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From *The Origin of Language* to a Language of Origin: A Prologue to the Grey Collection

HEDLEY TWIDLE

In his 1878 account of a five-month visit to South Africa, Anthony Trollope described his experience of the Grey Collection reading room in Cape Town. With the kind of sly provocation that made his account such a talking point at the Cape, he remarked:

> It would be invidious to say that there are volumes so rare that one begrudges them to a distant Colony which might be served as well by ordinary editions as by scarce and perhaps unreadable specimens. But such is the feeling which comes up first in the mind of a lover of books when he takes out and handles some of the treasures of Sir George Grey's gift (Trollope 1878, 74).

In 1861 George Grey, the singularly ambitious colonial autocrat who before the age of 50 had been governor of South Australia (1840–45), New Zealand (1845–53) and the Cape Colony (1854–61), donated some 5,200 items to the South African Library. With a silver trowel he had laid the foundation stone of the present building at the foot of the Company Gardens in September of 1858; in 1860 it was completed and—apart from a period between 1942 and 1944 when valuable holdings were moved to Stellenbosch for fear of enemy action—his bequest has been housed here ever since, kept, as stipulated, "wholly separate and distinct from the general Collection of Books in the Library".[1]

In the kind of cultural transaction often repeated in the nineteenth century, a private collection formed the nucleus of Victorian civic culture and, in this case, a British colonial identity in the process of formation. For a rising Anglophone mercantile class at the Cape, "The Grey" transformed

Cape Town's library at a stroke into "a local institution worthy of a much larger European city" (Dubow 2006, 48). Ever since, it has been dutifully celebrated by its custodians as "a mirror of Western culture" and a "treasure for all times".[2] Yet equally, from Trollope's account onwards, a note of unease seems to have been present when considering how exactly such texts might fare or signify when (re)located at the tip of Africa.

The novelist and travel writer goes on to censure himself for uncharitable thoughts in the face of such munificence:

> But why a MS. of Livy, or of Dante, should not be as serviceable at Capetown [sic] as in some gentleman's country house in England it would be hard to say; and the Shakespeare folio of 1623 of which the library possesses a copy—with a singularly close cut margin—is no doubt as often looked at, and as much petted and loved and cherished in the capital of South Africa, as it is when in possession of a British Duke. There is also a wonderful collection in these shelves of the native literature of Africa and New Zealand. Perhaps libraries of greater value have been left by individuals to their country or to special institutions, but I do not remember another instance of a man giving away such a treasure in his life-time and leaving it where in all probability he could never see it again (Trollope 1878, 74–75).

Nonetheless, what Trollope's pen sketch begins to suggest—and what this account hopes to explore—is the unusual and uncertain status of such a collection in contemporary Southern Africa: how it might be (or might not be) approached, used or appreciated; the complex networks of exchange across the southern hemisphere through which it was constituted; its curiously dual nature; and its afterlives or lack thereof. What makes Grey's career as a Victorian bibliophile doubly unusual, too, is that, a decade after Trollope's account, he would do the same again in New Zealand. In an act "unparalleled in the annals of nineteenth-century book collecting" (Kerr 2006, 13), he donated a second collection to the Auckland Public Library in 1887, one that was, if anything, more valuable and more extensive than the first.

A "Grey Collection" exists, then, in both South Africa and New Zealand; and both libraries have near identical statues of the man (as well as semi-tropical public gardens) in their vicinities. Both, in turn, are split between European and "indigenous language" materials in straddling two distinct book-collecting traditions. The first, a "Dibdinian" approach, sought out medieval manuscripts and incunabula (items printed before 1501) at a time

when the Napoleonic and political upheavals of the early nineteenth century had placed many rare texts on the market:[3] "as rapidly as collections from the *ancien régime* were scattered, other and very different libraries were formed from quite new perspectives", Kerr comments (2006, 7). In addition to manuscripts of Livy, Dante and the Shakespeare First Folio mentioned by Trollope, the treasures of the Cape Town collection include a Milan Greek Psalter of 1481 (supposedly the third book ever printed in Greek type), a fifteenth-century Dutch edition of the *Travels* of Sir John Mandeville and three manuscripts of works by Petrarch.[4]

The second approach led from Grey's interests in natural history, folklorism and philology, which were considerable. Having departed in July 1837 from Plymouth on the *Beagle* (occupying the old cabin of Charles Darwin, no less), Grey reveals in his bestselling *Journal of Two Expeditions of Discovery in the North-west and Western Australia* (1864 [1841]) how directly an interest in natural history—obsessive attention to rainfall patterns in Madeira, the wingspan of petrels shot off the Cape of Good Hope, bones of extinct auks—is extended to the practice of "indigenous" language collecting. In Tenerife, he compiled a vocabulary of the Guanches (one of the first peoples to be eliminated by the European voyages of discovery), while his 1839 *Vocabulary of the Dialects Spoken by the Aboriginal Races of S. W. Australia* (which also included several reproductions of rock art) established a pattern that would result in the Maori language publications that were the first of their kind: *Ko nga Moteatea* (1853), *Tupuna Maori* (1854) and *Nga Tipuna* (1857).

In New Zealand literary culture, it would seem, his compilation of translated Maori narratives, *Polynesian Mythology* (an English version of *Tupuna Maori*, published by John Murray in 1855) occupies a similar (and similarly troubling) place to that of Bleek and Lucy Lloyd's *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911) in South Africa. (However, Grey's preface to the volume, in which he exaggerates his role in the collection of the narratives and disguises his debt to the Maori chief Wiremu Maihi te Rangi Kaheke [William Marsh], could not be more different from the hesitant and self-effacing piece by Lloyd that begins the 1911 collection.)[5] With Bleek as the first curator of his Cape Town bequest from 1863, the governor's already substantial collection of "native literature"—the earliest attempts to record Maori, Polynesian and Australian Aboriginal languages—was steadily supplemented by African materials: word lists made by missionaries, grammars, catechisms, gospels, miscellaneous tracts—what one contributor to a volume celebrating the 150th anniversary of the South African Library called "the 'incunabula' of South African printing history" (Varley 1968, 36).

DOUBLING THE CAPE

This unusual duplication across the southern hemisphere can be taken, I would suggest, as the beginning of a provocative series of doublings that might be used to sketch out the curious space that this collection occupies. In contemporary South Africa, the ǀXam and !Kung materials transcribed by Bleek and Lloyd have become widely known and celebrated as a major, almost foundational element of post-apartheid literary (and even national) culture. But the Grey Collection, despite being the precursor and enabler of Bleek's "Bushman researches", remains a neglected and perhaps even disavowed archive containing an enormous array of African and "indigenous" language materials that are in a sense both priceless and useless; or at least, extremely rare and valuable, but at the same time curiously unreachable or unusable.

Given the kind of overweening comparative philology that drove so much nineteenth-century linguistic enquiry (now regarded as largely obsolete and as so obviously underwritten by the privileged networks and knowledge systems of empire), what is the contemporary reader to make of the immense textual and geographical variety Bleek records in his 1858 sectional catalogue? Entries for "Kora-Hottentot" and "Trans-Gariepian" dialects (i.e. those beyond the Orange River, or Gariep) are followed by "Se-Rolong catechisms" and "Zulu arithmetics", then "Malagasy natural philosophy", "New Zealand phraseologies", "Inland dialects of eastern Australia", "Samoan Old Testament" and "Tahitian New Testament". How, one wonders, might the larger narratives implied by the abbreviated entries of the catalogue best be approached? What methodology would take one beyond just another "General survey" or "Some notes on" (in the phraseology of earlier scholarship on the collection), or the temptation simply to reiterate the listed items, like this entry for the Nama Gospels regarded as one of the most valuable African language texts in the collection (of which more later)?

> 14. *Annoe kayn hoeaati haka kanniti*, *Nama-kowapna* … [Cape Town, 1831] …
> The four Gospels translated by Rev. J. H. Schmelen, with the assistance of Mrs Schmelen, a pious and excellent Namas. The translation does not appear to be bad; but "as the clicks, with the exception of one, are not marked in these Gospels, the natives are not able to read them" (Rev. G. A. Hahn) (Bleek 1858, 17).

Following Bleek's death in September 1875, it was Theophilus Hahn, the son of the missionary quoted here, who was appointed the second—and last ever—

designated curator of the Grey Collection. Having assumed the role in the interim with the blessing of the Grey trustees, Lucy Lloyd was outraged at the library committee's decision to appoint someone whom she evidently regarded as an unqualified, unprofessional dilettante to succeed her brother-in-law. In protest, she generated "a low swell of minor scandal" (Bennun 2004, 301), writing numerous letters to the *Cape Monthly Magazine*, to Grey in Auckland and to scholars in Europe, among them T. H. Huxley and Ernst Haeckel.[6] In February 1880 this normally reticent woman even staged a sit-in within the reading room that drew a personal intervention from the prime minister, a moment that suggests the varied claims of patronage, gender and the colonial institution that play out in the history of the collection as a cultural object.

Bennun (2004, 320–21) suggests that no texts of "traditionary literature" in the National Library of South Africa today appear to have been added to the Grey Collection by Theophilus Hahn: "He resigned in 1882 following *objections to his behaviour*. His catalogue was not published for a year after that, the printers having repeatedly declared the manuscript impossible to print". Paging through this uneven and sometimes unreliable one-volume *Index of the Grey Collection* (1884) brings home still further the disparate, almost randomly acquisitive nature of this archive: "Four Esquimaux Tracts without date"; "Buka ea Deutoronoma. Without Printer's or translator's name. 8vo. Sesuto"; "Polyglotta Africana; or a comp. vocabulary of nearly 300 words and phrases". As a collector, Grey was an opportunist, wide ranging and speculative rather than focused or "completist"; the result is a heterogeneous and—one is tempted to say—unresolved assemblage of primary materials on which later scholars (who never materialised) were to work. Can it, as Robert Thornton (1983, 79) wonders in searching for "the elusive unity" of the library, even be considered as a *collection* at all?

Trollope (1858, 75) ended his sketch of the South African Library with the ominous remark that "I was told that the readers in Capetown are not very numerous. When I visited the place there were but two or three". In September 2002 the publicity for the opening of an exhibition of 119 priceless items—"The Grey Collection: Up for Sale?"—was intentionally worded to provoke debate about a collection that, as an editorial in the *Quarterly Bulletin* (Anon. 2003) of the library ruefully admits, is barely used. Describing the "complete indifference" of the visiting national librarian from an unnamed African state when presented with the earliest printed works existing in several of the continent's languages, the Grey's custodians remarked that the lack of public interest in the collection "has similarly amazed Boards of Trustees, politicians and commentators ever since the books donated by Grey

arrived in 1863": "No-one doubts that the Collection contains treasures of unbelievable value, interest and artistic merit, yet somehow they are items to be looked at, talked about, but not *used* as Grey had hoped" (Anon. 2003, 50). The most popular resource in the now renamed National Library of South Africa, they note in passing, is its newspaper collection of clipping files and microfilm copies: modes of print culture that are local, topical, accessible, mass-produced and ephemeral—all those things that the "treasures" of Grey and Bleek are not.

To date, the most comprehensive account of the making of both Grey collections is Donald Kerr's finely detailed study, *Amassing Treasures for All Times* (2006). As the title suggests, it is a broadly sympathetic, at times even hagiographic account of this "Colonial Bookman and Collector" as a visionary "Patron of the Southern Hemisphere" (Kerr 2006, 20). In it the author (a curator and librarian in Auckland) registers three caveats in noting what his bio-bibliography is *not* concerned with: it is not a study of Grey's political activities, there is little attempt to explore the psychology of collecting, nor does it cover the more specialised areas of comparative linguistics and philology. Yet my account will suggest how impossible it is to disentangle these threads and that their vexed interrelation constitutes all that is most interesting about the collection as both an object of knowledge and also a node of late nineteenth-century knowledge production, one that has, for a variety of reasons, subsided into a kind of stasis and inertia.

What, finally, is the status of such materials? How could or should they be "used"? Writing from Auckland, Kerr (2006, 19) evokes a colonial governor who bequeathed books as "building blocks upon which others could craft self- and national identities". Grey was, after all, the architect of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi (or to the 46 Maori chiefs who "signed" it, Te Tiriti o Waitangi), which established British sovereignty over New Zealand and is to this day involved in legal discussions as to how the documents in question were differently conceived by primarily oral and literate cultures.[7] Yet if South Africa is a country whose "textured postcoloniality" combines the colonial histories of, say, Australasia and Nigeria (Attwell 2005, 1), then the Grey Collection in Cape Town registers a longer, staggered and more disparate process of text-making in the nineteenth-century colony. It becomes a site that requires one to think through not one, but multiple points of textual origin and various, often conflicting versions of what "the indigenous" has come to mean, from Bleek's philology to Thabo Mbeki's African Renaissance (a phrase that takes on a particular resonance when approached in mind of an archive that quite literally yokes these two components together.)

The discourses that lead to and from the Grey library, then, are an exemplary instance of how the privileged, obsessive nineteenth-century enquiry into the origin of language is always interacting with a more worldly, self-interested language of origin: a process of constructing a series of "beginnings" for written knowledge in and of Southern Africa, where the text is unable to shake off its material status. Beyond this familiar post-colonial accusation, however, a literary approach to the collection still wonders what traces can be discerned of the many interviews, transcriber-informant "couples" and other text-making encounters on the colonial periphery that gradually accumulate in late nineteenth-century Cape Town: what evidences might be salvaged of the fundamental linguistic creativity that marks all human culture.[8]

THE LIBRARY IN THE COLONY

At the end *The Idea of Africa*, his ambitious enquiry into how the continent has been produced by European texts since antiquity, V. Y. Mudimbe (1994, 213) remarks that "to comprehend the archaeological organisation of the very idea of Africa and its resonances, it seems to me, it is impossible not to consider Western literature and, particularly, its culmination in the 'colonial library'". Yet at the same time, Mudimbe acknowledges that, as with Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, the result of this methodology is inevitably a constant return to (and possibly reinscription of) a strictly Western canon, a series of great European texts that threaten to dominate the post-colonial scholar's attention. As such, it risks displacing for a second time the multifarious and disparate modes of language usage in Africa, which were only partially and problematically "reduced" to writing.

A point of departure from this familiar paradigm might be to balance an attention to that rather abstract imaginary of accumulated texts and tropes—"the colonial library"—with a more materialist account of "the library in the colony". How are specific institutions and collections established within an expanding "world system" in the nineteenth century? How are they marked by their local context and in what ways does this determine the problems and possibilities associated with their use today?

Exactly a hundred years before Grey's donation, a bequest from Joachim Nicolass von Dessin, a Dutch East India Company employee of German descent, had served as the foundation of a library culture at the Cape. His 4,500 volumes donated to the Dutch Reformed Church in 1761 were incorporated into the South African Library formed by proclamation of Governor Charles Somerset in 1818, an institution that was financed, famously, by a tax of one

rix dollar on every cask of wine at the Cape. A. J. Jardine succeeded the poet and journalist Thomas Pringle as the first librarian; colonial-traveller-turned-administrator John Barrow functioned as the library's London agent. Until moved into the present building, the books were housed in what was the Commercial Exchange.

As Saul Dubow (2006, 44) shows in *A Commonwealth of Knowledge*, all of the above suggest how the library functioned as a "key intellectual and cultural brokerage centre" associated with a rising Anglophone mercantile class at the Cape. He begins his work with a description of the "constellation" of mutually reinforcing institutions set along the Company Gardens: the Library, Museum, College and Institution (all bearing the title South African), as well as, slightly further out, the Royal Observatory:

> It is easy to overlook the underlying messages and sinews of association that link these fine buildings. Taken together, they bear testimony to a set of overlapping, interlinked networks of power and authority that significantly shaped the Cape's distinctive colonial identity (Dubow 2006, 1).

With Grey's texts joining the "Dessinian" collection along the historical axis laid out by the Dutch East India Company (and in close proximity to the mid-century bequest of Carl von Ludwig that formed the basis of the Natural History Museum nearby), such inputs "provided the elements of that shared foundation myth of European cultural mutuality which champions of Anglo-Dutch cooperation were eager to underline" (Dubow 2006, 55).

The mechanism of private subscription adopted to finance such institutions functioned both as a show of public spiritedness and "also an unmistakeable register of social status", Dubow argues (2006, 48). And as the international reach of Grey's book collecting and the desiderata letters dispatched all over the world by Bleek suggest, the "mutually reinforcing circuits of donation and recognition" (Dubow 2006, 57) underwriting an institution like the South African Library were not confined to its immediate context. Linked in a vast transcontinental movement of personnel and information, small colonial cities like nineteenth-century "Capetown" were, as Kirsten McKenzie (2004, 9) remarks, "at once intensely parochial and inherently cosmopolitan". The "the bright eye of the Cape", as John Herschel called the library in 1854,[9] made much of its high standing among high-ranking "Anglo-Indians" (British colonial administrators in India) who chose to spend leave at the Cape rather than voyaging all the way back to Europe.[10]

Yet today, as one walks to the library along Government Avenue and through the Company Gardens, it is difficult to ignore a sense of utter disconnection between cultural enclaves like the Special Collections and the life of the city beyond: the daily procession of tourists, office workers on lunch breaks, families, municipal gardeners, school groups, beggars and loiterers who move through one of the few racially mixed and truly public spaces of central Cape Town. It is difficult to forget, too, an historical detail that is not included in the current displays celebrating the building's 150th anniversary: what Dubow (2006, 68) calls the "piquant postscript" to the laying of the foundation stone in March 1858. As the crowds departed, group of 30 convicts employed in construction sat down to a meal where they were shown "the civilised mode of eating beef and mutton with knives and forks" by Thomas Maclear, the astronomer royal (*Cape Times*, 25 March 1858). "Thus was enacted the trope of civilization in Africa", Dubow comments wryly (2006, 68).

Perhaps, then, it is appropriate that the main entrance to the library no longer takes one past the statue of Grey; a detour is required to reach the cul-de-sac where the left hand of this frock-coated figure brushes a pile of books. A relic of a past best forgotten for most South Africans, he looks down the avenue of the gardens to where Cecil Rhodes gives a stiff left-armed (and now vaguely fascist) salute—"Your hinterland is there!"—gesturing, as Alex la Guma (1974, 12) liked to remark, towards what used to be the "segregated lavatories" of Company Gardens. The difference and distance between these two imperialists—some 100 metres or so in actuality—has been either emphasised or collapsed to nothing by different biographers and schools of South African historiography.[11]

"Few men have been so variously judged", wrote Rutherford (1961, v) in a biography of Grey, wondering whether his subject was "merely an ambitious self-seeker who humbugged the authorities by professions of philanthropy, or a genuine humanitarian pursuing high ideals by dubious methods which exposed him to misinterpretation". In the Southern African imaginary, Grey ranges from the icon of liberalism and learning celebrated by Kerr and Thornton to the ruthless and (in Jeff Peires's *The Dead Will Arise* [2003]) near-diabolical colonial governor who cynically exploited the aftermath of the 1856–57 Cattle Killing to bring Xhosa polities into the colonial economy. And if South African historiography of the last decades has revealed this relation between liberal philanthropy and violent repression as less a contradiction than almost the defining paradox of colonial modernity, it is nonetheless still surprising to learn that Olive Schreiner called Grey "God's Englishman", owned a treasured a photo of the statue (which she used to turn to for solace

in the aftermath of Rhodes's involvement in the Jameson Raid) and dedicated to him *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* (1897), an incomplete manuscript of which now resides in the special collections of the National Library.[12] "I have walked out of the Cape Parliament, which stands just over the way," she wrote to W. T. Stead in October 1896,

> where debates were going on in which the most talented and wealthy Englishmen in the world were voting for the Strop Bills (a bill for flogging native servants, which would make their condition not very much better than that of slaves) and in which personal ambition and the greed for wealth and power showed at every turn—and I've felt a curious consolation in coming across the statue (Schreiner 1988, 292).

In the 2002 colloquium about the future of the collection, however, members of the audience remarked that Grey was remembered as a "mass murderer" by many South Africans, prompting one commentator to address the tainted political legacy of the collection by asking:

> If Hendrik Verwoerd had bequeathed a priceless collection of books to South Africa, what would we make of the collection today? Or, conversely, would the same books be any different if they had been bequeathed by Nelson Mandela instead? That the answer to the second question is a self-evident "No" does nothing to resolve the first question (Morris 2003, 51).

The provocative asymmetry identified by the framing of such questions, unanswerable though they may be, seems crucial to hold in mind in a country where so many—one is tempted to say almost all—collections, bequests and other cultural assemblages have come about under (or have been in some way beneficiaries of) conditions of extreme and historically vivid political and economic injustice, where the texts in question are so obviously both documents of civilisation and barbarism. To frame the enquiry in a slightly different and more open-ended way, it is revealing to trace how the contested and painful legacy associated with Grey's mode of imperialism has been addressed by the contemporary interest in Bleek and Lloyd's "Bushman researches".

"PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT"

Following the anthropologist Roger Hewitt's rediscovery of Bleek and Lloyd's notebooks in the University of Cape Town's Jagger Library in the 1970s—

some 13,000 pages of phonetic notations of the languages once spoken by Southern Africa's ǀXam and !Kung peoples with English translations, glosses and notes running alongside—the reanimation and exploration of this collection of text, image and artefact has been one of the major events of South African scholarship. It has brought together scholars of archaeology, linguistics, literature, museum display, rock art and cultural politics, often controversially, in an attempt to explicate an archive that is by turns mythic and autobiographic, violent and comic, digressive, impenetrable, poetic, both impossibly distant and greatly moving.[13]

This, at least, is how the story is most often told: a cherished narrative (undoubtedly coloured by the wider cultural energies of the 1990s transition) in which Bleek, a man ahead of his time, sets aside his dry philological endeavours and his unfinished *Comparative Grammar* of South African languages to devote his attention to a culture that is fast disappearing.[14] In so doing, he performs a valuable service to the future, multiracial nation state: after all, the national coat of arms unveiled by President Thabo Mbeki on 27 April 2000 carries as its motto a sentence written in ǀXam, preserving the nineteenth-century orthography of the notebooks to record its various clicks: *!ke e:ǀxarra ǁke* is officially translated as "Unity in Diversity"; glossed more carefully from a language no longer spoken by any living South African, it can be rendered as: "people who are different come together".

Yet more recent, more sceptical accounts have reacted against too idealised a notion of cultural exchange in the Victorian garden village of Mowbray.[15] Bleek's placement as a well-connected colonial intellectual—his privileging of "Bushman folklore" at the expense of Xhosa and Zulu culture, and his proximity to the social Darwinism of his cousin Ernst Haeckel—is seen to annul much of the liberatory dimension of the ǀXam records. The "Bushmen"[16] were "poetical in their ideas, with an extensive mythological traditionary literature" wrote Bleek in a report of 1871; the Bantu peoples were "addicted to ancestor worship, speaking euphonious polysyllabic Prefix-pronomial languages, eminently prosaic in their ideas and literature".[17]

In the optimistic narrative, the difficult, Jekyll-and-Hyde-like dialectic of civilisation and barbarism that inheres in Grey's brand of intellectualised imperialism must be downplayed and displaced. In the search for an unsullied cross-cultural exchange to complement the tenor of post-apartheid scholarship, this perturbing oscillation is then split and separated among the various *dramatis personae*; it is, quite literally (in all the word's complex connotations of reiteration and duplication, elision and evasion) doubled: Bleek as the visionary, or the devoted, bookish intellectual, is opposed to the more questionable,

worldly Grey; or Lloyd as the empathetic listener versus the more abstract, distanced Bleek; or, indeed, both Bleek and Lloyd set against the later, less nuanced and more racialised scholarship of Bleek's daughter Dorothea. (One might even suggest that the scandal and contestation so often been associated with contemporary recuperations of the ǀXam material represents a working through this doubleness via a series of displacements and proxies.)

In an elegant account of the collection structured via interlocking biographies, Bennun (2004, 97) evokes a relationship between Grey and Bleek that, although initially mutually reinforcing, became ever more one-sided: "It was an unequal friendship. Grey needed praise but he did not need Bleek". Following the lead of earlier scholarship, Bleek's labour of cataloguing the Grey Collection is seen as a mere prelude (and even obstacle) to the later, more important work of devising an orthography for transcribing the words of ǀXam narrators like Diä!kwain (David Hoesar), ǀHan≠kass'o (Klein Jantje) and ǁKabbo (Oud Jantje Tooren). In a long, remarkable letter of 6–7 September 1875 from Jemima Bleek to Grey (following her husband's death), we read a protracted, almost Dickensian account of his demise in which there seems to lurk the subtle accusation that it was precisely the journey from Mowbray to the library in the "oft times raw morning air" that ended his life early:

> But as soon as our Cape winter set in that year we all noticed that he did not shew [sic] his usual power of recovering from the one or two colds which in spite of all precaution he would take during its continuance .... Early in May however the Grey Library became one day full of choking smoke from the weeds which were burning in the Botanical Gardens and this caused him to cough very violently which brought on some signs of hemmorrhage [sic] (Bleek 1975).

Here the ordered natural world of the Company Gardens no longer complements the Palladian facade of the library, but instead produces metaphors of over-abundance, unrootedness, disease and decay. And as this remarkable letter suggests, it is perhaps the sheer textual detail and what I choose to call the *bio-graphic* density of this nineteenth-century family archive (unusual within the Southern African context) that has compelled the attention of so many scholars, drawing one (even in the course of the present discussion) back toward the archival trove of this family history and away from the disparate holdings of the Grey Collection, which are much harder to thread into an affecting narrative. It is intriguing to note how even Andrew Bank's 2006 finely detailed account of the making of the Bleek

and Lloyd Collection—which begins with a scepticism toward received, anecdotal narratives of a perfect exchange of words for things in the colonial garden—culminates in a reassertion of its uniqueness, explained in part via a biographical back-story:

> where Wilhelm conducted interviews as an abstract quest for mythology, Lucy brought her own painful history of being ostracised and marginalised, and also an understanding of resilience and survival, to her meetings with informants who had also survived being displaced and ostracised (Bank 2006, 393–94).

Yet it is precisely the atmosphere of piety, melancholia and veneration surrounding the archive that is treated with bracing impatience in Shane Moran's *Representing Bushmen: South Africa and the Origin of Language* (2009). Following a series of articles in which he recast titles from the collection in order to reverse the ethnographic gaze—offering accounts of "Specimens of 'bushman' studies" (2001) and "Customs and beliefs of Bleek and Lloyd scholarship" (2005) within the contemporary academy—Moran's (2009, 15) more theoretical and deconstructive account seeks to show Bleek's "contribution to, and appropriation by, racial thinking". He suggests that this feted scholar of African languages (and populariser of that term later adopted by apartheid ideologues, "Bantu") should also be seen as the country's first systematic theoriser of racial difference. Suspicious of the recurrent image of the Bushmen as "exemplary indigenes" (Moran 2009 8), Moran's work is offered, he remarks, as a corrective to those studies of racism that pay no attention to the links between linguistic theory and cultural essentialism.

Yet for all its suspicion of the liberal, the personal and the biographical, such an approach (like the optimistic narrative before it) seems to remain tied to a rather immobile idea of intention within the language act; or else it follows too closely the accounts given by the various actors of their actions in correspondence or in official reports to the Cape parliament. For as Bleek sets out to investigate the origin of language while also engaging himself in the more worldly task of establishing the field of philology at the Cape (where so many disparate linguistic cultures collect and converge), one sees how the link between language and culture can be made and unmade, asserted and unravelled within the space of a page or a paragraph. The real challenge in reading such materials then becomes to chart how the multiple, overlaid doublings that structure a collection like that amassed by Grey and Bleek are always at play within any given text, any translation of the spoken into the written.

When Moran (2009, 118) claims, in the context of exploring how ǀXam narratives appear in the work of contemporary poets like Antjie Krog and Stephen Watson, that "the literary appropriation of Bleek's research has involved jettisoning the linguistic theory that drove and structured that comprehension", this is perhaps to misunderstand the workings—or the cunning—of the writerly imagination. Why, after all, that tired post-colonial censure ("appropriation"), when all literary activity is in some sense an act of appropriation and when ǁKabbo's accounts of ǀXam *kukummi*—news, stories, customs, gossip—suggest strongly that these "floating" narrative fragments owed their existence to being told and retold? ǁKabbo was a "giver of native literature" who, Lloyd (1911, x) recalled, "much enjoyed the thought that the Bushman stories would become known by means of books".

In the many acts of re-presentation that follow, the linguistic theory can hardly be consciously jettisoned; instead, it must continue, unconsciously, to shape the archive's conditions of possibility, but in ways that the original agents could not imagine. In this reading, the various, disparate makers of such a collection become, to borrow from Edward Said (2003, 24), figures "whose work has enabled other, alternative work and readings based on developments of which they could not have been aware", "figures whose writing travels beyond temporal, cultural and ideological boundaries in unforeseen ways to emerge as part of a new ensemble *along with* later history and subsequent art ... in all sorts of unforeseen proleptic ways".

It is precisely Grey's obsessive attention to natural history, paired with Bleek's "scientific" philology and painstaking orthographies, that enables Lloyd's more empathetic response (which in turn makes such language events available to a contemporary imagination): this is the constitutive, ongoing paradox of such a collection, and one that the final section of this account hopes to explore more carefully.

A LANGUAGE OF ORIGIN

"We move upon a giddy height when we attempt to know the direction of the world's development": so runs the opening line of Bleek's 1868 monograph *Über den Ursprung der Sprache* (On the origin of language), his cautious tone differing markedly from that of the preface by his cousin Haeckel. Translated in New York the following year, it was just one of a flood of nineteenth-century exercises in comparative philology that attempted to map evolutionary theory onto the study of language and to divine linguistic origins as a master key to human history: "the living and speaking witness of the whole history of our

race", as Friedrich Max Müller put it in a passage in Bleek's well-thumbed copy of *Lectures on the Science of Language* (1862), inscribed by the owner on 21 August in the year of publication.[18]

So many monographs on the subject rolled off the university presses of Europe in the nineteenth century that the bylaws of the Parisian Société de linguistique, founded in 1865, would in fact prohibit all further communications on the subject. "The question was banned because it was deemed unanswerable in any verifiable way", writes James Stam (1976, 3, ix) in charting the curious fate of this line of enquiry, a cultural moment when philosophers and linguists would "abandon and even proscribe a whole area of investigation which had been of such central importance to their predecessors".

Something of the grand illogic (and unsustainable abstraction) of nineteenth-century philology is captured in Max Müller's *Lectures*. As he outlines his vast conception of language as "an unbroken chain of speech" carrying one back beyond cuneiform and hieroglyphic literature to "the first utterances of the human mind", even to "the very words which issued from the mouth of the son of God when he gave names to 'all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field'", he pauses to register a brief caveat:

> If it were necessary for the comparative philologist to acquire a critical or practical acquaintance with all the languages which form the subject of his enquiries, the science of language would simply be an impossibility. But we do not expect the botanist to be an experienced gardener, or the geologist a miner, or the ichthyologist a practical fisherman (Müller 1862, 25).

There could hardly be a more glaring example of how this text-based imperial knowledge system entailed a rejection of the local, the customary, the conversational. One is put in mind of the "defining paradox of colonial archaeology" that Nick Shepherd formulates in tracing the interest in evolutionism, prehistoric artefacts and "Bushman paintings" that developed in the *Cape Monthly Magazine* between 1870 and 1920; the insight might well be extended to that study of suggestive *linguistic* remnants and fragments, philology. For even though it was inevitably a discipline concerned centrally with black African experience, "it was possible—in fact, it was entirely normal—to practise African archaeology without knowing, or wanting to know, anything about African people *per se*" (Shepherd 2003, 838).

The attempt to reconstruct whole from part (or in Haeckel's coinages, *phylogeny*—the development of the species—from *ontogeny*—the development

of the individual organism); the desire to look through an African present towards an ancient African past in which the intellect of the European scholar-naturalist enjoyed free rein: all of these evolutionary/archaeological tropes are seized on in a review of Bleek's 1858 catalogue in the *Cape Monthly Magazine* of that year. While conceding that "[l]exicons and catalogues are proverbially dry", it nonetheless regards Bleek's volume as full of "most valuable and interesting information" (Anon. 1858, 321); compares it, rather absurdly, to "Dr Johnson's great dictionary"; and summarises its intellectual aim of reconstructing an African ur-language by close attention to "pure survivals" within the speech patterns of Southern Africa:

> The Coptic language, the old Egyptic, the Berberic Hanssa, Ethiopic, in northern Africa, and the Hottentot language in southern Africa, all belong to the same family; and Dr Bleek assures us that the Hottentot species surpasses all the others in a faithful preservation of the original structure of these languages (Anon. 1858, 322).

At the same time, though, the unsigned reviewer notes the "forbidding aspect" of the work, clicks "bristling in the reader's face from every page", as an attention to the opaque materiality of the text begins to work against the ideal of transparent, scientific access to the lineaments of any given language.

Something of the over-determination inherent in this field of enquiry is revealed in the table of clicks that Bleek included at the beginning of the "South Africa" catalogue, a listing of 28 different orthographies used in notations of the oldest Southern African languages by various navigators, travellers and missionaries (see Figure 1*)*. On the one hand, this exercise in codification and comparativism could be read as an exemplary graphic of what Auguste Schleicher (in a letter of February 1859) envied about Bleek's situation: "You seem to be so fortunate as to be able to devote yourself entirely to the pure science of languages; this is the lot of few only" (quoted in Kerr 2006, 127). Yet at the same time, just as the metaphors of "entangled banks", trees and corals in Darwin's *Origin of Species* move in divergent, non-linear and often contradictory directions, Bleek's table of clicks signifies in a different way.[19]

For one thing, it is a demonstration of how theoretical enquires into linguistic origin inevitably became entangled in a set of actual (and variable) textual beginnings: "Apparently the oldest Hottentot vocabulary in existence", Bleek (1858, 26) writes, is found in Sir Thomas Herbert's *Travels* of 1638; the author "gives twenty-one words and ten numerals of the language of the *Hatten-totes*, which he had collected during his stay in the *Souldania Bay* (as

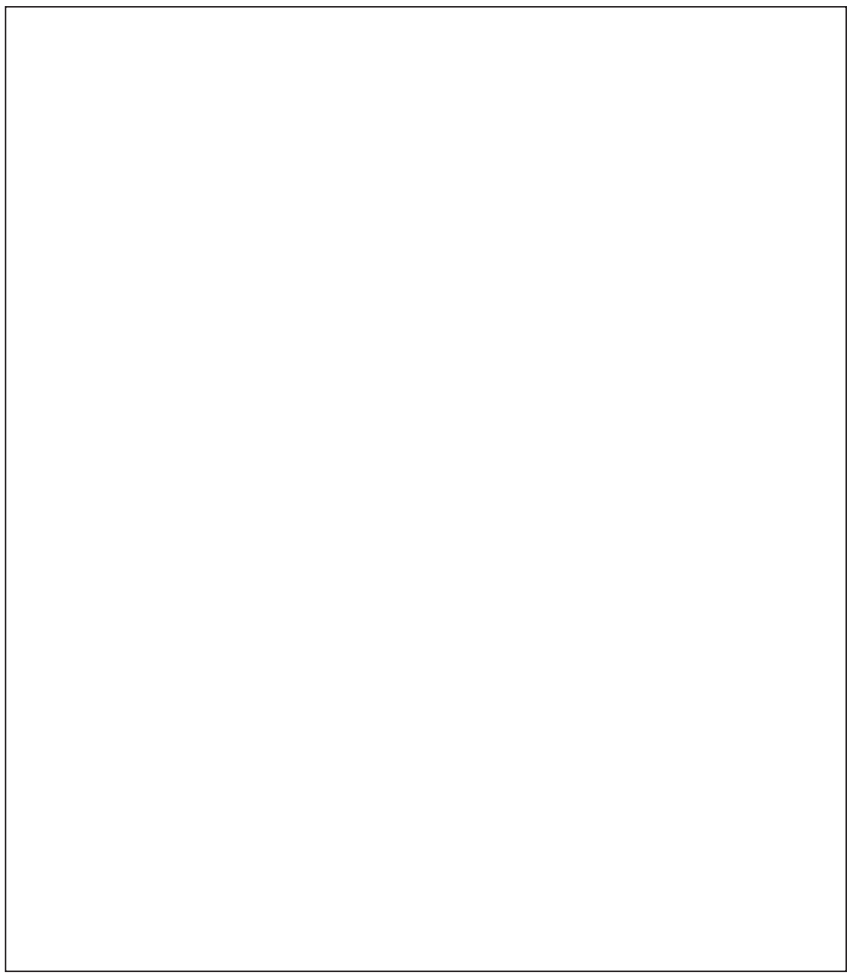

FIGURE 1. *The table of clicks that W. H. I. Bleek drew up for the first volume of his catalogue of the Grey Collection, showing the various ways in which the colonial travellers and philologists before him had tried to notate and codify the sounds of the Khoe, Ju and !Ui-Taa language families.*

Source: Bleek (1858)

at that time Table Bay was still called in English works of travels". And just as the ordered format of the dictionary generates a contradictory vibration suggesting the arbitrariness of the sign (a succession of incongruous vocables and non sequiturs yoked together by print), so too this table might also be read as showing up the limit of the colonial, linguistic taxonomy as it tries to apprehend and codify the sheer difference of the Khoe, Ju and !Ui-Taa language families. The difference is from European speech patterns, but also internal difference, given the immense linguistic variety of the African continent.

As Darwin's theory of organic evolution showed so powerfully, diversity is a keen marker of time. In this sense, the hundreds of lexicons, orthographies and grammatical tables that collect in the Grey Collection point towards how Southern Africa, far from being the static and timeless zone produced by colonial historiography, might be viewed as a vast site for the production and differentiation of language. In terms of how European technologies of literacy and print fared, it is even tempting to compare the subcontinent (as a region showing signs of the longest unbroken habitation by "modern" humans) with Australia and New Zealand (some of the last areas of the world to be "settled" in this sense). Bleek's table of clicks and "bristling" pages can be set against the relative simplicity of William Colenso's printing case that McKenzie reproduces in his discussion of New Zealand (see Figure 2) and the self-congratulatory swiftness with which missionaries there "reduced" Maori dialects to print in less than two decades.

Even as the respective geographical locations of Bleek and Grey were inviting an equivalence between Khoe-San and Aboriginal/Maori linguistic culture, the difficulty of standardising orthographies in the Cape Colony, the complexities of typesetting and the instructions to printers that occupy so much of Bleek's correspondence from the Grey Library: all of this, I would suggest, was beginning to reveal the impossibility of a synoptic, philological overview. The quest to chart the course of human development by tracing linguistic remnants back to some primordial origin of language is ineluctably dissolved into an endless series of languages of origin where each text posted from mission stations to the Grey Library is marked by its particular—and makeshift—circumstances of production.

It is a narrative one senses when one returns to Bleek's description of Schmelen's Nama Gospel. Here, even the clipped language of the single catalogue entry proves revealing about the strategies through which previously oral cultures are transcoded into literacy, and vice versa:

GOSPELS.
14. *Annoe kayn hoeaati haka kanniti, Nama-kowapna gowahyiihati.*
Qanu qgãi hõati hake kanniti, Nama-kowab-qna choa-æ-he-hã-ti.
Holy good tidings' four books, Nama-language-in written-being-they.

Na koeriipy, zaada koep Jesip Christip hoop kausy.—Diihiiko Hoekaysna
Xna gurib-ææ sada qkub Jesib Christib h b khausæi.—Diheko Xhuqgax-is-qna
That year on our Lord Jesus Christ birth after.—Done Cape Town-in

Kaykoep Bridekirkkipga.—1831.
Kai-qk b Bridekirkib-cha.
Mr. (groote baas) Wm. Stony Bridekirk-by.

The four Gospels translated by Rev. J. H. Schmelen, with the assistance of Mrs Schmelen, a pious and excellent Namas. The translation does not appear to be bad; but "as the clicks, with the exception of one, are not marked in these Gospels, the natives are not able to read them". (Rev. G. A. Hahn) (Bleek 1858, 17).

Bleek's entry here moves through four levels of transliteration and translation. Firstly, Schmelen's attempt to transcribe Nama using only the Roman alphabet; secondly, an interline transcription using the more sophisticated orthography of the missionary Knudsen as employed in his own translation of the Gospel of St Luke, "with the exception that the clicks are denoted by letters in the usual Kafir fashion, and the nasal sound of a word indicated by a Greek circumflex" (Bleek 1858, 15). Below this is a literal rendering in English by Bleek, which foreshadows the kind of stilted accuracy that will be adopted in the ǀXam notebooks. In its recourse to Dutch as a mediating *lingua franca*, it also suggests the complex tissue of linguistic registers that make up the documents he procured for the Grey Collection from missionaries like Hahn, Knudsen, J. G. Krönlein, H. Tindall and C. F. Wuras.

Finally, in the catalogue description at the bottom (and quite beyond its biographical temptation regarding Mrs Schmelen), the verdict on the translation as simultaneously "not bad", but also entirely unintelligible to its ostensible Nama readership suggests the circuits of cultural capital that Leon de Kock (1996, 65) summarises in describing the "dual goal of missionary emphasis on literacy": "reducing" languages of the "other" into a written

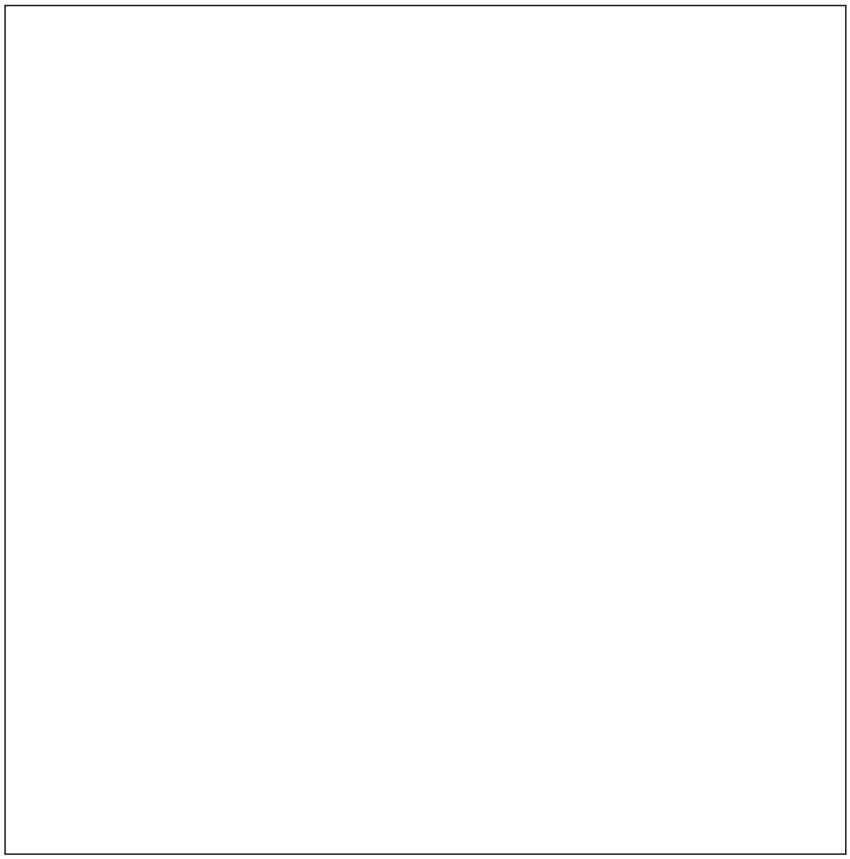

FIGURE 2. *F. W. Willey, plan of the first type cases in New Zealand made at Kororareka in 1835, to the order of William Colenso (cousin of Bishop John William Colenso) for use in New Zealand. Reproduced by courtesy of the Alexander Trumbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand (Reference no. PAColl-4734).*

D. F. McKenzie (1999, 101) quotes the following explanation from p. 7 of William Colenso's Fifty Years Ago in New Zealand *(Napier, 1888): "From as the Maori language contained only 13 letters (half the number of the English alphabet), I contrived my cases so, as to have both Roman and Italic characters in the one pair of cases; not distributing the remaining 13 letters (consonants) used in the compositing of English, such not being wanted …. Such an arrangement proved to be a very good one while my compositing was confined to the Maori language only; but when I had any English copy to compose it was altogether the reverse …. Fortunately this occurred but rarely; except at the time of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840), when I necessarily had much printing work to do for the Government of the Colony."*

orthography "so that the Bible could be translated into the semiology of a previously oral culture", while at the same time "teaching subject people facility in English [or in this case, German] so that their assimilation into a master discourse could be effected". With Schmelen's Gospel, the utility of the text is less important than the fact of translation: the verdict of "not bad" can only mean something among the tiny circle of missionaries and linguists who might be able to appraise the work and, perhaps, relay a simplified, acoustically deficient version of Nama back to their congregations. (To underline this fetishisation of the book as an object *connoting* literacy even when not promoting it, one could also point out that the son of God receives only the honorific "qkub" ["baas"], as opposed to the "Kai-qk b" ["groote baas"] afforded to the Cape Town printer Bridekirk.)

Yet if "the Book" is in this context always the Bible or portions from it, in the more secular approach of Wilhelm Bleek (a man who had, after all, defended his friend Bishop John William Colenso's questioning of the literal truth of the Old Testament) one sees at the same time a very different kind of book emerging in the Grey Library, one that might add a new dimension to what the category comes to mean in a (post-)colony like the Cape. These are the volumes in which the letters, word lists and, eventually, transcribed folklore sent from the mission stations are bound in marbled covers with titles like "Hottentot Manuscripts 1854–1866". They form fragile, often-chaotic colonial scrapbooks made from sheets of different sizes, many of which doubled as envelopes and so bear the address of the South African Library on the reverse. From 1867 a governor's edict provided for free postage for material sent to the Grey Collection and as such these leaves covered in minute handwriting seem suggestively emblematic of the combination of parochialism and growing global networks that underwrite the archive.

The materials in the volume listed above were published by Bleek in 1864, under the title *Reynard the Fox in South Africa, or Hottentot Fables and Tales*, in many ways a neglected precursor to *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*.[20] Again, the doubleness of the collection makes itself immediately felt: in Bleek's obsequious dedicatory preface to Grey, and in the title itself, as the trickster and jackal figures of Khoe-San mythology are interpreted in terms of the "Reineke Fuchs" German folklore. Yet in paging through the loose sheets and mission scrapbooks that formed the basis of this publication, one finds perhaps a more distant, unexpected homology between the two halves of the Grey Collection.

No less than the medieval illuminated manuscripts that form the treasures of the European holdings in both Cape Town and Auckland, the sheets

compiled by translator-transcriber "couples" in mission stations and then collected, compared and collated by Bleek and Lloyd evidence an enquiry across linguistic boundaries and an almost-monastic quality of intellectual concentration that is hard to reconstruct in twenty-first century South Africa. For all the modern nation state's 11 official languages and its symbolic reinstatement of a ǀXam motto on the national crest, the medium of post-apartheid governance and the African Renaissance remains English—the flattened, globalised English of neoliberalism and international finance. If the holdings of the Grey Collection retain any charge today, part of this might be to show up how curiously absent the promotion of African literature and linguistics is from the official culture of contemporary South Africa.

"OUR ENTIRE POSSESSION OF IDEAS"

In attempting to sketch a cultural history of the Grey Collection, this account has resisted the abstraction of "the colonial library" to consider the creation and afterlife of a single, once-controversial, but now largely dormant "library in the colony". In doing so it has suggested how Bleek's "Capetown" might be read as a site where the nineteenth-century science of language, requiring standardised, comparable sets of linguistic data, comes to be unravelled by the local demands of rendering the multifariousness of Southern African language usage on the page. Perhaps one could even suggest that Europe's sudden fin du siècle abandonment of enquiries into the origin of language, far from being the internal, intellectual collapse as suggested by Stam, might better be seen as a corollary of high imperialism. Comparative philology begins in earnest following the early Orientalist fascination with Sanskrit and proto-Indo-European, but it is the final phase of the colonial project that witnesses the discipline implode as the sheer diversity and difference of the linguistic data comes to over-burden and dismantle the philological tables drawn up by Bleek and his circle.

Writing in 1862, Max Müller registers this anxiety in positing the idea that the science language requires a necessary a distance from its object of study: botanists cannot also be gardeners. Yet, of course, it is precisely the "practical acquaintance" written off by Müller that distinguishes Bleek's approach, from his transcription of "Zulu legends" in Natal as Colenso's assistant to the interviews conducted to establish vocabularies with San prisoners on Robben Island as early as 1857. Nonetheless, an entry into the discourses that make up the archive suggests that it is wrong to see this approach as a setting aside of abstract linguistic theory for embodied practice or to view his work as

curator of "the Grey" as prelude or obstacle to the later, more well-known transcription of ǀXam and !Kung oratures.

Rather, it is intriguing to trace the unpredictable—and often divergent—consequences of Bleek's attempt to establish correspondences between evolutionism and philology. In those passages attempting to model the first principles of linguistic cognition, his *Origin* seems to feel its way towards matters that are now approached in different idioms by those trying to map the beginnings of symbolic behaviour within human history or our special, shared status as animals with an instinct for language. "The manifestations of thought", Bleek (1869, 143) writes, "are various; but no one of them is of more importance than language":

> For it is through language and with language that man as a thinking being has developed himself. It is communication by means of speech that brings his thinking to greater clearness, by bringing the different modes of thought into mutual furthering communication with each other. By means of speech man is able to hold with more tenacity the impressions already obtained, and thus better to combine the old with those whose action is fresher, and generally each one with every other, and to work them up into intuitions. It is the spring of self-consciousness, inasmuch as it is what enables man to distinguish himself and his emotions from the external world, and so to become conscious of both.

Reading such passages, one has a sense of the latent dimension or "future unconscious" of the archive being assembled in Cape Town, a quality that is guaranteed precisely by a fascination with and close attention to language, as Bleek gestures towards insights that are unsayable within his own intellectual moment. The nineteenth-century linkage between language and culture is troubled by intimations of the structural determination of meaning: disparagement of "lower" cultures is inevitably counterpointed by intimations of the contemporary model, in which every linguistic culture can only be regarded as equally complex, grammatically "correct" and self-consistent.

In this sense, it is intriguing to read how an encounter with a similar colonial archive determined the course of another major presence in recent South African letters. In a 1984 autobiographical fragment, "Remembering Texas", J. M. Coetzee describes his chance discovery of a cache of Southern African ethnographic and philological material at the university in Austin: anthropologists' monographs on the Herero, makeshift grammars compiled by missionaries and even the word lists of "Hottentot language" made by seventeenth-century seafarers. Quite

apart from furnishing the materials for his first novel, *Dusklands* (1974), the experience piqued a linguistic interest in Nama, Malay and Dutch stocks as they interacted at the Cape, leading to intellectual forays "that ramified further and further as I found (I was rediscovering the wheel now) that the term 'primitive' meant nothing, that every one of the 700 tongues of Borneo was as coherent and complex and intractable to analysis as English" (Coetzee 1992, 52). Reading such materials in the wake of Chomsky and the work of such very different "universal grammarians" led Coetzee to envision another kind of archive, one that suggests the complex double take by which a collection like "the Grey" simultaneously reinstates and unravels the primacy of "English literature":

> If a latter-day ark were ever commissioned to take the best that mankind had to offer and make a fresh start on the farther planets … might we not leave Shakespeare's plays and Beethoven's quartets behind to make room for the last aboriginal speaker of Dyirbal, even though that might be a fat old woman who scratched herself and smelled bad? It seemed an odd position for a student of English, the greatest imperial language of them all, to be falling into. It was a doubly odd position for someone with literary ambitions … ambitions to speak one day, somehow, in his own voice—to discover himself suspecting that languages spoke people or at the very least spoke through them (Coetzee 1992, 52–53).

The two different kinds of contents imagined for this cultural ark could in one sense be a description of the unresolved assemblage like the Grey Collection. The cleavage that Coetzee identifies between the two conceptions of human culture suggests, too, how challenging it still remains to bridge literary and linguistic approaches in charting the space that such an archive occupies today.

In a post-colonial context like Southern Africa, much of this difficulty has been seen to reside in the colonial or anthropological taint that is felt to lie over so much of the material. Grey's interest in natural history leads directly to "native literature" and his philological endeavours; in Bleek's privileging of the aboriginal, one senses the perennial danger that dogs even the most sympathetic recuperations of Southern Africa's indigenous expressive cultures in the twentieth century. In all such claims made by history on prehistory there lurks, as the archaeologist Shepherd (2005, 397) remarks, the tendency to collapse three entirely different narratives regarding the deep human past in Africa: a biological trajectory of hominid evolution, an anthropological account of cultural development and a much more recent history of those peoples now known as the Khoisan. The result has been a widespread conception of the San

as a kind of evolutionary holdover, an example of "living prehistory" somehow removed from the ambit of colonial struggle and contestation.

But if for many people the Darwinism of the nineteenth century automatically connotes scientific racism and social hierarchy, then this must be set against the very different inflections now given to evolutionary theory. The 150th anniversary of *The Origin of Species* in 2009 saw reappraisals emphasising the utterly contingent, non-hierarchical models that can be derived from natural selection: those aspects of evolutionary thought that carry with them a radically materialist, even egalitarian, logic. For although he could never rid himself of the residue of agency and intention that inheres in all language (the sense, that is, of natural selection being somehow purposive and directed), Darwin's preferred metaphors in his work were not ladders or linear trajectories, but trees, "entangled banks" and corals: a multidimensional branching of life forms in space and the unimaginable reaches of time unlocked by Charles Lyell's new geology—and reinforced by Darwin's own 1836 Cape visit to the granitic intrusions now called the Sea Point Contact.

In this sense, it is intriguing to see that it is the late Darwinian interpreter Stephen Jay Gould who writes the introduction to Pippa Skotnes's *Sound from the Thinking Strings* (1991), a limited edition of etchings and poems drawn from the !Xam records now regarded as one of the treasures of the African Studies Library at the University of Cape Town. (The volume was itself the centre of a scandal as to what "the book" might mean in South Africa when the creator deemed it an artwork and was subject to legal action for refusing to supply a deposit copy to the National Library of South Africa.)[21] In his preface, Gould expresses the modern consensus of evolutionary biology and genetics, which posits a human race based on fundamental sameness rather than difference, but a sameness that reveals (or disguises) itself precisely through our powers of cultural adaptability:

> Our essence is hidden from view, and manifest primarily in the diversity of overt expressions among our cultures and nations. The greater this range of diversity, the more we can learn about our essential nature and its remarkable flexibility. When we cut off parts of this diversity, by whatever means (from the ultimate brutality of genocide to the relatively benign spread of international fast food chains) we lose … an organ of our totality.
>
> I am an evolutionary biologist by training. I work with branching systems of genealogical descent. I know, from the core of my professional being, that when a stem of life's tree is extirpated and ripped off, that precious parcel of diversity can never arise again (Skotnes 1991, 3).

These twinned metaphors of branching abundance and extinction, of intense linguistic felicity and total language death, seem to provide apposite poles for the axis along which this nineteenth-century archive comes into being. If the "endless forms" and ramifications of Darwinian theory (and the linguistic enquiry it inspired) constitute one pole, the other is represented by loss on an unimaginable scale. In their fine, obsessive attention to detail, the early African manuscript and print materials of the Grey Collection (no less than the medieval incunabula) point constantly to all that was never recorded, products of a colonial modernity that sought diligently—even lovingly—to record what it was in the process of destroying.

This dialectic of abundance and loss is surely the final—and most difficult—doubleness to hold in mind when considering the process of cultural selection by which the materials recorded by Bleek and Lloyd continue to act on the literary imagination in South Africa.[22] It is a process where the textual, *textured* richness and generative afterlives of the ǀXam oratures are in one sense compensating for an ongoing absence at the centre of the archive—the unspeakability of genocide, forced acculturation and language death. The difficulty of holding this absence in mind surely accounts in part for the bio- and bibliographic density of the archive as it is constituted today, even perhaps for the veneration of marbled notebooks, Victorian handwriting, blotted papers, the physical trace.

It is a duality that lends a particular force to a line from Wilhelm von Humboldt's last letter to Goethe, quoted by Bleek (1869, 44) in his *Origin* as a touchstone for his endeavour: "Our entire possession of ideas is just what we, placed outside of ourselves, can cause to pass over into others." From today's vantage it seems a dictum in which both total faith in and the desperate fragility of human culture, as encoded in written texts, is finely balanced. It also seems a telling admission for a scholar who had spent years amassing so many arcane and specialised texts, so many of which, he must have come to realise, were becoming less the evidence of imperial expertise than emblems of incomplete, interrupted or impossible translation—texts destined to lie inert in the vaults of the Grey Library that he had done so much to create.

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NOTES

1 Judge E. B. Watermeyer to the Grey Trustees (late 1861), cited in Spohr (1962, 7).
2 The phrases are taken from titles by Varley (1968) and Kerr (2006).
3 According to De Ricci (1969), the collection of George Earl Spencer, as catalogued and described by Thomas Frognall Dibdin in the *Bibliotheca Spenceriana* (London: W. Bulmer & Co., 1814), served as the model for almost private libraries amassed in England during the first half of the nineteenth century. See Kerr (2006, 13).
4 The most comprehensive survey of this part of the medieval and Renaissance manuscripts is by Carol Steyn (2002), with a preface by P. E. Westra, who lists earlier accounts of this collection, most of them published in the *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library*. See also Robinson (1948), Varley (1949), Pama (1968) and Churms (1984).
5 As Anthony Alpers (1964) remarks in an afterword to his retelling of the myths contained in the 1855 volume, Grey (rather like Laurens van der Post in the Southern African context) inflated his role and downplayed his debt to others. Whereas he claims that "no considerable continuous portion of the original whereof was derived from one person", Alpers reveals that "as much as two-fifths of Grey's published Maori text … was actually the work of a single chief, Wi Maihi te Rangi Kaheke, who wrote down the Creation story and the whole of the Maui cycle in a clear, coherent narrative which Grey then used without acknowledgement"; he also "removed or altered important sexual references, and took out certain phrases that would have revealed that the actual narrator was acquainted with Christianity and European culture" (Alpers 1964, 233). See also Biggs (1952).
6 See "The Grey Collection controversy", *Quarterly Bulletin of the South African Library* 9 (1954) and Bennun (2004).
7 In his classic account of oral culture, literacy and print in early New Zealand, D. F. McKenzie (1984, 79) writes that the treaty offers "a prime example of European assumptions about the comprehension, status, and binding power of written statements and written consent on the one hand as against the flexible accommodations of oral consensus on the other".
8 In *The Portable Bunyan*, Hofmeyr (2004, 121) describes how "mission methods of producing translation seldom involved a solo translator": "[a]s we have seen, the basic working unit comprised a second-language missionary and a first language convert. Virtually all mission translation was hammered out in such pairs. These 'couples' worked long hours, were locked in tense and often intimate relations of dependence, and produced a style of translation that was coauthored.")
9 *Proceedings of the 25th Anniversary Meeting of the Subscribers to the Public Library, Cape Town, Saturday 6th May, 1854* (Cape Town, 1854): 20, cited in Dubow (2006, 45).

10 In Auckland, a more recent commingling of such parochial and international trajectories emerges as one commentator on the Grey Collection there describes setting out on a medieval pilgrimage "to find out what sort of things Chaucer read when he got home from a busy day at office, and what were the twenty books that this scholar of Oxenford kept at his bed's head". After search through great European libraries, he returned to New Zealand to discover that "if rightly taught and directed, I might have learnt almost as much as I know now about medieval books and medieval thought, Chaucer's books and Chaucer's thought, without going as far as Queen Street (Auckland)" (Bennett 1953, 82, 86).

11 In a meditation on the spaces and material culture associated with the Bleek and Lloyd Collection—and the relation between monumental sculpture and dehumanising anthropometric photography—Martin Hall (1989) imagines Wilhelm Bleek and the master ǀXam narrator ǁKabbo looking at the newly erected statue of Grey in June 1871.

12 In Anne Harries's *Manly Pursuits* (1999), a historical novel set on Cecil Rhodes's Cape Town estate, Groote Schuur, the protagonist comes across what can only be the 1897 edition of Schreiner's *Trooper Peter Halket of Mashonaland* in the library at Groote Schuur, finding it open on a book rest, the brutal frontispiece on display: "a truly shocking photograph of a number of dead Negroes dangling from ropes in a foreign-looking tree, while a larger number of white men pose for the picture beneath it, smoking, and at ease, as if unaware of the corpses in the boughs above them" (Harries 1999, 51). In the course of amassing an equally eccentric, but very different "library in the colony" at his restored Cape Dutch farmhouse, Rhodes commissioned an unusual and enormous project of bibliographic production. Obsessed with Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, yet unable to read the sources in the original Greek and Latin, he commissioned one typed translation of each, complete and unabridged, to be undertaken by team of scholars (all sworn to secrecy) working in the reading room of the British Museum. The results can be seen today in 440 volumes bound in square-sized red morocco, produced especially for Rhodes by Hatchard & Co. of Piccadilly.

13 See Wessels (2010) and Twidle (forthcoming 2012) for accounts of the afterlives of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection.

14 For accounts of the making of the Bleek and Lloyd Collection that are largely celebratory, see Hewitt (1986), Lewis-Williams (1981; 2000), Deacon and Dowson (1996) and Skotnes (1991; 1996; 2007).

16 See Twidle (forthcoming 2012, 20) for a discussion of the politics of nomenclature in relation to the Khoe-San (Khoe, Ju and !Ui-Taa) language families and their speakers in Southern Africa.

15 See Bank (2002; 2006) and Moran (2001; 2005; 2009).

17 Bleek, "Report regarding photographs" (1871), rep. in Bleek and Lloyd (1911, 435).

18 Here I am grateful to Tanya Barben of Rare Books in the University of Cape Town Library, currently engaged in a project of reconstituting the library of Wilhelm Bleek.

19 Here my approach is informed by Gillian Beer's influential account of the literary dimensions of Darwin's text, particularly the "metaphors whose peripheries remain undescribed", allowing the work to be "appropriated by thinkers of so many diverse political persuasions": "[i]t encouraged onward thought: it offered

itself for metaphorical application and its multiple discourses encouraged further acts of interpretation. The presence of *latent meaning* made *The Origin* suggestive, even unstoppable in its action on minds" (Beer 2000, 100).

20 For an account of the genesis of this volume and a comparison between Bleek's work and Nama oratures collected by German colonial officials in the early twentieth century, see Wittenberg (2010).

21 For the original documents of *Skotnes v South African Library* (339/95), 1997, see <http://www.saflii.org/za/cases/ZASCA/1997/28.html> (accessed January 2011). Here, Skotnes challenged the 1995 decision of the Cape Supreme Court that she was required to supply a copy of *Sound from the Thinking Strings* to the South African Library, arguing that, in the fine art tradition of "the artist's book", each volume was a unique and hand-crafted item, and that there was in fact no such thing as a "copy". Skotnes had won the original 1994 case brought to the magistrate's court, which was then appealed (and overturned) by the library. In 1997 the Appeal Court upheld the Cape Supreme Court's decision in favour of the library. Since then, however, the Legal Deposit Act has been redrafted and the Committee of Legal Deposit Libraries has decided to exclude from the provisions of the new Act editions of less than 20 copies. See the website of the Freedom of Expression Institute, which supported Skotnes's 1997 appeal: <http://www.fxi.org.za/archive/Linked/Legal%20Unit/Past%20cases.html> (accessed January 2011).

22 See also Winberg (2011) for an exploration of this dialectic with regard to the !Kung children's material in the Bleek and Lloyd Collection.

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