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Writing history : national identity in André Brink's post-apartheid fiction

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Chapter 4: Under Cover of Silence: The Politics of the Fantastic in *Devil's Valley*

“But the problem with yesterday is it never stays down, you got to keep stamping on it.”

Devil's Valley (299)

Silence, and in particular the silences surrounding the past, figures large in *Devil's Valley*, André Brink's twelfth novel that, first published in the year 1998, explores the changes that swept South Africa following the first democratic elections of 1994. In short, the novel contains the story of disillusioned journalist, Flip Lochner, who, in postapartheid South Africa, goes in search of an isolated Afrikaner community that has remained in the past and that is said to live in the remote mountains of the country's interior. More than that, however, it is the story of how Lochner, as narrator and main focaliser, reacts to the secrets harboured by the community within the context of his own misgivings about South Africa as the product of a repressive history. Analysing how the themes of silence and history are dealt with in the novel, I aim to interpret the transformation consummated in conceiving of South Africa's history as of necessity incomplete and selective.

The theme of history as something that can be profitably revisited is a running thread in the novel, as is the idea that the past continues to revisit the present. The ghosts of previous valley inhabitants mingle with the living. This seamless integration of the dead and the living is not merely an aesthetic feature reminiscent of the fantastical, but a realistic comment on the South African situation, where the past continues to assert itself. *Devil's Valley* suggests that silenced discourses never “stay down” but inevitably resurface as distorted and fantastical re-imaginings. The potential of such a fantastic reworking, I suggest, lies in its offering access to that which has been concealed.

One aspect of the novel that beautifully illustrates the perpetual resurfacing of the past is the handiwork of the Devil's Valley's resident painter Gert Kwas.⁵⁴ Kwas paints portraits of all the community's inhabitants, which he periodically updates as the years wear on by painting over the older portraits. The palimpsestic result is that all the layers of previous inhabitants as well as the younger versions of present-day inhabitants shine through, mimicking the uselessness of denying the past in the present. At the same time, the resultant portraits take on a frightening appearance that can be attributed to their being recognisable as human faces, which are made unfamiliar by their sporting too many features, as eyes and ears from the faces underneath are observable at the surface. The result is situated somewhere between the real and the improbable and, as such, lies within the realm of the fantastic. In a society such as the South African one, marked by restriction and constraint, the fantastic may prove valuable because it contains the capacity to point out the

⁵⁴ The word “kwas” means “brush” in Afrikaans.

possibilities for hearing and seeing that which was silenced or covered. In examining the silences that the novel's fantastic imagery points to, I propose to turn silence into a concept.

Deploying silence as a concept for an analysis of Brink's novel, I hope to study the politics of the novel, the assumptions of power and status it inflects in the South African society it presents. I posit that the presence of fantastical elements makes the absent present in the novel, and the silenced audible. The novel suggests the potential for reconciliation, or even redemption, to lie not with historical conquest or the description of facts, but with a revisiting of the past. Where the presence of fantastical elements indicates a history unsuccessfully laid to rest, I see the complications that surround the breaking of silence for the enlightened revisiting of the past framed in two ways in the novel. One of them posits silence as an absence; the other frames silence as abstinence.

The first connotation of silence, namely that of silence-as-absence, is addressed in the novel in the shape of the large lacunae in South African history that the fabula of *Devil's Valley* centres on. The largest of these takes the form of a dismissal of the ethnic cleansing that enabled white settlement in South Africa. This issue is addressed in the novel when the valley inhabitants deny that there were Khoi people who lived in the Devil's Valley before them. The silence-as-absence practised by the valley dwellers is mostly conceived of as active. Lukas Lermiet, the founder of the valley, points out, for example, that "there's nothing one can do about tomorrow. It comes as it must. All you can do something about is yesterday. But the problem with yesterday is it never stays down, you got to keep stamping on it" (299). This acknowledgement of suppression is couched in terms of authority through the subjunctive "got to" and an intimation of physical violence by the use of the word "stamping." In contrast, a passive form of silence-as-absence is set up in the novel as well, and characterised as equally detrimental to an enlightened revisiting of the past. The passive performance of silence is harder to detect and more insidious in its effect, and is dispensed in the novel by its character-bound narrator, Flip Lochner.

Ostensibly, the narrator, in his guise of journalist, is empowered to convey the stories told by the inhabitants of the Devil's Valley to the reader, because he is closer to the milieu of the reader than are the regressive valley dwellers. In spite of this, obvious discrepancies come to the fore between what the reader can be assumed to interpret as self-explanatory and the apparent worldview of the narrator. By looking at the relationship that is set up (and subsequently dismantled) between reader and narrator in the novel, the significance of silence-as-absence is shown to inform a larger context of silence as complicity, and history as a responsibility, in postapartheid South Africa. Hence, the first part of my chapter is devoted to tracing this narrator-reader relationship and interpreting its wider framework.

As the narrator's version of historical events presumably roughly coincides with that of the intended reader, this overlap can be brought to bear on the role of silence in contemporary South African treatments of the past. The first part of this chapter deals with these instances and relates them to the naturalisation of "whiteness" as discussed in Richard Dyer's *White* of 1997. Dyer's argument that white culture has set itself up as the invisible norm will be used to suggest an interpretation of Brink's novel as forwarding silence as a presence rather than absence. By setting something up as natural, its presence can be taken for granted to the extent of seeming absent: it is hidden in plain sight, as it were.

The conceptual aspect of silence-as-abstinence, rather than as absence, is also addressed in the novel. In contrast to absence, abstinence suggests a silence that resists. Although Lochner is eventually given free rein within the valley to record the inhabitants' stories of their past, the tales told are often incomplete, irrelevant and even conflicting. I argue that silence-as-abstinence as resistance is foregrounded in the novel. A tension is set up between the interpretation of history given by the valley dwellers and by the narrator. This is done by means of the contrivance of an "outsider" first person narrator, who constantly recontextualises the stories in an interior monologue informed by his knowledge of historical occurrences outside of the valley. I examine how Lochner's narration reveals that he conceives of himself as empowered by access to, variously, the valley's facts, women and land. Subsequently, I analyse how these presumptions are undercut in fantastical ways by the resisting silence of all three of these, ending on the insurgency practised by the soil of the valley itself.

After all, in the fictional setting of *Devil's Valley*, it is not so much the words that are spoken but rather the confrontation with unusual occurrences and strange appearances that alert the protagonist and, through him, the reader to what lies beneath the surface. The suppression of the depravity of the community's organisation – this pretence to absence – outs itself in unnatural appearance, whether in the form of webbed feet and multiple nipples or mirages of non-existent bodies of water or women. These unnatural appearances, I argue, take on the character of the fantastic. The fantastic, as espoused in Romantic and, particularly, in Gothic literature, focuses on phenomena that occupy the breach between reality and fantasy. Its transitional status has been analysed by Tzvetan Todorov, in his work entitled *The Fantastic* of 1973, as simultaneously communicating the anxiety of uncertainty and its motive.

In looking at the novel in terms of the fantastic, I aim to probe deeper than a mere consideration of images of hesitancy and doubtfulness to suggest that multiple memories and stories allow for the successful coexistence of experiences. The novel's fantastic images speak of contortion and agitation, *not* peaceful resolution. The coexistence of stories without mutual acknowledgement implied by an over-writing and silencing of what lies beneath speaks of a

malady that declares itself in disturbing ways. In the next section, I trace some of the arguments in a discussion on the usefulness of the imagination in achieving political change. In a subsequent section, I then assess the political significance of the two practices of silence within Brink's novel after analysing the use of the fantastic as defined by Todorov, for shaping the novel's politics.

Fantastically Hesitant: The Politics of the Fantastic

I start from the idea that the interpretation of a narrative can be seen as an articulation or opening up of the noise that the written form of a story closes off. The appearance of fantastical elements within a narrative that pretends to journalistic investigation and documentation can be perceived as a rearticulation of previously silenced stories and histories. The past, although censored and modified to suit the public appearance and morality of the valley-inhabitants, does not stay in the past, but continues to interact with present-day life, as it does in South Africa today. Investigating how Brink achieves this in *Devil's Valley*, I will also try to show why the fantastic is an appropriate genre to deal with the past that haunts the present.

Critical authors have previously condemned the use of the genre of the fairy tale or the fantastic in South African literature, as it was perceived a convenient way to side-step political issues that needed to be exposed. As J.M. Coetzee pointed out in his acceptance speech for the Jerusalem Prize in 1987, there was simply too much truth in the country for imaginative literature to hold. Truth "by the bucketful," he called it.⁵⁵ Exiled South African author Breyten Breytenbach even called on all writers to take up political responsibility instead of what he disparagingly called "speaking of flowers."⁵⁶ At the same time, South African author Njabulo Ndebele, in his groundbreaking essay "The Rediscovery of the Ordinary" (1984), warned against the tendency of sensationalism in South African literature, articulating the country's narratives as a series of spectacular and unmitigated tragedies. This tendency he saw as both too abstract and too general to be useful for contemplating the reality of South African experience as it left out the means of considering experience that was not as spectacular but no less important or, for that matter, no less tragic.

However, Emily R. Zinn, in "Rediscovery of the Magical: On Fairy Tales, Feminism, and the New South Africa" (2000), repositions Ndebele's argument in the context of the magical. She identifies the central position of the magical within the South African everyday as not so much standing in opposition to the ordinary but rather embedded in it. Ndebele uses a

⁵⁵ "[T]here is now too much truth for art to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination" (J.M. Coetzee 1991).

⁵⁶ In Rosemary Jane Jolly's *Colonization, violence, and narration in white South African writing: André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and J.M. Coetzee*, 34.

short story in which a magical incident occurs as one of the examples for his call for a return to the ordinary, and Zinn traces the same concern with the magical everyday in South African white writing. Not, as she firmly states, as a way to avoid the political, but as a way to steer South African literature in a new direction. She attributes Brink's increased interest in the magical to a fascination with "easy intercourse between the living and the dead" that forms a part of African oral traditions and has "spilled over into Afrikaans literature" (Brink, 26 cited in Zinn, 250).

Similarly, Elleke Boehmer (1998) expresses the hope that the end of apartheid has finally given South African authors the leeway to do away with the division between reality and fantasy altogether. She praises this inclusivity for exploring ways of representing the world that are true to its "skewed, fragmented, upended" nature (53). Zinn does not lose sight of the fact that the magical can be used for both liberating and conservative political ends. Nevertheless, she believes in the usefulness of fairy tales particularly in the South Africa context, because of "their flexibility and their tendency to cross cultural boundaries" (251). Nevertheless, such an interpretation of African literature by means of fairy-tale conventions may be problematic, as it flattens the distinctions between African oral folktales and the Western tradition of the fairy tale. She argues that both "resist the assertion of an authorial version," but forgets that, by now, the canon of Western fairy tales, although their origins cannot always be verified, is ossified into an authoritative body with its own conventions of interpretation (251).

Zinn shows how the potential for imaginative literature in a time of national crisis does not necessarily obstruct the political responsibility of the writer. Coetzee, in the very same acceptance speech in which he lamented the all-pervasiveness of truth, quoted Nietzsche when he added, "we have art so that we shall not die of the truth." In an essay published in Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly's *Writing South Africa* (1998), Brink views imagination as central for retrieving from the past what has been silenced:

I certainly am convinced that without the attempt to grasp, with the creative imagination, the past and its silences, South African society as a whole may get bogged down in mere materialities, sterile rationalisations, and the narrow mechanics of retribution or amnesty. (25)

Material reparations are required in the process of recovering from an unjust system. But, as Brink recognises, because these injustices were perpetrated largely within a context of language and images, not only in laws, it also requires an act of the imagination.

In imagining South Africa, one of the writers who serves as an example for penetrating the surface image of the nation, is Breyten Breytenbach. Breytenbach became frustrated with the state of South African writing in the 1980s, and critiqued the narratives that adhered to the determinist assumption that everything can be represented. In his works published at this time, such as *Mouir: Mirror-notes of a Novel* of 1984, Breytenbach associates this determinism with both Calvinist Christian discourse and apartheid discourse in seeking to consolidate power by authoritarian means. He sees it as the task of the politically responsible author to rupture the fixity of determinist writing and so provide an alternative to its attempts at control by means of naming, since “[n]aming is taming” (84). The strategy that Breytenbach proposes for achieving a resistance to literary authoritarianism is, as Rosemary Jolly analyses in her *Colonisation, Violence and Narration in White South Africa Writing* (1996), “envisioning that which is absent, rather than recording that which is present” (85). This because the absent, he argues, throws the validity of appearance into doubt, much in the same way as Tzvetan Todorov sees the fantastic doing.

In *The Fantastic*, Todorov studies the literary genre of the fantastic in terms of “codifications of procedures and responses,” examining the rules and codes that are shared by the novel and the reader for a successful attainment of a certain effect (Foreword, viii). He inquires into what defines a particular literary piece as fantastic by tracing both anti-structuralist suppositions, that state that “the structures formed by literary phenomena manifest themselves at the level of these phenomena,” and structuralist propositions, that claim that social structures are unrelated to reality but only knowable through models constructed according to that reality (17). The one sees literature as imitating observed reality and the other as creating a reality that we can observe. By this second definition, what we observe through language moves beyond the real and the natural and into the supernatural.

“The supernatural is born of language,” Todorov states, as a novel’s fantastic elements exist only in words, adding that “language alone enables us to conceive what is always absent: the supernatural” (82). This ability to conceive of what is not actually present communicates a possibility of what *could* be, unrestrained by traditional (physical, empirical) laws or (cultural, political, social) conventions. Similarly, Breytenbach calls for an inscription of the fantastic in the novel to represent not what is forever impossible but precisely what is possible. He sees history “as a discipline” that eliminates options in its attempt to reproduce the past “as present” (86). By recreating history as a story and seeing it as an account not only of what one experienced but also “the absence of what you did not experience,” he believes that the violence of determinism can be ruptured (86).

I argue that Brink's use of the fantastic is neither an apolitical cop-out nor an overdramatised spectacle of general power struggles. *Devil's Valley* is not apolitical because it presents aspects of the fantastic as the consequences of South Africa's politically incorrect past. Rather, the dead cannot rest because the past continues to have an impact on the present. At the same time, the fantastic images in the novel are presented not as dramatic ogres or frightening omens, but as the sad consequences of the irrational fear of intermixing of the valley community. The stifled nature of the people that populate the valley gives rise to the very impurity that they dread. In Brink's novel, the conjuring up of impossible scenes and images indicates a lack of the acknowledgement of specific historical occurrences, such as the mixed origin of the community, and not an attempt to side-step these issues. These call to mind what Todorov calls "the fantastic."

Todorov argues that the fantastic occupies an interesting position within literature, defined as it is by the retention of uncertainty. As he explains, any event that appears strange and irregular is usually solved by either its explanation as an illusion, which safeguards the laws of nature known to the reader, or as the product of the imagination, so that a different set of laws is accepted by the reader. The former situation would be an example of the use of "the uncanny" as genre, and the latter that of "the marvellous." The fantastic, as Todorov explains, is situated midway between these, and only for as long as the uncertainty about genre is retained (25). The fantastic therefore occupies a frontier, an interregnum, "a hesitation between the two," comprising a break or interruption (26). The hesitation by the reader as to what generic code to apply is by definition transient (31).

This hesitation of the reader, according to Todorov, is often the result of her identification with the chief character who, as in the case of Brink's novel, is simultaneously the narrator. Lochner observes numerous events that are not so much foreign but rather clichés of an out-of-date (and therefore out-of-place) Afrikaner past. This foreignness conforms exactly to what the narrator expects to find and wishes to record, evinced from his leading questions, which direct the interviewed character towards the admission of stereotypical racism. Apart from these instances, however, there are also occurrences that cause him to hesitate between attributing a particular event to an explicable reality or to the world of imagination, firmly setting them, at least for the duration of this hesitation, in the realm of the fantastic as outlined by Todorov (156). The fact that some things cannot be known because they are absent from the memories or experiences of the villagers, and others because they actively abstain from imparting them to the narrator, adds to the uncertainty that is characteristic of the fantastic.

Examining the significance of the fantastic in *Devil's Valley*, Todorov's arguments are helpful. He mentions, for example, the use of the fantastic as a pretext for alluding to things that would have been barred from realistic texts (158). The examples Todorov gives, such as incest, homosexuality, necrophilia and excessive sensuality, are all dealt with in *Devil's Valley* (158). However, their forbidden nature must be presumed not to extend beyond the morality of the Devil's Valley society, and not to that of the intended (twenty-first century) reader, who can be presumed to have encountered these themes in non-fantastic literary works.

More subtle is Todorov's suggestion that the fantastic aids the reader in dealing with the abnormal outside of a framework of (conscious or subconscious) condemnation (159). In this, he states, the themes of fantastic literature are the same as those of psychoanalysis, in that they deal with a perceived impossible causality between phenomena by allowing for connections between unconscious processes of the mind. Todorov asserts that the fantastic has a function in dealing with what is culturally unacceptable in the same way that psychoanalysis does, and that the themes of fantastic literature and those of psychological investigations overlap. The fantastic disturbs the stability of the narrative and has the power to initiate a new order in a way that, as Todorov states, enacts a transgression of the law (161).

Aside from this social function of the fantastic, Todorov also identifies the genre as useful at a pragmatic level for the purpose of horrifying the reader or keeping her in suspense. Moreover, he detects a syntactical function: aiding the development of the narrative (162). Lochner's narrative clearly needs the unbalancing effect of the fantastic in order to progress. If, as I venture, the narrator's search for information on the Devil's Valley is really a search for his own role within the contemporary South African context, the presumptions with which Lochner starts off need to be unsettled before any progress can be made. Just as the stories upheld by the valley's inhabitants give evidence of suppression, the story that Lochner *wants* to find ignores everything aberrant to his version of events. Contortions and mutations arise from both forms of censure and, I argue, eventually make Lochner as suspect as the people in the valley.

This links back to the central idea forwarded by Todorov: that the fantastic temporally suspends the border between what is real and what is not. This suspension interrupts the logic upheld by narrative and exposes this logic as a construct that represses everything that contradicts it. In tracking the fantastic signposts that litter Lochner's narrative to the silences they mark, the motifs of silence as silence-as-absence and silence-as-abstinence can be productively explored in the novel.

In the next section, I briefly outline out how the first of these, silence-as-absence, operates by making use of selected feminist theories on the functions of silence in discourse as well as Richard Dyer's hypothesis on absence in *White*. Then I examine the absences brought

to the fore in the novel by Lochner's first-person narration, investigating how he seeks to point out telling silences in the Devil's Valley community but, in the process, points to holes in his own articulation instead. By analysing his attempts to position himself as the enlightened outsider, the fantastic element within modern-day South African discourses on progress can be unravelled as prone to the danger of continuing omission and, therefore, being less than useful in redressing it.

The absence of race: Silence as absence

In an article entitled "The Problem of Silence in Feminist Psychology" (1996), Maureen A. Mahoney reassesses the meanings of silence and voice by complicating the viewpoint that voice is associated with power and silence with powerlessness. In this simplistic equation, those who cannot speak cannot make their experience known and therefore cannot influence their own lives or history. Mahoney quotes feminist theorists such as Carla Kaplan and Carol Gilligan in arguing that sometimes authority resides with the silent party, for example in job interviews or psychotherapy. The potential for resistance in silent defiance contradicts the idea of silence as one-dimensional. Similarly, in her "Cries and Whispers: The Shattering of the Silence" (1995), linguistic expert Robin Tolmach Lakoff recognises the traditional association of silence with a lack of content and, therefore, with absence (25). Lakoff interprets the interest in the effect of gender relations on speech over the interest in silence as unsurprising, because presence is often perceived as more meaningful than absence, as "[w]hat is explicit and apparent," she claims, "responds to analysis more readily than what must be inferred" (25).

Both Lakoff and Mahoney argue for the recognition of the ambiguity of silence, which complicates the mono-dimensionality of its interpretation as mere manifestation of the absence of power. At the same time, however, both authors recognise that subjects cannot always choose to be silent anymore than that they can choose to speak; sometimes silence does indicate an absence of power. Lakoff describes the subtle form of control that lies in "silencing by silence" (or, in other words, non-response) practised by the powerful against the powerless. Non-response, she posits, even "annihilates" the other speaker and pretends that she does not exist, so that, in this context "[s]ilence is analogous to invisibility" (29). The analogy between silence and invisibility connects with Richard Dyer's discussion of whiteness as invisible, connoting an absence of race that constitutes a silence within racial discourse upheld by the empowered.

In his seminal study *White* (1997), Dyer commences his investigation of the representation of white people in Western culture with precisely silences or lacks: he observes that white people are not "raced" in the West, and therefore slip unobtrusively into the position

of norm against which everything is measured (Dyer, 2). Dyer points to the conspiracy of silence that sustains this normative position. Whiteness, he argues, is an empty construct that is not based on reality because “[w]hite people are neither literally nor symbolically white” (42). The skin colour of Caucasians varies and never approaches pure white, just as their characters differ and never approach the moral purity that white connotes symbolically. The pretension is therefore in need of constant reiteration by means of cultural imagery.

Citing examples from literature, cinema, and art, Dyer interprets whiteness as an active and explicit cultural marker, not an absence of specificity that cannot be critiqued. By coming to see whiteness as a fabrication that is based on distinguishing features as much as other racialised colours are, the power structure that underlies it is exposed. One example that he refers to frequently is the invisibility of whiteness, since Caucasian people usually do not recognise themselves as white, or, for that matter, “raced,” at all. Dyer describes “how amazed and angry white liberals become when attention is drawn to their whiteness” (2). He argues that this refusal to identify with “white” as racial is often connected to an emphasis on egalitarianism. He cites bell hooks, who argues that “they believe that all ways of looking that highlight difference subvert the liberal belief in a universal subjectivity” (2). This, as hooks points out, rather than making racism disappear, serves to normalise and, therefore, perpetuate it.

The same presentation of white as the absence of race is set up in the exchanges that take place between the narrator Lochner and the inhabitants of the Devil’s Valley in the novel. Lochner never makes mention of his inevitable complicity in white privilege but, instead, presents himself as a champion of the maligned. At the same time, the valley dwellers’ stubborn repudiation that there exists an alternative to whiteness in the stories of their origin presents the reader with the ostensible absence of race. This absence of race is so implausible in the South African context that its lack becomes discernible, as the novel’s distorted narratives are marked by the distortions of fantastical imagery. These distortions finally see whiteness being “made strange,” inviting a perception of the silent insistence on racelessness as a racist discourse (10).

I now return to silence-as-absence in an examination of both the active silencing perpetrated by the valley inhabitants in their concealment of aspects of their history, and the passive, but no less treacherous, silences inherent in the narrator’s conveyance of the Devil’s Valley past. The ludicrous insistence on an absence of race by the valley community, I argue, manifests itself in the contortions of the fantastic, and I interpret the novel’s fantastic elements as indications of a troubled past that “won’t stay down.” In analysing Lochner’s dissimulation, I posit that his threefold positioning as narrator, as white male, and as a journalist, make him

inevitably complicit in suppression. By failing to confront this complicity and presuming its absence, Lochner is precluded from attaining the status of freethinking liberal and, instead, sees his thinking confined.

The absence of race as implausible and therefore up for investigation is emphasised from the onset of the novel. Describing his first vision of the Devil's Valley community, Lochner concludes his report with the observation that "[t]here was something outlandish about the scene," because "nowhere in the Devil's Valley was there any sign of a black or brown labourer" (37). The narrator calls the reader's attention to the fact that something is amiss in his description of the valley community, something he terms "outlandish" to draw on its connotations of "foreign" and "not native." Absurdly, this glosses over the remarkability of finding a traditional nineteenth-century rural community in the midst of an industrialised, modern nation. Lochner sets up the valley's lack of racial progressiveness rather than its other forms of historical stagnancy (speech, dress, beliefs) as a feature of note. Already we are confronted by the bias of an ostensibly objective reporter in the way that he focuses the attention of the reader.

The absence of "any sign" of black or brown people in the Devil's Valley is a artifice connected with the community's validation by the pretence to purity. Tant Poppie Fullmoon, hostess to Lochner, tells him, for example, that, at the time that the first Lermiet moved into the valley, "there was no one else here, this place was set aside for us from the beginning of time, so God kept it clean for us" (97). The idea of a location set aside by a higher power articulates a belief in the election of the Devil's Valley society. Simultaneously, it implies that the community has the obligation to maintain their isolated way of life, leaving little room for transformation. Tant Poppie's explanation equates emptiness with "cleanliness," suggesting that the settling of the valley by Lermiet and his compatriots did not destroy the clean nature of the location as they, themselves, were clean. The only way to retain this cleanliness, or the appearance of it, is to remain silent about what her story leaves out: the practise of miscegenation that contradicts her pretence to purity.

Tant Poppie is one of the agents who ensures that the absence of race is perpetuated and silence maintained about a past that "won't stay down" in her capacity as the midwife who stones to death those babies that exhibit "black blood" and are considered "throwbacks" to an earlier, multi-racial make-up of the valley's community. The silence that accompanies her routine, as these "lost" children are never referred to again, is broken by the contortions exhibited by the children that she does allow to live. These often take on fantastical forms, ranging from oddly distributed body hair to harelips and multiple digits. The deformities of these children are caused precisely by the prevention of admixture, which has resulted in

inbreeding. These grotesque features ironically sabotage the connection between biological and metaphorical purity.

Dyer investigates our modern concept of whiteness as the historical conflation of the colour white with symbolic connotations centring on the idea of purity. Purity denotes a singularity in referring to the absence of diversity that, by extension, links its metaphorical meaning of virtuousness to an absence of plurality as well. In this way, the silence surrounding the miscegenation practised by the Devil's Valley founders would appear to be motivated by the community's pretence to righteousness. As soon as this silence is interpreted as what it is, as the absence of acknowledgement of their mixed beginnings, however, the pretence to virtue is transformed into an exposure of vice.

Dyer analyses the link between whiteness and purity on both physical and metaphorical levels. Although he stresses repeatedly that the skin colour denoted as white is not actually white at all, he acknowledges that cultural representations have nevertheless asserted white as the means of identifying Caucasians. As main catalyst and sustainer of the idea that whiteness equates with morality, Dyer points to Christianity. He argues that "Christianity...is founded on the idea – paradoxical, unfathomable, profoundly mysterious - of incarnation, of being that is in the body yet not of it" (14). He continues that this artificial link between the body and spirit in Christian culture forges symbolic and metaphorical connotations of whiteness to the extent that they become as "natural" (or rather, as "unnatural") as the physical (18).

Christianity plays an important role in Brink's *Devil's Valley*. Dyer's identification of purity as the primary obsession of whiteness finds a conspicuous counterpart in the narratives of the founding of Devil's Valley that accentuate the unsullied nature of the society's ancestry. In "Biblical Mythology in André Brink's Anti-Apartheid Crusade" (2000), Isidore Diala points out that Brink's novels frequently centre on the "Afrikaner reduction of the Bible to a white mythology that complements the materiality of apartheid" (80). This "white mythology" is "white" both because of its perpetuation by a race (fictitiously) designated as white, and because its status as mythology (and therefore not reality) is carefully kept silent, invisible, and white.

The bible, Diala posits, forms the superstructure of myth and allegory that supports the way in which Afrikaner people see black people. According to him, Brink connects Afrikaner consciousness, its assertion of hardship and the imperative to fight for land and survival, to what she calls a "Christianisation" of apartheid (81). Brink's novels send up the Christian practice of interpreting phenomena according to biblical symbolism. He interprets Brink's ridicule of divine ordinance as a refusal of "the Afrikaner Biblical sanction of apartheid" (81).

This biblical sanction is cited in the novel when Lukas Lermiet tells Lochner that the valley *was* founded on admixture. On enquiring into the community's founding history, Lochner is told that the valley was "full of enemies" on Lermiet's arrival, and not an empty wilderness (297). Lermiet relates how he and his companions "had to get rid of [the Bushmen and Hottentots] to clear a spot for ourselves" (297). This alternative story reveals the missing element in the version told by Tant Poppie, the silence-as-absence that leaves out the shameful notion that the community is racially impure, as well as the scandal of the violence that accompanied the consummation of miscegenation by the valley founders. But more even than an absence of certain facts, the silenced truth conceals a reversal of facts. Instead of the accepted story about a population that resides in a certain locale and is protected by divine ordination from pollution by outsiders, the valley's suppressed history is the story of the Afrikaner Lermiets as the outsiders who perpetrate defilement.

Lermiet continues his story to Lochner by telling how a few of the surviving enemies were allowed to integrate with the community and came to live, not just alongside, but also among them. The reasoning behind this was the need for female partners in order to maintain the community. This apparently uncharacteristic detour from the idea of keeping the race pure is justified by means of a pseudo-biblical baptism of the Khoi women who are given, not just Afrikaner names, but names from the bible. This hides the presence of race in its absencing of the features of race. In narratives of the past, race resides in words and names and those, easier than physical appearances, can be changed so that their original identity is silenced.

The biblical parallel is extended when Lukas Lermiet asserts that similar practices are described in the bible and would therefore pass as legitimate. "Abraham and Isaac and Jacob also had to make do with what they could get," he claims, establishing a telling analogy between his own tribe and these three figures from the Book of Genesis, all three of whom were patriarchs of the Jewish, and later Christian religion (297).⁵⁷ All three were also wanderers who did not stay in their place of birth but travelled and became the heads of families in new places. Lukas Lermiet is forging a resemblance that would position him as the head of such a great family, relegating the fact of impure origin to the sideline.

The silence around this mixed ancestry he justifies by claiming his eradication of race. Lermiet tells Lochner, in a boastful manner, that "[w]e Lermiets are good breeders. We fucked the whole Devil's Valley white" (298). The presence of black females is thus precluded from influencing the racial make-up of the bloodline. The allotment of superior power to the white

⁵⁷ These three formed a direct paternal line: grandfather, father and son. Abraham, as first patriarch, was forced to marry the servant Hagar because Sarah remained childless. Isaac, the next patriarch, was married to a bride picked out by his father. And Jacob, as third patriarch, was tricked into marrying Leah when he wanted to marry Rachel and had to work a further seven years to reach his desire.

Afrikaner males insists on their ability to absorb, and therefore neutralise, the contaminating effect of their partners' blackness. The presence of these black women has thus been purged from history and the silence around their absence warranted.

The silence-as-absence perpetrated by the mythologies of the valley inhabitants is clearly set up in Devil's Valley by their internal contradictions and the fantastical appearances they give rise to. The silence-as-absence performed by the narrative of its character-bound narrator, however, is more insidious but, I argue, no less indicative of the damage done by enforced silence. I now turn my attention to the way in which Lochner, as the novel's narrator, attempts to situate himself as a reliable outsider empowered to convey truth. Simultaneously, I examine how this pretence is both reinforced and then subverted by his variegated status as white male; as narrator; and as journalist.

“I know what our people are like”: the white, guilty narrator

The position of the narrator, investigative journalist Flip Lochner, as the outsider of the community he is interviewing, yet as the insider in the world the reader of the novel is presumed to inhabit, enables him to parade the strangeness of the object of his investigation and comment on its aberration from present-day South Africa that is its context. This sets the community up as one that is perceptibly different from the one from which Lochner as narrator derives. Hence, the reader may be inclined to accept the strangeness of the trappings of the valley within the logic of the novel, but she is clearly warned that Lochner's observations that follow should not be dismissed in the same way. Lochner frames his observations of Devil's Valley in disapproving terms that, I argue, serve to conceal his complicity, as a white man, in South African hierarchies of power.

To return to Lochner's description of his first thoughts on the valley community, the way in which he phrases his sense of wonderment is revealing of his own bias. The complete version of his summation runs:

There was something outlandish about the scene, although it took some time to register. Only much later, like the sight of a star that reaches the eye long after it's already expired, did I discover what it was: nowhere in the Devil's Valley was there any sign of a black or brown labourer. It might have been somewhere in Central Europe, or on the moon, anywhere but in the South Africa in which I'd been living all my life. (37)

The observed fact that there are only white people living in the valley is framed in specific terms. Lochner notes that there are no black or brown *labourers* in the valley. Far from this implying that there *are*, perhaps, black or brown inhabitants who are not labourers, the remark reveals the expectation of the narrator: the absence of black or brown inhabitants may be

expected, but the absence of black or brown people to perform menial tasks is not to be expected. The beliefs that inform Lochner's suppositions are exposed to judgement as much as those of the people of the valley.

The abnormality, for the narrator, lies in the absence of the paradox of apartheid that preaches the physical segregation of races, but at the same time requires physical propinquity for the economic and political hierarchy to be sustained. In the earlier-mentioned "Biblical Mythology," Isidore Diala traces the roots of colonial racism in economics. The biological arguments for a hierarchy among races attempt to neutralise racial difference as physical difference, whereas the difference imposed by imperialist practice actually had its roots in economic motivations. White peoples' perception of blacks, she argues, are formed by myths and allegories that substantiate the idea of inferiority on a metaphysical and physical level. For this reason, he states, white people cannot see black people objectively (13). On the corporeality of the racist paradox, Dyer states:

All concepts of race, emerging out of eighteenth-century materialism, are concepts of bodies... Black people can be reduced (in white culture) to their bodies and thus to race, but white people are something else that is realised in and yet is not reducible to the corporeal, or racial. (14)

"The idea of race," he goes on:

locates historical, social and cultural differences in the body. In principle this means all bodies, but in practice whites have accorded themselves a special relation to race and thus to their own and other bodies. They have more of that unquantifiable something, spirit, that puts them above race. This is a badge of superiority. (30)

Lochner is prepared to find an absence of racial equality, but cannot reconcile his conception of white people with the notion of their having racialised bodies capable of labour. Hence, he is presented as Dyer's white liberal, who pretends affront at the racial segregation practised by a rural Afrikaner community, but fails to think outside of racial terms himself.

When the narrator at a later stage returns to the issue of the absence of brown or black people in the valley, he frames this in a similar way. Questioning his hostess, he asks:

"One thing I noticed here," I said, "is that all the people in the Devil's Valley do their own work, I find it hard to understand, because I know what our people are like ... Are you telling me there never were any black servants with the Lermiet party?" (96)

Lochner finds it hard to fathom the stoic practice of an absence of race. The expectations of the narrator with regards to the Devil's Valley community is thus transferred to the reader: signs of

rural backwardness or fundamentalist tradition are accepted as confirmations of the journalist narrator's sensationalist expectations, but any deviance from these expectations strikes him "like the sight of a star that reaches the eye long after it's already expired," something he fails to notice as it occurs but which seizes his attention after it has passed his field of vision.

On hearing from Tant Poppie that the Devil's Valley community chooses to preserve its isolation from the outside world to prevent the corruption of their society, Lochner reports on the world from which he comes, and explains:

"The country went through bad times which lasted for many years," I said, "but a while ago we had elections and now there's a new government and everything ... we even have a black president now. The whole world looks up to him." (96)

Tant Poppie's retort that "then you can mos see what God wanted to protect us from" (96) is meant to set off the unfamiliarity of the valley community's outdated views from the reader's familiarity with Lochner's perception, while the downplaying of the horrors of the apartheid years as "bad times" lends extra bathos to the rapport between narrator and reader. Drawing the reader into agreement with the narrator, however, sets her up for a confrontation with complicity. This is seen when Lochner himself realises that his convenient "exoticising" of the Devil's Valley community does not allow him to avoid a reconsideration of himself as similarly guilty of discrimination and intolerance, albeit to a different degree.

By "exoticism" I refer to the active construction of something as foreign and other to make it fascinating, as critiqued in Edward Said's 1978 *Orientalism*. Said's emphasis on the relationship between power and knowledge implicit in Western constructions of the non-West is relevant to Lochner's opposition between the Devil's Valley community and the rest of South Africa. In both cases, an ostensible positive appreciation of otherness is rooted in a negative inversion of the dominant culture. Just as Said termed Western "Orientalism" "[a] Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (3), Lochner practices an authority over the valley inhabitants by emphasising their otherness. This, I argue, detracts attention away from their sameness in constructing narratives that propose a particular conception of the world as righteous and allow no opposition.

Again, the option for opposition arrives with them being "made strange" in Dyer's method of undermining the assumptions of representation (10). The significance and repercussions of a strangeness attributed to representations of whiteness within Brink's novel is evident both in the ways in which the narrator Flip Lochner represents the inhabitants of Devil's Valley and the ways in which they represent themselves. In making whiteness strange, Brink's *Devil's Valley* offers an opportunity to expose the assumptions of both the narrator and

the character's descriptions of a fictional South African society. Ironically, precisely by employing the fantastic, this novel manages to emphasise the normalisation of social hierarchies: against a backdrop of such obvious outlandishness, the artificial power structure imposed on the so-called real world seems almost as bizarre as that of Devil's Valley.

Lochner perpetually emphasises his difference from the people that he observes in the valley, or, rather, he stresses that the deviance is all theirs. His narrative emphasises that the features and events the community experiences as normal are, in actuality, anything but. Although the inhabitants themselves find nothing strange in events such as ceremonies with goat sacrifice, frogs raining from the sky, dead people walking and chatting among the living, or lakes appearing and disappearing in different locations in the valley, Lochner reacts to these activities of the community as bizarre. I argue that by unpacking the way in which Lochner is positioned as the novel's narrator that the silences that are the object of his investigation can be connected with the silences that are its means.

“My fuck-up of a life”: the narrator as rat

As a first-person narrator, the reader easily identifies with Lochner because, as Todorov states in *The Fantastic*, “the pronoun ‘I’ belongs to everyone.” The reader's recognition of herself in the narrator allows her to “enter as directly as possible into the universe of the fantastic,” where the combination of supernatural events and a realistic narrator creates the doubt that is the ultimate condition for the fantastic (84). That these events would appear fantastical to the reader can be understood within the context of Lochner's own misgivings about South Africa as abnormal in itself, a product of a repressive regime that continues to leave its mark both inside and outside of the Devil's Valley. He is told different versions of the story of the origin of the valley's community, each of which contradict the others, while all emphasise a shared sense of guilt. This guilt seems the result of the failure to maintain racial purity, but can also be associated with the guilt over displacing the former Khoi inhabitants of the valley. This is suggested by the leading questions that the narrator asks and the way in which he interprets the phenomena he encounters.

Tant Poppie's pretence at “cleanliness,” for example, when she tells the story of the settling of the valley by the Lermiet clan, is met with derision by Lochner, who already knows that the valley had not been empty. His narrative suggests that the purity of its white settlers, too, is contestable, describing their righteousness in sarcastic terms. He is careful to disassociate himself from such dissembling and fails to consider his own complicity. In spite of the distance that he tries to establish between himself and the objects of his investigation by his adoption of a tone of superior ridicule, a conflation is effected between himself and the valley

founders. This is accomplished by the authoritative position that he claims for himself as judgmental narrator who, like the founding fathers, allows this empowerment to go to his head.

On first seeing the Devil's Valley at the opening of the novel, Lochner narrates: "And down at the very bottom lay the deep slit of the valley, half-hidden behind dark thickets of natural forest. The kind of view that turns on a dirty mind," continuing that "I could imagine the sensation the first Lukas Lermiet must have felt looking down here, the kind of randiness that marks every first man: seeing the earth unfolding" (7). Describing the land as actively and willingly "unfolding" itself in front of the explorer's gaze, reference is made to the colonial myth of the untouched land inviting violation by the very intactness that explorers attribute to it. This theme, much-examined in postcolonial criticism, is inevitably associated with a feminising of the landscape, in which land available for male exploration is associated with women made sexually available for male conquest.⁵⁸ By stating, in an appreciative tone, that he "could imagine" what Lukas Lermiet, the founding father of the valley community, must have felt, and phrasing his speculations about these feelings in such strong sexual terms, Lochner makes himself complicit with these bigoted practices without acknowledging them as such.

This complicity also extends to his investigative practices. Lochner is clearly set up as the conquering male within his own narrative, wherein he also makes it quite clear to the reader what Devil's Valley represents to him. On first being confronted with the opportunity of picking up his investigation of the history of Devil's Valley after abandoning it thirty years earlier, Lochner states: "For the first time in years something had caught me by the balls again" (19). This frames his understanding of this opportunity in decidedly, perhaps even aggressively, masculinist terms. Lochner appears to perceive his chance for exploration in terms of a pseudo-colonial, and perhaps even megalomaniac, opportunity for (sexual) conquest. Lochner terms Devil's Valley a "fallow field...where no historian has yet set a fucking foot. Every word spoken in this place is a bloody new invention. This is how the writer of Genesis must have felt. *Let there be light!*" (46).

The ostensibly unexplored nature of the history of the valley is what appeals to the investigative journalist, he instantly compares himself to that epitome of masculine concern for primacy, the Christian God, assumed to be referred to as "the writer of Genesis". That Lochner overlooks the ironic fact that the Devil's Valley is already populated, and therefore not exactly untrodden, fits in neatly with early accounts of exploration that promulgated the myth that the African continent was uninhabited. It is also at odds with his own disapproval of the origin stories of the valley inhabitants that pretend to a virgin location awaiting their penetration. The absence of intelligent life that he pretends to is as unjust and inaccurate as the Lermiet

⁵⁸ See McClintock (1995) for a comprehensive analysis of this colonial strategy.

allegations of available land. Throughout Lochner's narration, the similarity between what he is doing as omnipotent reporter and what the Lermiets do in fabricating their valley's history is shrouded in silence.

The agenda behind the narrator's expectation of what he would find in the valley may be revealed by his commiseration that he "might have been somewhere in Central Europe, or on the moon, anywhere but in the South Africa in which I'd been living all my life" (37). The contention that what he expects to find is an indication of "the South Africa in which I'd been living" (emphasis added) explain his relegation of all that is contrary to his conception of South Africa as "as alien" as Europe or the moon. Lochner's research in the Devil's Valley achieves a personal note here as it takes on the aspect of a quest for validating, perhaps questioning, his understanding of the country. In this light, Lochner's role as an investigative journalist becomes relevant.

One would perhaps assume there cannot be a more committed form of writing than journalism, providing objective, unbiased, or at least verified information to readers, who become the responsible citizens around which modern-day democracy is based. However, this assumption is disturbed by contemporary journalistic practices, such as in South Africa's past, where the State of Emergency made freedom of the press impossible.

Lochner directly comments on this in relation to an incident with his editor during the apartheid years. This editor had called him in to the office to reprimand him for reporting on a particular story on racial discrimination. In reaction to Lochner's simple contention that he had observed the race-motivated atrocities he had reported on with his own eyes, and could, therefore, not be expected to disavow them, he is told that: "[f]or your information this never happened" (14). The contradiction between what Lochner knows to have happened and what he is being asked to ignore not so much as to *unknow*, influences his later conceptions of reality. Because of this, he becomes obsessed with written records, as he sees these as irrefutable.

The notion that a paper presence can refute absence and overcome enforced silence is perhaps not an unreasonable one. In the context of apartheid South Africa, however, with its history of law-enforced gagging and muzzling practices written into the constitution, the faith in "small hard facts" is naïve, if not irresponsible (30). This is another paradox of apartheid, which required journalists to report that what had happened, had, in fact, not happened at all. Lochner wonders how South African journalism can ever regain its commitment in the face of such practices of silence-as-absence.

In a similar way, South African poet and journalist Antjie Krog (1998), describes that many journalists, although aware of the importance of reporting on the proceedings of the commission to inform the country and make the past "headline news," also had misgivings

about doing this. They had previously been used by the apartheid government to censor reports on resistance and, following on this complicity, they were unconvinced that their commitment could ever be believed again (15).

After Apartheid, and away from the specifically South African context, Brink's novel suggests that journalism does not necessarily revolve around well-researched facts but, rather, on spectacle. The reader's perception of Flip Lochner is already framed by the epigraph that opens the novel:

Most journalists are restless voyeurs who see the warts on the world, the imperfections in people and places ... Gloom is their game, the spectacle their passion, normality their nemesis.

The probability that Lochner's journalistic viewpoint will be marked by exaggeration and grandeurism is instantly set up. Additionally, the presence of the opening quote points to an external narrator that frames Lochner as character-bound narrator, who, in turn, frames the valley inhabitants as story-tellers. This reminder of the presence of a character-bound "I" immediately warns readers that all experience described in that story is filtered through the subjective perception of this "I".

Lochner's position as a journalist, a white male and a narrator who is the hero of his own story and aware of his power as the author of that story, makes its impact upon the tale he is telling us. Lochner's own admission of disillusionment with journalism as a high-standing ideological or moral tool and his own lack of scruples, make it unlikely that his viewpoint is simply believed by the reader. So, we have to work for our information as readers, sifting what we can use from what we cannot. In this way, the complicity of Lochner triggers the reader to make her own decision on the novel's meaning.

As discussed above, the narrative of *Devil's Valley* contains numerous indications that cause the reader to doubt whether the information that its narrator provides is part of the reality that he pseudo-objectively seeks to uncover, or part of the reality that he has already established in his mind. The fantastical imagery that the novel throws up, I argue, unsettles Lochner's pretence at a factual account. It also functions as warnings to the reader to look beneath the surface of his interpretation for indications of his motivations. In this way, the narrative's resistance to presenting history as a tabulation of facts proposes a revisiting of the past as an alternative. In addition to the instances of silence-as-absence that the discussion above has seen the novel forward to complicate conceptions of history, in the next section I examine its proposition of silence as abstinence.

The resistance implied in conceiving of silence-as-abstinence is showcased by the valley inhabitants, who only tell Lochner what they have decided fit for his consumption. They practice silence-as-abstinence as a means of control over his intrusion. I focus, in my examination of the community's attempts at withholding, on Lochner's female interlocutors and explore the ways in which Lochner variously seeks, and is denied, access to the valley's records, its women and its lands. All three of these, I argue, actively resist control by defying the narrator's delineations of them. Before looking at these, I briefly return to the theory on silent resistance and discuss the merit of ideas on the gendered power configurations of fantastic narratives.

Silence as Abstinence

In assessing silence-as-abstinence within the context of the novel, I return briefly to Mahoney and Lakoff's distinction between silence as absence of power and silence as empowering. The main fault that Mahoney, in "The Problem of Silence," finds in the simplistic association of silence with absence lies in the presumption of a unitary voice that is suppressed and needs to be heard. This denies the complexities of "different roles and shifting subject positions," and conflates the individual experience with a collective one (604). This presumption of collective feeling comes to the fore strongly in Lochner's dealings with the valley inhabitants. Their unitary stance against him as outsider gradually gives way to reveal the presence of outsiders within the community itself, all of them women and the most notable one of these being the orphan Emma. Emma, as a woman of uncertain parentage and unprotected by a male husband or father, is vulnerable to exclusion from the traditional community. She is earmarked by Lochner as a convenient point of access in his attempts at extracting information.

In defining insider status in the power structures at play in the *Devil's Valley*, gender plays a central role. In her exploration of the way in which female characters and images are read in fictional and historical narratives, Debora Kodish (1987) claims that men are often attributed with an active role with regard to new lands or peoples or events that are to be brought under control. Women, however, form part of those phenomena that are placed under such control. She identifies the theme of a "powerful male outsider" who causes "the new awakening of an often silenced woman" as a powerful one, which "resonate[s] with a marked, if unacknowledged, sexuality" (574-5). The male outsider is active, while the female insider is a passive informant who is to be "won into speech" (575). This theme is certainly present in *Devil's Valley*, where Lochner falls in love with Emma and is determined to save her from her marginal position within the valley community by taking her with him when he eventually goes home.

As Lochner sets himself up as the conquering male within his own narrative, his exploration into the silenced elements of the community's history, which centre on Emma and her parentage, start to take on the nature of a sexualised conquest, in which he wins both the story and the girl at the same time. In Lochner's expression of a desire for exploring the unknown, the oft-referred to sexual frustration that he experiences is aligned with his apparent need to "plunge" into the "hidden depths" of history. Lochner also equates the Devil's Valley with female possession on a more personal level, as he tells of his initial misgivings about leaving his wife, Sylvia, to do research on the valley because he is aware that a journalist colleague of his is competing with him for her affection:

If I were to abscond for a couple of months to do research in the Devil's Valley, I had little doubt that he'd settle so tightly into her own little devil's valley that once again only his toes would stick out. (19)

Sylvia is literally equated with the valley. Lochner's decision, years later and after his divorce from Sylvia, to return to researching the valley may reasonably be equated with a desire to repossess what he has lost, with regard to both information and the possession of Sylvia.

Ironically, the power to satisfy that Lochner attributes to the stories about the community is never fully realised, as that which Lochner seeks to uncover and, I would argue, possess, resists his intrusion by a practice of silence-as-abstinence. This active resistance takes place in the novel at both animate and inanimate levels, as well as individually and communally.

Exploring the connotations of power and powerlessness in silence, Mahoney admits that there is a problem with the notion of silence as defeat and powerlessness, not potentially a choice or an act of resistance. She quotes D. W. Winnicott who views silence as not only a pathology but as possible power and activity, particularly in claiming the right not to communicate. Silence he sees as potential protest against intrusion (Mahoney 83). This links up with the refusal of many of the valley inhabitants to speak to Lochner as journalist, and his suspicion that they are all conspiring to tell him a particular version of the story or even nothing at all. Under Winnicott's definition, this gives evidence of conspiracy in preparing responses as a sign of resistance against probing.

Mahoney gives this a psychological interpretation when she explores the capacity for resistance as lying in the balance between choosing to be heard and not be heard and speaking and refusing to speak. She cites absence as potentially a form of "perfect communication" where all sense of individual subjectivity is lost and sacrificed to mutuality, as it forms the condition for realising one's own agency in communication, or, indeed, in one's ability to

withhold it. I argue that Lochner's pursuit of, and experience of insurgency from, the valley's documentation, its women and its land, are all presented as agents performing silence-as-abstinence in the novel.

The valley inhabitants' ability to remain silent under interrogation directs authorial control away from Lochner and plummets his narrative in the realm of the fantastic. This is in contrast to that out of which he had hoped (and expected) to construct his narrative, and which he describes as "the reassurance of a few small, hard facts" (30). These, in their irrefutable solidity oppose the fantastic. Lochner describes the reassurance of facts to lie in their being "certain, unshakeable by wind or weather," which opposes them to the unpredictability of both the natural and the fantastic (30). As already discussed, Lochner's experiences as a reporter in South Africa have made him uneasy about conceptions of the truth. He cynically recounts in his narrative how he had believed in the possibility of truth in his youth, but how disillusionment had "shocked [him] out of this" and transformed it into a faith in facts (91). Because these facts need to have the appearance of hardness and certainty, he comes to the Devil's Valley with tape recorder and camera in tow. As devices that record only what appears in front of them and leave a tangible record, they would be able to give credence to appearance as real. Each time that Lochner attempts to use the recorder, however, it resists, and the camera is dropped and breaks on his initial descent into the valley. These incidents are so improbable that they resemble inanimate forces that sabotage the pursuit of facts in an enactment of silence-as-abstinence.

In a similar way, Lochner's expectations of finding historical documentation in the valley are repudiated by the residents' insistence that there are none. "It was to get away from all those things in the Colony that our Seer first brought us here," Tant Poppie tells him (46). The refusal to keep records is associated with an act of political resistance against colonial rule. Lochner's initial interpretation of this absence of records as an opportunity to install himself as primogenitor associates his attempts at delineation with the autocratic practises of the colonial government that the absence of records resists (46). Rather than an opportunity to "play god," however, this pre-emption from access to documented fact makes Lochner dependent on the testimony of others. Although oral testimony does not have the hardness or certainty that he attributes to recorded fact, it is also not characterised by a willing pliability but, rather, takes the form of an elusive and frustrating indeterminacy that resists his authority. The oral accounts provided by his interviewees leave silent as much as they tell, and equally unreliable fantastic images confront him in total silence. In examining these, I focus on their female variants, and discuss the complications that gender adds to silent resistance.

“Too slippery to catch”: abstinence as a silence that resists

The use of the fantastic in *Devil's Valley* foregrounds the perception of Flip Lochner as the eyes and ears through which readers comprehend the goings-on in the valley. This is because he, as the medium observing phenomena, is also the agent who relegates it to the fantastic through his inability to explain these realistically or dismiss them as imaginary.

Simultaneously, this allows the reader to become aware of the inhabitants' expression of silence that Lochner's narration cannot efface or overrule. In Todorov's words, "The fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (25). The silence-as-abstinence encountered by Lochner often make it impossible for him to explain the impossible or illogical away.

Compelled to rely on the oral accounts of the valley residents, Lochner indicates a preference for interviewing its women. This is because he sees them as more "accessible" as they share his outsider status in the patriarchal Devil's Valley society. At the same time, however, Lochner's own chauvinist conceptions of women colours his interaction with them. His approach to women is characterised by sexualisation, particularly in his pursuit of Emma. Although he contacts her under the auspices of investigating the silenced story of her lineage, Lochner eventually equates this buried story with the history of the valley, and his desire to obtain the story with his desire to possess Emma.

In other instances, such as his interviews with Annie-of-Alwyn, he takes a similar approach in envisioning himself as conquering his subjects, even if he is not particularly interested in them romantically. In his description of their awkwardness with each other after she has blurted out the story of her great grandmother in a surprisingly unrestrained way, he sees himself and Annie: "[l]ike two people, I thought, who'd had sex too soon and now were embarrassed about getting dressed in front of each other" (280). His interaction with the valley women is determined by unequal gender relations and misrepresents his dependent position as the interloper asking for information. I contend that these unequal relations are addressed by the women's use of silence-as-abstinence as a form of empowerment.

Emma, who becomes involved in Lochner's search for facts on her mother and father, evinces a conception of history that actively opposes his rigid definition of it. Rather than the "small, hard facts" that Lochner seeks, Emma wants "a story that makes sense" (288). Her version of history asserts that it be user-friendly and practical, which sets it up as active and productive in the present. The way in which Lochner deals with history sees it made certain and safely consigned to the past.

Emma's abstinence in resisting that inflexibility occurs on three levels. First of all, she refrains from giving Lochner the single, coherent version of her past that he asks for. Instead,

she contradicts not only the other villagers, who tell Lochner their versions of Emma's actions, but herself as well. Secondly, she frequently abstains from answering his questions at all. To Lochner's invasive "I want to know everything about you," she responds by inviting him to give an account of himself with the words, "No, tell me about *you*" (288). Thirdly, Emma's resisting silence-as-abstinence takes the shape of the fantastic. Her appearance defies Lochner's apprehension, as, the first time he sees her, she is bathing naked in a pool in the distance but disappears instantly when he tries to approach her. After she becomes his (unreliable) informant in his quest for the truth, he is still often reminded of the elusive nature of Emma's presence. When he tries to convert her to his faith in facts, for example, he proposes that, "it's in our nature to look for something to hold on to. Footprints to lead you somewhere." Even as he says this, however, the fantastic confronts him with its predicament as he is reminded of the first time that he saw Emma, "when she, too, hadn't left any footprints" (288).

A similar resistance is practised by Tant Poppie, who refuses to give Lochner the explanations he seeks when events disturb his sense of reality and logic. One of these events is the nightly visits he receives by the silent women who inhabit the realm of the fantastic in that they defy his attempts to classify them as either real or imaginary. The first of these visits occurs just after Lochner has taken part in the village porcupine hunt. On returning to his bed after the hunt, the narrator recounts the following:

I was still conscious of blowing out the candle, but after that I blacked out. In my sleep a woman came to me. She drew the kaross from me and set to work with the kind of clean, absolute lust a man only dreams about. By the time I became aware of her, I was already far gone. (86)

The attestation that this event occurred "in my sleep" would suggest that Lochner is merely dreaming, but the ensuing description of events unbalances this suggestion.

After describing sexual intercourse, the narrator relates how the visiting woman tries to flee from him. He grabs her foot but she, however, is "[t]oo slippery to catch," and gets away from him. In a delayed reaction, Lochner returns to bed only to sit up suddenly to remember that the foot he had clutched had "long toes and fleshy webs between them," and that he had "a long blue ribbon knotted loosely around my prick" (87). Descriptions of the woman as "belonging to the night" and having webbed feet attribute her to the realm of the imagination, in spite of the contrary evidence of the physically irrefutable ribbon.

To develop the suspense in which the narrator, and, subsequently, the reader is caught, a similar occurrence takes place the following night, when the narrator admits to having "lustful dreams" before he is interrupted by the entrance of a woman. On her exit, he attempts to shed

light on her but fails to see more than a “brief flare.” Yet, he states, “that kept me awake, because a succubus is not supposed to be visible in the light” (137-8).

Again, the scene of the appearance of the woman is framed by the narrator’s dreams, in this case dreams that are specifically “lustful” and that can therefore reasonably be assumed to incite “visions” of the same nature. The relegation of this apparition as Lochner’s fantasy, however, is undercut by his assertion that he could physically *see* her by the light of his lighter, in spite of the fact that “a succubus is not supposed to be visible in the light.” The woman, by this logic, may have been real after all, but again she is furnished with characteristics that hamper her easy categorisation as real, such as her strange appearance (the harelip) and her propensity for having wordless and unbidden sex with foreign men. The hesitation between relegating this incident to the real or the imaginary, which, instead, sets it within the realm of the fantastic, continues in descriptions of the third visit.

The following night, Lochner again receives a woman in his room, and again he catches a brief glimpse of her on leaving. The woman who visits the narrator on the third night is not, from the outset, simply postulated as appearing in a dream, presumably because both narrator and reader are, by now, aware of the ambiguous nature of these visits. She is once again presented as “strange,” however, both by means of her appearance (the hair that covers her entire body) and the effect that she has on the narrator (his hair standing on end). The possibility for consigning her to reality appears to be achieved when the narrator retains her physical clothing at the end of the episode. The dismissal of her indeterminate nature is precluded, however, by the inability of her clothing to reveal anything about her identity. Her dress is “like any other in the Devil’s Valley,” and nothing in the valley is ever what it seems.

Subsequently, Lochner confronts Tant Poppie with the nightly visits. “These last few nights there were women coming to my room,” he states, at which Tant Poppie undercuts the factuality of his statement by soberly replying, “I am a light sleeper and I did not hear anything.” (182). She resists his appeal for an explanation by sidestepping his appeal for elucidation. When he continues his account of the events, Tant Poppie, on her part, continues practising silence-as-abstinence in opposing him. Lochner’s questions about the identity of these women are met not with a verifying answer but a mystifying question. “Who says your visitors were real women?” she asks, “[t]hey could have been nightwalkers” (183). This, once again, leaves the impression that the nature of the Devil’s Valley cannot be classified as part of either the reality that forms the background of Lochner’s own life, or the imagination that he seeks to impose on the valley by means of a sensationalist story. The fantastic remains intact thanks to the unwillingness of Tant Poppie to give an explanation of phenomena. Lochner’s frustration at his inability to obtain the information he wants makes obvious the link between

silence and resistance, a connection that is further strengthened on extending the interpretation to the very ground of the Devil's Valley, which, in being personified, constitutes a fantastic translation of the spirit of the valley community by performing a resistance of its own.

Dry as hell: the Devil's Valley

The coherent arrangement of the Devil's valley community is tested by the prodding of Flip Lochner into the community's past. The disintegration of its society is symbolised by a drought which inhabits more and more of the conversation of the people, as it comes to play an increasing role in the novel. The drought threatens the survival of the people and, at the closing of *Devil's Valley*, a last-ditch attempt is made to rally the troops by a sermon from the community's preacher Holy Lermiet. The presence of an outsider in the form of the inquiring narrator has caused a shift in perception in the community and, instead of showing a united front, the meeting becomes a platform for discussing alternative ways of interacting with each other.

As already mentioned, one of the central figures in the novel who embody the potential for imagining a way of life outside of the context of Devil's Valley is Emma. During the first encounter between Lochner and Emma, where she is bathing in a pool of water, the incredulity surrounding her presence is compounded by the fact that the pool of water suddenly disappears as much as she does. The explanation that Lochner is offered by Lukas Death does nothing to resolve his confusion, but does set up a fantastical analogy between the valley community and the topography of the valley itself. He says: "There's no stopping her when she gets the urge... That one will squeeze water from a stone." (34). The will to water is connected with its physical presence, so, within the logic of the novel, the opposite may also hold true. The extreme drought could be interpreted as a lack of will to water in the valley and this could indicate a resistance from within the valley to the continuation of an established way of life.

Alternatively, it could simply point to the unsustainability of its perpetuation. The absent rains need not necessarily be read on a metaphoric level, as the predicament mirrors that of rural communities in South Africa today. During the apartheid regime, rural communities were generously subsidised by the apartheid government, who recognised that its ideology found its strongest core in the communities of white farmers. With the abolition of apartheid, government subsidies were redirected. The absence of government protection left farmers vulnerable in times of extreme droughts, while European and US farmers were still protected by their respective governments. Newspapers report that many South African farmers in the Western Cape and Northern Cape Provinces, who have struggled with drought since 2003, have since turned away from farming and have taken up alternative means for subsistence, mostly

within the tourist sector. This has led to the actual disappearance of a traditional way of farm life.⁵⁹

The beliefs and practices of the community of Devil's Valley are depicted in the novel as out of touch with contemporary South African concerns. In spite of Lochner's attempts to find in the valley a means of redeeming himself, his attitude to the fantastical renderings of Devil's Valley say less about the valley itself and more about his interpretation of them in context of the South Africa beyond the valley. The novel suggests that Lochner has been exposed to a life-altering discovery within its confines. Following on his insistence of "tangible evidence," he reaches a point near the end of the novel where he understands that "[w]e fabricate yesterdays for ourselves which we can live with, which make the future possible" (299). His questionable motifs and disagreeable disposition, however, leave open whether he, together with the reader, has been transformed by this new understanding of the past. This is expressed by the uncertainty with which the novel ends, as Lochner tries to make his way out of the valley but is obstructed in its last paragraph by the dead patriarch of the valley who forms his "last ordeal" (369).

As discussed, the resistance that is offered to Lochner's sanctimonious insistence on weighing down the valley community with his interpretation of their way of life takes the form of silence-as-abstinence. Villagers refrain from validating the narrator's conjectures and withhold their alternative explanations, and even the reliability of written records is actively hidden from him. Additionally, the appearances of fantastical phenomena defy Lochner's insistence on classification and fact-finding and silently practise their resistance. These silent phenomena are found in the guise of worldly and otherworldly figures and even extend to inanimate objects, the most profound of these being the valley itself. Considered together with the instances of silence-as-absence as discussed above, I contend that *Devil's Valley* suggests that a reconciliation with the past may be achieved by revisiting it equipped with the insight that it has brought, as it refuses to be dismissed or fully known from a distance, mental or real.

The danger of dismissing the past out of hand, a danger expressed in Devil's Valley through the motif of the fantastic, lies in such dismissal making progress impossible. Lochner, and, through him, the reader, is exposed to this idea through the juxtaposition of the two meanings of silence: as suppression and as resistance. By the end of the novel, however, the reader is uncertain whether this fantastic juxtaposition has achieved a transformation in the

⁵⁹ Whether this is to be lamented or not would, of course, depend on the factors taken into consideration: although the aesthetic appeal of traditional Afrikaner farm life should not be over-sentimentalised in the context of the ideology it represents, the failure of many South African farming industries has caused not only farmers but also many rural farm workers, often casual labourers, to lose their livelihoods as a result.

narrator's perception of history, symbolised by the uncertainty with regards to his escape from the valley.

This uncertainty, I would argue, is productive, as it emphasises that a recovery of a silenced past does not guarantee a retrieval of human dignity, even in the context of postapartheid South Africa. As previously discussed, Nicola King's *Memory, Narrative, Identity* (2000) expresses this in her plea for the allocation of space, which allows for the unsayable to remain unsaid. Not for the sake of catching or capturing it, but for the sake of imparting a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. She states that "the unsayable prompts the attempt the articulate, to represent, but writing cannot unbury or recover the presence (of absence)" (126). In this sense, the uncertainty provided by a literature of the fantastic does justice to past silences as a necessary condition for being able to live in the present.