and ravenous crow.<sup>265</sup> These animals are “the eaters of carrion, the accessories after the fact of sudden death” (Van der Post 1961: 211). The brother is, in animalistic terminology borrowed from the settler (Fanon 2001: 32-33), described as a dehumanised beast, who takes part in, or who is consumed during, this unnatural orgy of uncanny death. It becomes easier to dispatch such an abjected corpse, which is both faceless and a no-thing. However, to the black psyche, this metonymic misappropriation of the brother’s body has psychological offshoots:

In the period of colonization when it is not contested by armed resistance, when the sum total of harmful nervous stimuli overstep a certain threshold, the defensive attitudes of the natives give way and they then find themselves crowding the mental hospitals (Fanon 2001: 201).

Fanon, a psychotherapist who treated psychiatric patients in Algeria during the war of independence against France, indicates that the reactionary psychoses diagnosed among colonised Algerians are the direct result of abject colonialism characterised as a total onslaught on the indigenous person’s sense of humanity (Fanon 2001: 200-250). Amagunyana’s Soliloquy is a psychoanalytical self-assessment by the poet through the poetic voice to make sense of “The time of the Hyaena”;<sup>266</sup> the advent of colonial-induced madness. He/she does so through recourse to the lion. The lion is the most regal, the most well-adapted and most intelligent creature of the African veld;

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<sup>265</sup> See Van der Post (1961: 172-173,211-216).

<sup>266</sup> The hyena is in a traditional African context also associated with madness (Van der Post 1961: 215).

it is essentially an animal that acts on individual instincts (Van der Post 1961: 244). It is a symbol of the rational, an antithesis of the Hyena; the Usuthu chief fully appropriates the lion's rational qualities by killing it; he is anointed by its blood and filled with its courage.

This scavenger-hunter binary apposition is common in the praise poetry of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The hero of the *izibongo* was either a noble hunter or powerful animal, like a lion or bull. The warrior's enemies were either scavengers – hyena or vulture, or lowly creatures – snakes (Opland 1992: 181-234). Mqanda's *izibongo* which criticizes John Tengo Jabavu, the "black snake", for his pro-colonial stance has already been discussed. A much more virulent attack was reserved for the incestuous 'scavenger' Chief Ngqika, "a drunken plaything of the whites" (Opland 1992: 217):

He's a scandalmonger, mocking men behind their backs,  
 He traffics with scavengers,  
 He's an imp who consorts with outsiders,  
 He's a black snake that cleaves the pool.  
 He's a vulture with foul wings,  
 He's a kite resting in swamp waters,  
 He's a rogue monitor with one horn,  
 Rejected by his kin and left to himself.  
 He likes to snuffle about in trivia,  
 He's a thornless aloe<sup>267</sup> that still pricks.  
 He's a wild beast who devours his own homestead though he denies it,  
 [...]

(Ngqika son of Mlawu, 1906; tr. Opland)

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<sup>267</sup> Inanimate objects were also used as metaphors for personality traits. To denote manly strength, for example, the burning shield, stones, thunder and lightning were used as symbols (Opland 1992: 187,191,201,202,205,220).

However, in *Amagunyana's Soliloquy* doubt still remains part of the chief's dramatic monologue, notwithstanding his lionised martial qualities; the violence committed by the settler is at first euphemised in pastoral diction, because it cannot be confronted in all its maddened veracity:

Then came the Whiteman with  
 That assegai of his, which hurls so fast  
 The hurtling iron ball [...] <sup>268</sup>  
 Before it human flesh however brave must  
 Melt like early dew [...]

However, both in Fanon's (2001) postcolonial theory and later on in the poem, the "muscular tension" is at last visited on the oppressor. Now the settler becomes the object of the "natives'" derision of western bestiality:

[...] I hate his most unnatural paths [...]  
 [...] I scorn his  
 Most effeminate ways [...]  
 His too fine food [...]

In a similar vein, the *imbongi* Bachomi Bogale lauds the Ngwaketse Chief Seepapitso's victory over the Afrikaner rebel General Ben Pienaar in Botswana in 1915, during the 1914-1915 Boer Rebellion:<sup>269</sup>

I saw Boers come from afar, from far far away,  
 [...]  
 he did not look for his juniors,

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<sup>268</sup> This refers to a gun or rifle.

<sup>269</sup> More than 11000 Afrikaners rebelled against the pro-British Union government, led by fellow Afrikaners, to regain the independence of the former Boer republics of the Transvaal and Orange Free State. They also vehemently opposed the Union's participation in the war (See General Staff Defence Headquarters, Official History 1924: 15-25; and Judicial Commission of Inquiry's report on rebellion, 1916).

but caught hold of Tagafara<sup>270</sup> unbridled  
 and rode it out of sight, the prince;  
 he hastened ahead, the warrior  
 and went to wait behind the hills,  
 behind the hill of Segwagwa.

The tall son of Bathoen turned them back;  
 the Europeans<sup>271</sup> caught them, powerless,  
 and bound them, after removing their satchels,  
 while they wiped their tears away.

They were caught by the lion of Kgoro plain,  
 the lion of Kgalabanna plateau,  
 the youthful lion of Kanye hill.

(Seepapitso son of Bathoen, ca. 1915, republished in Opland 1992: 229-232)

The white Afrikaners were caught by an African warrior, and subsequently behaved in a 'womanly' way by crying about their lot.

As Attwell (1999: 274) has pointed out, at the end of Amagunyana's Soliloquy, the poet-cum-chief affirms his own humanity in the face of colonial oppression, and accepts the *fait accompli* of colonialism only on his own terms, in the fashion of the African independent churches:<sup>272</sup>

[...] should it all prove true in hours  
 Not yet arrived that his Eternal one  
 Is Great or greater than our own Great-Great,  
 Then will I do Him homage and serve Him,  
 And in the manner he had fashioned me.

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<sup>270</sup> Seepapitso's war horse.

<sup>271</sup> Seepapitso handed the captured Afrikaners over to the English.

<sup>272</sup> The Independent Churches were formed during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century by African Christians who became disgruntled with white missionary endeavours that were dismissive of African culture. These churches adapted and incorporated Christian beliefs into their own religious cosmologies (Saunders & Southey 2001: 87-88).

But not in theirs.

The French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre, in the preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (2001: 9), indicates that Fanon "speaks of you [the French coloniser] often, never to you" when discussing the effects of colonialism in general, and the violation of Algeria in particular. His audience is the other of the settler, the colonised subject, and the settler becomes the othered. The same is true of the poetic voice in *Amagunyana's Soliloquy*, which speaks to a black audience about white oppression in a Zulu newspaper. The poem propagates a kind of lionised Native "Superman", in which elements of both the philosophies of Nietzsche and Fanon are present:

I loathe his work. 'Tis only fit for slaves  
 Who fear the death. 'Tis woman's lot to work,  
 To till the soil to find the food to feed  
 Her offspring and her lord. 'Tis his to wield  
 The spear, to raid the enemy afar,  
 Nor suffer him to ever enter ours.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher Nietzsche insists that "The *liberated* man, and even more the *liberated spirit*, tramples underfoot the despicable kind of well-being that shopkeepers, Christians, cows, women, Englishmen, and other democrats, dream of".<sup>273</sup> And war is an act of freedom, achieved through the active male instincts. This philosophy would have dire implications for warfare in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as it found expression in total war. Similarly, the pre-war Futurism and Vorticism in England, which was a reaction against Victorian and Edwardian tradition, emphasised technological advancement and energetic, aggressive social mobility above Victorian and Edwardian class stasis (Norris 2005: 144; Bergonzi 2001: 409,412-414). Fanon (2001: 74) concurs with this role of violence as a freeing

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<sup>273</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), quoted in Kenny 2008: 241 (emphasis in original).

agent, but within a colonial context. It is only through aggression that the native regains his self-respect in the face of colonial dehumanisation. It is precisely the promise of the reaffirmation of self-worth through “muscular demonstrations” (44) to release the tautly spun psychological frustrations that drove black intelligentsia in South Africa to volunteer for active service during the First World War. It provided a catharsis for colonial induced mental frustrations.

#### 4.1 The Death-defiers

S.E.K. Mqhayi (1875-1945), although he did not take part in the Great War, did much to lionise African valour during this conflict. Mqhayi was the most eminent and prolific Xhosa *literatus* and *imbongi* of the first half of the 20th century, publishing biography, poetry, fiction and history (Opland 2007: 105; Opland 2009). He wrote in Xhosa within the *imbongi* tradition, but was influenced by European texts as well, including the English Bible (Opland 2009: 14,15,22). Jeff Opland has assumed the role of Mqhayi's modern-day *imbongi*, and his research has rescued Mqhayi's Xhosa texts from obscurity. Peires (in Opland 2009: ix) notes "[Opland's] diligence has been rewarded by the discovery of warm bodies, still very much alive and just as vigorous and articulate as they were on the day that they disappeared." These dynamic bodies of timeless texts are cloaked by Opland in a mist of spiritual regeneration; he remembers being accompanied by his son on their 2008 pilgrimage up Mount Glory, Ntabozuko,<sup>274</sup> to Mqhayi's almost inaccessible gravesite:

The inscriptions, in deep *shadow*, were difficult to make out. But the glorious obelisk rose tall above the well-intentioned desecration, reflecting the sunlight, and Mqhayi's *spirit* lives on to lead us, here on his beloved Ntabozuko, as in his peerless writings. Some of those writings, mostly now as inaccessible as his grave, are *assembled* in this book<sup>275</sup> and herewith returned to the people of his beloved nation (2009: 2, my own emphasis).

Earlier praise for Mqhayi, by a fellow Xhosa poet, mirrors these words:

[Mqhayi's literary] creations are rich, all depicting the Bantu *soul*, its strife and yearnings, its sufferings and sorrows and its majesty. Herein lies the secret of the greatness of his works: it is Bantu in *blood* and soul. His literary works are to the Xhosa what the Strauss Waltzes were to Vienna, and what Napoleonic victories were to the French. *A memorial*

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<sup>274</sup> It is located at the village of Berlin, near East London in the Eastern Cape.

<sup>275</sup> Opland's (2009) *Abantu Besizwe*.

should be erected to him so that the father can point Mqhayi to his son, the mother to her daughter, the host to his guest and say with pride: 'herein lies the *immortal* Mqhayi' (Walter Nhlapo, 1945, quoted in Opland 2009: 16; my own emphasis).

Opland's quest for Mqhayi's literary "spirit" or "soul" has come full circle. A memorial was erected on the grave in 1951, as Nhlapo had hoped for in 1945. Although this monument is physically remote, the memory has been made accessible through Opland's translated and reproduced "warm [textual] bodies", which are "still very much alive", "vigorous and articulate" in their tactile and visual, as well as auditory, olfactory and gustatory imagery-performances from the grave.

Mqhayi's After the Battle (ca. 1915) unites most of the *izibongo* literary conventions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The poem is a confluence of the past, present and future. Past losses in the poem are represented by the Xhosa civil war of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century between the Ngqika and Ndlambe royal houses. Death inhabits Hoho forest, which lies above the plain of Amalinde, the site of the terrible fratricidal battle of 1818:

Crane feather piled on crane feather<sup>276</sup>, at Hoho;  
 Iron bit into flesh, at Hoho;  
 Club clashed against club, at Hoho;  
 The oxhide thudded, at Hoho;  
 There was thumping here and there and there, at Hoho;  
 Someone passed on without prayer, at Hoho;  
 He joined the multitudes in a moment, at Hoho;  
 The vulture fed with his dogs, at Hoho;  
 The buzzard fed and left more for the raven, at Hoho;  
 The hyena fed and passed on to the wild dog, at Hoho;  
 The green fly fed and left more for the maggot, at Hoho;  
 (Butler & Opland 1989: 50; tr. Xhosa by Jeff Opland)<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Only the elite Xhosa warriors wore the crane feather, which was a symbol of bravery on the battlefield (Butler & Opland 1989: 196).

The abject face of death is blurred within the “multitudes” of the slain warriors, and the “flesh” is quickly broken down by a descending food-chain of scavengers – from vulture down to maggot. This natural process of biological decomposition and earthly ingestion is, however, made unnatural by the earth’s apparent rejection of this blood sacrifice:

Today the country’s in labour;  
 Today the land’s in pain;  
 Beware of something in the stomach,  
 Suspect this thing in the womb;  
 Today it’s as if Gilikankqo’ll be born,  
 As if a doe who spurns her own fawn will be born.  
 [...]
   
 Someone said today the beast’s enraged,  
 Something long expected had now come to pass,  
 For they<sup>278</sup> looked at his brows and saw he was furious;  
 Today those brows are like clouds on a thunderous day,  
 Today they’re flashing like lightning, and the people tremble.  
 Someone said today the world’s at war.  
 (50)

Adamastor has been provided with a landfall, in the form of the monster Gilikankqo. The storm-enveloped monster metonymically rises in a storm-cloud as the white settlers, who are “people who traffic in lightning” (51), and who established a bridgehead at the Cape. In a later poem, Mqhayi ‘praises’ Edward,<sup>279</sup> the Prince of Wales, who visited South Africa in 1925, as the monster Gilikankqo:

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<sup>277</sup> A slightly different version is published in Opland (1998: 41).

<sup>278</sup> The Xhosa ancestors.

<sup>279</sup> Edward’s Xhosa praise-names in this poem include “Body-That-Smokes”, “Burning-Body”, “Scourge-of-the-Nation”, and “Flasher-of-Lightning”.

The monster whose lair no man knows.  
 Its body smokes like fire,  
 Its body burns like flame.  
 It spits sparks as if it were a steam-engine.  
 It flashes lightning like the heavens.  
 [...]

Spirit-like, priest of war, wizard,  
 [...]

Hayi, the mighty Great Britain!  
 Here she comes with bible and bottle,  
 Here she comes, a missionary escorted by a soldier,  
     with gunpowder and guns,  
     with cannons and breechloader.  
 Forgive me, O Father, but which of these must we accept?  
 Pass on, calf of the beast,  
 Trampler who even now is trampling,  
 Pass on and return safely – eater of our country's inheritance.  
 Long live the king!  
 (The Prince of Britain [royal visit, 1925], S.E.K. Mqhayi; tr. Xhosa,  
 Chapman (ed.) 2002: 65-67)

This uncanny sorcery of the white wizards who oppress with the conjuring stick – gun or cannon – is a common theme. In Amagunyana's Soliloquy (1906), it is "That assegai of his, which hurls so fast / The hurtling iron ball" (Couzens & Patel 1991: 37), and in an earlier 19<sup>th</sup> century Zulu *izibongo*, the white settler Henry Francis Fynn is described thus: "Throbbing like rumbling thunder [...] / He who points with a stick and thunder and lightning come forth, / Whatever he points at falls and dies. / Our egret that

came from the sea; / Elder brother of Shaka whom he raised from the dead”<sup>280</sup> (Henry Francis Fynn, 19<sup>th</sup> century, tr. Zulu; Opland 1992: 190-191).

In After the Battle and The Prince of Britain, Gilikankqo metonymically becomes the blacks’ Adamastor, who dashes their hopes for freedom against the rock of oppression. It is this “beast”, “creature”, “monster” and “snake” who is now hacking off his own body parts in a European civil war. It is “The time of the Hyaena”, the time of madness. The past, present and future are all instances of the same ambivalent and binary prophecies of doom and revival, which were made by Ntsikana and the prophetess Nongqawuse during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and which still hold true for the present and future. The present is shaded in the storm-clouds of a world war. The future is an uncertain web of prophecies of the Xhosa’s ultimate regeneration. Time in general – past, present and future – is mauled within the powerful jaws of the maddened hyena, the evil night-scavenger that preys on the meek:

[...] you will sell your fathers;

[...] your fathers will sell you;

[...]

[...] Darkness will descend;

(After the Battle; Butler & Opland 1989: 51; tr. Xhosa)

There is, however, hope. A rebirth can only be realised through a “sacramental slaughter” that will lead to “pools of blood” (51). The “real battle” (51) with which the poetic voice concludes is an allusion to not only the European war for ‘civilisation’, but also the Africans’ struggle for political and social emancipation in the country of their birth.

It is precisely this sacrifice that is echoed by Mqhayi in his *izibongo* on the European war. It is a timeless reassembling of the memory and spiritual

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<sup>280</sup> Henry Francis Fynn healed Shaka’s wounds and subsequently became a court favourite (Opland 1992: 190).

bodies of those blacks sacrificed during the conflict. In A Call to Arms (1916),<sup>281</sup> which forms the last stanza of the longer poem The Black Army (1916),<sup>282</sup> he exhorts the 'native supermen' to acts of bravery in far-off Europe:

Off with you then, my fellows, off to France!  
 Remember the hunger you have left at home.  
 Sent out to face the slaughter there today,  
 You're sacrifices for the Black-skinned race.  
 Go, you bull-calves of the cows with milk-filled udders,  
 Away, sons of the lean and the long-starved,  
 And you too, offspring of the death-defiers.  
 Go, for we have long foreseen all that would come.  
 Our people's God decided in advance.  
 Away, your legs uncramped with stiffness,  
 No quake or tremor in your hearts.  
 Go with light bodies, limbs unfrightened,  
 And stride on, stride, stride, stride!  
 Stand, stand firm, stop, sto-o-o-p!<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>281</sup> Grundlingh (2011: 32-33) gives the date for A Call to Arms as 1916. Similarly, Opland & Nyamende (2008: 408) indicate that The Black (or Dark) Army (*Umkosi wemidaka*), was first published in the 31 October 1916 issue of *Imvo*.

<sup>282</sup> Opland's (2009: 18-19) and Opland & Nyamende's (2008: 408) research indicates that The Black (or Dark) Army (*Umkosi wemidaka*) and The Sinking of the Mendi (*Ukutshona kuka Mendi*), which is discussed in the next section, were first published in 1917 in book form, as part of the third edition of Mqhayi's novel *Ityala lamawele* (The Court Case of the Twins), and in *Imihobe nemibongo* (Songs and Poems) of 1927.

<sup>283</sup> Cope & Krige 1968: 278, tr. Xhosa (referred to as Version 1, V1)

A slightly different translation from the original Xhosa is given at: <http://kaganof.com/kagablog/2007/10/03/sek-mqhayi-a-call-to-arms/>, tr. from the Xhosa by former president Thabo Mbeki. Accessed: 23 September 2012. Opland's (1998: 42) translation is very similar to this version. (referred to as Version 2, V2):

And so leave our shores, my peers, for France!  
 Remind yourselves of the poverty you leave behind.  
 Defeat the temptations of the rootless Satan,  
 Because you are where you are today as our offering,  
 You go as the sacred sacrifice of the African nation.  
 And so forward, offspring of the cow of the long udder;  
 Forward, calves of teats lengthened by sharing  
 Advance, because the times decreed that this had to be.  
 The God of our forefathers has gone ahead of you.

The 'facts' or *izinto* that Mqhayi gives about black responses to war as vocalised by the poem are also the literary *izinto* or 'things' of war experience. They are both instances of the same *ibali* or oral history tradition, which sometimes undergoes textual changes in the process of the oral handing-down from generation to generation. Xhosa history, literature and folktales become a matrix of interchangeable and expandable limbs of meaning, which are detached and re-attached to the textual body that constitutes the praise poem (Opland 2009: 9-12, 20-23; Opland 2002: 198). The subject or subjects of the *izibongo* is the focus of its meaning, and not its coherent structure, as the subject, together with its adjectival praise-attachments, is constantly relocated within the structure of the poem, depending on the nature of the oral performance. Essentially, this subject, either an object, animal, commoner or royal personage (Opland 2009: 7-8; Opland 2002), or in the poem The Black Army, the black sacrificial warrior, is a living-behind-the-tombstone entity, whom Mqhayi – the apotheosised textual body – ventriloquises as a living soul or spirit. The abject corpse is neatly wrapped away in the ever-shifting form and content-arrangements of the traditional praise poem. In its place, an apotheosised marionette body is strung up with strands of living word-sinews. The 'death' of the warrior can be superimposed on the 'death' of Mqhayi; the 'death-defying' warriors are instances of Mqhayi, the poet whose death was "no ordinary event, for he was no ordinary poet".<sup>284</sup> The orgasmic sacrificial spilling of blood on the battlefield becomes the poetic voice's *la petite mort* in words. Xhosa poetry, history and folklore are all mirror-images of the same immortal bodies caught in a perpetual cycle of texts, poets and oral performances, giving voice to warriors, kings, commoners and ancestors.

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March on, your legs free of cramps;  
 Move on, your hearts free of the fear of cowards;  
 With a light step, and bodies drilled for brave deeds,  
 Advance! Advance! Advance!  
 Left, right, left, right!  
 Left, left, left, halt!

<sup>284</sup> Walter Nhlapo, 1945, quoted in Opland 2009: 15.

In a praise poem dedicated to the Xhosa writer and politician J.T. Jabavu (1859-1921), Mqhayi writes:

You will not die, you'll keep speaking –  
 your reports are written in books,  
 written in Imvo Zabantsundu's lines.  
 Your reports are written in books –  
 written in the minds of those who've been born.  
 Your reports are written in books –  
 written in the hearts of those who die.  
 Your reports are written in books –  
 written in the minds of your nation.  
 Go and rest when your Lord so commands –  
 we who remain will interpret our dreams of you.

(*Umfi u J.T. Jabavu* (1921) / The late J.T. Jabavu, published in Opland 2009: 158)

The act of writing becomes a perpetual cycle of a 'writing-into-existence', as the *amabali's* or *izibongo's* subjects – the battlefield or political warrior's heroic deeds and the writers' texts – are part of the memory of the living, part of those who must still be born, and those who have already gone to the ancestral home. The poetry becomes the dream: dreaming the ancestors. The *imbongi's* oral performance emotionally explodes and boils over into a trance through which the performer is transported to the past by invoking the ancestors in a torrent of word-sacrifices to placate the gods and spirits (Opland 1992: 26-27,106-108,181,186,225). This cry from the grave is a very potent force:

We hear the loud call  
 you see with your eyes.  
 We hear the buzzing

You make in heaven.

(*Umfu u Jonas Ntsiko* (1918) / The late Jonas Ntsiko; published in Opland 2009: 146)

This is, in essence, a religion of never-ending volution, which is also evident in the 'white' poetry on the war. In The Black Army, the black recruits are called to action:

Listen then, young men, you are exalted!

Your nation is in the book of the nations.

You must dance, fellows, line up;

Do this and that, and this and the other!

Do so and so, and so and so on!

(ii, Cope & Krige 1968: 276)

Furthermore, "stride on" (V1) and "Advance" (V2) comes as an amen-mantra of the perfect alpha-omega trinity at the close of the poem; it is the three-ring onomatopoeic enforcement of black self-worth: the "stay watchful" refrain in After the Battle serves the same purpose. The abjected, both the biological-physical and psycho-social black corpse, is regenerated through martial preparedness and acts of valour, which are remembered in the dreams of the nation, and, significantly, in those of other people as well.

In The Black Army, this dream is a dreaming *izibongo* in eight stanzas, which exhorts black volunteers to sanctify the sacrifice made by the African politico-social body. This communal sacrifice was made by the parents in schooling the young in the right ways of the ancestors, notwithstanding the efforts to the contrary by white missionaries. The black recruits are "bodies drilled for brave deeds" (V2), not only by the white drill-instructors and officers on the parade ground, but also by the heroic example set by the warrior ancestors. Both the volunteers and ancestors are living, active and wholesome black bodies; Kristeva's (1982: 4) the "thing in the morgue('s)" is

completely absent. Traditional South African indigenous cosmology paired the world of the “forefathers” (V2) or “death-defiers” (V1) with that of their progeny: the corpse is, therefore, alive somewhere else; in the land of the ancestors, which is a mirror image of that of the living – somewhere here, present. Significantly, the dead are integrated into the world-of-experience of the living; the quick and the dead are conceptualised as one communal body, with mutual social responsibilities (Schoeman: 452-453; Peires 1981: 161-167; Peires 1987: 45,48,56; Zarwan 1976: 523). This is why Mqhayi exhorts the subject in the praise poem The Late Jonas Ntsiko (1918) to “Always think of this world / in the joy of that world; / recall what you left behind / and inform the ancestors” (Opland 2009: 148). And in The Late J.T. Jabavu (1921) Mqhayi states that “those in the Highest / will be told of conditions on earth” (Opland 2009: 158). The recently departed act as the messengers of the living, of their hopes and wishes. But in order for the ancestors to provide the progeny with protection, the living descendants of the dead have to demonstrate respect through certain votive offerings. In the poem, the volunteers have to honour the names of the forefathers through acts of bravery, who in recognition of their children’s obedience will prepare the way to Europe and ultimate victory. This is an appropriation of the European battlefield as part of the native country, very similar to that which the ‘white’ poetry postulates. The ancestral ground has always been central in the African religious cosmology. The graves are kept, and offerings are made at these sites. The bond can never be broken, or else divine displeasure would be visited on the perpetrators (Schoeman: 452). Cowardice on the battlefield would inevitably lead to a withdrawal of ancestral protection, and eminent calamity. Only by following the heroic example of the forefathers – men like Ntsikana and Shaka – could the strange land of Europe be appropriated as a haunt for the ancestors and as a consecrated space. The black soldier could thus keep in touch with the benevolent spirits in times of crisis, as the *amathongo / izi(imini)nyanya*<sup>285</sup> live in the true warrior’s heart; they are united as

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<sup>285</sup> The Xhosa ancestors.

“the heart of the hunter”. In a southern African traditional cosmology, the heart or soul of the dead lives on in the stars;<sup>286</sup> the ancestors, therefore, shine their light of protection on the noble warrior wherever they go, even in the dark night that is war.

However, Mqhayi, like the elite African Christian converts and those who volunteered for active service during the Great War, could not have been overly confident of divine sanction and protection in a far-off white-man’s war. Firstly, as a Christian, Mqhayi would certainly have been aware of the pitfalls to faith that the dead body – the mass-produced waste product of war – generates or degenerates; there is a burning innate human need to hide the dirty thing quickly in the morgue and eventually in the grave. Additionally, his traditional religious Xhosa cosmology did not sit easily with the concept of vile death and the dirty corpse, as discussed earlier. To make matters even murkier, the Xhosa assigned mystical qualities to the sea, the place from where the white oppressor emerged (Peires 1979: 54). The settlers were the physical manifestation of this dark mystery (54). At the time of the Great War, Afrikaners, because of their paternalistic oppression of black people, were seen as “a demonic race” by blacks (Nyamende 2011: 13), and these Dutch devils had ominously emerged from the sea in 1652.<sup>287</sup> As most volunteers for the South African Native Labour Contingent (SANLC) for service in Europe came from the landlocked Northern Transvaal (Grundlingh 2011: 22), leaving for overseas on a ship precariously tottering on a vast unknown ocean, proved to be a daunting prospect for some, especially after the sinking of the black troop-carrier the *SS Mendi* in February 1917, during which many black soldiers drowned (Grundlingh 1981: 201-202; Grundlingh 1987: 74). This argument gathers credence if the fact that most Africans who volunteered for active service were uneducated peasants (Grundlingh 2011: 22) is kept in mind – people who did not have knowledge of the wider world, let alone the sea, and of that which lurks beneath the unfathomable abyss. Eye-witness

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<sup>286</sup> See Van der Post (1961), *The Heart of the Hunter*.

<sup>287</sup> In this year, the Dutch East India Company established a refreshment station for its trading vessels on route from Europe to the East (Saunders & Southey 2001: 60-61).

accounts at the time reveal that “superstition” about the lands across the seas – the *Mkiza* – abounded and that “illiterate” Africans believed that a black body could not return alive from beyond the great waters (Willan 1978: 70). In the poem, Mqhayi encourages his charges to be brave in the face of this menacing oceanic uncertainty and to think of the “hunger” (V1) or “poverty” (V2) at home, from which they are escaping: the real economic predicament of uneducated blacks, who were used as low-paid unskilled labour tenants on white farms and as migrant labourers on the diamond and gold mines; black farmers who received substandard and inadequate land on which to farm under the 1913 Natives Land Act;<sup>288</sup> and all blacks, including the intelligentsia, who had no political representation in the country of their birth. Being consumed by the Leviathan of the deep was preferable to being torn apart by the white Adamastor of colonial tyranny, who was devouring black land, causing famine and social disintegration in its wake.

However, water also served as a space of regeneration in a traditional South African cosmology. The Xhosa believed that the marsh *uHlanga* was the birthplace of people and cattle; the water metaphor also encompassed the birth of a Christ-like saviour *Sifuba-sibanzi* during the Xhosa cattle-killing (Peires 1987: 54-55,61-63). J.J.R. Jolobe (1902-1976)<sup>289</sup> mystically refashions this watery expanse of rebirth in his *izibongo* The Cattle-killing through Nongqawuse’s vision:

The rays of the morning are breath-taking,  
 Creating a shimmering glitter  
 On the stretch of water,  
 Surrounded by beautiful flowers  
 As if by watchmen,  
 And a cluster of reeds  
 Where the songsters nest,

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<sup>288</sup> See Maylam (1989: 143-144).

<sup>289</sup> Jolobe shares with Mqhayi the distinction of being the two most distinguished Xhosa writers (Butler & Opland 1989: 232).

A riot of colours  
 Taking in the breeze  
 Of heavenly breath,  
 Dancing in rhythm  
 As if entranced in praise  
 On that expanse of water,  
 The ancestral spirits' home.<sup>290</sup>  
 (Butler & Opland 1989: 56; tr. Xhosa)

Water also represented the baptismal font of the missionary schools, where so many Xhosa elite received a western education. *Amathongo* and Christ, therefore, all emerged from a watery source.

The educated African elite, who made up about a quarter of the volunteers for the SANLC (Grunglingh 1987: 77; Grundlingh 1981: 207-209), and who wrote the poetry, shared this uncanny and ambivalent relationship with the sea with their educated white equivalents, poets like Francis Cary Slater, who were deeply influenced by a Romantic view of nature, which could be both benevolent and malevolent:

I looked upon the rotting sea,  
 And drew my eyes away;  
 I looked upon the rotting deck,  
 And there the dead men lay.  
 (The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, IV, 240-244, 1798, 1817, Coleridge;  
 The Norton 1983: 573)

In a South African context, of course, the Titan Adamastor rises from the sea as a terrible shade, shrouded in dark cloud and leaping waves:

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<sup>290</sup> However, Jolobe's poem ends with an apostrophic lament, in which the sea is depicted as a site of loss: "Thou, O cascading falls, / Whose waters drop, / Do your eyelids overflow, / Weeping?" (60), and a metaphor for the death and destruction wrought by the cattle-killing.

A shade so sinister its coming wore  
 That through our quickened pulses terror spread,  
 The great waves thundered and we heard them roar  
 Crashing far off upon a rocky head.  
 (The Lusiads, Canto 5, 38, 1572; Van Wyk Smith 1998: 51)

It was this terrifying sight, which had both tempestuous physical – treacherous waters, and psychological – uncanny spaces, fallouts, which not only awaited white conquistadors on their way to the Cape of Storms from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards, but also black recruits on their uncertain quest northwards, to the birthplace of the cross. Nearly 74 000 Africans served as non-combatants in South-West Africa, East Africa and France (Grundlingh 1987: 57). This is surprising in light of the incessant land-grabbing perpetrated by their white comrades-in-arms and the fearful outward sea journey to the unknown. As stated already, some members of the black elite saw participation in a war as the only means to reassert their dignity in the face of colonial dehumanisation.<sup>291</sup> The educated African, Coloured and Indian elite held lofty ideals of upward political mobility. They were hopeful that loyal service in defending the Empire would lead to the improvement of their constitutional rights in the Union (Grundlingh 1981: 40-45,63-68,212,215,217-218).<sup>292</sup> According to the black elite, loyalty was due to the liberal and mostly just British government, and not to the unyielding and oppressive Union government (Grundlingh 1987: 72-73, 77; Grundlingh 1981: 212). They argued

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<sup>291</sup> Ironically, there are also various other reasons that convinced black men to volunteer which are very similar to that of their white compatriots. These were the lure of adventure, building of moral character, previous military service and the love for army life, economic betterment, greater social mobility, various political reasons and coercive measures introduced by the recruiting bodies [See Grundlingh (1981: 203-218) for black motives, and Genis (2000: 79-86, 143-160) for those of whites].

<sup>292</sup> It must be noted that there was no blanket African support for the war. Many did not volunteer because it did not directly concern them. Many did not trust the white authorities, and less educated blacks even supported the Germans, who were seen as the lesser of the two evils (Grundlingh 1981: 48-55,62-63,195-196). In contrast, the Coloured and Indian communities as a whole did support the Union and British war effort (63-64,67,167).

that Britain had a liberal constitutional history, as opposed to the colonial states in Africa, which based their rule on the example set by the divide-and-devour policy of the Berlin conference of the 1880s.<sup>293</sup>

Understandably then, *The Black Army* does not draw on a South African patriotism. But more surprisingly, it also negates loyalty towards Britain. Instead, a uniquely African one is invoked. The elite had lost all faith in the settler governments, which in some cases – e.g. the Bambatha rebellion – acted more cruelly than the British had done during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Mqhayi draws on the inspiration of the past heroes of his race to reclaim an aggressive African patriotism in the present. The fact that loyal death on the battlefield may lead to more political rights within a colonial framework is not his main concern; a new African regeneration in the face of the destruction of indigenous self-worth through acculturation is. He speaks of pent-up frustration, of taut muscular irritation, which is let loose on the First World War battlefields not only through an “offering” and “sacrifice” (V2), but also through “slaughter” (V1):

In the colonial world, the emotional sensitivity of the native is kept on the surface of his skin like an open sore which flinches from the caustic agent; and the psyche shrinks back, obliterates itself and finds outlet in muscular demonstrations (Fanon 2001: 44).

Kristeva’s poststructuralist corpse, which is a constantly oozing wound (1982: 3), is audibly echoed by Fanon’s postcolonialism. Mqhayi’s poetic subject – the “Black-skinned race” (V1) – is stitched within this open-ended abscess. The poetry provides for a psychoanalytical discourse as the black consciousness through Mqhayi is allowed catharsis as the speaking other or abject:

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<sup>293</sup> During this conference, held in 1885, the colonial scramble for Africa was unleashed in all its ferocity (Palmer & Colton 1984: 628).

The subject that is located in the wound, which must be kept open for the abject to be heard, is involved in the very activity of signification through the concatenating rhythm (Harrington 1998: 152-153).

It is a poetic conjuring back to life of the abjected black zombie from the depths of colonial negation: "Raise the fame of Africa among the nations" (*The Black Army*, vii, Cope & Krige 1968: 278). In this process are to be found acts of literary terrorism on the part of the black intellectual. In the first stanza of the poem, Mqhayi employs sarcastic irony to reassert black self-worth in the face of colonial paternalism:

Oh yes, we are so thankful  
 When our homeland gives us a thought  
 And has us go down to the coast to work  
 In the hour of its difficulty.  
 And in any case, who are we  
 To be able to help the King of England,  
 The noble gentleman on whom the sun never sets  
 Who holds his sway over the land and sea  
 And thinks even of annexing the heavens.  
 (*The Black Army*, vii, Cope & Krige 1968: 276)

Mqhayi alludes to the fact that the whites needed black help in winning the war: "They reached their last resort in calling you" (vii, 278). Here he also plays on irony: the superior white man needed the inferior black man to help him win his wars. This observation was made at a time when the recruit-hungry British Army desperately needed more labourers to help with manual labour on the Western Front. However, the Union government could not recruit a sufficient number of African recruits for service in this theatre (Grundlingh 1981: 188).

The poet also employs acts of near sedition as he fraternises with the enemy:

Go catch the German Kaiser, bring him home,  
 And cut this war short in a jiffy;  
 Let the Kaiser come and talk with us,  
 We'll tell him how the Zulus won at Sandlwana,  
 Of Thaba Ntsu where the Boers were baffled,  
 The gathering of wizards at Gwadana [...]"  
 (The Black Army, v, Cope & Krige 1968: 277)

Mqhayi is at pains to reassert black pride through references to black military history: the Zulu defeated the British at Isandhlwana in January 1879, and the Basotho initially withstood Boer encroachments from their mountain stronghold at Thaba Bosiu during the 1850s and 1860s (Maylam 1989: 78,114). Mqhayi "embrace[s] ... the cast-offs of thought, its shells and corpses..." (Fanon 2001: 181) by invoking the past, but simultaneously, he is scooping from Fanon's "seething pot" (181) of black discontentment, though he does not empty it completely. Mqhayi challenges the realities of black abjection through a traditional and authentic African literary form, the *izibongo*. He does, however, not create what Fanon classifies as "an authentic work of art" which "realize(s)... the truths of a nation" (181). He does focus on the realities of colonialism, but this is still a reaction and not a resistance. Mqhayi is still writing as a "second phase" indigenous writer (179); his poetry has not fully evolved into a "fighting literature" (179) that is written in the "zone of occult instability" (183), wherein only violence leads to liberation (186-189). According to Fanon (2001:182-189), colonial poetry should be wholly immersed in the liberation struggle, which forms part of a national culture as defined as a "whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence" (188). Mqhayi is the harbinger of

violence, but not in the Fanon mould; the incitement to violence should be directed at the colonial authorities and not against a far-off enemy. Mqhayi does rebel, but not in terms of a postcolonial aggressive futurism. It is only within a modernistic colonial framework.

The black politico-social corpse, therefore, does rise from the wound in The Black Army as a disgruntled, but unarmed *impi*, who does not directly challenge settler authority. An eye-witness to these *impis* going off to war is Nimrod Makanya, who observed:

It is very hard and difficult  
 To face the Germans without arms.  
 The government says we must go to France.  
 No man is bold enough to face the Germans without arms.  
 (Zulu song quoted in Morris 2004: 149)

African recruits were extremely dissatisfied that they were not issued with firearms, which negatively affected recruitment. The white Union government introduced this measure as it feared possible black mutiny against white authority (Grundlingh 1981: 194-195): this was a direct cause of the “Black Peril” debate that was raging at the time. The black body was totally defenceless against the physical and political assaults by the white other.

In all this reaction, the waste-product of war, the corpse, is still safely stitched away within the dash of war:

But if it happens that a man [soldier] gets bitten,  
 Burnt up, nothing’s simpler –  
 Send him to join his fathers  
 With a solemn service:  
 [...]  
 (The Black Army, iv, Cope & Krige 1968: 277)

Essentially, these “fathers” are “death-defiers” (V1); they are alive, somewhere else, which in an African spiritual framework, is also somewhere here, present. The killed-in-action joins the living-dead in a mirror reality.

It was the sinking of the *SS Mendi*<sup>294</sup> that brought about a further cascading of the horizons of death-poetics, which reverberates in the mythologizing of historical memory, similar to the Battle of Delville Wood.

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<sup>294</sup> Another South African troopship, the *Galway Castle*, was torpedoed on 12 September 1918 on its journey from Plymouth back to South Africa, with passengers, wounded soldiers and SANLC men on board. 143 People drowned (Wessex Archaeology 2007: 40, *SS Mendi Archaeological Desk-based Assessment*. Available at: <http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/files/projects/ss-Mendi/ssMendiReport.pdf>. Accessed: 6 November 2012). The less substantial loss of life and the absence of an ‘heroic’ event on board while sinking may be reasons for the *Galway Castle*’s less than legendary status in comparison to the *Mendi*’s.

## 4.2 The Leviathan of the Deep

The *SS Mendi* was a troopship that was transporting members of the South African Native Labour Contingent to France when it was struck by the transport ship *SS Darro* on 21 February 1917. It sank in the English Channel near the Isle of Wight and more than 600 souls were lost (Grundlingh 2011: 20). This incident has become a potent symbol of African heroism in the hands of poets and politicians alike.

The earliest poetic reference to the Mendi is The Sinking of the Mendi, by Mqhayi, published in 1917 shortly after its sinking (Opland 2009: 18-19; Opland & Nyamende 2008: 408).<sup>295</sup> Mqhayi's translated poem is stylistically based on English Renaissance poetry, with eight-line stanzas, in rhyming couplets, and with alternating rhythm of iambic/anapestic tetrameter and pentameter. But it is essentially a traditional praise poem that lauds the Mendi-dead:

Ah, those dead stood in the foremost rank  
Of Africa – great the ship's burden when she sank.  
Brave of the brave they were, men who bring  
With their blood greetings to the King of Kings.  
Death has its wage – to live again.  
Gladly I would stand with them, new-risen men,  
And shine like one whose work is well done  
In the great brightness of that Day's dawn.  
So then, let it be.<sup>296</sup>  
(vi, Cope & Krige 1968: 280)

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<sup>295</sup> The earliest newspaper accounts of the sinking of the Mendi are 'The Mendi Disaster' in the *Imvo Zabantsundu* of 27 March 1917, in which it is asserted that "those who had died by drowning had given their life for the liberty of all peoples of the Empire", and that of 14 January 1918 ('Wail of the Native Widows') in *Abantu-Batho*, which proclaims "they have died to set us free" (Grundlingh 2011: 21).

<sup>296</sup> There is another slightly different translation of this poem published in Butler & Opland (1989: 78).

As in The Black Army, an African nationalism is asserted, free of any colonial interference:

To you who died for Africa, who sailed down  
 Over the sea to meet the German, we make it known:  
 It was not for the King by any loyal tie,  
 It was not for Britain you went to die.<sup>297</sup>  
 (ii, 13-16, Cope & Krige 1968: 279)

The black recruits volunteered to fight for Africa. The Mendi is metaphorically appropriated as Africa's bride, whose last effusion of menstrual fluid mixes with the life-giving blood of the male warrior, which leads to a new birth of African pride and self-affirmation deep within the watery womb of the sea:

And as our bride down her last flood  
 The Mendi takes the service of our blood.  
 (i, 7-8, Cope & Krige 1968: 278)

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<sup>297</sup> W.G. Bennie's translation published in Butler & Opland (1989: 78) differs here significantly from C.M. Mcanyangwa and Jack Cope's later translation published in Cope & Krige (1968: 280). Bennie's version reads:

To you also who perished in Africa,  
 In the German land of the east-  
 'Twas for the honour you had for your King,  
 'Twas for your allegiance to Britain.

Here, the blacks who died in German East Africa are also included in the patriotic sacrifice. In this translation Mqhayi the "Christian poet loyal to Britain, and also [...] a Xhosa proud of his traditions" (Butler & Opland 1989: 203) comes to the fore. The answer to the conflicting loyalties evident in the two translations of the poem lies within a socio-linguistic matrix. Bennie's pro-British translation was influenced by the conciliatory tone of black-white relations of the post-First World War era. Bennie, an eminent Xhosa scholar, mirrors the paternalistic politics of the age in his version to a degree. In contrast, the Mcanyangwa-Cope version was published at a time when black resistance to white rule was much more vociferous, and blacks reasserted their self-worth through, amongst others, the nascent Black Consciousness movement. Secondly, Bennie revised the Xhosa spelling and naming system in 1936/1937. His new spelling guidelines created "the bizarre characters that formed such an inhibiting element of that new orthography" (Opland 2009: 24; Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxxiv-xxxv). The 'real' meaning of the poem could, therefore, have been lost somewhere in the translation.

The new African infant is the proud black primogenitor in whose blood is mixed the chromosomes of a traditional African past and the sacrificial blood of Christ:

With what victim do we make atonement?  
 For home and family what offering is sent?  
 Do we not sacrifice the bull-calves of the kraal,  
 Single out those most loved of all?  
 [...]  
 Was not Abel's death the whole world's price?  
 Was not the Saviour heaven's sacrifice?"

(iv, 25-28, 31-32)

Then be comforted, orphans of our nation –  
 From one death rises new creation;  
 One man must serve that others may live on.  
 (v, 33-35, Cope & Krige 1968: 279)

The black body is metonymically transformed into a sanctified Abel, who suffers at the hands of the damned Cain; it is the white settler whose flesh now bores the mark of shame – that of the fratricidal beast Adamastor. Although it is the black bodies on the Mendi who die, they will, like their physically alive but psychologically dead black-colonised Africans, be resurrected: the dead soldiers in the presence of God, and the African as the living equal to the white. It is the “new-risen” men or “Chief's brave death-comrades”,<sup>298</sup> who, like the ancestral “death-defiers”, live on in the mirror-reality of heaven, and as part of the South African socio-political body. This martial ability of the sacrificial “bull-calves of the kraal” is entrenched in the praise poetry:

Gouger!

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<sup>298</sup> W.G. Bennie's translation in Butler & Opland (1989: 78).

Stab-on-sight!

Horn quick to gore.

Crusher with the haft of an axe:

It's a sad day for those you stab,

Like one who gives then takes.

Bull with many scars.

One who bellows and the cowards scatter.<sup>299</sup>

(Bull, tr. Zulu; Opland 1992: 160)

This ushering in of a “new creation,” or “new life” and “awakening”<sup>300</sup> by the sacrifice of the bull-calves, however, does create a cascading presence of doubt and absence: had the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse not promised the coming of a similar chiliastic epoch during the previous generation? Mqhayi was consciously under the sway of this sacred vision that never came to fruition but which only led to the death of many thousands through starvation. Ironically, both the Xhosa cattle-killing prophecy and Mqhayi's poetic vision are centred on the seemingly futile blood sacrifice in obtaining ancestral sanction. This sacrificial bond of blood had deep historical roots in the Xhosa collective psyche. It was the prophet Nxele during the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and the sage Mlanjeni during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century who first emphasised the slaughter of livestock to placate the ancestors to atone for breaking the witchcraft taboo, and to usher in a new age of abundance and immortality (Peires 1989: 1-2, 9-10; Peires 1987: 51,58-59; Keller 1978: 96). In Mqhayi's poem, the young black recruits metaphorically become the cattle that are slaughtered and whose blood again seals the bond between the living and the dead. In both instances, the sacrificial rites exacted a heavy toll. Almost 4000 blacks were killed during the war (Gleeson 1994: 99), and ten times as many Xhosa, during the Xhosa cattle-killing (Peires 1987: 43).<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> Also see Opland (1992: 188,216,227); and Chapman (2002: 27).

<sup>300</sup> W.G. Bennie's translation in Butler & Opland (1989: 78).

<sup>301</sup> Approximately 400 000 cattle died during the killing-spree.

The black volunteers also metaphorically serve as *lobola*-cattle (Butler & Opland 1989: 203) as the Mendi-bride is married off to the quintessential warrior victim. This archetypal black warrior finally divorced the lady of the sea during the 1980s after decades of marital strife; it was a messy separation as the new radical black body oozing revolution endeavoured to sever all ties with white apartheid oppression. The Mendi reminded many revolutionaries of black collaboration with white officialdom, and those perceived as “sellouts” were severely dealt with (Grundlingh 2011: 27).<sup>302</sup> The memory of the bride of the sea all but faded away across the horizon.<sup>303</sup>

Mqhayi, a keen observer of his time, must also have been aware of the *fin de siècle* crisis in the English literary consciousness, which unleashed a flood of doubt in what the future might hold, and the questioning of the previous generation’s self-confidence. But Mqhayi does not withdraw from reality into flights of nostalgic and exotic literary flights of fancy, as most of the *fin de siècle* writers did.<sup>304</sup> His millenarian writing is fully immersed in the real politics of his time.

Mqhayi’s two poems dealing with the First World War share similarities with the body of colonial text that Fanon (2001: 179) classifies as a “fighting” and “national literature” and are instances of the awakening of anti-colonial violence. However, they are not yet “revolutionary literature” in the full sense of the term, as the violence is directed outwards towards the German enemy, who, as in the ‘white’ poetry, is ascribed an uncanny and even diabolical nature:

To you who died for Africa, who sailed down  
Over the sea to meet the German [...]  
(The Sinking of the Mendi, ii, 13-14)

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<sup>302</sup> An abject example of this is the ‘necklacing’, or burning alive of perceived black traitors (See Morris 2004: 8, 236-238).

<sup>303</sup> Ironically, due to political motives, the apartheid government tried to become the father of the bride by honouring her sacrifice, at the time when the black revolutionary was trying to destroy its nuptial bonds (See Grundlingh 2011: 27).

<sup>304</sup> See Bergonzi (2001: 379).

and:

Keep that Zeppelin up there in the sky.  
 When it throws its fires down, hurl up lightnings,  
 When it scatters poison, throw a powder up!  
 If it sends electric shocks, use bees!  
 Confuse it – confusion, confusion, confusion!

(The Black Army, vi)

Similarly, although the arrival of the white settler in After the Battle is imagined as the coming of the Beast of Revelation, which ushers in a time of unnatural events and portents, the local threat of white oppression is not directly addressed, but alluded to in prophetic terms. This white peril debate is metaphorised as the sea, which looms ominously as an all-pervasive sub-text.

In The Black Army and The Sinking of the Mendi the uncanny nature of the sea is superimposed on that of the far-off faceless German enemy. The strange war bird of prey, the Zeppelin, is also associated with the German, who becomes a devil raining fire, poison and lightning from above. "Our assegais are no good now; they could not reach an aeroplane" (Grundlingh 1982: 7) is how one African volunteer tried to put this fear into words shortly after the war.

The poetic voice vents its frustration with settler oppression on the Germans, who, although they also brutally subjugated colonised peoples,<sup>305</sup> are not the real enemy. The stage was not yet set for a full-on revolution of words and actions against the Union government that would characterise post-World War Two black literature. Black politics in South Africa was still a reaction through peaceful means and not yet a fully-fledged resistance. For

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<sup>305</sup> The German-Herero War of 1904 is a particularly contentious and abject example. Mqhayi was most probably aware of this conflict that took place within the borders of South Africa's northern neighbour (See Dederling, T. 1993. The German-Herero War of 1904: Revisionism of Genocide or Imaginary Historiography? *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19(1) March 1993: 80-88).

instance, in *The Black Army*, Mqhayi encourages his warrior charges to “Keep to the [whiteman’s wartime] law and the accepted rules / And any new decree...” (vii). The treatment meted out to serving Africans in South-West Africa, German East Africa and Europe was even worse than that reserved for German prisoners-of-war, in which inhumane living conditions and indiscriminate flogging were common occurrences.<sup>306</sup> African dissatisfaction with service conditions in Europe even led to the premature disbandment of the SANLC early in 1918 (Grundlingh 1987: 114). However, even though resistance to white oppression on the homefront was less vociferous than on the frontline, and the unacceptable treatment of African soldiers was not widely known in the Union at first because of censorship (Willan 1978: 76-77), the war poetry of civilians like Mqhayi does represent a gradual assemblage of an embryonic black socio-political body, whose new limbs were steadily gestating into political and revolutionary maturity.

This gestation period is also an age of heroes – e.g. that of Ntsikana, Shaka, Hintsa and Bambatha. The First World War further built on this tradition and created new saviours. The epitome of a traditional early twentieth century South African hero, to whom Mqhayi acted as an unofficial *imbongi* throughout his life, is Isaac Williams Wauchope<sup>307</sup> (Opland 2007: 105; Grundlingh 2011: 32). Shortly after Wauchope’s death in 1917, the *Imvo* newspaper ran an article on him that reads: “this son of Dyobha of the Cethe clan was one of the highly talented black people of our land” (*Um-Fu, Isaac W. Wauchope, Imvo*, 3 April 1917, 4; published in Opland & Nyamende 2008: 397). Thus, a tradition of lionisation was established which Mqhayi enthusiastically took up; through narrative descriptions and poetry, he goes to great lengths to describe Wauchope in heroic terms as a fine African specimen (Nyamende 2011: 5-6; Opland 2007: 106-107). The historian Nyamende has acted as a modern-day *imbongi*, similar to the Opland-Mqhayi nexus, by describing Wauchope as a larger-than-life and deeply moral man of action, who

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<sup>306</sup> See Willan (1978) and Grundlingh (1987: 86-114).

<sup>307</sup> Wauchope was also known as Dyobha, which is the Xhosa name of his father (Opland & Nyamende 2008: xix).

descended from Ndlambe warrior-stock through his grandfather Citashe (Nyamende 2011: 6,8). To emphasise the validity of his estimation, Nyamende quotes Jacob Bam who said of Wauchope: "He was a man of great bearing, and piety; he was also chiefly in bearing, and indeed by birth".<sup>308</sup> The Wauchope ethos is one that has been a very potent force in reclaiming the abjected black body. Again, this extolling of physical prowess is entrenched in the 19<sup>th</sup> century *izibongo*, as is seen in Hintsá's praise poem.<sup>309</sup>

To Wauchope is credited the only surviving war poem by a black soldier on active service during the First World War. He is said to have encouraged his African brothers to die bravely during a war dance on the deck of the *SS Mendi* while it was sinking off the Isle of Wight (Clothier 1987). The earliest poetic source for this oral battle-cry is 1935 (Opland 2007: 105; Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxvii)<sup>310</sup>. The authenticity of Wauchope as the writer-performer of this poem is in serious doubt; even the historical veracity of the death drill has been questioned.<sup>311</sup> However, notwithstanding the poem's doubtful First World War historicity, it does speak of a communal experience of war and cascading representations of the living and dying black corpse.

In 1916, at 64, Wauchope enrolled for active service as an interpreter in the SANLC (Nyamende 2011: 13). His reasons may have been moral redemption or patriotism (13). Wauchope's standing as a camp-fighter for his people suffered after he was found guilty of falsifying a will before the war, and he subsequently served a short gaol sentence (11-12). He stated after his

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<sup>308</sup> Jacob Bam in *The New African*, 23 March 1936: 23; quoted in Nyamende (2011: 14).

<sup>309</sup> Also see Opland (1992: 227).

<sup>310</sup> The earliest source that links Wauchope's heroic deed and the sinking of the *SS Mendi* is dated 1934, and an older but less heroic account is dated 1932 (See Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxvii-xxviii).

<sup>311</sup> Nyamende (2011: 14) agrees with Jacob Bam (1936) and Clothier (1987: 96-98) that Wauchope's death-drill and concomitant oral poem is based in truth. Opland (2007: 105; 2008: xxvii-xxviii) evidently also concurs with the veracity of this incident. Wessex Archaeology's 2007 report, *SS Mendi Archaeological Desk-based Assessment* indicates that the "Death Dance" taking place was "conceivable" (42). However, Grundlingh (2011) argues that this event could not have taken place because of the adverse circumstances under which the *SS Mendi* sank. (See Grundlingh 2011: 29-31). Willan (1978: 85) concurs that this event's taking place "is rather unlikely".

release that he “will do nothing wilfully to add to the disgrace into which it [his Congregational Native Church in Fort Beaufort] has already been plunged through my grievous fault” (Wauchope quoted in Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxvi). He may have been desirous to set the record straight. And he did so – although not necessarily historically, definitely within the historical memory – in performing the famous death-drill *izibongo* as an accompanying battle cry to a last heroic war dance while the *SS Mendi* was being submerged by the dark waves.

The mythologizing of the Mendi death-drill, together with Mqhayi’s *izibongo* that praises Wauchope, formed part of the efforts by the black middle-class elite to promote the memory of the Mendi during the pre-Second World War decades (Grundlingh 2011: 22, 32-34). Mqhayi’s *izibongo* of Wauchope’s heroic cry echoes as follows:

Those who were there say the hero from Ngqika's land descended  
from heroes was standing aside now as the ship was sinking! As a  
chaplain he was free to board a boat and save himself, but he didn't!  
He kept on appealing to the leaderless soldiers urging them to stay  
calm, and die like heroes on their way to war. We hear that he said:

Now then stay calm my countrymen!

Calmly face your death!

This is what you came to do!

This is why you left your homes!

Peace, our own brave warriors!

Peace, you sons of heroes,

This is your final day today,

Prepare for the ultimate ford! [...]

(Mqhayi, The Late Rev. Isaac William Wauchope, *The Bantu World* 19  
Jan. 1935: 6, quoted in Opland 2007: 106; tr. Xhosa).

Jacob Bam's 1936-version published in *The New African* of 23 March 1936 (23, quoted in Nyamende 2011: 14) inserts an unmistakable inclusive African nationalism:

Be quiet and calm my countrymen, for what is taking place now is exactly what you came to do. You are going to die, but that is what you came to do. Brothers we are drilling the drill of death. I, a Xhosa, say you are all my brothers. Zulus, Swazis, Pondos, Basutos,<sup>312</sup> we die like brothers. We are the sons of Africa. Raise your cries, brothers, for though they made us leave our weapons at our homes, our voices are left with our bodies.

South African soldiers from the different ethnic groups served together performing menial tasks, and faced the same hardships on the battlefields. Consequently, a more inclusive black consciousness was starting to evolve in the ranks, which was negated to a great degree in the Union, where a tribal divide-and-rule policy was adhered to by the government (Grundlingh 1987: 124). Mqhayi had tapped into this growing communal African psyche and 'black-skin(ness)' in The Black Army and The Sinking of the Mendi by depicting the black soldiers from South Africa as the quintessential African warriors who "shine" as their martial "work is well done". Bam also plays on this theme of an escalating black working-class identity. Furthermore, his poem is also evidence of a growing communal black consciousness that was frustrated by its near silent political voice, the ANC, which was particularly ineffectual during the 1930s. The men of the SANLC also did not receive any war medal or 'native medal' as other colonial volunteers of the British Empire had after the war, and the veterans' claims for war service compensation was botched by the Union authorities (Willan 1978: 83). The Mendi day was the only vocal means of loudly asserting a black identity; however, the

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<sup>312</sup> Black soldiers on the Mendi were drawn from all sections of the African community. However, ironically, the Sotho, Tsonga and Venda contributions from the Northern Transvaal weighed the heaviest by far, although they are not mentioned in Bam's version. (See Grundlingh 1987: 75-79). Surprisingly, the 'warlike' Zulu "formed a distinct minority" in the SANLC (See Grundlingh 1987: 65-66). They had only as recently as 1906 suffered severely at the hands of the Natal government, and memories of this were still festering. Additionally, the Union government's recruiting strategies in Zululand were ineffectual.

celebrations focused on reconciliation of the races through emphasising communal self-sacrifice for a greater empire good (Grundlingh 2011: 21-25). It was the poetry that most audibly proclaimed an inclusive and racially exclusive black nationalism within a white dominated world: a pan-Africanist brotherhood.

Bam's 1936-version is published in Clothier (1987),<sup>313</sup> and with a few alterations in *The Star* newspaper of Friday, 22 February 1952.<sup>314</sup> Interestingly, in *The Star's* version, and in an earlier unpublished draft of Clothier's (1987) work, Wauchope's poetic persona refers to himself as a Zulu. This may be because of the status that the Zulu nation has enjoyed as the archetypal noble warrior-nation, which engendered respect from even the white apartheid government. The Mendi is writ large in heroism, which could possibly, in the white editor's mind, only have been the conduct of a Zulu warrior, and thus the 'Zulu' translation was used.<sup>315</sup> However, even the noble Zulu warrior stood aghast while looking out across a perplexing watery mass.

Mqhayi's "the ultimate ford", the sea, the life and death-giver, as a dark uncanny space in which the dead sank away, did present the black consciousness with a predicament. As stated earlier, to the Xhosa it represented a mystical realm from where the strange white settlers (Peires 1979: 54), the wizards with lightning rods (Opland 1992: 190-191), rose: those who brought death and destruction in their wake. It also became a site of psychological loss during the Xhosa cattle-killing of 1856-1857, during which it was believed that the whites, or rather those who did not want to join the cattle-killing, had to be driven into the sea - both the whites and the sea fell beyond the Xhosa cosmology and cultural frame of reference (Peires 1987: 56; Zarwan 1976: 532). It is also beneath the water where the large snake of African lore lives (Lewis-Williams 2004b: 51); It is "Nabulele, / Monster of the deep pools. / Or Makhanda-mahlanu, the snake with five heads, who comes

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<sup>313</sup> The versions in the preface and on p. 58 differ slightly.

<sup>314</sup> Unisa, Audiovisual collection, Microfile 0555, *The Star* 15.02.1952-29.02.1952.

<sup>315</sup> See Van Wyk Smith (1990: 17-18) on the noble Zulu-warrior myth in South African literature, and Els (1992: 139-170) on the potency of Zulu nationalism as reflected in *Inkatha*.

/ as a whirlwind”;<sup>316</sup> and also “[...] Icanti, that foul snake / That lurks by rivers, changing oft his shape / To spread disease and leprosy that eat / The flesh”.<sup>317</sup> In Mofolo’s early 20<sup>th</sup> century Zulu novel *Chaka*, the snake is associated with unnatural sexual urges, and with the “King of the Deep Pool”, which is also the devil-serpent of Genesis (Attwell 1999: 280). Rivers were also guarded by devilish maidens who, through song, lured the unsuspected to their watery deaths (Butler & Opland 1989: 84).

By contrast, the snake was also closely associated with the world of the spiritually elevated dead as it was either a messenger from the gods or the ancestors, or even a divine anointer of kings (Attwell 1999: 280). The ominous water metaphor and the black snake are inseparable in a traditional thematic war setting. The black snake denotes a hero, a powerful python (Opland 1992: 218,222-223,224,227), or traitorous villain (217; Opland 2004: 41). It is a symbol of battlefield – and sexual<sup>318</sup> – prowess, similar to the horn of the bull-calf, or refers to the hyena-like Satan-snake, who cowers close to the ground, and stealthily and rapaciously sinks its fangs into the flesh of the unsuspecting victim. Both processes are initiated by a watery substance – bodily fluids in the former, liquid poison in the latter.

Water is a conjuring space not only for black magic but also for regenerative divination. In Shaka’s days, the Zulu warriors were cleansed in the sea on their return from battle (Opland 1992: 132). Similarly, Xhosa warriors bathed before battle:

Itola [war doctor] too his rites mysterious made  
And in the river all the army washed.  
Then like a mamba black the swarm uncoiled.

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<sup>316</sup> *The Prince of Britain*, S.E.K. Mqhayi; tr. Xhosa, Chapman (ed.) 2002: 65.

<sup>317</sup> *Ntsikana’s Vision*, D.J. Darlow; published in Butler & Opland (1989: 84).

<sup>318</sup> In a traditional African polygamous social structure, wealth and status are measured in terms of the number of cows and bulls that is owned – which serve as nuptial ‘payment’ or *lobola* – and the subsequent number of wives and children that is married and begotten (Eloff 1960: 111,115; Potgieter 1960: 81).

(The Battle of Amalinde (1818), JJR Jolobe (1902-1976); Butler & Opland 1989: 48)

It was a baptism which anointed the warrior with phallic heroism and which rid him of the impurity inherent in the spilling of blood and contact with the corpse. These cleansing ceremonies were accompanied by war songs (48, Opland 1992: 132), which are similar to the emotionally loaded war dances and the *imbongi's izibongo* - a spontaneous outpouring of potent feelings (131).

Water was also a metaphor for loss; the spilling of water signifies both a spiritual-emotional and physical leaking, and the cross-over from life to death:

I am spilled out like water

Chorus: Beat the drum, oh yea!

We are finished!

Chorus: Our people are finished!

Oh! to have one's parents dead!

Chorus: Our people are finished!

I am going to the ford where my sister was killed.

(I am Spilled out like Water, tr. Shangana-Tsonga, Opland 1992: 140)

In the Mendi Hymn, water links birth with death and signifies the loss of bodies beyond the known borders of land and life:

We all wept when the news came

From beyond the sea

Announcing the sinking of young men

When the Mendi went down

O, the sea, the merciless river,

Swallowed them alive

Down went the mighty Bantu offspring:  
 Down down they went to the Land of the Dead.  
 (George Tyamshashe)<sup>319</sup>

Political loss is also illustrated by the water metaphor:

You can curse a person so misfortune ensues.  
 Gcaleka it was who earned divinership through the river;  
 (Sigcawu Son of Kreli, early 20<sup>th</sup> century, tr. Xhosa, Opland 1992: 226)

Although Sigcawu is the successor to a rich tradition of divination, he could do nothing to stop the utter decimation of the Gcaleka-Xhosa's independence during his rule from 1892 to 1902. Similarly, the *izibongo* of Solomon, king of the Zulu (1913-1933), employs water as a fleeting substance to illustrate the loss of Zulu independence:

When he sought to unite the Xhosa and Mpondo diviners  
 He held a diviner's oxtail wand  
 Which was by custom for Shangaan diviners  
 Ndaba's son had quarrelled with no one  
 He'd gone to hunt game at Nkonjeni  
 And drink of the deepest of pools  
 For shallow waters fouled him with mud  
 Hail, hail, son of Ndaba  
 You are the paramount chief  
 (Solomon Son of Dinuzulu, tr. Zulu, Opland 1992: 234)

Solomon is a 'snake', "fouled" "with mud", as he cooperates with the white authorities. He is treacherously advised by his conniving counsellors

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<sup>319</sup> Unisa, Audiovisual Collection, Microfile 0555, *The Star* 22 February 1952, 15.02.1952-29.02.1952.

who are “Like vultures surveying a carcass” (233); the abject carcass stinks with the rot of the Zulu body-politic – the foul mud of a drying riverbed. Water turns to mud, and eventually to earth and hard rock. It is the *isivoivane* cairn throwing its rocky shade across the ancestral pit in the ground:

Who’s the pit that they’ll drown in on the day of destiny,  
When he speaks in the ancestral voice of Hintsá.

(Sigcawu son of Kreli, Opland 1992: 227)

The “day of destiny” had not dawned for the Xhosa by the time the Great War broke out; all the prophecies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century diviners – Ntsikana, Nxele, Mlanjeni, Mhlakaza, and Nongqawuse – and the heroic resistance by chiefs such as Hintsá, or peaceful cooperation with the whites as expounded by chief Ngqika, had come to naught. It was the same for all African communities of 19<sup>th</sup> century South Africa. The abjected living black corpse had stumbled from loss to loss:

Thesele, of the enormous cleft of the place of the protruding rocks,  
The cattle go in by it, they’ve gone forever,  
In go the long-bearded people,  
In go the great-horned cattle.

(Moshoeshoe, tr. Sotho, Opland 1992: 205)

And the people have entered it, they’ve gone forever!

(Moshoeshoe Son of Mokhachane, tr. Sotho, Opland 1992: 199)

Although this poem lauds the 19<sup>th</sup> century Chief Moshoeshoe’s efforts of black unification within the Basotho state, and as the father of the later-day independent Lesotho (1966), it does allude to the destruction wrought by the *difaqane* wars and colonial expansion in South Africa’s hinterland, as well as the eventual corrosion of the Basotho’s independence and economic

enslavement by the capitalist-apartheid South Africa (Maylam 1989: 57-58, 111-119).

But just as Thesele-Moshoeshoe was a chief providing protection to the *difaqane* destitute that came from Sotho, Nguni, San and Khoi communities (Maylam 1989: 115), the *isivivane* and ancestral pit do reveal the cyclical and regenerative embodiment of bodies through time. It is a running stream, a watery hollow, which is also a metaphor for Mqhayi's "the ultimate ford" – the Mendi as a water-gate from where the "death-defiers" rush forth. To Mqhayi, the "proud barbarian" with deep Christian sensibilities, this Xhosa water-bound *isivivane* is both the western grave-stone and altar / baptismal font, and the rock-cairn or mountain towering over the hole in the earth from where the ancestors speak to the living – the Xhosa *uHlanga*-swamp of creation, which was also a pool or river hiding a deep cavern in the earth (Peires 1987: 54-55). Metonymic offshoots of this portal to the ancestral world include the San-Tswana's "Slippery Hills" in Botswana, the home of the spirits (Van der Post 1958: 174-200; 1961: 158) and Ntsuanatsatsi in the Free State, the hole with its overhanging hill, where the first Basotho were born, and where their voices can still be heard (Hall 1987: 48). Since earliest times, cave, rock-face and watery hole in the ground permeate various indigenous cosmologies as instances of the veil that physically separates but spiritually unites the quick and the dead.<sup>320</sup>

This link between the ancestors and the living through the hole in the earth is provocatively written into life by the South African novelist Marguerite Poland in her novel *Shades* (2008), which is set during the time of the South African War of 1899-1902:

'Somewhere here there will be a place where men go to confess the sorrows of their hearts. Perhaps you know of these places yourself? They are ancient things, holes dug in the earth. Crispin saw one with me at Mbokothwe and we stood there a long time together and he placed a stone on an *isivivane* cairn with me. It is where one makes

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<sup>320</sup> See Lewis-Williams (2004a & 2004b), and Van der Post (*The Lost World of the Kalahari*, 1958 & *The Heart of the Hunter*, 1961).

peace with the shades and with God' [...] Without speaking, Benedict picked up a small stone from the ground and walked to the traveller's cairn and stood beside it. There, on the top, another stone had been newly placed. He touched it, saying, 'This is Crispin's.' And then he raised his eyes to the trees and the old rocks and the mountain far beyond and brought them back to rest on Crispin['s corpse lying in the pit, where he committed suicide] and he said in Xhosa as if he were addressing God on his behalf, 'May God and the shades of our fathers walk with us in our hour of need,' and he spat on the stone in his hand and placed it beside the other on the cairn. 'Qamata, siphe amandla' – God give strength to us (423-424,425-426).

In the novel *Crispin*, the white Xhosa, is beset by a "dyadic soul" that oscillates between a consciousness that is "half-heathen and half-mission" (439), and which eventually leads to his untimely death. Similarly, Mqhayi, and other mission-schooled *iimbongi*, are caught within the same schizophrenic dual-consciousness of western and African. For the *imbongi*, this duality has definite neuropsychological implications.

Lewis-Williams (2004a; 2004b: 55-61) has convincingly indicated that water is a metonymic offshoot or sensorial manifestation of the cave or hole in the earth, which is a neuropsychological space in which shamans or traditional healers trance or hallucinate. These shamans also 'become' snakes in order to negotiate these narrow subterranean and watery crevices (Lewis-Williams 2004b: 57). In 1856, the Xhosa prophetess Nongqawuse had the following visionary experience: "One day she returned from the deep pool / With her body quaking like one traumatised. / She fainted and cooed like a pigeon".<sup>321</sup> The *imbongi* of war also acts as a shaman, a spear-like snake, who visits or poetically-orally raises the subterranean or submerged ancestors, and who encourages the warriors to acts of bravery by following the example of the "Chief's brave death-comrades" through war songs – "Do I fear a thing, you chiefs? / Do I fear to pitch down a pit? / Are we concerned by strangers? [...] / Our lightning will thunder and take him".<sup>322</sup> The individual's praise

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<sup>321</sup> *The Cattle-killing*, J.J.R. Jolobe, in Butler & Opland (1989: 55).

<sup>322</sup> *Leave the Royal Chief in Peace!*, M.Q. Cele, tr. Zulu. Early 20<sup>th</sup> century Zulu war song. See Opland (1992: 131)

poem becomes his earthly voice after death, when it is performed by the *imbongi* (Opland 1992: 26). The *imbongi* is a diviner who, in a state of heightened oral-poetic performance, deals in the forces of nature to bring the enemy down. No grave-“pit” or death-“thing” or enemy-“strangers” will stand between the warrior-poet and ultimate victory.

Within the *izibongo* of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the water or underground image is, therefore, an ambiguous mix of traditional African beliefs and enculturated white cosmologies. However, the spiritual predicament of either white or black bodies in a South African context remains the same:

Heaven above, Hell below, and the level of anxious humanity in between appear in one form or another across the globe (Lewis-Williams 2004a: 144).

Neuroscience explains this universally-held neuropsychological hallucinatory experience of sinking down below, or floating up, which is interpreted by the individual consciousness within a specific cultural context (Lewis-Williams 2004a: 101-162; 2004b: 47-48,55-61). The shaman ‘boils’ or trances by taking substances or through meditation, or both. Poetry can also be induced by these means. Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan* is an example of a drug-induced hallucination which led to a creative outpouring of word-images (The Norton 1983: 564-565). Similarly, the turn of the century oral praise poet of the Ngwane Nguni, Msebenzi, smoked hemp, as did many other traditional *imbongi*, to access the cave-like recesses of the mind (Opland 1992: 192). Van der Post (1961: 165-166,227) argues that poetry and art are archetypal spiritual processes of primordial becoming by looking infinity square in the eyes. Lewis-Williams (2004a: 146-147, 289-290) assigns a universal “‘introcasm’” to poetry as it creates meaning through under and above-world and supernatural metaphors, which are metonymically represented by “underwater and underground” or “floating and flying” images; the poet becomes the “Absolute Unitary Being” by deeply contemplating life’s mysteries in a tiered cosmos – those above and below,

and everywhere in between. In essence, the *izibongo* is a prayer which ensures communion with God and the ancestors, and it thus engenders their subsequent protection (Opland 1992: 26-27).

Lewis-Williams (2004a: 101-135) also assigns a more 'rational' or 'scientific' explanation to this mystical and transcendental poetic experience: visions are born in the human nervous system in altered states of consciousness. It is a cave in the mind in whose cavities are echoed the rhythms of life's themes. However, it is not only the "caverns measureless to man" and "deep romantic chasm" through which the river Alph runs "Down to a sunless sea" that are proclaimed by the poet (Lewis-Williams 2004a: 146), but also the "dome in [the] air" (*Kubla Khan*, 46; *The Norton* 1983: 564). Fancy, therefore, resides both in the depths of sea and earth, and in the boundlessness of sky. Mqhayi tries to make sense of the corpses lost at sea by calling on the aerial "heroes" or "death-defiers" (*The Black Army*, V1) of the past to lead the bodies on their watery quest. This is, however, no easy conceptual shift to make:

With the sinking of this ship, the Xhosa people lost their reliable sons;  
but when the name of this chaplain was mentioned among the dead,  
the nation was dealt a grievous blow. Clearly Xhosa himself suffered a  
severe wound, a massive loss, at the setting of this brilliant star of his.

Ow!!!

Nojoli's cry was heard,  
the keening cry of Rharhabe's wife,  
daughter of Nomagwayi of eMbo,  
bemoaning the beauty swept out to sea,  
saying death hadn't claimed them, they were growing in strength!  
Peace, Phalo's people,  
Ngconde's, Butsolobentonga's.  
At times like these a nation despairs.  
Chizama's star has set,

the Xhosa nation's back is broken!  
 The best of stars we took such pride in,  
 the animal cub died while talking,  
 died giving heart, securing his testament!  
 Someone said what an unseemly death,  
 suddenly coming in alien territory,  
 in a strait between two bulls....

(*The Bantu World* 26 Jan. 1935: 4, Opland 107)

In a traditional South African spiritual milieu, the setting star denotes the stopping of the heart, the death of a great hunter. The dead live in both the ground and the sky. The heart or soul turns into a star, and the ghost or spirit lives in the hole in the ground. Within this tiered cosmos, the spirit doctors turn into snakes so that they can travel underground. As snakes, they explore the deep watery tunnels running beneath our feet in search of powerful sorcerers who have died and whose hearts have fallen like stars from heaven. These sorcerers are consulted because of the advice they can give on everyday things (Van der Post 1961; Lewis-Williams 2004a & 2004b). In Mqhayi's *izibongo*, Wauchope is the powerful spiritual leader and hunter-warrior, and Mqhayi acts as the traditional healer who desperately searches for answers. These are essentially the meaning of black sacrifice on the high seas, which does not seem to have led anywhere meaningfully in the sphere of black political rights and psychological emancipation. Through his poetic 'boiling',<sup>323</sup> Mqhayi endeavours to consult Wauchope spiritually so that he may lessen their plight and serve as encourager of his people. Wauchope, who "died giving heart", as a second generation African hero, must lead the Great War warriors on their quest to achieve psychological and political emancipation. Mqhayi is especially qualified to act as 'boiler' or conjurer as his rich performances of *izibongo* led to his audiences' spiritual revival and to his own personal ecstasy:

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<sup>323</sup> A word denoting trance or hallucination in the spiritual framework of the San.

With these words the Nation's Poet boils our blood and enflames our ears so we cannot hear" (Quoted from *The Bantu World* (9 March 1940), in Opland 2009: 9,526). "When he spoke this last word, he dropped his head to his chest. We rose to our feet, clapping and cheering. I did not want ever to stop applauding. I felt such intense pride at that point, not as an African, but as a Xhosa; I felt like one of the chosen people (Nelson Mandela quoted in Opland 2009: 9).

The interchangeable *izibongo* praise-units become the auditory and aural rhythms of the shaman's chanting and dancing. The poet's word-visions and images are therefore drawn from an altered state of consciousness. This is very similar to the shaman's progression through a three-stage hallucinatory experience whereby the senses transcend into an altered reality with concomitant instances of outer-body or metamorphosed bodily experiences (Lewis-Williams 2004b: 56-57,60-61). The praise-units of the *imbongi*, therefore, serve a similar purpose as the geometric patterns of the rock paintings of the shaman, as both depict a deep spiritual and emotional connection to the ancestors and visions that lie beyond the page and behind the rock.

In this vein, Mqhayi ventriloquises Nojoli, the dead wife of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century chief Rharhabe, to conjure Wauchope's ghost aurally and aurally through praise-units. Nojoli confirms that the warriors' hearts have fallen with Wauchope's back to earth: "the beauty swept out to sea" and that "death hadn't claimed them, they were growing in strength!" It is the apotheosised euphemism of the corpse, which is a metaphor for both black disenfranchisement and the veiling of the physical *manqué*. Blacks did not receive the constitutional rights the elite had hoped for by participating in the Great War. The dead were in fact not "growing in strength". Both the physical and socio-political corpse was rotting beyond recognition when this poem was published in 1935. The black-death, Wauchope's and his black countrymen's, is "an unseemly death" that takes place "in alien territory" surrounded by an unknown sea of an even stranger ocean. The apotheosised death, so extolled by the princess Nojoli, is actually an empty echo of

meaninglessness. The indeterminate “Someone” who speaks the *manqué* in the poem is the schizophrenic no-one: Wauchope’s oral poem is in all probability not his; the black socio-political body is emptied of its rights; and the no-thing – the abject corpse, is no-where, or rather imprisoned in the nightmarish prison-maze hell of the Minotaur – the Adamastorian shade, which has metonymically become the body-shell with Alzheimer’s disease. Wauchope’s inheritance is doubtful – both his poetic and political ‘testament’. Even his moral ‘will’ is in doubt, although Mqhayi goes to great lengths to stake a moral claim for his hero:

Go, prince of Chizama's place!  
 You'll be eating porridge with God.  
 We Xhosa people never die,  
 we're judged when the dead arise,  
 death to us is profit and gain,  
 for there we get our strength,  
 for there we get our speed.  
 Go, Chizama, we grant you leave.  
 Never forget us there in the highest.  
 I'm finished!

I'm finished!!

I'm finished!!!”

(*The Bantu World* 26 Jan. 1935:4, Opland 107)

Sad irony and ambiguity also litter this *izibongo*. The first accounts of the spiritual significance of water in a South African context assigned it a regenerative quality. *Dxui*, “the first spirit of Africa”, was also a manifestation of water and a spiritual birthplace (Van der Post 1961: 154,199-200). In Mqhayi’s poem, Wauchope *will join* god because he was a moral man. He *will be* reborn through the water-womb into the presence of god. However, ironically, the Xhosa is only “judged when the dead arise”. But the dead

never arose; Nongqawuse's mid-19<sup>th</sup> century vision of the appearance of new herds of cattle and the rising of the ancestors in the wake of the destruction of Xhosa food-sources led only to more death:

On the way they [Twin, Qukezwa and Heitsi] came across many dead bodies lying on the road. Some of the bodies had not finished dying yet. Their sunken eyes showed a little glimmer of life. Their cracked skin looked like land that had been thoroughly punished by drought [...] Their skin clung desperately to their bones (Mda 2000: 294).

This death and destruction brought about by the 1856-57 Xhosa cattle-killing had a devastating effect on the Xhosa psyche, splitting households and communities between "Believers" (in the prophecies) and "Unbelievers", which Mda (2000) provocatively explores in his novel *The Heart of Redness*. In the novel, the Xhosa bodies are caught in a cycle of misappropriation by their own prophets' empty visions, by the apartheid system and by the economic and political nepotism of modern-day, post-apartheid South Africa. Mqhayi's Mendi-dead essentially also exist in a state of limbo, a purgatory of in-between existence – they are dead, but not yet accepted by god into heaven. In fact, "the bodies had not finished dying yet"; they have been slowly decomposing in their underwater tomb of perpetual circling tides. It represents Dante's hellish wheel – its movement signifies nothing; it is aimless.

Grundlingh (2011; 1987: 139-140) has indicated how the water-grave of the Mendi-dead has been politically desecrated over the years, not allowing them a permanent burial. Their bones have been assembled marionette-like by intellectuals and politicians alike from the 1930s to today. The Mendi myth of African valour has grown significantly since 1994 as the new black government has ventriloquised the death-skull to give voice to the current political discourse in an effort to remember, and re-member, the abject socio-political corpse; this is in direct contrast to the National Party government

that primarily tried to stifle Mendi-day celebrations in an effort to squash African nationalism.<sup>324</sup>

Instances of these exhumations are the fleeting Mendi Memorial Club founded in 1919 to memorize the Mendi disaster, and the 1928 instituted educational fund and annual memorial-day celebrations. More deathly edifices to the sacrifice made by the men on the Mendi include a war monument in France at Arque-la-Bataille near Dieppe, the Mendi-plaque at the Delville Wood memorial on the Somme, the engraving of the names of the fallen on the Hollybrook memorial in Southampton, and various smaller memorials across South Africa (Grundlingh 2011: 21,27), as well as an official country-wide Mendi-Day celebration instituted in 1936 (Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxviii).<sup>325</sup>

Mqhayi's 1935 *izibongo* to Wauchope's heroism on the Mendi was written when black resistance against white discrimination was at its lowest ebb. During the 1930s, the ANC was completely disorganised and toothless (Saunders & Southey 2001: 2, 195). Mqhayi's *izibongo* is, therefore, a desperate call that echoes the then political climate of black near-voicelessness. The abjected living black corpse had become a walking zombie with a severe case of Alzheimer's disease. However, it was Mqhayi's poems that were slowly re-assembling the black socio-political corpse through memorising the dead bodies of the Mendi victims. In addition, the national Mendi Day instituted in 1936<sup>326</sup> provided Mendi veterans with the opportunity to share their wartime experiences (Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxviii). Furthermore, African ex-servicemen associations were formed after the war (Willan 1978: 85), where combat stories between brothers-in-arms could be shared. This poetic and narrative retelling is an essential psychoanalytical process for the reawakening and entrenching of a collective memory.

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<sup>324</sup> See Grundlingh (2011: 21-31).

<sup>325</sup> This process is continuing post-1994 as more recent Mendi memorials, including the Christening of a battleship the *SAS Mendi*, and a Mendi award for exceptional bravery (Grundlingh 2011: 29) have been commemorated.

<sup>326</sup> It seems that Wauchope's role in the Mendi disaster was never mentioned during these national anniversaries; although his heroic deed was referred to in the pre-1936 local memorial celebrations (Opland & Nyamende 2008: xxviii).

In this context, poetry and story-telling becomes an anamnesis; the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung (1875-1961) argues provocatively that the individual psyche is part of a past, present and future collective 'uber-psyche', which is the communal mantra repeated across the centuries, a spiritual anaphora of resurrection and communion (1961: 172-173). Thinking bodies are linked within the history of the collective unconscious from the ancient cave or deep-cellar of the unconscious, to the attic of the conscious (196-199). The unconscious is also part of "the mythic land of the dead, the land of the ancestors" (233-234); it is Jung's "the collectivity of the dead [and living souls]" (233-234), as all bodies, living and dead, are part of the "collective spirit" (116) – an assemblage of silent Thespians (116-117). And the play that is written for these actors taps into the collective soul. Writing, and specifically writing about the dead or dying, such as war poetry, becomes the compilation of a book of the dead. In Jung's case, the uncanny encounter with spirits led to an epiphany of writing, a *numen* of words:

Then it began to flow out of me, and in the course of the three evenings the thing<sup>327</sup> was written. As soon as I took up the pen, the whole ghostly assemblage [of spirits] evaporated. The room quieted and the atmosphere cleared. The haunting was over (232-233).

Writing, therefore, represents an act of catharsis as the memory of the dead is reinstated in the consciousness of the living, and the ancestors are thus appeased. In a traditional African context, *izibongo* writing or oral remembrance also serves as a ritual of reconciliation to re-appropriate ancestral benevolence. According to Jung, all humankind has access to this common ancestor, which refers not only to a common physical archaeological prototype, but also, more crucially, to a common spiritual ancestry or a collective psyche. It is similar to "the shadow [or repressed personality]... whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal

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<sup>327</sup> The *Septem Sermones*.



What if they sleep, when their duty be done. He, them ever guide,  
 He, them remember and know that lie concealed in the tide!  
 O, cruel sea! the day shall ripe when you the Mendi crew must yield,  
 And may we never forget the heroes in the sea sealed!  
 (*Bantu World*, 18 March 1939, published in Couzens & Patel 1991: 101-  
 102)

The warriors' bodies are entombed or "amiss" in an uncanny sea, whose violent spray casts up disturbing images of "chilly winds", "dense fog", and troubling memories of the day "When she sank [...] you and I were sad [...] / [when] We felt something was wrong". It is this "something" that is again completely "amiss". Once more the corpse is hidden in the "dense fog" of metonymically conjured euphemisms. Vague traces of the abject are found in the "dusky glory" that "repose" or "sleep" "on the breast of the British sea". Death, the universal archetype of being and not-being, is "irrepresentable" (Jung 1961: 171, 473) because its vessel, the corpse, is an unfathomable horror (Kristeva 1982). Initially, the sea is a metaphor for a caring mother, but quickly metamorphoses into a vindictive Adamastor-Leviathan, an offshoot of colonial oppression, who has devoured the noble bodies and refuses to regurgitate them.

The only poem on the Mendi written from the other side of the racial divide during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was conceived after the Second World War. In the true 'settler' poetic convention of early 20<sup>th</sup> century South Africa, D.J. Darlow's (1881-1971)<sup>328</sup> The "Mendi" (1951) buries the corpse in Romantic diction:

Quiet sleep and dreams and visions of the night,  
 Sweet memories' pictures and the soaring flight  
 Of fancy; thus they lay with hearts at rest [...]

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<sup>328</sup> D.J. Darlow was born in England, and lectured English in South Africa, where he also later served as a Presbyterian minister (Butler & Opland 1989: 230).

(iv, published in Butler & Opland 1989: 76)

Keats's kind "deceiving elf" who casts his net of fancy over the creative imagination so that life's limitations can be transcended, is also present in Darlow's poem. But "the fancy cannot cheat so well" (Ode to a Nightingale, viii, 73), and the spell is broken. The poetic consciousness in Keats's poem wakes to a sense of forlornness on the disappearance of the nightingale's image, and the soldiers on the Mendi are violently dragged from their peaceful sleep when it collides with another ship.

The dual malevolent and benevolent nature of elves within traditional Germanic folklore and English Medieval poetry, and the water-sprites or 'nixies', who drowned young men with whose beauty they fell in love and who also caused madness (NLEM 1989: 279), would certainly have been known to Darlow, the English literary scholar. In The "Mendi", the elf becomes the thing or *tokoloshe*<sup>329</sup> as a metaphoric presence of the cascading corpse. The sea is a synchronic space that is animated with animism – the monster Adamastor that swallows living souls.<sup>330</sup>

Darlow's sea is a ravenous surging presence, similar to that found in the other poems on the Mendi and in Coleridge's famous sea poem – and the uncanny sea-monster is assembled Frankenstein-like through the natural elements that ominously devour the ship and its crew:

What thunderbolt [...]  
 [...] a monster of the unfathomed deep?  
 [...] In mocking mirth  
 The waves danced round her joyous for the feast.  
 Like ravening wolves from winter's fast released  
 They leap to tear her with their greedy jaws  
 Slavering with hunger [...]

<sup>329</sup> A malevolent dwarf familiar or zombie in the South African indigenous belief-system.

<sup>330</sup> See De Villiers & Coertze (1960: 180, 184) for a discussion on animism in indigenous cultures.

(iv, Butler & Opland 1989: 77)

The Adamastor-imagery in the poem clearly mirrors that of the white poetry on Table Mountain and *Cabo Tormentoso*:

O strange white Sea-Mist,  
 Did the Great One above us weave thee with His fingers  
 To hide His Dark Children?  
 (ii, 76)

Darlow alludes to both the physical and psychological presence of the Adamastor-Leviathan in much the same way that Sir Francis Hastings Doyle (1810-1888)<sup>331</sup> did in his famous heroic poem, The Loss of the Birkenhead<sup>332</sup>, wherein the British troopship bound for the Eastern Cape in 1852 is “devour[ed]” by “a hidden rock” living in “the bloody surf” near Danger Point off Gansbaai in the Western Cape (Butler & Opland 1989: 51-52). The British soldiers stood “in line” on the deck while the women and children on board were disembarking for safety, and they live on as “sleep[ing]” “martyrs” (52, 197). Darlow, therefore, writes in the heroic tradition of the British lore and law of the sea, and could thus easily appropriate his adopted country’s instance of titanic sinking to the Birkenhead tradition.

The Mendi quickly sank in dark and misty weather, and the men drowned in the icy cold water of the English Channel (Grundlingh 2011: 29-30). This historical incident is cloaked in the mist of a dark Africa; the volunteers were black, and the geographical and psychological space from where they originated is also different and, therefore, darkly other. This darkness is all pervasive and even paints the ship in murky hues, as it

<sup>331</sup> He lectured English literature at Oxford University (Butler & Opland 1989: 231).

<sup>332</sup> Another poem that explores this incident in similar heroic terms is The Loss of the Birkenhead, in E.D. Jackson, 1870, *Nugae Lyricae: In Three Parts*: 1-4. Available at: <http://books.google.co.za/books?hl=en&lr=&id=UFMCAAAAQAAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR13&dq=The+loss+of+the+Birkenhead&ots=QMHWorRMfT&sig=34h7pq9EyRz6OrScw8SBbQCZqx0#v=onepage&q=The%20loss%20of%20the%20Birkenhead&f=false>. Accessed: 30 November 2011.

becomes the “monster’s decks”, sailing in a “dark storm”, under which prowls the enemy, a “Creeping, sinister” presence (i,ii, Butler & Opland 1989: 75). Again, Coleridge’s “slimy things” are lured to the surface. The ship’s “foe” is a physical German submarine, and also the uncanny presence of lurking death, which is made even stranger and more threatening because it takes place within the unfathomable sea:

But some were caverned in the vessel ‘s womb,  
 Caverned in darkness as the nether tomb  
 Had burst its ramparts from the vale of life.  
 (iv, 77)

The caves and caverns echo the unreal and terrible Beauty of Romantic poetics: “the caverns measureless to man” (Kubla Khan, 4, 27), shaped in “[...] ragged blocks of savage stone, / [...] [bedecked with] Carved lamps and chalices, and vials which shone / In their own golden beams [...]” (The Witch of Atlas, xx, 203-206), and whose cave-mouths “Charmed magic casements, opening on the foam / Of perilous seas, in faery lands forlorn” (Ode to a Nightingale, vii, 69-70). Darlow emphasises this troubling duality inherent in nature:

Slow were the hours and the cold grew stronger;  
 Slow were the hours and the long night longer;  
 And the mist crept up from the sea  
 Shrouded in wonder.  
                   To thee, O Sea-Mist,  
                   Pray we for safety.  
                   From the foe, lurking,  
                   Creeping, sinister,  
 (ii, 75)

While Mendi slowly laboured from the west

Heavily shrouded by the dreary mist.

(iv, 77)

Even Adamastor is at first called upon to provide safe passage from the thing slithering on the seabed. It is Nature decked out in all its dichotomous “wonder”. In the end, however, it is evident that it is Adamastor’s own tail dragging across the seabed that wraps itself round the Mendi’s ribs to plunge it down into darkness: an obscurity that alludes both to the psychological othering of black bodies and the physical and concomitant oblivion of the historical memory of African wartime sacrifice.

Darlow endeavours to rouse these black bodies from their psychological and physical slumbers. They are the “warrior race” that comes from an Eden of “mountain kloofs”, “stark hill-sides of the watery veld”, “golden pasture”, and “sunshine”. These images contrast markedly with the uncanny and dark watery uncertainty of the sea, which becomes the warrior’s vindictive mother, as she carries them for a second pregnancy in her womb, only to be stillborn. However, the mother-image does include an element of regeneration, as the dead foetus has been resuscitated and grows as the memory of the Mendi mutates in the historical and poetic consciousness of the event. If it were not for their heroic watery death, the names of the Mendi-dead would have merged into the faceless and forgotten casualty lists of the other war-dead.

An offshoot of this mother-metaphor is the image of the Mendi as bride for the African hero. The *impi*’s martial prowess has penetrated her womb, and from this union will grow an African regeneration founded in black pride. But the bride is also violated by the sexual miscreant, the Adamastor-*tokoloshe*. She assumes a very passive feminine role in both yielding to the spear of the African warrior who stands “Silent and firm [...] in the rape / Of life”, and the violation by the well-endowed dwarf familiar as she “sank / Down to her foes the grey waves long and lank” (iv, 77). The drowning men assume a feminine role in the face of the monstrous waves. These waves are

also cobras: another sexual motif with deep spiritual significance in a western and traditional South African cosmology, as discussed earlier. It is not only the bride Mendi that is entered by the phallic symbols, but also the drowning men. This alludes to the powerless political, social and economic position that blacks occupied in apartheid South Africa; like women, they were subjected to the same white phallic paternalism, which assigned them an “impassive” role in society.

Darlow employs a number of zoological metaphors, similar to those found in the traditional *izibongo*, to ‘Africanise’ the moment of death:

As a tall kudu smitten by the spear  
 Stands for a moment wavering, half in fear  
 Half wonder, ere he crumples to the earth,  
 So the Mendi stood [...]  
 (77)

The Mendi is also metamorphosed into a “sea-cow” (i, 75) and “great fish” (ii, 75). The wreck’s regenerative-historical and symbolic importance lies in the cattle metaphor, as cattle were central to the African’s social, economic and spiritual existence.<sup>333</sup> The fish metaphor is more ominous as it alludes to the great sea-monster, or quintessential spiritual and physical destroyer in the Bible.<sup>334</sup> It is also the “great fish” that God sent to punish Jonah for his disobedience, and in whose belly Jonah underwent a spiritual quickening (Jonah 1-2). In this metaphor lies the spiritual awakening of the Mendi dead, who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their sins, just as the cattle of the kraal are slaughtered to attain redemption from the ancestors. The myriad imagery illustrates the ambivalent, dichotomous and ambiguous nature of death, and any effort to come to terms with it.

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<sup>333</sup> During traditional marriages, cattle are given as a gift to the parents of the bride to compensate for the loss of their daughter. Cattle are also the symbol of wealth and status in the African communities and sacrificed to appease the ancestors.

<sup>334</sup> Biblically, the Leviathan is described as the dragon, the snake or the manifestation of Evil – the Devil.

The poet's English literary heritage is evident in the waves-wolves simile. Lycanthropy, or a person's physical and psychological metamorphosis into a ferocious wolf, has been a feature of European folklore for centuries (O'Donnell 1912; NLEM 1989: 277). These werewolves inhabit "desolate and isolated regions" of the earth (O'Donnell 1912: 7). Darlow, who was born and educated in England, thus could easily make the conceptual shift from werewolf wasteland to surreal sea. Similarly, the poet, a naturalised South African, could tap into the traditional South African context, wherein evil conjurers and witches are believed to be able to change into animal form, or use beasts of the veld as "familiar" (De Villiers & Coertze 1960: 190) to do their evil bidding. Significantly, these European carnivores' ferociousness and diabolical nature are amplified by their severe winter habitat. However, although their "naked claws / of Death" (iv, 77) do suggest images of nature's cruelty, the nature symbols can never approximate the abject abhorrence of the corpse's blow to the senses. Death in nature implies regeneration in the great food-cycle: the corpse's end is mere wastefulness.

The closest approximation of the full horror of violent death comes near the end of the poem as "The icy waters [...] / [...] o'er the brown limbs slip / [...] like cobras sting / The tortured flesh and their venom fling / Into their eyes" (77). But the true physical and psychological implications of 'corpsification' are not fully explored as the poetic diction again ascends into euphemisms of immortality: "Yet uncomplainingly / They grimly strove with Death" (77). The victims are not dead, as their sacrifice has sealed their eternal life:

[...] with courage free  
 They fought. "'Tis this we came for. Men, be strong,"  
 One cried, "Ha! Madoda! no weak throng  
 Of children we!" And one with gleaming smile  
 Laughed at the waters and their foggy guile:  
 "'Tis nothing yet," he boasted. So to death

They went, six hundred Africans; no breath  
 Of cowardice besmirched their sacrifice.  
 With oozy lips they murmured: "Now, O Christ."  
 Six hundred Africans before the astonished world  
 Flaunted a banner that shall not be furled.  
 (iv, 77)

In the tradition of the white war poetry of the Great War, the dead are made beautiful and smilingly leap to their deaths – only in death is everlasting life possible; the apostrophe in the third last line establishes a communion between the living Christ, and the drowned souls. However, the corpse is still slithering beneath the rhyme. The "oozy lips" that have to establish this holy communion with Christ actually ooze the abject thing:

[...] let them rot, stink, ooze, end up in the sewer [...] fertilize the fields!  
 [...] the true sense of History [...] and what we've come to! jumping this way!  
 [...] whoops! and that way! [...] the death dance! impalements!  
 purges! vivisections! [...] twice tanned hides, smoking [...] spoiled,  
 skulking voyeurs, let it start all over again! guts ripped out by hand!  
 let's hear the cries, the death rattles [...] a national orgasm! (Kristeva 1982: 153)

Here, in a section on "Suffering and Horror" during the Second World War, Kristeva quotes from Louis-Ferdinand Celine's *Rigadoon* (1974). Darlow's "oozy lips" do create vile cascading images of decomposing bodies, including those of the Nazi concentration camps, whose abject history he surely must have been aware of by 1951 when the poem was written. The use of the word "besmirched" in the poem now loses its almost harmless abstract quality and is bloated by the horrific meaning of piles of Auschwitz-corpses stacked in mountains of rotting flesh.

This 'globalisation' of suffering was evident in the soldier-poets of the Second World War who were more interested in the wider impact of international politics and concerns in war (Adey 1976: 49, 54). Darlow seems

to be writing in this tradition and assigns the African heroes a global stage in the era of decolonisation. However, he does not seem to support this process of independence wholeheartedly as he still cloaks the Mendi sacrifice as one made for English king and settler country. In a traditional *izibongo* within the poem, the Africans sing the king of England's praises in archetypal nature metaphors: "the Bull of the High Veld", "The Lord of the Herd", "the Chief of the Ranges", "the Giver of Rain-clouds", etc. Their sacrifice is, therefore, affirmed in a wider context of the fight against evil and un-English totalitarianism; their wartime colours hang perpetually in the great hall of martial and empire fame. Darlow is desperately trying to give death and black sacrifice a meaning, or rather a surface-certainty. He subsequently clings to the veracity of the death-drill incident as he clearly alludes to Wauchope's heroic *izibongo* in the last stanza.

Forty years later, this "death dance" is again appropriated, although more figuratively, in a volume entitled *Mendi: Poems on the Sinking of the Mendi* by Cathal Lagan, Basil Somhlahlo, and Brian Walter (1994). It "represents the response by three poets working at the University of Fort Hare to a challenge from Hilary Graham [the artist] to write about the Mendi disaster" (Introduction). The period from the 1950s to the early 1990s in South Africa's history was an epoch of cataclysmic upheavals – from the National Party's entrenchment of segregation in the form of apartheid, to the ANC's armed resistance and subsequent liberation from this system in 1994. The memory of the Mendi dimmed during this period, as the ethnically obsessed apartheid government did not want to be reminded that blacks fought side by side with whites during two wars and "actively discouraged" Mendi Day celebrations as instances of racial integration (Grundlingh 2011: 26-27). As a result, the Mendi all but disappeared from the collective memory. Globally, from the 1950s, 'third world' colonies also received their independence, mostly violently. In the process, the west as pillar of stability and righteousness was gradually eroded at its base. The 1994 *Mendi* collection of poems is subsequently less heroic and much more sober than Darlow's narrative ode,

and consciously builds on the Mqhayi tradition. The reawakening of the Mendi-memory was initialised in Norman Clothier's book on the history of the sinking of the Mendi, entitled *Black Valour* (1987), and Hilary Graham's "Mendi" exhibition, which represents "the most comprehensive pictorial monument to the disaster" (*Mendi* 1994: Introduction). Similarly, the poetry in the 1994 collection endeavours to provide a landfall of remembrance for the forgotten Mendi dead:

## I

They danced from home  
 to that old rhetoric  
 of the pipe and drum,  
  
 the songs of war,  
 liberties won  
 with victory, the free world,  
 and dignities to come,  
  
 but instead their homes  
 were pressed under  
 the hard laws of  
 the Union's skeletal thumb,  
  
 and they died  
 a million miles away,  
 dancing to the watery thump  
 of death's ironic drum.

## II

The waters over the ship  
 have not yet closed:

as we peer in  
and see those men dancing  
in the vortex of time

we are drawn down, down  
to stamp with them in death  
our feet upon the decks  
of all history's listing ship,

to affirm with them  
the brave free world  
they dreamed to win.

(Landfall – Songs and Dances, Brian Walter, 3-4).

The landing in this poem and in the others in the collection is euphemised as a spiritual connection within the collective South African psyche. The bodies are hidden deep beneath the alien sea, in far-away waters, but the Mendi's soul, if not fully salvaged, is being resurrected in memory:

She lies five fathoms deep,  
a hemisphere from home [...]
   
[where]
   
A drowned heart awash with salt [...]
   
hears all day the seabird wail

of curlew and cormorant,  
seagull and tern,

and longs for the homely hadedah,  
korhaan or kelkiewyn<sup>335</sup>.

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<sup>335</sup> These are all indigenous South African birds.

(Landfall - "the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them",  
8,10)

Their spirits need the landfall  
of home honour: souls straying  
above the cresting foam  
seek a footing in the hearts  
of the living, and long to rest  
in the roost of an earth-nest.

*The Mendi dead are mewes today  
that cry upon the sea.*

(9)

The soul of the Mendi has sprouted wings to soar above the abject  
rotting on the seabed:

[...] Fish  
and eel, mussel and seaweed  
have wrought their change:  
rust has drained her metal  
into the seabed. Her dead  
are unconstituted, sinews  
and bones have unbecome;  
fears, fossilized  
in the salted air, echo  
alone in seabirds' cries;  
sorrow and longing  
thermal the sea-crests.

(8)

It is the death-cry of Wauchope that wings above the waves like a seabird, whose song is heard and remembered:

May breaking waves of song  
raise their sea spirits, and praise  
the earth-salt dead  
(Landfall - Sacrifice, 11)

The cyclical nature of existence and that of the Mendi's memory is proclaimed:

A foot lifted to stamp  
in dance upon the earth  
rings the round of life,  
  
from birth which raises  
to death that pounds  
us back into our land,  
  
pounds a person into  
the communality of sand,  
as women crush grain  
for bread or beer:

let us dance and pound  
the grain of being into  
death's lively ferment,  
where seeds are crushed  
to feed yeasts, and swell  
ancestral sacred bread:

let us raise knees  
 and spirits, stamp feet  
 down and claim  
 our living ground.

(Landfall - Mendi Death Dance, 6)

The quick and the dead dance to the death-drill of time, which is a never-ending cycle of becoming. It is the *Mandala*, the “magic circle” or “psychological View-finder”, which is the psychic instrument of centring the individual within a chaotic cosmos (Jung 1961: 478-479). This symbol of centring is universal, and is also found in the indigenous South African cosmology.<sup>336</sup> The Mendi dead have risen like the grain or seeds from earth, which rise as yeast, to feed the living and the dead in a communion of bread and beer – the “ancestral sacred bread”. This new becoming echoes the “*ubuntu*” and “*uhuru*” - freedom in a collective brotherhood:

great bravery was busy  
 round lifeboat and raft,

Brotherhood welled from  
 depths of sinking hearts,

ubuntu broke all rank,  
 language, race and class.

Help and prayer moved  
 upon the watery dark

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<sup>336</sup> This cyclical representation of time is also explored in Zakes Mda’s novel *The Heart of Redness* (2000), which seamlessly ‘jumps’ between the Xhosa cattle-killing, the apartheid era, and post-apartheid South Africa by employing the universal themes of prophesy and religion.

as struggle found the fine  
 democracy of the drowning,

and the brave new  
 uhuru of humanity

in death.

(Landfall – After the collision, 15)

The poem alludes to the fact that both black and white died together on the ship. There is historical proof that white officers and black conscripts tried to save each other while the Mendi was sinking. One of the white officers who survived the ordeal affirmed that “Could everything that occurred that night be told, it would be a record of undying fame for our South African natives” (Quoted in Grundlingh 1987: 94). Another survivor, Captain L.E. Hertslet, claimed that the black soldiers acted heroically in the face of death (Grundlingh 1987: 93-94). Mqhayi (*The Bantu World*, 1935) poetically confirms “that the young men of your country worked wonders in that crisis, wonders in rescuing large numbers of white men who were their superiors, and lost their own lives in saving others!” (Quoted in Opland & Nyamende 2008: 408). Although instances of heroism may have been inflated, the window of opportunity was left open for blacks to climb through and be accepted as equals, as Sol Plaatje’s novel *Mhudi* (1920) also envisioned.<sup>337</sup> However, the Mendi disaster did not bring white and black closer together, as racial oppression was further entrenched after 1918.<sup>338</sup> Brian Walter’s Shipwreck

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<sup>337</sup> There are interesting correlations between Plaatje’s novel and Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*. Both depict possible black-white reconciliation within a cyclical representation of history (See Mda (2000) and Attwell 1999: 282-283).

<sup>338</sup> H.W. Stump, the captain of the Darro who rammed the Mendi through “gross incompetence or criminal neglect”, was only leniently dealt with by the English Court of Inquiry into the Mendi’s sinking. The Mendi disaster was also quickly forgotten by the Union government. Grundlingh (1987: 94-96) argues that these negations of black suffering could have been part of the trend at the time to abject the black body as a racially inferior object.

paints the sinking of the Mendi as a metaphor for the sinking void of black sacrifice and political rights:

[...]  
 then dreams of docking  
 victorious at a Cape  
 of colour liberty, right  
 and dignity, of a *grondwet*<sup>339</sup>  
 built of consensus and stone  
 slid into the watery night:  
 a world of possibility  
 built deep in the heart  
 buckled and split apart.  
 (5)

Basil Somhlahlo echoes this "silence" in action, which leads to "silence in death" (On Battles Never Fought "And Glories Never Earned", 27). The African soldiers on the Mendi, the "short horn bulls", who could not carry weapons, died as heroes. In the poem, the modern day and armed "War veteran" proclaims his heroism, which is dubious at best. The Mendi's heroic silence is in stark contrast to the loud lies of the self-proclaimed heroes of the revolution.<sup>340</sup> Another irony that is alluded to in the poem is that many of the African "short horn bulls" of the two world wars were despised by their progeny for being traitors and lackeys of the whites. Their voices were, therefore, silenced. The ultimate sacrifice for freedom, as reflected in the Mendi, has been made base through present-day self-aggrandisement and self-enrichment:

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<sup>339</sup> Constitution.

<sup>340</sup> Two *Umkhonto we Sizwe* (MK) veterans "indicate that there was a major crisis in the organisation [ANC] in the late 1970s and 1980s [...] It was ironic that this [torture and murder of MK recruits by MK camp administrators in Angola] was happening within a political organisation that was waging a liberation struggle to stop this very form of behaviour in South Africa where apartheid policemen held the power of life and death over black people" (Bopela & Luthuli 2005: 177). MK was the armed wing of the ANC.

[...]

The present is for sale  
 For buyers big and small  
 In colours all we strive  
 To make the tape in Time.

God rebuked of Man,  
 The world is for sale.

(The Cock Cries Thrice The Night is At Three, 28)

But there is still hope in redemption through black self-affirmation:

[...] *Mendi* live

With men of fame and valour  
 So black, so short, so brave  
 The crew of *Mendi* live  
 (29)

And this process of winning back the dignity of the abjected black body has its roots firmly in the African literary past:

Salute the brave  
 That sank with the *Mendi*  
 Unflinching heroes  
 That went down proud  
 Says Mqhayi  
     The Laureate of Azania.  
 What can we say!!!  
 (31)



Brian Walter's initial poems share this sense of loss, but again in After Collision, the final poem in Walter's series on the Mendi, the optimism in a future rainbow nation is reaffirmed, which may very well be realised after the miracle of *ubuntu* and *uhuru* of 1994. Walter's poetic voice gives abject instances of South Africa's racially divided past to emphasise the desirability of such a new-found humanity:

[...]

But an act of fate swirled  
us into an unearthly  
grave of eternal exile

where we have suffered  
a change into symbol  
and encompass  
all the land bereft:

those at home who in fact  
suffered that umbilical theft  
of the unholy Land Act.

(Landfall - Land Act, 2)

The Natives Land Act of 1913, which is referred to in the poem, accelerated a process of the expropriation of land owned by blacks, which had already started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Saunders & Southey 2001: 102). However, the new political dispensation of the 1990s ushered in a policy of land restitution. Like the Mendi dead, who are being resurrected in memory, the living black body is reclaiming a foothold on the African soil. Like the black political exiles who returned after 1994, the Mendi dead are also returning:

[...]

to be raised and praised  
 when the Apartheid leviathan  
 is finally beached.

(Landfall - "the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them", 7)

The past's Adamastor-Leviathan - apartheid - however, has cascaded into the timeless conundrum, which is the abject corpse. Brian Walter and Basil Somhlahlo go to great lengths to euphemise the thing. In "the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them" (7-9) the corpses "have unbecome" and are now "unconstituted", and have resurfaced as aerial spirit-souls. The corpse is now the "drowned" and "sea-swept heart" (10), and "the earth-salt dead" (Sacrifice, 11). They are hidden as death takes place "in the undersea dark" (African Quest, 13). Somhlahlo uses the "belching sea" "monster" or "beast" to swallow the Mendi dead (The Cock Cries Thrice the Night Is at Three, 29; Medi-Mendi, 30,31) - to hide the horror from view. In Not Alone (30), a spell is cast so that the zombie dead do not return:

Sisters of disaster  
*Mendi* Nongqause  
 Nongqause *Mendi*  
 Forever buried  
 In never-never land,  
 Don't come back.

It is a timeless cycle of unbecoming that the poetic voice exorcises - the 19<sup>th</sup> century Xhosa cattle-killing, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century black wartime sacrifices. Neither of these led to any political gains, but only to the seemingly abject loss of life and dignity. The vile corpses - symbols of this Loss - are banished to a place of nowhere, a "never-never land" of no-place, where, forever, the abject, the never-thing - the corpse and its PTSD and Alzheimer infested brain - will



the same way that the South Africans of 1994 felt betrayed by their leaders' perceived selfish political manoeuvring and inability to stop the abject violence.<sup>343</sup> South Africans of the early 1990s were caught in a cycle in which living bodies were tortured, torched, shot, stabbed and hacked to pieces. The shipwrecked Mendi is a potent metaphor for this abjectification of bodies that are lost and forgotten beyond the abyss of "Lands End"; and it is also a metonymic offshoot for the violence of apartheid and the sea. The sea is personified as the Adamastor-Leviathan of *Cabo Tormentoso*, and the Wild Coast of the Transkei, where so many crews have perished from the sixteenth century onwards (Van Wyk Smith 1998).

The memories on the Mendi are truly mutating (Grundlingh 2011) as its meaning is being mended in various ways, i.e. Brian Walter's *ubuntu* and *uhuru*:

[...]

But we danced at last as warriors,  
to show death our earthly best  
before swirling in the whirligig  
of time, where we still turn  
in currents of change. The liberty  
we sought was a whirlpool, our lot,  
a sinking ship: our task, our death.

But we became all people: we are  
the skeletal dance of war, the ivory  
of sacrifice, the slavery of race,  
the sunken gold of liberty:  
we have turned into your quest.

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<sup>343</sup> Many right-wing whites felt betrayed by the white National Party government's 'sellout' to the 'communist' ANC, and some of the African Homelands and the Zulu Inkatha Freedom Party bitterly opposed the majority ANC. The early 1990s was a particularly violent era in South Africa's history with political murders and rape an almost daily occurrence (See Morris 2004: 244-262).

(African Quest, 14)

Basil Somhlahlo also employs poetry as the mender of meaning:

But we are

like the present

Blind witnesses

To the expected future

(The Cock Cries Thrice The Night Is At Three, 28)

and:

The beast that swallowed *Mendi*

Lingered long in memories young

Old men took turns

To tell the story to the young [...]

(Medi-Mendi, 30)

Walter's and Somhlahlo's poems remember, but it is Cathal Lagan's Meditations on the Mendi that most closely appropriates the fractured nature of the *izibongo* through his stream-of-consciousness poetic remembrance of the *Mendi*. His praise-bits indicate that the words and songs remembering the *Mendi* dead are slippery unstable corpses themselves – poststructuralist nothings:

There is no more to be said

That which was, and was dead, is dead,

No more to be said. (16, 18, 20,23,26)

There is no reaching out, no empathy

With the dead, they are alone,

We gaze at their sea like cattle from a field  
 Seeing NADA, for nature is itself,  
 And the sea, overwhelming, metaphorless,  
 Delights in heaving alleluias of nameless praise  
 To its own mystery, or it is  
 A dull polder of possibilities  
 Where anything or nothing might happen.

(18)

The sea, a shell of nothingness, whose watery substance is also everywhere inside living things, is an ideal tomb for the no-thing corpse, which permeates everything and anything that it touches. The poet's meditative words echo the silence of their deaths through pastiche-writing that transgresses into various metaphors, which in themselves are empty signifiers of the empty sea:

[...]

Water is slippery ground for the poet,  
 Whose swan-like presence hides  
 The awkward tread of urgent feet,  
 Yet we dive again into depths  
 As dark as their imagined graves  
 And find the wreckage of mystery  
 Eluding our word probes,  
 For they move in time's slow baptism  
 Of all desire, and we who would attempt  
 To prosper by our art to raise them up  
 Are unaware of what they mean.

(20)

Their historical death has no stable meaning. It is a poststructuralist subjectivity. The only 'real' meaning lies in "this moment" (20), when the artist:

[...]  
 Toying, testing and changing  
 The brush tip of truth,  
 Getting it right this once  
 That is never right again, nor the same,  
 For each brush flick, once and once, once... once,  
 Can never be again, nor be the same  
 For there is nothing stable here  
 On this mountain tip of time [...]  
 (19)

But the never-ending journey or moment of discovery is what gives existence, and the Mendi sacrifice, meaning:

May no false sighting obviscate  
 Or cast a shadow on the voyage we undertake  
 As we journey North to confront the South,  
 Not among ancient ruins and acid rain,  
 Nor in the granite light of Ionian isles,  
 But through the ironies of this history,  
 At this time of turning  
 And being turned,  
 For what was, and was dead, is dead.  
 There is no more to be said.  
 (26)

It is both a historical and psychological quest to reassemble the fractured corpse of a common South African psyche: a collective consciousness that is haunted by “a dark albatross / Circling the shores of our own countree!” (25) – an ominous presence of something that cannot be known but only experienced.

The poststructuralist “brush flick” that has drawn the *Mendi* “NADA” in most horrid outlines is that of Kelwyn Sole on his word-canvas The Beaching of the ‘Mendi’. In this word-painting, the nightmarish oozing of body parts become ‘real’ or nearly real – momentarily – in a macabre “death dance”. He probes the recent spewing out of the Mendi corpse on a South African beach. This birth of the near-thing came to pass on the eve of the first democratic elections held in South Africa in 1994. Kelwyn Sole’s<sup>344</sup> poem is a conception of an uncanny gestation period which concludes in a nightmare birth. The water breaks on the beach scene of white and black bodies, who have just recently been reinstated in ‘white’s only’ public places, uncomfortably holidaying together at the sea, dogs defecating on the sand, and women sunbathing – “turning near-naked torsos / spitted on the sun”. The uncanny spewing quickly turns to full-out horrific retching as Adamastor’s vomit seeps into the sand of the crowded beachfront in the form – or non-form – of body parts:

suddenly all notice

a shape indistinct  
among the waves

at first can’t see

so pick up hot

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<sup>344</sup> Kelwyn Sole lectures English at the University of Cape Town (De Kock & Tromp 1996: 326-327).

sunglasses lazily

then jump up

scream, slip, and run

in panic run

on a newly deserted beach

bobbing from the waves

a hand claws

slowly up the sand

spidering its fingers

a flesh-flayed foot drags

leg and hip

ribs a marimba for the wind

ears separate

grotesque sea shells

the bones complain

shudder and rattle

at last home free

talking fragments

multiply to multiply

strive to rebuild their life

upon the shore

a head with absent eyes

rolls and rolls and rolls

inside the wind

wonders how it will come to rest

(De Kock & Tromp 1996: 269-271)

The poststructuralist nightmare has come home; blacks are now 'free' in a democratic and new South Africa, but the emaciated bones still rattle with loss; the body parts have come home, but are still fragmented: an incongruous assemblage of parts, a post-traumatic nightmare. Political freedom has not led to economic, social and psychological emancipation - the black corpse is still abjected through poverty, violence, nepotism and xenophobia. Psychological and physical loss is metaphorically expressed through the abject corpse.

Grundlingh (2011: 28-29) indicates that even today the *Mendi* dead are not allowed to rest as their remains are being appropriated by modern-day politicians. Its sacrifice has become part of "a national orgasm!" (Kristeva 1982: 153) of heroism which is being verbally spilt to appropriate African history as equalling or even eclipsing that of whites. The "death dance!" is part of the political "purges" and "vivisections" of the Truth. It is, however, the poetry, together with sober historical reinterpretations of the past, which captures the inherent and collective doubt that is artificially buried by grandiose renditions of the past.

Then again, these 'sober' interpretations are made primarily by white historians and poets. The abjected black corpse is rising Lazarus-like, and only by asserting its right as an *imbongi* can it reassert its humanity and fill the political and psychological void with praise songs.

To commemorate the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the demise of the *Mendi* Leviathan, Lindiwe Mabuza, the South African High Commissioner in

London, wrote “a lament”, the SS Mendi, as an *izibongo* for the remembrance ceremony held on 21 July 2007:<sup>345</sup>

Ninety  
 Long years  
 Bold young bones  
 Long buried  
 By History  
 Lay restless  
 In the tomb  
 Of foreign waters

Long  
 Very long decades  
 Our warrior spirits  
 Unbound  
 Craved to journey home  
 Yet remained hovering  
 With a massive ache  
 Amongst carefree  
 Seagulls  
 Floating  
 Over this unsteady  
 Burial site  
 Forever fluid  
 In climate most  
 Hostile

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<sup>345</sup> As part of the ceremony, which was organized by Mabuza, a wreath was put to water off the Isle of Wight. Kennedy. M. 2007. Available at: [http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=345:africans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330](http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=345:africans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330). Accessed: 9 January 2013; originally published in the *Mail and Guardian*, 21 July 2007, ‘Ninety years on, South Africa salutes 600 men left to drown in channel’.

In seasons  
Especially harsh  
To faces of the South  
To sons of the sun

Ninety  
Long years  
Your rite of passage  
Nipped at infancy  
Could never flower  
Hankering for deliverance  
Your communal voice  
Could not be heard  
Silenced by deception  
Stifled by  
Educated cover-ups  
Through the length  
Of the longest journey  
That has brought us  
To these shores  
Of your harrowing end  
To hear again  
Your anguish  
Break  
Through all waters barriers  
With a heart-searing  
A heart-tearing  
Dirge  
That even now  
Rises from ancient seabeds  
Scathingly

Mount on backs  
Of Seathings  
Uncaring  
Along the crest  
Of swollen waves  
Forever swelling

Six hundred plus  
Young  
Male  
Voices  
Chorus  
One African  
Plaintive  
Hum  
That rises with each wave  
In harmony  
With rumours of  
New life  
Taking firm root  
In the land of your birth  
In alliance  
With all that is young and good  
And the present of peace  
You bought us  
With your undying love

Because we have  
Rediscovered our memory  
Because we have  
Recovered our souls

We can now hear  
These sacred voices  
In all our tongues  
When they pierce  
Through our amnesia  
Shock our consciences  
Into conscious  
Recall  
Of every soul  
Lost in these wildernesses  
Bed [sic] us to  
Reclaim  
Each mother's son  
Whose coffin is  
A ship  
Each unsung hero  
Forgotten in  
The cold French soil  
At Dieppe  
Or amongst the trees  
Of Delville Wood  
All enriching foreign lands  
With each drop  
Of precious life

It is a prayer  
To bow before  
These child-heroes who  
Though long gone  
And deleted in history  
Continue to bless

Listen  
 To the music of the birds  
 When united in their freedom  
 Lend melodious notes  
 And sweet rhythms  
 To the motion  
 Of such eloquent waters  
 With endless tales  
 Of the English Channel  
 Whose greed swallowed  
 All  
 Alive  
 Then belched them  
 Dead  
 On  
 Some icy  
 Ocean  
 Floor  
 Here  
 At the cemetery of the brave  
 All aboard  
 The doomed  
 SS Mendi  
 (16th July 2007)<sup>346</sup>

The poem echoes the "Hum", which is the same as the "Ow", "Oh", "O", "Ah", "Alas" and "Nada" reverberating in the body of poetry on the Mendi. It represents the apostrophe of absence. It is very much a modernist musical string, similar to the hollow 'boum' that resonates in the cave of E.M. Forster's *A Passage to India* (1924). Both signifier and signified in the cave

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<sup>346</sup> Available at: <http://www.delvillewood.com/poems.htm>. Accessed: 6 November 2012.

descend into a no-sound or no-thing (Gillie 1983: 145,146). This is the 'Big O' in *King Lear* signifying emptiness and nothingness. The 'O' is the "swollen" and "swelling" Mendi corpse-spirits in Mabuza's *izibongo* that are "hovering" and "Floating" in the "unsteady" and "fluid" water-cave of the strange sea. Significantly, this "Hum" has deep roots in the Xhosa collective unconscious and psyche. It tolls out in Ntsikana's early 19<sup>th</sup> century hymns, which have persisted as popular and influential choral church music to this day (Opland 1992: 109-112). It is still ringing in Michael Huna's 'modern' poem The Death of Ntsikana (Butler & Opland 1989: 87-89), and Guy Butler's Ntsikana's Bell (Chapman 2002: 144-147).

In Ntsikana's Ntsikana's Bell and Round Hymn, the "Ahom", and "Hom, homna" are repeated as an amen-mantra in the calling out to God's children. This is similar to Forster's literary summons of 'OM', Brahma, the Hindu Creator in *A Passage to India* (Gillie 1983: 146), in implying the interconnectedness of absence and presence through the use of the seemingly 'nonsense' or 'no-sense' word 'boum'. Similarly, Mabuza can call on the Mendi dead through a prayer-hymn to rise from the alien seabed, and to take hold of the South African consciousness because apartheid, the Adamastor-Destroyer of their memory, has been slain. The Mendi dead's communal chorus can at last be heard as it "rises with each wave" above the dying roar of the Leviathan. It is a structuralist binary as " [...] absence implies presence, absence is not non-existence [...]" (Forster 1957: 175). The one can only be known through the other.

There are definite elements of doubt inherent in Mabuza's publicly stated optimism that bodies may yet be recovered from the wreck: "Their souls are not sitting well in the English Channel, and ours are not very healthy as long as we do not do what is right, what is necessary. If we don't tell and retell their story, they would definitely have died in vain."<sup>347</sup> Where

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<sup>347</sup> Kennedy, M. 2007. Available at: [http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=345:africans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330](http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=345:africans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330). Accessed: 9 January 2013; originally published in the

poetry and remembrance ceremonies recover the memory of souls and spirits of the dead, they cannot salvage the physical remains of the dead, the ritualistic act of bringing the “Bold young bones” home to attain psychological closure. Only archaeology can achieve this. The Mendi has been caught in a deluge of ‘trench archaeology’ hype that has swept over England in recent years. Made for television documentaries, like the History Channel’s *Trench Detectives*, that endeavour to recover the silent voices of the dead through the physical reconstruction of trench artefacts and human remains. British archaeologists from *Wessex Archaeology* are planning to map and photograph the wreck site. However, the archaeologist John Gribble, who has conducted the archaeological desk-based assessment on the Mendi for Wessex Archaeology, is less optimistic that bodies will be recovered, as the Atlantic would have scattered the vast majority – and possibly all – the corpses beyond salvage.<sup>348</sup> This doubt is also expressed in the official *SS Mendi Archaeological Desk-based Assessment* report (Wessex Archaeology 2007).<sup>349</sup>

The Mendi today is seen as a symbol of possible reconciliation between South Africans of different races, and between South Africa and the UK, after the ravages wrought by colonialism.<sup>350</sup> Ironically, the main drives to survey the physical wreck of the Mendi have emanated from the UK. However, in recent times the South African Government has indicated that it wants to appraise the physical state of the wreck.<sup>351</sup>

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*Mail and Guardian*, 21 July 2007, ‘Ninety Years on, South Africa Salutes 600 Men left to Drown in Channel’.

<sup>348</sup>[http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=345:af-ricans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330](http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=345:af-ricans-drowned-in-the-british-isle-of-wight-in-1917&catid=140:newsworthy&Itemid=330); Accessed 9 January 2013; originally published in the *Mail and Guardian*, 21 July 2007, ‘Ninety Years on, South Africa Salutes 600 Men left to Drown in Channel’.

<sup>349</sup> Available at: <http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/files/projects/ss-Mendi/ssMendiReport.pdf>; Accessed: 6 November 2012.

<sup>350</sup> See Wessex Archaeology (2007: 41,44-45); and *South African Government Statement Signals Renewed Interest in the Wreck of the SS Mendi*. Blog posted 18 June 2012. Available at: <http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/blogs/news/2012/06/18/south-african-government-statement-signals-renewed-interest-wreck-ss-mendi>, Accessed: 10 January 2013

<sup>351</sup> The wreck has been officially recognised by the UK as a war grave and subsequently been protected against looting that had taken place since the 1970s. Currently, further research on the Mendi is being conducted by South African and British researchers, assisted by Wessex Archaeology. However, no funds are currently available to commence with an archaeological exploration of the Mendi. *South African Government Statement Signals Renewed Interest in the*

In the spirit of Ntsikana's message of "co-existence with the whites" (Opland 1992: 109), and co-operation between white and black, Mabuza advocates harmony between black and white as she also calls on the white heroes of Delville Wood in her *izibongo*. Significantly "it is the wreck itself that provides the physical and cultural link or 'portal' between 21st century society and the story of the Mendi. Without this physical link, the cultural significance of the Mendi is likely to be much reduced" (Wessex Archaeology 2007: 37). Similarly, the wreck will most probably come to represent the communal body of the African warrior, as the individual corpses are lost in the vortex of the vast seas. Crucially, it is the poetry that serves as the psychological and emotive 'portal' between the quick and the dead:

SS Mendi, our fallen heroes  
 We come here today  
 To commemorate February 21, 1917  
 Celebrate your bravery  
 Hails for your courage

SS Mendi, our fallen heroes  
 Our courtesy visit  
 Is also to acknowledge  
 The mighty Mendi name  
 To understand its origin

SS Mendi, our fallen heroes  
 We're visiting your resting place  
 To connect and accept the event  
 For blessing and guidance  
 Through the deep blue seas

SS Mendi, our fallen heroes

We bid you farewell

In accepting our call

To guide the Mendi name

Aluta continua [the struggle continues]

(Our Fallen Heroes, Petty Officer Mpho Rakoma, recited at the memorial wreath laying for the SS Mendi by the *SAS Mendi* on 23 August 2004)<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Available at: <http://www.delvillewood.com/poems.htm>. Accessed: 6 November 2012.

## Conclusion

The South African war poetry of the Great War represents a vertical literary mast, to which are attached metaphors and metonyms of signification, in endeavouring to rise above a horizontal nightmare space of psychological and physical loss. Christ, bird, the transcendental visions of African vistas, fauna and flora, and barrack-room *lingua* are the symbols of regeneration in a no-man's-land of death, destruction and utter wastage. Additionally, the moon doubles as night-nurse, who covers the corpse in darkness, and as poetic muse, who pours forth floral word-bouquets onto the soldier's grave.

These flights of fancy also include the effusion of sanitised blood, spilling from the Christ-soldier's wounds, to bind the beautiful dead in a peaceful apotheosised sleep. It is essentially an eroticised sleep where warriors lie together after an orgasm of blood.

The African nature topos is a powerful vision that partly transcends ugly death. Bush, desert, sea, cattle and springbok evoke images of home comforts, known and loved spaces, which rise above wartime circumstance.

However, in German South-West Africa and German East Africa, Adamastorian nature becomes an alien space that psychologically feeds on the mind and body of the soldier. The only way of escape is through satirical irony and wit.

In transferring the Romantic 'faerie lands forlorn', European satire, irony and wit, barrack-room ballads and cockneyisms to the African bush, and then superimposing these on the far off battlefields, the *manqué* still remains present in its absence, an all pervasive psychological presence that finds a useful metaphorical ally in the form of Adamastor, the Titan of the Cape.

In trying to hide the *manqué*, South African war poets have created a uniquely South African version of the Romantic Nature lyric, in which nature and sea become a matrix of Old England and New Africa. However, both land and water represent a psychological landscape of othering and abjection.

The indigenous *izibongo* of war also utilise nature metaphors and metonyms to hide the corpse. Animal images are used to re-represent the slippery poststructuralist *manqué*. The water-womb of the Mendi especially suggests cascading representations of the corpse that has a timeless quality. However, the *izibongo's* more fluid structure of interchangeable meaning-units makes it possible for the poet to displace, and replace, the *manqué* from physical view; however, it still hovers ominously as psychological presence.

The representation of the cascading corpse of the Mendi and Delville Wood opens up new horizons on South African death poetics, which are still felt today. Ugly death has remained the same for both early 20<sup>th</sup> and later 20<sup>th</sup> century poets, although the poetic cage in which the *manqué* rages varies from the traditional poetic forms of the nature lyric, sonnet, ballad stanza, couplet, barrack-room ballade, and *izibongo* to the loosely held forms of free verse of modernism and postmodernism.

South African Great War poetry does raise modern issues in that it grapples with the destructive force of modern technological warfare, and the concomitant breakdown of notions of chivalry, manliness and religious belief. The *izibongo* struggles with colonial subjugation and echoes proto-nationalist notions of resistance to this rule. Essentially, some of the poetry rises to the heights of Modernists literary despair in content, and like Lefebvre's verse, in both content and form. Whether traditional or modern, all the poets are endeavouring to come to terms with the poststructuralist *manqué* and its horrific leftover minions.

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