

The colonial gaze and the artist's use of authoring strategies in Charles Davidson Bell's *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*

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At the time of their making, colonial paintings were considered objective accounts of actual places and situations. Contemporary redress of colonial depictions contends however that such representations were culturally and materially determined and thus reflects the philosophical and moral bias of their painters. Charles Davidson Bell's painting *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (1850) is often reproduced in South African history books without proper context - neither the artist nor the artwork has received much critical attention from art historical scholars. I regard the critical revisiting of Bell as important because it interrogates how Victorian colonial artists, such as Bell, employed authoring strategies and visual codes that served to entrench and naturalise debasing perceptions of their subjects. In this article, I consolidate various authoring strategies, put forward by different theorists, in a triangulated interpretive reading that further takes into account ideological frameworks and social reality in the interpretation of this artwork. My interpretation shows that Bell conformed to entrenched authoring strategies, concepts and features familiar to him, and aesthetic modalities that typified the art of his time. Scrutiny of the artist's authoring strategies brings to light the role of the colonial gaze in establishing hierarchical relationships between binaries of colonial self and other/coloniser and colonised.

Key words: Charles Davidson Bell, colonial gaze, colonial painting, O/others, persuasive imaging

Die koloniale blik en die kunstenaar se gebruik van outeursstrategieë in Charles Davidson se *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*

Koloniale skilderkunstenaars het aanvaar dat hul eietydse aanskouers hul kunswerke sou interpreteer as objektiewe uitbeeldings van werklike omstandighede en omgewings. Die kontemporêre herinterpretasie van eertydse koloniale uitbeeldings toon egter dat hierdie uitbeeldings deur kulturele- en materiële-kontekste beïnvloed is, en voorts die filosofiese en morele vooroordeel van die kunstenaar reflekteer. Charles Davidson Bell se skildery *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (1850) is 'n voorbeeld van so 'n koloniale-era uitbeelding wat dikwels sonder die nodige konteks in Suid-Afrikaanse geskiedenisboeke verskyn. Nóg die kunswerk, nog die kunstenaar, het al veel kritiese aandag van kunshistorici ontvang. Ek voer aan dat kritiese herinterpretasie van Bell belangrik is, aangesien dit besin oor die wyses waarop Victoriaanse kunstenaars, outeursstrategieë en visuele-kodes aangewend het om heersende persepsies rondom hul subjekte te versterk en te naturaliseer. In hierdie artikel konsolideer ek verskeie outeursstrategieë, soos deur verskillende teoretici omskryf, in 'n getrianguleerde interpretatiewe interpretasie van die kunswerk, wat ook ideologiese raamwerke en sosiale realiteit in die bespreking daarvan in ag neem. My interpretasie van Bell se kunswerk voer aan dat die kunstenaar konformeer het tot verskanste outeursstrategieë, gevestigde motiewe en estetiese modaliteite kenmerkend aan sy eietydse kunsanskouings. 'n Kritiese ondersoek na die kunstenaar se eie outeursstrategieë bring die rol van die koloniale-blik in die daarstel van hiërargiese verhoudings tussen die binêre koloniale self en ander al dan, die kolonialiseerder en gekolonialiseerde.

Slutelwoorde: Charles Davidson Bell, koloniale-blik, koloniale skilderkuns, A/ander, oordedende uitbeelding

Charles Davidson Bell's painting *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (1850) (figure 1) is familiar to many South Africans through its reproduction in various of the country's popular, as well as scholarly, history books - often without mention of the artist responsible or the time and context in which the original artwork was produced. Presented in this way, the image is held up as an unproblematic representation of a specific historical occurrence in a particular historical account of South Africa.

This artwork depicts an event that marks the beginning of sustained European colonial presence in Southern Africa - the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, agent of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, at the Cape of Good Hope. The work is painted in a naturalistic style akin to Romantic Naturalism (cf. Rosenblum and Janson 2005: 156). The setting that Bell chose for this scene is the beach near Table Mountain - in the distance Devil's Peak towers under a dramatic semi-clouded sky. The moment depicted is the first meeting between Van Riebeeck's party and a group of indigenous Khoikhoi.¹ Perched on the central sand dune and bathed in strong directional light are Van Riebeeck and a number of his men, on the other, depicted just outside the spotlight and separated from the Europeans by the shallow gully, the Khoikhoi. The Europeans are dressed in period style, brandishing various regalia and weaponry. The Khoikhoi are shown in traditional dress, although a figure sitting closest to the European group appears naked.



Figure 1

C. D. Bell, *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652, 1850*, oil on canvas, 75.9 cm x 92cm, South African Library Collection (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 17, p. 156).

In an effort to introduce history painting to the Cape Bell produced two oils in 1850, *The Isle of the Holy Cross* (figure 2) and *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* (cf. Brooke Simons, 1998: 93-94; Godby, 1998: 156). *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* was considered the best historical painting on exhibit when displayed at Cape Town's First Exhibition of Fine Arts in 1851 (Lipschitz 1992: 18-19). Generally speaking the genre of historic landscapes reflect scenes that tend to deal with historical, and sometimes mythical, subjects as set in the past, and which are often populated by figures that are part of that particular narrative (cf. Chu 2003: 183). Both the genre and context of the first public viewing of this artwork suggest that its intended viewing audience was the metropolitan cultural elite of British society at the Cape.

Scottish-born Bell (1813-1882) first arrived in Cape Town in 1830. Bell is often described as an explorer-painter, who also worked as a book illustrator (Brown 1978: 4-6; Ogilvie, 1988: 54). In 1834 Bell was recruited as second draughtsman to the scientific expedition of the Cape of Good Hope Association for Exploring Central Africa into the central regions of Southern Africa under the leadership of Dr Andrew Smith (Brooke Simons 1998: 28) – his task was to record ethnographical subjects and landscapes (Lipschitz 1992: 2). It was on this journey that Bell first encountered, what fellow expedition member John Burrow termed, a ‘real native’ (Brooke Simons 1998: 31). In 1838 Bell qualified as a land surveyor, an occupation he became familiar with as a member of Smyth’s expedition. In February of the same year Bell was appointed as Government Surveyor to the Surveyor General’s Office (Brooke Simons 1998:167, Lipschitz 1992: 11). While working in the Surveyor-General’s department, Bell produced a number of ethnographic paintings that purported to reflect events relating to the behaviour of indigenous peoples (Record 1994: 64).

Very few publications are dedicated to Bell or his work. The first to attempt at a detailed biography of Bell was undertaken by Anna Smith in an article published in 1954, seventy-two years after his death. Smith drew most of her information from contemporaneous 19th century sources such as newspapers, as well as information gathered from documents in the Cape Archives (Bradlow 1998: 10). A later contribution by Smith was a biography of Bell contained in the Dictionary of South African biography (1968, volume. 1). In this instance, Smith included information from Bell’s obituary written by his long time friend Charles Piazza Smyth (Lipschitz 1992: 27). Most South African art historical reference books and compendiums contain only passing references to Bell (these include: Brown 1978: 5, 8, 9, 12, 21, 24); Fransen 1981: 129-130; Ogilvie 1988: 53-54), of which Fransen (1981: 129) and Ogilvie (1988: 53) also contain errors and inconsistencies. Other sources completely omit any mention of him (cf. Alexander, 1940: i-171; Alexander & Cohen 1990: 1-179; Battis 1941: 1-43; Berman 1983: 1-368; Bouwman 1948: 1-134).

Academic research documents on the artist and his work are also scant. At the time of writing two Master’s dissertations were registered on the national research database: Lipschitz’s *The Charles Davidson Trust Collection: A Catalogue and Critical Study* (1992: 1-215) and my Own, *A Comparative Reading of the Depiction of Afrikaner Ancestry in two Works by C. D. Bell* (Strydom 2009: 1-212). Lipschitz’s dissertation catalogues and critically surveys the Bell Heritage Trust Collection. It includes a biographical overview of Bell that derives primarily from unpublished and secondary sources such as documents from the Surveyor General and Colonial Office, housed in the Cape Archives. Lipschitz (1992: 1-28) gathered further information from letters written by Bell, kept in the Cape Archives and the Bell Heritage Trust Collection. However, *The Life and Work of Charles Bell by Brooke Simons* (1998: 1-176) remains the only contemporary publication to date dealing exclusively with Bell’s biography and oeuvre as artist. Brooke Simons draws from a wide spectrum of sources both in South Africa and Scotland, including the John and Charles Bell Heritage Trust Collection, the South African Library, South African Cultural History Museum, MuseumAfrica, the Cape Archives, Crail Museum and the National Museums of Scotland.

However, Godby (1998: 140) emphasises that knowledge about Bell, especially as an artist, is sketchy and often greatly distorted. He is best known for his two large oil paintings displayed in the South African Library - *The landing of Van Riebeeck* and *The Isle of the Holy Cross* (cf. Bradlow 1998: 10). Both are painted, as noted, in the realist Romantic tradition and can generally be considered part of the 19th century genre of history painting. These two

works belong to a group of several artworks Bell based on extracts from Van Riebeeck's journal (Brooke Simons 1998: 93; Lipschitz 1992: 18).



Figure 2

C. D. Bell, *The Isle of the Holy Cross*, 1850, oil on canvas, 75 cm x 92cm, South African Library Collection (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 4, p. 94).

In addition to referring to historical sources, the naturalistic approach that Bell employs in *The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*, akin to a style Rosenblum and Janson (2005: 156) call Romantic Naturalism, creates the impression of a faithful and believable depiction of the subject matter that presupposes objective empirical observation on behalf of the artist. The style satisfied the Victorian criteria of judging painting in terms of its representational qualities, presenting 'real life' (cf. Guy 2002: 314); a view supported by the actual setting of *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*, which in turn suggest an eyewitness account of the event. However, painted two centuries after the actual event, Bell clearly had to draw on his imagination to depict this historical moment.

To render his view of the event believable to his audience, Bell employed several authoring strategies to support his naturalistic style, among them Claudian principles of pictorial arrangement such as separating foreground, middle-ground and background by using light and tonal perspective to recreate the spatial depth typical of European depictions at the time (cf. Godby 1998: 144).

Persuasive imaging and the colonial gaze

I contend that Bell's use of authoring strategies amounted to a form of persuasive imaging that supported his colonial gaze. According to Yancy (2008: 6), the colonial gaze "is that broadly construed epistemic perspective, a process of seeing without being seen, that constructs the Black [sic] body into its own colonial imagery". The colonial gaze belies the notion of the 'innocent eye', which Brown (2001: 23) describes as, "one of the most powerful Romantic myths". This presumed innocent eye made its way into the reception of depictions of nature and landscapes. It sustained the belief that an artist's innate instinctive vision would guarantee a truthful, objective depiction regardless of his own academic artistic training or external factors such as social, cultural, political or economic contexts. In practice, however, artists' depictions were of course telling of their own cultural milieu and artistic imagination (Brown 2001: 24).

Weheliye (2005: 40) ascribes the power of the colonial gaze to the hegemonic position of vision and "ocularcentric discourse" in Western modernity and exposes the complicit role thereof in the construction of race and racism. The colonial gaze contributes to the denigration and objectification the colonial other (McFarlane 2004: 175, 176). It serves to essentialise and fix the identity of the colonised according to an entrenched European hierarchy of same-other/coloniser-colonised dialectics. This dialectic of difference was based on pre-existing racial categories and was brought to bear by European myths, pseudo-science and ingrained beliefs regarding the other. In turn, the colonial gaze reinforced these racial categories, which again served to underpin the colonial gaze (Yancy 2008: 2 - 4).

In colonial discourse, the subjectivity of the colonised is continually located in the gaze of the imperial Other, or so-called *grande-autre* (Ashcroft et al., 1998: 171). In Lacanian terms the *grande-autre*/Other refers to the symbolic and the unconscious (cf. Payne, 2000: 392). From a postcolonial perspective, the *grande-autre* can be likened to both imperial discourse and the imperial centre, as well as to empire itself (Ashcroft et al. 1998: 170). This interrelation functions on two levels: on one hand the Other represents the vehicle by which the colonised subject's perception of the world is mediated. By the same token, the Other – like imperial discourse, the imperial centre and empire – sets the standards by which the colonised subject is defined as different or other. In a similar way, an artist's colonial gaze and use of persuasive imaging not only suggest mastery of the colonial landscape, but also of its inhabitants.

Ashcroft (2001: 15, 141) argues that colonial painting functions as an allegory of imperial control by which the surveyed comes into being. By means of perspective, modes of surveillance and cartography, Europeans translated their control of space into cultural control. Ashcroft (2001: 141) further argues that surveillance and observation are in the same league as the most powerful authoring strategies of imperial dominance:

it implies a viewer with an elevated vantage point, it suggests the power to process and understand that which is seen, and it objectifies, and interpolates, the colonised subject in a way that fixes its identity in relation to the surveyor.

In a similar vein Ashcroft (2001: 141) suggests that both Arcadian and Sublime modes of colonial painting function as an allegory of imperial control, because it is through the representation of surveillance that the surveyed comes into being.

According to Boehmer (1995: 94-95) the coloniser's motive for documenting the colonised landscape and its peoples stemmed from two main pretexts. On one hand, there was a desire to understand and control the unfamiliar, and on the other, a need to shy off, tame and demarcate

that which seemed uncontrollable. In the process the coloniser employed a number of strategies such as highlighting the unfamiliar as strange and exotic or, conversely, omitting the inscrutable altogether. Whatever the motives behind the documentation of the colonised peoples and lands, such representations reinforced perceptions regarding the dominance of Empire by making imperialism seem part of the natural order of things. However, these strategies only served to frustrate the situation as it exposed the actual “unreadability of the other” (Boehmer 1995: 2-3, 94).

The colonisers faced a further difficult task in their attempts to graft their own hermeneutic structures onto the colonised milieu (Boehmer 1995: 92). Hence, those documenting the unfamiliar environment were constantly dependent on their own customary concepts, narratives and metaphors in order to describe and encompass their unsettling new surroundings (Boehmer, 1995: 92). Jacobs (1995: 9) adds that European perceptions of foreign lands invariably incorporated both factual and fictitious conceptions. Thus, when confronted with the non-native aesthetics of their new milieu:

[European] travellers adapted the familiar concepts of hill, meadow, brook and so on to give shape to their experience. They sought out features conforming to their own aesthetic schemes – misty tones, a heterogeneity of natural and geological features, the idealised landscapes associated with the seventeenth-century French painter Claude. So, it was as we now tend to believe, that the reality most feasible for a colonial culture to occupy was one of its own making, described in its own language (Boehmer 1995: 92).

The above excerpt illustrates how pictorial devices such as linear perspective, elevated vantage points and other illusionistic artifices were employed as strategies that abetted European artists ‘persuasive imaging’ of the colonised landscape. Hills (1991: 100) uses the term persuasive imaging to describe how the viewer may be convinced of the reality of a particular depiction through the artist’s use of the conventions of naturalism - in spite of the fact that the pictorial information in question is mediated by the artist’s selection and manipulation thereof. I would suggest that in light of the pseudo-scientific bias that underpinned the depiction of colonised peoples (cf. Ashcroft et al. 1998: 209; Loomba 2005: 56,101-102), the notion of persuasive imaging is not only confined to the depiction of the landscape but also to colonial depictions of others and otherness.

In support of the notion of persuasive imaging, European artists also employed a number of other pictorial devices and visual codes that served to entrench and naturalise debasing perceptions of their subjects through their depictions. There were particular aesthetic protocols that determined the depiction of certain classes, for example. These protocols were also indicative of social and moral codes of behaviour (Barrell 1992: 1). The use of colour, rendering of light and shadow and composition may all be used to codify power relations. This is eloquently illustrated in Wa Thiong’o’s (1993: 43) description of conventional colonialist painting: “In many paintings of the colonial period, the white adventurer was always at the centre of the action with rays of light radiating outwards from him. Africans were background shadows merging with the outer darkness and the natural landscape”. Wa Thiong’o’s judgement is supported by Boime’s (1990: 2) suggestion that chiaroscuro transcends the mere modelling of light and shadow - that as a polarity, it represents the religious dualism of Good versus Evil. Therefore, I argue, that this dualism inherent in chiaroscuro can also be read in terms of the Manichean allegory, which itself illustrates the way that all aspects regarding the relationship between coloniser and colonised are polarised through imperial discourse, to set up a binary opposition that pits good against evil and superior against inferior and, ultimately, European against other.

Another conventional way to delineate exclusivity and social hierarchies within a picture is the use of a triangle or pyramidal composition, often by means of a hierarchical descending order from top to bottom (cf. Barrell 1992: 123; Boime 1990: 19, 95, 209). Dividing the picture in different planes from top to bottom and foreground to background may indicate not only the physical but also the social position of a figure, with those regarded as inferior or subordinate often relegated to the lowest register or point of the composition (cf. Boime 1990: 92, 183). Other devices used to signify social standing include posture and material markers such as clothing. Subordinates tend to be depicted in crouching or kneeling positions, for example, and are often shabbily dressed in contrast to the upright poses and regal dress of the élite (cf. Barrell 1992: 44; Boime 1990: 103, 170, 179). Racial markers were used for more extreme forms of juxtapositioning. For example, in 16th century European portraits of the upper classes black people were often depicted with the purpose of drawing attention to the Other's white complexion – and by implication their superiority as subject (Honour & Fleming 1999: 27).

The various authoring strategies discussed above demonstrably support the persuasive imaging of colonial territories and peoples, thus facilitating the colonial gaze of European artists. Considered together these strategies comprise a set of criteria that can provide a more thorough interpretation of colonial artworks and yield illuminating insights. Whereas the notion of the innocent eye promoted the belief that colonial artists' innate instinctive vision would guarantee a truthful, objective depiction regardless of aspects like academic artistic training or external factors such as social, cultural, political or economic contexts, their depictions were in fact telling of their own cultural milieu and artistic imagination (Brown 2001: 23, 24). Thus, with a view to determine how Bell's colonial gaze influenced his persuasive imaging in *The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*, I will conduct a triangulated interpretive reading as proposed by Lerner (1991: 335). This approach considers the (1) ideological frameworks, (2) social reality and (3) authoring strategies that governed the production of the artwork. The reading will serve to provide a more comprehensive perspective on Bell's work, and in particular helps to establish how the artist's colonial gaze and use of authoring strategies determined his depiction of early Dutch colonisers and indigenous Khoikhoi people in the colonial landscape.

The colonial gaze and persuasive imaging in Charles Davidson Bell's *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*

The ideological framework: the Victorian context

Since colonial paintings reflect the intangible social values and cultural assumptions of their time (Carruthers & Arnold 2000: 119), an analysis of *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* within the ideological framework of its production, necessitates a consideration of the ways in which this artwork reflects Bell's bequeathed Victorian cultural values.

The title of the work reflects its subject matter and, along with its position in the history-painting genre, thus also suggests that it can be interpreted as a narrative piece. The story told is European, and is related from a European perspective. There are no references to pre-colonial history. Thus, the artwork negates the existence of the pre-colonial - hence colonialism is cited as the only history. The main impetuses behind modern European imperialism were to colonise and expand territory, and this artwork depicts and commemorates the beginning of this process at the Cape. The historical reference point, 1652, is determined according to the Western calendar and it depicts an event that has significance for European colonial history. Painted nearly two centuries

after the occasion, this artwork represents an epic scene of “inflated heroism” depicted in the Romantic style (Record 1994: 64). Significantly, the only individual named is Van Riebeeck.

Since this artwork depicts an event of historical importance, it can also be read as a memorial painting. However, when it was painted, the Cape was a British colony and no longer under Dutch control. Britain, together with France, is considered as the foremost imperial power of the 19th century and therefore epitomised European power (cf. Young 2001: 31). Thus, painted from a British perspective, the work is not a memorial to Dutch power and grandeur – but rather homage to the rise of British imperial expansionism.

The dissemination of Eurocentric culture was an important motivating factor behind modern European imperialism and was congruous with a perceived need to civilise non-Europeans (cf. Ferro 1997: 11-12; Young 2001: 31). In Bell’s painting this is evidenced in the presence of a priest representing the Christian faith in opposition to what was considered a godless heathen indigenous culture (cf. Mountain 2003: 30). The Khoikhoi’s position in front of Devil’s Peak further alludes to their non-adherence to Western religious conventions. The shallow gully separating them from the Europeans further strengthens the implied divide between the civilised Christian and heathen savage. The inclusion of a religious minister is significant since Christianity was a central tenet of the Western account and codification of history (cf. Ferro 1998: 20). Loomba (2005: 99) posits that missionary zeal and efforts to convert natives went hand in hand with most colonial enterprises. In many instances the bestowal of Christianity was used as justification for the economic pillage of colonies.

In the artwork, European commodities brought ashore for barter purposes represent the other great European meta-narrative – mercantile capitalism. Van Riebeeck and his wealthy merchants, religious minister and gentry occupy the central position of importance to the middle of the picture, with the Khoikhoi relegated to the far right corner of the painting. European national vanity and Europeans’ own perceived custodianship of the balance of world power were also intrinsic to the European imperial programme (cf. Ferro 1997: 11-12; Young 2001: 31). As propounded by Ashcroft et al. (1998: 126), the European desire for and belief in its own cultural superiority was of far greater consequence than the conquest of profit. Hence in this artwork, depicted in a glow of light, we find Van Riebeeck and his men with their opulent costumes and weaponry as markers of wealth, status, military superiority and national identity (the latter also symbolised by the Dutch flag), signifying the prosperity of civilisation which they have come to bestow on a ‘primitive’, exotic corner of an ‘uncivilised’ Africa. The display of national status symbols and pageantry can be seen as an expression of colonial authority and the dominance of the coloniser. The flag is of exceptional scale compared to the figures and towers over the scene. The flagpost pierces the African sky and points away from Devil’s Peak towards Europe. Hence, similar to Delacroix’s (1798-1863) *The 28th of July: Liberty Leading the people* (1830), Bell’s use of the flag in this artwork can be seen to combine allegory with actuality with the flag here symbolising not only colonial conquest, but also the ‘liberation’ of the indigenous population from a perceived backward, godless and uncivilized existence (cf. Honour & Fleming 1999: 655). The Khoikhoi’s position in front of Devil’s Peak may further attest to this, since Christians at the time often equated skin colour with religious persuasion and cultural status (cf. Giliomee 2003: 14).

Not only did the indigenous peoples appear somatically different from Europeans, but to European observers they also seemed to have no economy, religious or political structures and neither literacy nor what Europeans considered an intelligible language (cf. Mountain 2003: 30). These perceptions were supported by pseudo-scientific theories of the time (e.g. Phrenology and

other theories bolstered by social Darwinism). According to such theories, race was regarded as a result of an immutable biological hierarchy with Europeans occupying the highest rung (cf. Ashcroft et al. 1998: 209; Loomba 2005: 56, 101-102). Another example of this was the pseudo-science of physiognomy. This contributed to the advancement of the notion that biological features such as race somehow divined a person or a group's social and psychological character and traits, and was therefore also responsible for historical development and cultural formation (cf. Lambourne 1999: 259). Thus, indigenous peoples were generally viewed as primitives who lacked culture altogether. Their depiction on the periphery of the composition in *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* is thus not surprising, and at the same time validating Wa Thiong' o's indictment of stereotypical colonialist paintings (cf. 1993: 43).

In spite of the perceived inferiority of indigenous peoples, Europeans often resorted to portraying them in the manner of ancient Greeks and Romans, in a manner that would associate them with the notion of the noble savage. This represented an individual who was somehow redeemed on the basis that he shunned society in favour of communing with nature, existing as a naïve primitive on the periphery of civilisation while still possessing no culture (cf. Marien & Fleming 2005: 504). According to Van Wyk Smith (1992: 285) the noble savage trope forms part of a dichotomy that served to present the native as both exotic, but sufficiently familiar to a European audience. The opposite extreme represented natives as brute savages. This practice was evident in the works of several authors and artists working in South Africa during the 19th century, including Bell's (cf. Godby 1998: 146, 153). The depiction of the Khoikhoi in this artwork attests to this, with at least two members of the group (the standing figure and the seated figure on the far right) depicted in poses recalling classical sculpture.

In spite of this allusion to classical pose, the Khoikhoi's facial features are depicted coarsely and are far more generalised in appearance than those of the Dutch colonisers, rendering them unrecognisable as individuals and in this way identifying them as a homogenous 'type' different from Europeans. Barrell (1992: 134) suggests that figures painted indistinctly in this manner constitute an attempt to evade the question of their actuality. Bell's practice of depicting various South African ethnic and racial groups as particular 'types', as evidenced also in his early ethnographic drawings (cf. Godby 1998: 145-146), is consistent with the pseudo-scientific racial discourse of the time, where it was conceived that physiognomical distinctions such as race could determine a person or a group's social and psychological character and traits. In turn, this belief helped to sustain the notion of the natural world as a universal hierarchical system (cf. Carruthers & Arnold 2000: 22,171). Their rudimentary attire and various degrees of nudity, which starkly contrasts with the richly dressed and adorned Europeans, further show the Khoikhoi's supposed primitive savagery.

According to Godby (1998: 145-146) there is evidence that Bell's works reflect the shared European prejudice of the time regarding Africans' inferiority as a race; as is evident in the ethnographic drawings Bell made on Smith's 1834 expedition. Godby (1998: 146) argues that: "many [of these] drawings reveal a patent satirical intention in their style that is directly at odds with any scientific purpose", that, indeed, through their style of caricature they serve to convey a detached sense of superiority over their subject matter by means of satire. In this regard Godby (1998: 146) cites a drawing, *Medicine man blowing counter charm towards the enemy* (1834) (figure 3), as cogent example of Bell's manipulation of different modes of depiction used to frame aspects that will appeal to his presumed rationalist European audience's sense of the primitive and the ridiculous. In contrast, Bell's depictions of himself at the time (figures 4 & 5) differ markedly from his stereotypical depictions of others (Godby 1998: 147). In this regard Bell echoed the mindset of many colonists for whom others in their society represented a certain

set of associations based on colonial prejudice. Negative perceptions about the Khoikhoi in particular, had been entrenched in the mainstream British public imagination (Viljoen, 2008: 190). In Cape society at the time of Bell, the Khoikhoi were considered to be quarrelsome, down-at-heel inebriated sloths (figure 6), whereas the local Boers (figure 7) were seen as obese and boorish sloths (Godby 1998: 147; Moodie 1835: 169-170). Godby (1998: 147) argues that Bell often tended to depict his subjects according to prevailing colonial perceptions:

Bell insisted that certain behaviour typified any given subject, he also maintained a very restricted image of its physical form. In the same way that his 'Boer' was invariably fat, so he took every opportunity to exaggerate the appearance of steatopygia in his 'Hottentot' and 'Bushman' subjects.

In light of the above discussion it becomes evident that this artwork is both a reflection and evidence of the ideological context in which it was produced. The current reading of this painting also seeks to bring to light the ideological frameworks that determined the hierarchical relationships between the binaries of colonial *self and other*, pitting the representation of coloniser against colonised, the civilised against the uncivilised, as well as the hierarchy of racial superiority.



Figure 3

C. D. Bell, *Medicine man blowing counter charm towards the enemy*, 1834, watercolour (monochrome), 18.5 cm x 26.7 cm, MuseumAfrica Collection (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 8: 145).



Figure 4

C. D. Bell, Illustration taken from letter to the artist's sister Christina, 1837, ink, Bell Heritage Trust Collection, UCT (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 10: 147).

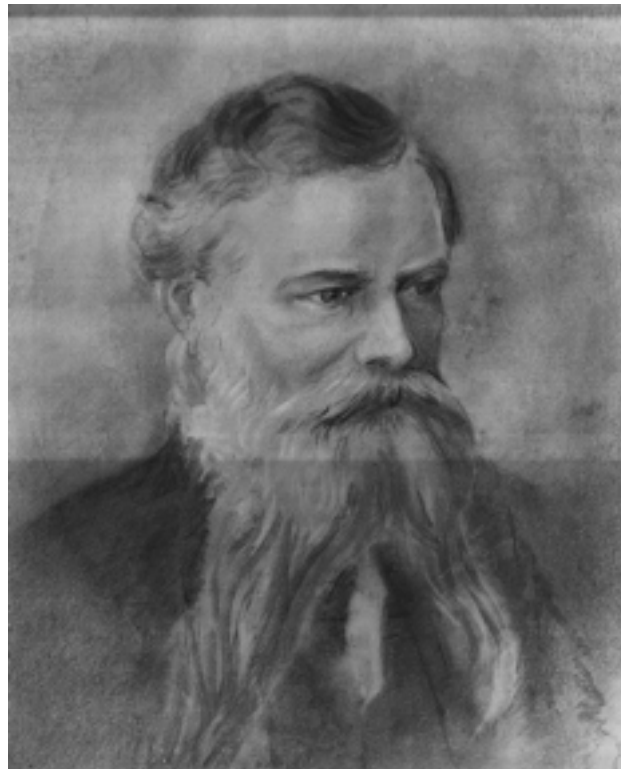


Figure 5

C. D. Bell, Self portrait, not dated, crayon on paper, 70 cm x 57 cm, William Fehr Collection (source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 1: 2).



Figure 6
C. D. Bell, Hottentot, not dated, watercolour, 16.5 cm x 10.5 cm, Bell Heritage Trust Collection
(source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 9: 21).



Figure 7
C. D. Bell, Hottentot, not dated, ink and wash, 10.8 cm x 16.7 cm, Brenthurst Library Collection
(source: Brooke Simons 1998: figure 2: 141).

Social realities

The Khoikhoi presented an otherness foreign not only to European social realities, but also the Europeans' previous encounters with foreign peoples in the East (cf. Giliomee 2003: 3; Katzen 1982: 198, 202). Bell likely inherited a view of the Khoikhoi derived from late eighteenth and early nineteenth century British travelogue accounts, notably by the likes of John Barrow (1764 – 1848). Barrow's view of the Khoikhoi seemed more benevolent than previous accounts, yet he still regarded them as inferior human beings (cf. Van Wyk Smith 1992: 310, 319-320). Importantly, Barrow was also instrumental in shaping English public opinion regarding the

boers. He suggested that their reluctance to engage with the British reflected the manner a “vanquished people” generally reacted to their conquerors (Streak 1974: 6, 12, 22,88,91). Van Wyk Smith (1992: 322) argues that Barrow’s compassionate view of the Khoikhoi should in fact be viewed against his disdain for the boers, whom he regarded as “...more indolent, more ignorant and more brutal, than any set of men, bearing the reputation of being civilized, upon the face of the whole earth”.

Barrow’s account of the boers echoed nineteenth century British depictions of the Malay, who formed part of the British Empire in the East (cf. Alatas 1977: 204). The negative portrayal of certain sectors of society in this manner had its roots in Britain itself, where the working class were considered indolent, morally inferior and dim - characteristics that were readily projected on colonised peoples. However, as Alatas (1977: 30) points out, a negative portrayal of the British working class was no indictment of the British nation as a whole, whereas in the case of the colonised, entire ethnic groups were easily arraigned to such prejudice. According to Alatas (1977: 120,125) such negative stereotypes served as justification for colonial domination and territorial conquest. For the most part these negative stereotypes were based on superficial observations that were already premised on prejudice. Furthermore, these accounts were not scholarly but generally contributed by the likes of civil servants, sailors and travel writers (Alatas, 1977: 112).

Convention, however, determined the inferior position of non-Europeans in canonical depictions (Boime 1990: 21). Bell’s use of naturalistic style enables him to distinguish the Khoikhoi racially from the Dutch colonisers. Racial biases were presented as objective truth and were often supported by a similarly entrenched gender bias – the one often serving as mutual justification for bias against the other. Perceived feminine characteristics were assigned to “the lower races” during the mid-nineteenth century, for example (cf. Loomba 2005: 58-59). In other instances, Caucasian women were deemed closer to Africans than to white men. Within this hierarchy, African women occupied the lowest rung. They were considered so lowly and ‘primitive’ that they were seen not to possess the self-awareness to even be able to go insane. On other occasions the colonised landscape, and not necessarily the people, were feminised - as in particular explorers’ accounts of Africa (Boehmer 1995: 87).

Both racial and gender biases are discernable in *The Landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652*. In spite of the naturalistic style, Bell’s depiction of the Khoikhoi in this painting is gender-vague due to the generalised way he painted their features. In contrast, the Dutchmen are carefully depicted with great attention to detail and a discernable individuality to each figure. The Khoikhoi are depicted as physically similar, with the exception of an apparent mother and child grouping. Whereas adornments may indicate a distinction of rank and gender within the group, facial features and clothing appear alike in all the Khoikhoi, except for the figure seated to the left, who appears nude and as a result, ironically more genderless. In this depiction, the traditional attire and body form of the Khoikhoi further serves to highlight their otherness from the European norm.

Apart from conspicuous somatic differences, the Khoikhoi were also culturally different from the colonisers. Significant primary cultural differences were lodged in the way in which indigenous societies were structured socially, politically and economically. The Khoikhoi were perceived to be technologically and culturally far less developed than the indigenous peoples in the East with whom the Dutch and the British had already had more sustained contact (cf. Giliomee 2003: 3). The Khoikhoi were former hunter-gatherers who adopted domesticated livestock via West and Central African Iron age peoples (Giliomee & Mbenga 2007: viii). They

lived a lifestyle of nomadic pastoralists and traveled seasonally, taking their portable matjieshuise (houses made of woven basketry) with them. When settled in a particular location, they lived in village encampments consisting of roughly a hundred clan members. Territories for grazing were more or less defined, but the low nutritional value of fynbos and regular droughts meant that clans often had to move beyond their own territory to find grazing (Mountain 2003: 40-46). Probably because local conditions necessitated the sharing of resources, the Khoikhoi's notion of private ownership related only to livestock and did not extend to land (Smith & Pfeiffer 1993: 17). Khoikhoi society was plutocratic. In such societies, an individual's wealth was determined by political standing. In Khoikhoi society, wealth was primarily measured in terms of livestock. However, their notion of private ownership related only to livestock and did not extend to the land, which they considered as inalienable (cf. Smith & Pfeiffer 1993: 17). In contrast, Europeans regarded land as a commodity and bartered with the intention of obtaining realty rights. Thus after European settlement, the cattle trade with the Dutch actually eroded the traditional power structures and social cohesion of the Khoikhoi (Elphick 1985: 38,112; Ross, 1999: 10, 22). The different views regarding land occupation and usage led to the European myth of a terra nullius – an empty and unused landscape that was for the taking (cf. Van Eeden 2004: 25-26). This notion is also found in the tradition of British landscape painting where a well-ordered and controlled fecund landscape equalled a well-organised society (cf. Barrell 1992: 133). In *The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* the landscape depicted also represents a *vacuum domicilem* – an unproductive and uncultivated land, thus unused and up for grabs.

The Khoikhoi's lack of material goods highlights another significant disparity between coloniser and indigenous economies. The Dutch are depicted presenting and carrying ashore many wares and goods, material proof of their wealth as a mercantile colonial power. Both the subject matter and the narrative of this painting – the establishment of a victualing station on the profitable Cape trade route – commemorate the expansion of the Dutch (and by implication, broader European) merchant empire. Interaction and trade with Europeans eventually led to the disintegration of traditional Khoikhoi society (cf. Ross 1999: 10, 22) – a fait accompli by the time the artwork was painted.

One social reality that is not apparent in Bell's depiction of colonial relationships between coloniser and colonised is the British attitude towards the Dutch – neither at the time of the event depicted, nor at the time of the artwork's completion. By the time the painting was completed, South Africa's colonial history had nearly spanned two centuries; the majority of that time under Dutch occupation and rule. In 1652 the British and Dutch were colonial rivals, but by 1850 the descendants of the colonial heroes depicted in Bell's painting were subjects of the British Empire. This aspect gains significance when considering that both the artist and intended audience of the artwork were British.

By the time the Cape Dutch people became British subjects, their society had already become African-based (or sociologically indigenous) and had lost most of its cultural associations with the Netherlands (cf. Steyn 2001: xxiv). Indeed, English civil society at the Cape disregarded and disdained everything associated with the Cape Dutch. To them Dutch settlers were culturally different; they spoke a foreign language and adhered to a different religious persuasion. British accounts of the Cape Dutch tended to be very negative and disparaging. The common English perception of these people, by the time also called boers, included attributes such as indolence, ignorance, indifference, treachery, cruelty, boorishness, troublesomeness, disaffectedness, moral degenerateness, coarseness and a lack of polish in manner, and suggested that they were dirty and slovenly in appearance. The Spectator of 17 May 1834 referred to these people, who by then could be called Afrikaners, as “semi-savage Dutch Africans” with Kitchener's description

of the Afrikaner as “uncivilised Afrikaner savages with a thin white veneer” six decades later, corroborating such a stance (cf. Streak, 1974: 125, Steyn 2001: 26). Apart from considering themselves morally superior, the English found Afrikaners’ non-observance regarding class, rank and title particularly irksome. During the first years of British occupation, the British’s sense of superiority was a recurring issue in English/Cape Afrikaner relations (Streak 1974: 41).

At the time Bell painted his account of South African Imperial history, another pivotal colonial event that shaped South Africa as a country and its history, the Great Trek (1836-1854) was drawing to a close. In many ways this event represented the social, ideological and above all political rejection of British hegemony - an event considered by some to herald the birth of the Afrikaner nation (cf. De Klerk 2008: 342-343). Ross’ claim that British nationalism was the “prime nationalism to which both Afrikaner and African nationalism reacted” (cf. Giliomee, 2003: 194) supports such a view. Thus, Bell’s choice to depict an event that heralds the beginning of the history of the Afrikaner seems at odds with the social, cultural and political status quo that existed between British and Cape Afrikaners at the time. The painting bears little relation to the actual event, and is rather concerned with the perceptions and values of 19th century British colonial power. Thus, giving credence to Record’s (1994: 65) suggestion that the artwork represents a “jingoist appropriation” of Dutch history for British imperialist purposes.

Authoring strategies

European artists used various authoring strategies to convey their observations of both the colonised other and colonised landscape. Such depictions were generally predicated on stereotypical representations. These artists further tended to resort to conventional and familiar concepts, narratives and metaphors in order to describe and encompass their unsettling new surroundings (cf. Boehmer 1995: 92). One such strategy is the depiction of the colonised as sub-human. In contrast with the superiority afforded representations of an expanding Europe, the colonised were either represented in generic terms such as faceless masses; or in lesser terms by showing them as uncivilised, subhuman, child or animal-like; all part of the attempt to justify and rationalise European colonialism (cf. Boehmer 1995: 79; Smith & Pfeiffer 1993: 20).

Bell’s belief in British superiority as race and in the colonial project meant that he too on occasion regarded indigenous peoples as savages – as examples in his personal correspondence attest (cf. Brooke Simons 1998: 35). Reading *The landing of Van Riebeeck, 1652* in its ideological context reveals the artist’s disregard for the Cape’s indigenous inhabitants and pre-colonial history – an attitude that literally rendered these ‘opaque centuries’ invisible. The superiority afforded the representation of Europeans can be seen in the central position assigned to Van Riebeeck and his party compositionally. Posture is another device that may signify social standing (cf. Barrell 1992: 44; Boime 1990: 103, 170, 179). In this work all the Khoikhoi, bar one, are depicted in crouching or seated positions in contrast to the upright poses of the Van Riebeeck group, thus indicating the subordinate position of the Khoikhoi in relation to the Dutch.

The Khoikhoi’s depiction as a homogeneous and anonymous collection of people rather than individuals reiterates their subordination and corresponds to the way the other is viewed. The attention and detail afforded to the Europeans’ rank and occupation reflected in their dress further highlights the Khoikhoi’s anonymity. The Europeans’ rich attire reflects the prosperity of the Dutch merchant nation. Their costume displays variation in both style and colour, with vivid hues of gold, as well as orange, blue and white – representing the colours of the Dutch flag. The Europeans thus dominate the composition also in terms of palette. In contrast, the

artist renders the traditional dress of the Khoikhoi in a generic manner by depicting them in simple earth-coloured clothing. The pigmented skin depicting the backdrop of shadows cast by Table Mountain visually consumes the Khoikhoi, thus echoing Wa Thiong' o's indictment of representation in colonialist paintings (cf. Wa Thiong' o, 1993: 43). By using authoring strategies that depict the Khoikhoi as sub-human and inferior to Europeans, Bell situates them firmly in the position of the other.

While colonists' depictions of indigenous peoples were regarded by their contemporaries as exemplifying the truth, these depictions represented a particular version of reality intended for a specific audience. Such accounts were often characterised by a heady mixture of fact and fiction. The Romantic Naturalist style in which Bell depicted the Khoikhoi presupposes the 'believable' and faithful depiction of subject matter thus rendering this painting 'real' for its intended audience (cf. Rosenblum & Janson 2005: 156). Ironically, Bell's use of the Romantic style means that he also made use of pictorial strategies associated with the picturesque and sublime (cf. Godby 1998: 145,156; Brooke Simons 1998: 67), adding a heroic flair, thus belying the supposed 'reality' of this picture.

As an aesthetic modality, the sublime is often associated with seascapes or mountainous scenery (cf. Chu 2003: 183) - both of which are present in this painting. An artist's use of the sublime generally aims to elicit overpowering emotions in the viewer. This is achieved through the use of awe-inspiring epic vastness as well as rousing the imagination through the power of suggestion (cf. Clarke 2001: 234; Chilvers 2003: 574). The geographic character of Table Bay with its towering mountains, the unusual and iconic shape of Table Mountain and the reputedly stormy seas around the Cape naturally lend themselves to attaining this goal. Although Table Mountain itself is not depicted, the artwork's primary intended audience of Cape residents could hardly be unaware of its towering omnipresence. Its omission, therefore, does not negate its implied presence in the imagination of the viewer. Bell's decision to depict the enigmatically named Devil's Peak under a stormy sky further serves to rouse the imagination through the power of suggestion. Since the sublime mode of colonial painting functions as an allegory of imperial control, the artist's use of this authoring strategy highlights his complicity in colonial processes of representation (cf. Ashcroft 2001: 141).

Apart from aesthetic modalities such as the sublime, European artists also made use of composition and perspective as authoring strategies. In this work the Europeans stake the highest register - even towering above the imposing Devil's Peak - their commanding flagpole piercing the overcast sky, alluding to the triumph of European Christian civilization over heathen Africa. The shallow gully that separates the Europeans from the Khoikhoi further emphasises the divide between these two binaries. Despite historical records that estimate Van Riebeeck's party numbering only around ninety (Giliomee 2003: xiv, 1, 4). Europeans occupy almost three quarters of the painting's format and also constitute the focal point of the composition. They are pictured coming ashore - a sign of agency - and are represented as industrious and self-possessed in their new surroundings. Their advancement into the landscape is visually supported by the diagonal line flowing from the bottom left to the top right that dominates the format of the painting. In the same way, Van Riebeeck leads the Dutch advance into foreign territory - the strong diagonal line guides the viewer's eye across the picture plane, visually conquering the expanse of the landscape it depicts. In contrast, a small group of Khoikhoi represents the entire indigenous population of the peninsula; and occupies only a quarter of the composition. Devil's Peak frames the Khoikhoi group, further alluding to their supposed heathen (read: uncivilised) ways. They are shown passively awaiting an audience with Van Riebeeck. Thus, read from left to right, the picture purports the heroic arrival of European colonisers, easily able to stake their

claims in the face of a small and docile indigenous population, thus reflecting a very unlikely and idealised account of events, especially considering prior violent exchanges between the Khoikhoi and Europeans (cf. Mountain 2003: 46-47).

Apart from composition, the use of perspective as authoring strategy also comes into play in this artwork. Perspective in colonial paintings may be translated into real spatial situations through the persuasive imaging of the artist, whereby Europeans transfigured their control of space into military and cultural control and, ultimately, possession and thus highlighting the complicit role of artists in the colonial programme (cf. Ashcroft 2001: 15; Godby 1998: 144, 150). In this artwork perspective is characterized by a single controlling viewpoint that recedes from the foreground into the middle distance and distant background. This type of perspective renders depicted space accessible for the viewer. Bell's use of a single controlling viewpoint thus assumes symbolic significance that represents an instrument of the possessive gaze of his imperial eye.

In the artwork, chiaroscuro light effects and tonal perspective further helps to achieve the separation of the picture plane into foreground, middle-distance and background, resulting in the illusion of great depth. However, as noted above and to recall Boime (1990: 2), chiaroscuro is concerned with more than the mere modelling of light and shadow - as a polarity it represents the religious dualism of Good versus Evil and thus analogous to the Manichean allegory.

The use of planar recession and chiaroscuro in this painting also evokes the landscape paintings of the 17th century artist Claude, whose types of Italian landscape painting set the canon for the picturesque. According to Lipschitz (1992: 67) Bell readily adopted picturesque stylistic and topographical conventions in his depictions of the South African landscape. This artwork is a striking example of the artist's use of Claudian principles of pictorial arrangement. Thus, as an aesthetic modality, the picturesque was reliant on presupposed pictorial models that determined how nature was to be looked at and presented an all-embracing coded form of representation that presented the foreign landscape for the colonial gaze.

Conclusion

In my reading of the artwork it emerged that Bell relied on, and conformed to familiar concepts and features, established authoring strategies and aesthetic modalities that typified the art of his time. By considering the authoring strategies that governed the creation of this work, I exposed the hierarchical relationships between binaries of colonial self and other/coloniser and colonised.

I argued that the use of established conventions and aesthetic modalities abetted the Bell's persuasive imaging of the colonized landscape as well as his stance on colonial others and otherness. In scrutinising such authoring strategies, the ideological frameworks that governed the hierarchical relationships between binaries of colonial self and other were exposed.

I demonstrated that this painting bears little relation to the actual event depicted, in spite of it being based on historical accounts. Rather, it deals with the perceptions and values of 19th century British colonial power and thus, to all intents and purposes, represents a partisan nationalist appropriation of Dutch history for British imperialist purposes. In light of this, this work may also be seen as a reflection of racial attitudes of the time in which it was painted, rather than a record of Dutch attitudes towards the Khoikhoi at the time of Jan van Riebeeck's settlement.

Through his use of persuasive imaging, Bell attempted to convince his audience of the reality of his particular depiction of colonial history. By appropriating Dutch colonial history, Bell lays claim to almost two centuries of European occupation of the Cape, thus naturalising European presence on the sub-continent, while at the same time absconding Britain of the negative aspects of the imperial legacy inherited by the British in 1806 and framing it squarely on the colony's Dutch heritage.

Note

1. These pastoralists, called Hottentots by the Dutch, used the term Khoikhoi to refer to themselves. The term Khoekhoen reflects the correct spelling according to modern Nama orthography (Smith & Pfeiffer 1993: 79). With regard to the naming conventions of African communities and languages, I concur with Smith and Pfeiffer (1993: 79) who use the commonly accepted term Khoikhoi, as opposed to Khoekhoen, and Giliomee and Mbenga (cf. 2007: x) who, according to convention, use epithets sans prefixes (for example Pedi as opposed to Bapedi).

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