

**C LOUIS LEIPOLDT'S *THE VALLEY* — CONSTRUCTING AN ALTERNATIVE  
PAST?**

**by**

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## FOREWORD & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The introduction to *The Valley* came from a visit to the farm Bushmans Kloof in the Cederberg, at the time owned by Mr Bill McAdam, when doing research there, for a manuscript. It began with a reading of the 1980 edition of *Stormwrack*, edited by Stephen Gray, with its ‘Introduction’ by Gray. Gray posed unanswered questions about the connection between Leipoldt’s life and the text, which prompted curiosity and further investigation. The article written by Stephen Gray entitled ‘Leipoldt’s Valley Community: The Novelist as Archivist’<sup>1</sup> proved invaluable for the research undertaken in this thesis.

In 1999, whilst researching the BK manuscript in the Africana section of the J S Gericke Library at the University of Stellenbosch, I met Dr John Kannemeyer whom I know.<sup>2</sup> He very kindly gave me a copy of Chapter II of his raw manuscript for his proposed biography of C Louis Leipoldt, subsequently published as *Leipoldt, ’n Lewensverhaal*.<sup>3</sup> The reading of Kannemeyer’s chapter further enhanced my interest in C Louis Leipoldt and for this I am indebted to John Kannemeyer, for this kind act, and I wish to state that it greatly inspired me for further work on Leipoldt.

Thanks go to Mrs Hannah Botha, at the time, of the J S Gericke Library of the University of Stellenbosch, for her assistance when I was researching the BK manuscript as well as to Mimi Seyffert, Head: Special Collections at the Library as well as Lynne Fourie who assisted with the Preller research. Thanks are extended to Professor Marius Leibold, formerly of the University of Stellenbosch, a person with great experience in research, for encouraging me and ensuring that I understood that my thesis should contain the ‘golden thread’. Also, thanks to Dr Keith Hunt, formerly of Rhodes University, for his encouragement and making sure that I fully understood that a project of this nature would require great commitment and hard work, especially towards the end of the process, when finally ‘putting it together’. To be forewarned in this way certainly forearmed me for the task that lay ahead. Professor ‘J P’ van Niekerk, formerly of the University of Cape Town, has been a source of great encouragement, and explained to me how one day my mind would change from the

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<sup>1</sup>Stephen Gray, ‘Leipoldt’s Valley Community: The Novelist as Archivist’, *Social Dynamics*, 10(1), pp. 46 – 51, 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Subsequent to writing the Foreword to this thesis, John Kannemeyer died on 28 December 2011, precisely 132 years after the birth of C Louis Leipoldt (28 December 1880).

<sup>3</sup>J C Kannemeyer, *Leipoldt, ’n Lewensverhaal*, Tafelberg, Cape Town, 1999.

experience of writing up a thesis of this nature. Dr Eric Woods, a close friend, encouraged me to absorb as much as I could. Cape food historian Peter Veldsman is thanked for his guidance in matters pertaining to Leipoldt — Peter’s conversation on the topic has always been incredibly helpful as he so freely and kindly shared his views on aspects of the life of C Louis Leipoldt, with me. Psychologist Dr Glenda Cleaver’s insights into the way Leipoldt might have reversed the roles of certain of his characters in *The Mask*, have proved most reassuring and I thank her for the conversations I could have with her, a long-standing friend.

This thesis was made possible through the kind donation of books by Raymond Danowski; and the generosity of Mr J J M (Boetie) van Zyl. Raymond Danowski gave up much of his time in conversation and has been sending books for my studies, and a long time before that. This act of generosity has stimulated much thought across many fields, especially in the philosophy of history. Mr J J M (Boetie) van Zyl sponsored my MA studies at the University of Stellenbosch, entitled ‘The Historiographic Metafiction of Etienne van Heerden’ and also gave me financial assistance in the early stages of my research, for this thesis. The school where I currently teach, Diocesan College, awarded me a bursary and so did the University of Pretoria, and for this I am most grateful.

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Mr Dirk Muller is thanked for introducing me to his father Mr Billy Muller whom I interviewed at age 101. Billy was a personal friend of Louis Leipoldt, and a regular visitor at ‘Arbury’, Leipoldt’s home in Kenilworth. Dirk is thanked for sending me a picture from his personal family collection, featuring Louis Leipoldt with members of the distinguished Van Zijl family of Clanwilliam — one of the persons in the picture is Hendrik Van Zijl, Judge President of the Cape Supreme Court, and another his son Helm who later also was President of the Cape Supreme Court. Professor Wium van Zyl is thanked for sending me articles relating to Leipoldt, and Mr Piet Westra formerly Director of the South African National Library, is thanked for his encouragement. The Bergh families of the Cederberg, Martin and Yola, John and Sue and their sons Oloff, Robert, Ross and Thomas, are thanked for their hospitality whenever I stayed on their farms, which appear somewhere in Leipoldt’s fiction; as are Robert and Anne Paterson, of Clanwilliam, who took me on a discovery trail to detect the farm of the character Everardus Nolte. I would like to thank the staff of the Leipoldt Collection at the University of Cape Town Archives and Manuscripts, for their amazing assistance; Lesley Hart, Isaac Ntabankulu, Bobby Eldridge and André Landman have been very helpful. Trudy Hoefnagels a colleague at the school where I teach greatly assisted with some of the Preller translations from Afrikaner-Dutch to English.

I thank Diana Madden of the Brenthurst Library for granting permission to use the references from the Reitz manuscript. Great thanks go to Michael Reitz, the grandson of Deneys Reitz, for allowing me access to his grandfather’s unpublished manuscripts and also for the long telephone conversations about related topics, for instance that his grandfather’s book had sold

particularly well.<sup>4</sup> Thanks go to Marié Coetzee, Head of the Archives and Special Collection at the University of South Africa, as well as Annette le Roux, the Archivist. The Library Staff at the Adler Museum of Medicine in Johannesburg, the Library Staff especially Alett Nell and Elsa Coertse at the University of Pretoria and the staff at the National Archives in Pretoria are thanked for their kind assistance. I would like to thank David and Marlene McCay, Christo and Caro Wiese and Japie Basson<sup>5</sup>, as well as Dr Ton Vosloo for the continued interest in my studies. Finally, I should like to thank Riaan Oppelt for sharing some thoughts about *The Valley* and sending me unpublished material to read, which greatly stimulated my interest, for instance, ‘C. Louis Leipoldt and the Role of the “Cape Malay” in South African Cookery.’<sup>6</sup> The acclaimed British photographer Jennifer Gough-Cooper is thanked for her inspiration, in the form of many conversations, which took place around the dinner table on the beautiful farm, Nooitgedacht<sup>7</sup> in the Karoo. The renowned international architect and artist Pancho Geddes, over many years, has always been a great source of inspiration, and has probably been the greatest influence for me to try to conceptualize aspects of Leipoldt’s life, the writing of which has emerged in the words of this thesis, through careful research — producing an alternative history (and form of history).

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<sup>4</sup>Michael Reitz in a conversation with me on 9 July 2008.

<sup>5</sup>Mr Japie Basson, a retired South African politician, passed away on 8 August 2012.

<sup>6</sup>Riaan Oppelt, ‘C. Louis Leipoldt and the Role of the “Cape Malay” in South African Cookery’, *Journal of Literary Studies*, 28(1), March 2012, pp. 51 – 68.

<sup>7</sup>The meaning of ‘Nooitgedacht’ is ‘who would ever have thought ...’ and so in a similar way, one could say, who would ever have thought that a study such as this thesis would one day come to fruition.



## KEY TERMS

Cultural memory

Experientiality

Herbartian apperceptive masses

Historiographic metafiction

Intellectual pluralism

Parallel processes

Political liberalism

Presence

Reception ethics

Representationalism

Side-shadowing

White's formalism

## ABSTRACT

*The South African author C Louis Leipoldt is known as an Afrikaans poet and as one of the 'Driemanskap' with Celliers and Totius. Together with Eugène Marais, they wrote the first serious Afrikaans literary poetry in the early decades of the Twentieth Century. The 'Driemanskap', grouped together for its clear national(ist) thrust, is well-known as part of the Tweede Afrikaanse Taalbeweging not only for celebrating the universal effects of nature but also for extolling the virtues of forgiveness after the South African War. Apart from his extensive canon of Afrikaans literature and a sizable discourse in the culinary field, not much is known about The Valley, Leipoldt's so-called 'English' novels written in the late 1920s and early 1930s in English, a language he was equally at home in. The titles of these novels making up The Valley trilogy are Gallows Gecko, Stormwrack and The Mask. Despite several efforts to have the novels published with leading publishing houses in both Britain and the United States of America, both during and after his lifetime, the three 'English' novels of C Louis Leipoldt remained unpublished for 69 years. It was in 2001 that for the first time they appeared unedited in a compendium volume. Prior to 2001, two of the novels were published – in 1980, the year of the centenary of Leipoldt's birth, an abridged edition of Stormwrack appeared, edited by Stephen Gray and published by David Philip, Cape Town. It was re-published by Human & Rousseau in 2000. An abridged edition of Gallows Gecko appeared in 2001, under the title Chameleon on the Gallows which the editor Stephen Gray explains he changed for stylistic reasons.*

*Leipoldt uses the form of historical fiction in his trilogy as a way of conveying historical meaning by relating the chronicle (1820 – 1930) of the place he calls the Valley, recognizable as Clanwilliam. Initially, the Valley is at peace and is sketched in its idyllic state. After the Jameson Raid of 1895, the prospects of the South African War become a reality for the inhabitants of the Cederberg as they are torn apart by their emotions, feelings and loyalties. The course of events drastically changes when war finally comes to the District. Discontinuity and change is a strong theme in the novels. Eventually the inhabitants of the Valley find that the former, respectful relations, based on tradition and tolerance, have given way to sectarian interests. This changes the social fibre of the once idyllic environment. The Valley is a lamentation of lost opportunities for a culturally unified South Africa. Its voice is one of moderateness and is inclusive for all South Africans, addressing race relations as a theme as well as decrying sectionalism. In the light of this, it is argued that Leipoldt is revealed as a political liberal and cultural pluralist. This can be heard through the voices of the characters in The Valley and seen by the way Leipoldt meant the events in his fiction to serve as an allegory for the way he saw South Africa emerging at the time. He was writing against the Nationalists, particularly against the narrative of Gustav S Preller, who spent his working life constructing a volksgeskiedenis that resulted in a significant public history that dominated Afrikaner historical thinking from circa 1905 to 1938. In this sense, it is argued, The Valley is an alternative history to the dominating Preller historiography, and because it is in the form of narrative/historical fiction, it can also be seen as an alternative form of history, to be read against certain theoretical texts, without in any way detracting from the voices of criticism against deconstructivist history.*



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