

Limited Possibilities:
agency and subaltern subjectivity
in four South African allegories

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For Peter

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of the negotiation of black women's subjectivity in four South African allegorical novels. Using aspects of postmodern discourse, and feminist and postcolonial literary and cultural theories on identity formation and subjectivity, I propose that it is in the allegorical mode that the four writers are able to offer black women as female gendered subalterns the space to negotiate subjectivity and to assert agency. Given the history of sexism, racism and imperialism in South Africa, the politics of place impact crucially on the practice of writing literature, so that the tensions between the representation of others and self-representation becomes crucial in identity formation.

Through the four texts, I propose that there is a spectrum of practices, and that each offers different possibilities for black women's subject formation: from the most limiting liberal discourses, through the interrogation of those discourses, to an autobiographical moment of self-reclamation.

It is my contention that J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians (1980) offers a complex allegory of subaltern subjectivity, while at the same time proposing that such subjectivity remains beyond the scope of the white liberal humanist discourse's ability of expression. Consequently, I argue that Wilma Stockenström's The Expedition to the Baobab Tree (1983) may attempt to move beyond Coetzee's novel in situating the subaltern as the narrating subject of

the text, but can still only posit the possibility of her subjectivity. It is with Bessie Head's A Question of Power (1974), I argue, that the attempt to inscribe the subaltern subject autobiographically is most marked, and in which the very notions of insurgency are linked to the transgression of boundaries of race, class, gender and sanity, in a white supremacist, patriarchal, imperial social order. In my analysis of Mike Nicol's The Powers That Be (1989), I show how stereotype, its inscription and simultaneous interrogation, offer and mask the possibilities of subaltern subjectivity, in allowing for critical positions which map the insurgency of the subaltern subject and her agency in the ruptures within the dominant social discourse.

Therefore, the thesis holds that allegory offers possibilities for the South African writer to engage with the insurgent subaltern that remain absent from mainstream, realist discourse.

Introduction

The major critical engagements with and within South African literature have often been historically overdetermined by the demands of macropolitical debates in the broader South African cultural context, especially in relation to the manifest effects of apartheid ideology and practice. Consequently, much critical attention has been Marxist and Lukàcsian in focus (Lilford 1996:15-19), looking critically at the relationship between the worlds represented in literature and the worlds inhabited and addressed by the literary texts -- the central thesis of such criticism has often been that the literary representation was not mimetically true enough to the phenomenological reality. Annamaria Carusi (1993:95) ascribes this to

a rupture in South African literary discourse between the practices of literature and of literary criticism on the one hand, and the type of discourse about literature produced by post-structuralist theory and by post-modernism generally on the other.

One of the unfortunate problematics associated with this "rupture" has been the demands posed to writers to focus on particular modes of engagement with contextual politics, and the focus on phenomenology which has sometimes implied an uneasy construction of the transparency of language, its ability to render 'truth' which lay outside of itself. In South Africa the privileged modes of literary representation in the light of these prescriptive discourses have been realism and social realism.

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However, South Africa has a rich history of non-realist writing, deriving from varied sources such as the African oral traditions of the indigenous languages and cultural practices, as well as the religio-cultural traditions of the European settler populations, and in the latter half of the twentieth century, a particularly rich tradition of allegorical writing. As I argue in the first chapter, this is paired with a more general critical re-evaluation of allegorical genres (Quilligan 1979:155), and new perspectives on the politics of representation opened up by theories of structuralist and poststructuralist engagement (Hawkes 1977:7-8). Except for the study of individual writers, for example Teresa Dovey's booklength study of J.M. Coetzee's oeuvre (1988b), and some superficial discussion of fabulation as a trope in South African literature (Christie, Hutchings & MacLennan 1980), not much attention has been given to non-realist literary practices. This has often been attributed to the narrow demands set by the South African critical establishment for what is considered political and polemical criticism.

It is my contention in this dissertation that allegorical writing in South Africa offers spaces in which the negotiation of subjectivity, and the representation of that process and its success or failure, can be dealt with differently and more constructively than is often supposed in Marxist and Lukácsian criticism. Using debates in contemporary feminist theories on gendered subjectivity and its negotiation and representation in textuality, I argue that the subaltern woman's subject position, principally evidenced by the agency granted her in performative textuality to claim her self and to

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represent that self, is explored at length in allegorical writing, chiefly because of the foregrounding of the constructedness of discourse per se. In this way, the discussion of subjectivity and agency in postmodern discourse, and the ways in which allegory features so importantly in postmodern and poststructuralist critical debates, provide an interesting and fruitful nexus for the exploration of the possibilities for negotiating and representing subaltern subject positioning and agency in literary texts. Then, using the new relationships between literary texts and the politics of context explored and examined by postcolonial discourse, I posit that the four texts under examination in this dissertation offer spaces in which subaltern subjects can be represented, or rather, that the possibility that the subaltern does indeed have subjectivity, even if it remains discursively inexpressible because of conflicting discourses -- such as the conflict of representation and self-representation between the Magistrate and the barbarian woman in Waiting for the Barbarians -- can be examined.

Much of the dissertation takes the form of close critical analysis, with special emphasis placed on the examination of the representation of the effects that the nexus of race, class, and gender have on identity constitution, and how contextual literary politics affect the way in which we read the tension between the representation of subalterns by others, and attempts at subaltern self-representation. Necessarily, the central thesis holds that allegory provides the South African writer with greater freedom to

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explore both the possibilities and limitations which enable and circumscribe subaltern subjectivity and agency.

In the following section of this introductory chapter, I elaborate, briefly, the progression of the central argument of the thesis through the various chapters.

In the first chapter I attempt to outline the relationship between allegory and historiographical discourse, showing how allegory does not disavow history so much as interrogate it as discourse (Slemon 1988:162). Therefore, since allegory is implicated in processes of interpretation (Fletcher 1964), as well as the politics of signification (Quilligan 1979), and in the late twentieth century is manifestly influenced by debates in post-structuralism and semiotics (Eco 1990; Connor 1989), it constitutes itself as an interesting mode in and through which to examine the relationships between subjects and the discourses in which (and in opposition to which) they are constructed.

Examining each of the four novels which are critiqued in greater detail in subsequent chapters in the light of theoretical work on allegory by among others Angus Fletcher (1964), Gay Clifford (1974), Maureen Quilligan (1979), and Deborah L. Madsen (1994), I show how they can be read as allegories of subaltern subjectivity, engaging with theoretical debates on the constitution of subjectivity in language and through language use. This is followed by a contextualised critique of the texts and the central argument in terms of contemporary debates on the (self)representation of black women,

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both in South Africa and elsewhere. Using the work of bell hooks (1995a, 1995b, 1992, 1984 & 1981) and Carole Boyce Davies (1994) on black female identity, its discursive constitution and representation, along with more specifically South African feminist scholarship on black women and representation (Driver 1996, 1993, 1992a, & 1992b), as well as critical debates on the nexus of race and gender on power relations and access to representation (Lewis 1993; Hassim and Walker 1993), I propose that gendered subjects are negotiated in textuality. These new subjects, I propose, in agreement with Julia Kristeva (1986 & 1984) and Hélène Cixous (1976), are situated in the kind of textual discourse which offers interrogations of and inscriptions against patriarchal, imperial, racist discourses which overdetermine and deny black women both subjectivity and agency, principally through the proscription of textuality.

In the second chapter I offer a close critical analysis of Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians, in the light of critical debates on the novel itself as well as theoretical debates about subjectivity and agency. Using the work of Laura Mulvey (1975), John Berger (1972) and Teresa De Lauretis (1984) among others, I examine the implication of the visual mechanism in subject positioning, and how it resembles the ways in which language is implicated in the positing of subjectivity. Following on from this, I investigate how the barbarian woman's subjectivity is circumscribed by and in the Magistrate's narrative act, principally through an assessment of the Magistrate's construction of an identity for her when he reads the signs of her torture as the signs of her self. In conclusion, it is my argument

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that the Hegelian master-slave dialectic is interrogated in the text through the foregrounding of the manner in which the barbarian woman, and more pointedly her body and her speech, is policed by the Magistrate.

In the third chapter I examine how subjectivity as performance is engendered in Wilma Stockenström's The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, arguing that alterity, speech and the female body are linked in the narrative. Given the insights of French feminist theory in this regard, especially the work of Luce Irigaray (1985a) and Cixous (1986 & 1976), I propose that the slave woman speaks her self into history and textuality. Thus, again, subjectivity is posited through performative language use. I also examine the process by which the slave woman re-orders time (and by implication, all systems of ordering and organization complicit with racist, patriarchal, capitalist, imperial discourses) and the ways in which it circumscribes her sense of self. In the concluding section of this chapter I analyse the tensions between reading, writing and speaking in this novel.

The fourth chapter of the thesis focuses on Bessie Head's A Question of Power, and I investigate the fruitful intersection of the allegorical with autobiography. Using debates in critical work on autobiography and black women's writing, I propose that Head's text offers new possibilities for the articulation of subaltern identity. Furthermore, because of the nature of the text, I also examine it in the light of critical debates within feminism and post-structuralism on 'madness' and female identity, suggesting that it is through the

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speech act that the social order is over-turned so that 'madness' and 'sanity' are both interrogated, and shown to be constructions and tools of social and sexual control.

In the concluding chapter I focus on the most recent of the four texts, Mike Nicol's The Powers That Be, examining its interrogation of the dominant social order and its discursive constitution in late apartheid South Africa. Through a critique of stereotype, I investigate the ways in which Nicol's novel is situated ambivalently -- like the other texts -- both within and outside of the discourses it is attempting to critique and deconstruct.

My contention is, therefore, that it is allegory that foregrounds the constructed nature of identity, and in doing so, offers the most interesting possibilities for the representation and negotiation of subaltern subjectivity and agency.

Chapter 1

Signs & Wonders:

Allegory and Subjectivity in South Africa

There is a long history of allegorical writing in Southern Africa, exemplified in such early works as Olive Schreiner's The Story of an African Farm (1881) and Alan Paton's Cry, The Beloved Country (1948), both of which use biblical motifs allegorically to comment on the patriarchal relations intrinsic to colonial discourse and the unethicity of apartheid racist discourse respectively. However, it is only since the 1970s that the use of allegory has become more widespread and theoretically interrogative in South African literature. Quilligan (1979:155) argues that "[w]e seem in the last quarter of the twentieth century to have reentered the allegorical age". In this regard she is one of a group of critics who have reappraised allegory in relation to the debates on cultural value in the twentieth century (Fletcher 1964; Clifford 1974), and linked it to contemporary debates in cultural production (Jameson 1991; Connor 1989; McHale 1987).

Consequently, in the following chapter, I examine the ways in which South African allegorical novels of the late apartheid era offer exploratory comments on issues of subjectivity and agency in a social order that denies the subaltern -- and here I mean "the subaltern as female (sexed) subject" (Spivak 1987:218), as Rey Chow (1996:127) states, "the native as a voiced subject", the black woman as an

oppressed subject in patriarchal imperialist racist South African apartheid discourse -- the modes and means of (self) representation, and in which access to (self) representation is reserved as the 'natural' privilege of a minority class of white writers. Drawing on the theorists of allegory, I propose that it is through allegory that black women's subjectivity can be negotiated in and through literary texts in a social context which otherwise denies them both agency and subjectivity.

I. Allegory and History

Angus Fletcher (1964:1) suggests that allegory is "omnipresent in Western Literature from the earliest times to the modern period". This vague and all-inclusive statement, though, masks the different periods in which allegory operates as a mode of writing and reading. Grant Lilford (1996:10) traces the etymological roots of the term to the Greek *ἀλλεγορία*, which itself derives from the combination of the roots *ἄλλος* (other) and *ἀγορία* (speaking), and links this to the allegorical features of the Homeric epics.

According to Maureen Quilligan (1979:135), a second phase of the allegorical is instituted in the middle ages, with biblical motifs and a marked reliance on the methodologies of scriptural exegesis featuring strongly in texts like Piers Plowman and Dante's Divine Comedy. For Lilford (1996:12), allegory requires active participation from the reader in the construction of textual truth, since "the answer lies within the reader and the text is merely a guide". In this regard Northrop Frye (1957:341) proposes that "[c]ommentary ...

is allegorization", so that, by its very nature allegory is intertextual, "an absorption of and a reply to another text" (Kristeva 1986:39).

The third historical cycle of allegory derives from debates in Rational discourses on literature and the politics of cultural value. Here, as Lilford (1996:12) shows, Goethe is the primary figure in the devaluation of allegory in favour of Symbolic representation and criticism. Fletcher (1964) and Madsen (1994) examine this in greater detail. It is this devalued status of allegory which is inherited by the twentieth century, and which Quilligan (1979) and Fletcher (1964) set out to redress.

Lilford (1996:13) investigates, briefly, the links between allegory, and more pointedly Christian allegory such as John Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress, and the colonial enterprise in Southern Africa. He posits an association between imperial missionary work, the devaluation of African traditional belief, and myth. In his argument, à propos of Frye (1957:54), "allegory is a structural element in literature: it ... cannot be added by critical interpretation alone". Hence, historically, allegory has always been concerned with questions of value (Madsen 1994:135) and with interpretation and commentary (Frye 1957:341).

M.H. Abrams (1993:4) defines allegory as

narrative fiction in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the "literal", or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts, and events.

Fletcher, a central figure in the twentieth century critical re-evaluation of allegory, argues that "allegory says one thing and means another. It destroys the normal expectations we have about language, that our words 'mean what they say'" (1964:2). Allegory would therefore be implicated in the post-structuralist and semiotic critical processes of elucidating the arbitrary relationship between signs and their referents (Hawkes 1977:19-28 & 123-150; Eco 1976:3-46; Kristeva 1984:21-24), and become associated with processes of interpretation and reading, as Umberto Eco (1990:8-17) proposes. Steven Connor (1989:90) and Brian McHale (1987:142) point out the indeterminacy of contemporary allegory, so that they concur with Quilligan (1979:67), who argues that allegory "slide[s] tortuously back and forth between [the] literal and metaphorical understanding of words, and therefore ... focus[es] on the problematical tensions between them". As such, it is necessarily "a radical linguistic procedure" (Fletcher 1964:3), in that "one coherent set of circumstances ... signify a second order of correlated meanings" (Abrams 1993:5). In an elaboration of this argument, Fletcher proposes that

we must avoid the notion that all people must see the double meaning for the work to be rightly called allegory. At least one branch of allegory ... serves political and social purposes by the very fact that a reigning authority (as in a police state) does not see the secondary meaning (ibid.:7-8).

Given that Nick Visser (1992:484-496) traces the history of censorship in South African culture throughout the period of colonial settlement to the present, allegory would seem to be the ideal mode for South

African writers to critique the oppressive socio-political context which they inhabit, and which is addressed by their writing. After all, as Fletcher (1964:22) argues, allegory "appears to express conflict between rival authorities, as in times of political oppression ... to avoid censorship of dissident thought". This concurs with Lilford's (1996:13) assertion that "throughout the colonial and post-colonial history of Southern Africa, various allegories have sought to define cultural and political identity". Examples of such allegorical texts in the late apartheid era include Lewis Nkosi's Mating Birds (1987), and André Brink's Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor (1993). In this regard, Abdul JanMohamed (1986:91-92) faults allegorical texts, and more specifically Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians, for being Manichean and ahistorical, but Stephen Slemon (1988:161-163) contests this, arguing that postcolonial allegories often show up the constructedness of history, the ways in which historiography is constituted as discourse. This is particularly evident in the novels by Coetzee and Nicol examined in this dissertation.

This view of allegory, that it interrogates rather than disavows history and historiography, fits in well with McHale's argument that

if there are several distinguishable allegorical meanings, then the literal level circulates among them, so to speak, never coming to rest, each level in turn functioning as literal relative to the others ... indeterminate allegory is a means of inducing an ontological oscillation (1987:142).

Lilford (1996:10) characterises Coetzee as a "sceptical and secular allegorist[] ... grappl[ing] with the nature of truth in the text,

interrogating the truth value of previous texts", and this would situate his work as one of McHale's "indeterminate allegories". As I argue in the second chapter, this also concurs with Dovey (1996, 1988a & 1988b). I would propose that the novels of each of the other three writers under examination in this thesis -- Wilma Stockenström, Bessie Head and Mike Nicol -- can be characterised thus as well. These views reiterate Paul de Man's (1981:2) argument that "[i]n the wavering status of the allegorical sign, the system of which the allegorical is a constitutive component is being itself unsettled". According to Lilford (1992:82), in a discussion of the work of Coetzee and Marechera, "[a]llegories in these novelists call representation, truth, and even allegory into question", so that, by implication, the work eventually also calls itself (its truth value and processes of interpretation) into question.

As such, it would seem that allegory, as a mode, is chiefly also concerned with signification, with processes of representation and signifying. Therefore, as Kristeva (1984:164) argues, "[t]he text ... establishes language as a symbolic system with a double articulation: signifier and signified", and brings the relationship between the two (signifier and signified; denotative and connotative meaning; primary and secondary levels of meaning; the words and what they mean) under interrogation, destabilizing it in order to show up the constructedness of what is often assumed to be a 'natural' link between the different levels of signification and meaning.

a. Waiting for the Barbarians

Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians has been read as an allegory of colonialism (Dovey 1996; Wade 1990; Jolly 1996 and 1989; JanMohamed 1986; Watson 1986 and 1980), as a Lacanian allegory of subjectivity (Dovey 1988a and 1988b), and as a Manichean political allegory of South African politics in the late apartheid period (JanMohamed 1986; Attwell 1993; Dovey 1996). In an interesting departure from these, Lilford (1996) offers a reading of the novel as an allegory of gardening and drought. It is not my purpose to provide a comprehensive argument and exegesis of the allegorical elements and structure of Coetzee's novel here, but to explore how a combination of the critical approaches mentioned above may be fruitful in approaching the text as a self-interrogating allegory on subaltern subject representation. It is this reading which I pursue in the second chapter, examining the ways in which the barbarian woman's relationship with the Magistrate becomes an allegorical inscription for the processes by which the subjectivity of black women in South Africa have been and continue to be rendered in fictional discourses, while it acknowledges at the same time, almost paradoxically, that such subjectivity remains beyond the reach of the white writers (and the liberal humanist discourses inhabited by these writers) who attempt to inscribe it. Thus when Fletcher (1964:107) argues that "[t]he silences in allegory mean as much as the filled-in-spaces", the silence of the subaltern in allegory seethes with meaning.

David Attwell (1993:74) argues that the novel is "recognizable partly as a fictionalization of this particularly paranoid moment in

apartheid discourse", reading it as a response to the historical cultural-political events of the late 1970s in South Africa. In this regard, he seems to concur with and elaborate on Rosemary Jane Jolly's argument that "[t]o reject the strange geography of the novel, to desire it to be immediately recognizable, is to reject the narrative itself, to diminish the fiction" (1989:71). As Attwell (1993:73) states, "the novel's non-specific milieu [suggests] ... a strategic refusal of specificity, a refusal that is the result of being painfully conscious of one's immediate historical location". Sheila Roberts (1982:47), however, argues that because the novel "does not name its country, ... [and] makes no pretence at being a naturalistic work of identifiable time and locale", Coetzee is "only a South African writer in so far as he is South African" (loc.cit.). She then states, paradoxically, that the novel could only have been written because Coetzee is a South African, and in this she reflects so many critics who seem unwilling to engage fully with the demands of the narrative, and of Coetzee's interrogation of boundaries and categories. One example of such critical blindness has been Nadine Gordimer's review of Coetzee's text (1984). In a critical deconstruction of this position and the novel itself, Dovey (1988:134) proposes that "this novel uses allegory against itself to undo the traditional rationality of allegory ... [so that] allegory announces its connection, not to the world, but to other texts". As Kristeva (1986:37) argues, "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another", and

Coetzee's novel has been read as such a text by Dovey (1988b), among others. For Kristeva (1984:59-60)

inter-textuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another ... it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic -- of enunciative and denotative positionality.

This would concur with Attwell's argument that "the question is ultimately not about the laws of history but about who controls the signs of power" (1993:86), in other words, who has the power to represent whom. Consequently, Jean-Phillipe Wade (1990:283), in arguing that "allegory reveals the conventionality and instability of all writing", shows that Coetzee's text interrogates not only history, but also the liberal South African protest novel, foregrounding what Eagleton (1996:71) calls "liberalism's obliviousness of one particular thought-system: that which sustains its own position". Thus the novel would be situated in a discourse which "implies the abandonment of a former sign system, the passage to a second via an instinctual intermediary common to the two systems, and the articulation of the new system with its new representability" (Kristeva 1986:60). It is because of this position that Wade can assert that

allegory not only enables the reader to consider the meanings offered, but also, crucially, to observe the processes of their construction, thus preventing the possibility of the reader misrecognising them as being "naturally" given by the real (1990:282).

For Dick Penner (1989:76), therefore, "[i]ntentionally, the setting is no-time, no-place, a quality which underscores the allegorical nature of the novel". This concurs with Robert M. Post's statement that "Waiting for the Barbarians takes place on the frontier of an

anonymous country ... sometime in the past" (1986:67), and also with Benita Parry (1996:59), who reads the setting of the novel as an "unnamed and unspecified imperial frontier". As Fletcher (1964:73) proposes, "[t]he mode seems to aim at both clarity and obscurity together, each effect depending upon the other". Julian Gitzen (1993:9) argues that the "pointedly fictitious setting increases the novel's allegorical force". It is in this sense that Coetzee's novel resembles Stockenström's The Expedition to the Baobab Tree -- both are paradoxically South African while simultaneously resisting being read as only about South Africa. If, therefore, as Fletcher (1964:113) suggests, "[a]llegories are based on parallels between two levels of being that correspond to each other, the one supposed by the reader, the other literally presented in the fable", then the ways in which the world represented in the novel corresponds to the South Africa in which the novel is written and published -- and in which its author resides -- is constructed in the process of reading. As a result, "the complete discourse is pervaded by doubt, double-meaning, and ironic detachment" (ibid.:84). It is this very quality that allows Coetzee's novel to interrogate the political context and the greater discourses of which it is a localised, historicized manifestation (Attwell 1993), while at the same time being criticised as ahistorical (JanMohamed 1986).

But Coetzee's engagement with his context, his interrogation not only of the political context itself, but of the way in which context is discursively constituted and represented in the discourse of the liberal protest novel, concurs with Fletcher's argument that

[a]llegories are classically used for didactic and moral suasion (sic). They may, during times of political revolution, present totally new theories of ethics (1964:120).

This reiterates Madsen's argument that "[a]llegory flourishes at times of intense cultural disruption, when the most authoritative texts of the culture are subject to reevaluation and reassessment" (1994:135). Waiting for the Barbarians therefore interrogates the ways in which South African liberal discourse interprets and constructs history, showing how these are discursive constructions, reading and writing practices (Dovey 1996:143-144), not phenomenological, 'natural' givens; and by extension, the novel itself becomes a discourse, open and subject to the very processes of interrogation and critical reading to which it subjects liberal discourse. This argument is explored at length by Dovey (1988b:242-254). It is Clifford (1974:43) who argues that "allegories often share qualities with straight instructional or theoretical works written at the same period". As Peter Strauss (1992:393) shows, Waiting for the Barbarians "seems to have an unusually direct reference to the situation of the white liberal in South Africa", and I would suggest, more pointedly, white liberal writing. Again, this echoes Madsen's argument that "it is the self-conscious concern with interpretation that relates [allegories] so closely with value" (1994:135). Interpretation is consciously explored at various levels in the novel: the Magistrate's attempts to decode the poplar slips and thereby (re)construct a complete, teleological history for the barbarians become futile, and he realises this, just as his attempts to decode the barbarian woman, and later

his own narrative, fail. Coetzee's novel can thus be read both as an inscription (albeit ironic) and a fierce interrogation of the politics of representation in the liberal protest novel. Therefore, as Kristeva would argue, Coetzee's novel demonstrates that

linear history appears as abstraction. The only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction through a process of reading-writing; that is, through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure. History and morality are written and read within the infrastructure of texts (1986:36).

For Fletcher (1964:199), "allegory is chiefly concerned with sin and redemption", and the Magistrate reflects this concern in his attempt to expiate his existential guilt in his relationship with the barbarian woman. From the Christian symbolism of the foot washing, through the quest to decode the meanings of the glyphs on the poplar slips which would only follow (according to his own thinking) his decoding of the scars on the barbarian woman's body, the Magistrate, like Joll, has an almost manic religious fervour for the 'truth'. Madsen (1994:135) contends that "[i]nterpretation in allegory is thematized as the quest for a transcendental center or origin of meaning ... in terms of which narrative truth will become legible". But Coetzee's work shows that such expectations, such a quest, will always necessarily fail, as the Magistrate does not and cannot reach the falsely teleological resolution masqueraded as narrative truth, realising that whatever conclusions he comes to will necessarily be yet another allegory, one possible interpretive construction among several possibilities. As Eagleton (1996:114) shows, "[t]eleology, thinking of life, language and history in terms of its orientation to

thinking of life, language and history in terms of its orientation to a telos or end, ... of history or language as a simple linear evolution misses the web-like complexity of signs".

As Clifford (1974:53) demonstrates,

the greatest allegories are intransigent and elusive not simply for defensive reasons such as political caution but because they are concerned with a highly complex kind of truth, a matter of relationships and process rather than statement.

Coetzee's novel refuses to become a prescriptive statement on any one political ideology or representational ethic. Instead, it interrogates several ideological positions, including its own, in quest of what Penner (1989:84-86) calls Coetzee's ethical vision. As Dovey (1988a:141) suggests,

Coetzee's novels [are characterised] by a "double-sided" allegorical structure, which involves both the allegorical reading of a prior mode of discourse, and a self-reflexive allegory of the way in which the novelistic discourse inevitably works to erect an identity for the speaker, an identity which will ultimately be divested of authority by the authority of the discursive context in which the novel is read.

I would therefore submit that while the Magistrate is the only source of information in the text, he is at best an unreliable and ambivalently situated source, so that despite his best efforts to circumscribe the subjectivity of the barbarian woman in his own discourse, she remains elusive, uncaptured. If, as Fletcher (1964), Clifford (1974), Quilligan (1979), De Man (1981) and Joel Fineman (1981) claim, the allegorical mode is about interpretation, in that it "makes an appeal to an almost scientific curiosity about the order of things" (Fletcher 1964:69), then the ways in which the Magistrate attempts to interpret the barbarian woman and the scars on her body,

become allegories of interpretation and the circumscription of other identities. As Debra A. Castillo (1986:86-87) observes, "[t]he magistrate can only write what he has already read, can only explicate the story that has already revealed its truth, can only assign meaning where meaning is single and transparent". And Coetzee's novel, through the Magistrate's narrative, shows that such singularity and transparency of meaning is impossible and false in its assertion of truthfulness.

b. The Expedition to the Baobab Tree

If Coetzee's novel interrogates allegory at the same time that it presents itself as an allegory, Stockenström's novel cannot lay claim to such extreme complexity and self-interrogation. Rather, it seems to offer an allegorical history of its own to counter the master narrative of South African apartheid historiography and its representation in Afrikaans literature.

Clifford (1974:14-15) proposes that "[t]he fundamental narrative forms of allegory are the journey, battle or conflict, the quest or search, and transformation". Fletcher (1964:151) argues that "allegorical progress may first of all be understood in the narrow sense of a questing journey". He elaborates on this by demonstrating how this progress

is represented by voyages, land journeys ... there is always a material description of travel from a home to some distant place, and then either a return, or a continuation of the voyage ad infinitum (ibid.:153).

The slave woman's narrative in Stockenström's novel is certainly an "expedition", though the ambivalence of where the expedition is from and to is a crucial part of the narrative. In the original Afrikaans text it is simply a "kremetartekspidisie", literally a "baobab expedition", so that the title of the English translation imposes a false "directedness" on the journey. Throughout the narrative there are several expeditions: the journey of the slave woman from the interior to the coastal city as a child, her later journey back to the interior of the continent, her subsequent loss of or abandonment by the others on the expedition, her journey to the baobab tree, her various excursions from the tree into her surroundings, and her final journey after drinking the poison gift of the little people. As the slave woman herself states, "I have so much to tell of a trip to a new horizon that became an expedition to a tree" (30). Brink (1992) discusses the implications of Coetzee's retitling of the novel.

As my analysis in the third chapter of this thesis shows, the slave woman's narrative is also a textual negotiation of subjectivity, and in that sense a journey towards selfhood. As Kristeva (1984:67) argues, "textual experience represents one of the most daring explorations the subject can allow himself (sic), one that delves into his constitutive process". Because she is unable to write -- "if I could write" (30) -- she speaks her narrative, and this is emblematic, almost allegorical, of the inability (at the time) of many black women to come to voice in literature (Driver 1992b & 1988). Brink (1992:6-7) submits that "these thoughts have been transferred, by an invisible mediator, an implied narrator ... translated into a language

intelligible to the reader". This relationship between black women, writing, speaking and literature is explored in depth in the fourth chapter, but suffice it to say here that several critics have shown that the relationship between black women and the novel as genre is uneasy (Driver 1996 & 1988; Daymond 1996), and that there is a problematic history around auto/biographical representation of black women by white women (Driver 1992b & 1988). Brink (1992:6) points to the problematic nature of Stockenström's novel, in that it represents an other -- despite its admirable attempts to renegotiate the imbalances in South African literary representation, it remains a book about a black subject written by a white author, so that it is implicated in and complicit with the social hierarchies described by Dorothy Driver (1996; 1990 & 1988), Shireen Hassim and Cheryl Walker (1993) and Desireé Lewis (1997; 1996 & 1993) that allow white writers privileged access to the representation of blackness, without reciprocity.

If, as Clifford (1974:23) posits,

[i]n journey ... the traveller is an instrument whereby systems can be explored. Because he (sic) is an outsider he often possesses a special kind of objectivity about the newly encountered system as a whole ... so the questions asked by the traveller are a natural pretext for explanation[,]

then Stockenström's slave woman represents an appropriate subject through which to explore the system of colonial, patriarchal, and racist relations of the coastal city, which functions as an allegorical representation of apartheid South Africa, though it is not only limited to that referential meaning.

After all, the slave woman embodies hooks's assertion that "[t]o be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (1984:v). She also embodies Salman Rushdie's (1992:210) description of the migrant subject which I invoke later in this chapter in the discussion around subjectivity and agency. The slave woman occupies contradictory subject positions -- as illustrated in the third chapter -- which allow her to explore the power structures of her own world (the world of the slaves) as well as that world inhabited by her masters. However, as my discussion in the fourth chapter shows, and in agreement with Cixous (in Cixous and Clément 1986:71) who proposes that "if there were no other one would invent it", the slave woman is incapable of exploring the world of the little people, who speak "a language for geckos and tapping beetles" (67).

c. A Question of Power

If the quest in Stockenström's novel is a variation of physical journeys that become emblematic of (an) existential journey(s), then Head's A Question of Power exemplifies Fletcher's contention that

[i]t does not even need to involve a physical journey. Travel is not the only way one can change places. The whole operation can be presented as a sort of introspective journey through the self (1964:153).

In this way Head's Elizabeth and Coetzee's Magistrate resemble one another. Just as the Magistrate's narrative is an introspective, self-analytical quest for truth, so Elizabeth's descent into 'madness' and Head's recovery of her self through the representation of that 'madness' in the autobiographical text are quests. But it is

interesting that the protagonists in all four texts are displaced persons: Coetzee's Magistrate is displaced from the capital of Empire to the outpost in the borderlands, and the barbarian woman is brought to the frontier town after a raid into barbarian territory; the displacements of Stockenström's slave woman have been delineated in the previous section; Head's Elizabeth is firstly a refugee from South Africa in Botswana, and then exiled from 'sanity' and re-placed in 'madness'; Captain Nunes and all the villagers in Nicol's novel arrive at the settlement from elsewhere.

Head's self-representation -- the relationship between autobiography and self-reclamation in A Question of Power is discussed in detail in the fourth chapter -- is also an introspective journey into her own "inner hell[]" (12). And if, as Clifford (1974:42) argues, allegory demands

an audience prepared to undertake what is essentially an energetic form of reading, in which the reader's critical abilities are constantly brought into play by a desire to know and understand[,]

then Head's autobiographical novel resembles Coetzee's novel: both are particularly difficult texts, since the reader is required to engage in "an imaginative exercise in perceiving connections vertically and horizontally: vertically to significances outside the text, and horizontally to objects and events within it" (loc.cit.). In Head's case this involves exploring the relations between the world narrated in the text and the phenomenological, historical world of Head, subject and writer; in addition, the reader must engage actively with the ways in which the signs within the text relate to one another, in

another, in how the language and the representation of 'madness' interrogates perceived notions of 'sanity', and the ways in which race, class, gender and sexuality influence these constructions. As Caroline Rooney (1991:110) shows, the novel represents "not only the violent realisations of a constructed truth, but the violence of the construction of its realisation, or coming into being".

As such, not only does A Question of Power become an allegory of subaltern subjectivity, 'madness' and the effects of racial prejudice on those subjected to it, but it also explores how these are constructions, necessary as they may be to the negotiation and establishment of subjectivity. This argument, at one extreme, would hold that in Frantz Fanon's terms the condition of the native is necessarily a nervous condition, so that an allegory of subaltern subjectivity would be an allegory of 'madness', on the understanding that such an allegorical reading would interrogate 'madness' as a construct. Jacqueline Rose (1994), Roger A. Berger (1990) and Carol Margaret Davison (1990) propose that Head's novel does this remarkably well. Thus, when McHale (1987:145-146) suggests that "allegory projects a world and erases it in the same gesture, inducing a flicker between presence and absence of this world", it can be argued that Head's Elizabeth projects the world of her torture at the hands of Sello, Medusa and Dan, then erases it in an attempt to reclaim a renegotiated and reconstituted sanity, and a different kind of subjectivity. As Rooney (1991:111) argues,

[w]hile Elizabeth may be said to be the subjected or oppressed site where meanings are constructed, she is also the subjectless or effaced host of a parasitic

deconstruction [emphasis added].

Leigh Gilmore (1994:xiv) contends that "[a]utobiography is positioned within discourses that construct truth, identity, and power, and these discourses produce a gendered subject". As such, A Question of Power is a revealing allegory of subjectivity, insofar as "interpretation in allegory is thematized as the quest for a transcendental center or origin of meaning ... in terms of which narrative truth will become legible" (Madsen 1994:135). Like the Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians, Elizabeth discovers that such transcendental truth is illusory, always already constructed, and that the transcendental subject of Kantian and Hegelian philosophy is untenable.

d. The Powers That Be

If Coetzee's novel interrogates allegory as a mode at the same time that it inscribes itself as an allegory; Stockenström inscribes an alternative to the dominant discourses of South African history and historiography in her novel; and Head enacts a process of self-reclamation through writing and negotiating new subjectivities through the repudiation of realism for allegorical modes; then Nicol's novel, the most recent of the four texts under examination in this dissertation, shows how allegory

is ironic in that images and figures are simultaneously one thing and another or several others, and also reveals a deliberately willed ambiguity in the recurrence of double plots and identities, transformations and metempsychosis, the fantastic, and -- very importantly -- by the ways in which the concept of time operates. Time and historical sense are presented as relative, and what one might vulgarly call the 'great moments' of many allegories obviously attempt to create a sense of timelessness and a-temporality. It is also at such moments that the mythopoeic aspect of allegory is most

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strongly felt (Clifford 1974:95).

Nicol's novel is set in an indeterminate historical period -- we can only assume it is some time in the twentieth century, given the presence of radio communication in the text -- and a geographical location that resists specific identification -- one assumes it is somewhere on the west coast of Southern Africa. The social order of Captain Nunes's world is not stated to be overtly racist -- though the forbidden wedding of Fagmie Jabaar to a white bride hints that it is; as William Finnegan (1989:9) argues, "the history of South Africa is interleaved with the history of the village" -- but its operations mirror those of the apartheid regime. Like Coetzee's text, therefore, Nicol's novel shows a world "out of time, [and] a belief in the possibility of pattern revealing itself in variousness" (Clifford 1974:105). Finnegan (1989:9) argues that "Nicol spins a parable about the perils of commodity fetishism that is at least as compelling as the more pointed allegory about the apartheid state". This concurs with Clifford (1974:11) who shows how "in allegory the concern is always with process, with the way in which various elements of an imaginative or intellectual system interact, and with the effects of this system or structure on and within individuals". As Augustin Shoote tells Nunes, "[w]hat you are doing is inhuman. They may be the laws but that does not make them right" (6). But Nunes constructs his ethical vision in a binary structure, so that for him "the treatment of morals [is] a war between virtue and vice ... between two warring armies of moral germs, the good and evil viruses" (Fletcher 1964:199). Nunes's model of political dissidence and crime as disease, concurs

with Fletcher's position that in allegory "'sin' ... is a general term for any contagious error, and that political depravity would be subsumed under it, if the work were a political allegory" (ibid.:208). This reflects Mondling's view of "the wars of independence ... [as] nothing more than an excuse for mayhem and plunder" (32-33). And the view of the political dissident as a virus complements the view of the "mixed-bloods" (51) as tainted with degeneration and blood flaws (Coetzee 1988:136). But Nicol's text demonstrates that while "the same procedure of isolation is followed with those who are in any way suspected of being unclean, who have become unclean by violating a taboo" (Fletcher 1964:209) -- Joll's isolation and interrogation of the barbarian prisoners, and later of the Magistrate himself in Coetzee's novel, mirrors Nunes's isolation and interrogation of various villagers in Nicol's work -- it also demonstrates that "the contagion may be walled in, instead of walled out, an irony of which many allegorists are acutely aware" (ibid.:214). This notion of the containment of the contagion within is taken to its extreme with Nunes's apparent spontaneous self-combustion, when he "burst into a pillar of flame that reached the ceiling" (172), which could be read as an allegorical and apocalyptic vision held in the late apartheid South Africa of what was perceived to be the oppressive regime's fateful path towards self-destruction.

Nicol's novel is therefore an attempt to show up the paranoia of dominant Afrikaner Nationalist apartheid discourse, and its dialectical relation to the paranoia in liberal humanist discourses at the time. Subsequently, the subject positions envisaged by Nicol's

text are circumscribed by this paranoia, and often foreground the performative aspects of identity constitution, especially in the moments of masking, so that identity is always shown to be constructed, rather than 'naturally given', which is an exploration of identity as sign, as an element in a signifying chain, and as such, as an unstable system.

II. Gender, Genre, and Subjectivity

In a discussion of feminist criticism, Terry Eagleton (1996:129)

states that

though the oppression of women is indeed a material reality, a matter of motherhood, domestic labour, job discrimination and unequal wages, it cannot be reduced to these factors: it is also a question of sexual ideology, of the ways men and women image themselves and each other in male-dominated society.

It would therefore seem crucial to examine representation as the site where such imaging occurs. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1987:241) states, "a sympathetic text where the gendered subaltern has been represented [should be] unravel[ed] ... to make visible the assignment of subject-positions". Cecily Lockett (1988:21) suggests that in South African literature "black women ... are the 'other'"; they would seem to be, as Rushdie (1992:144) states, "the Other, the reversed twin in the looking-glass, the double, the negative image, who by his (sic) oppositeness tells one what one is". As such, woman as 'other' constitutes "the repressed that ensures the system's functioning" (Cixous in Cixous & Clément 1986:67). This argument is elaborated by Patricia Hill Collins (1996:310), who suggests that "[r]ace and gender

oppression may both revolve around the same axis of disdain for the body; both portray the sexuality of subordinate groups as animalistic and therefore deviant". As Spivak (1988:287) states, "[i]f, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow". This view of black women in South African discourses of representation has been discussed at length and in depth by various critics (Gilman 1986; Lewis 1993; Hassim and Walker 1993; Lockett 1988; Driver 1993, 1992a, 1992b & 1988). Lockett (1988:35) traces the conventionalized representations of black women in South African literature, and concludes that

South African writers and readers, whether black or white, need to take cognisance of the often damaging type-casting of black women in our literature and begin the process of creating a literary space for depictions of black women with aspirations beyond those imposed by race and gender.

Her discussion centres on the representation of black female figures in the work of white authors (male and female) and black male writers. However, perhaps because it lay beyond the confines of her investigation, she fails to give account of the ways in which black women's self-representation, or representations of black women by others, have attempted to interrogate and explore the constructions (and constrictions) of these stereotypes in order to move beyond the constitution of identity for black women within their limiting terms. Obversely, Carli Coetzee (1993:21) consciously avoids texts by colonised subjects, and proposes a critical contest of the "[o]ppositional criticism" (ibid.:9) of Said's Orientalism, by "examin[ing] the possibilities of transgression and complicity in the

texts of both men and women" in relation to colonialist discourses on both the South African landscape and what she terms the "indigenous" (ibid.:24) subjects of the colonial enterprise. However, and in consequence of Lockett's argument, as Spivak (1987:219) states, "questions of the subject-constitution of the subaltern female gain a certain importance". The texts examined in this thesis offer such interrogations and, especially in the case of Head's A Question of Power, alternatives to the stereotypes of silenced, marginalised, voiceless, dangerously savage or animalistic black women. As hooks (1992:44) shows,

black female identity was made synonymous again and again with 'victimisation'. The black female voice that was deemed 'authentic' was the voice in pain; only the sound of hurting could be heard. No narrative of resistance was voiced and respected.

However, the four texts examined here attempt to offer a different repertoire of representations of black women from the conventional images offered in South African literature. As Spivak (1987:203) states, "it is only the texts of counter-insurgency or élite documentation that give us the news of the consciousness of the subaltern". I would posit that each of the texts examined here contains a "narrative of resistance", and, moreover, in Head's case especially, even a narrative of survival. As Shoshana Felman (1993:13) states, "survival is, profoundly, a form of autobiography". Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians illustrates how the hackneyed image of the animalistic black woman is a construction by another -- it is the Magistrate who observes that "[p]eople will say I keep two wild animals in my room, a fox and a girl" (34). Stockenström's slave

woman may, "[l]ike the wild animals... make my paths" (8), but the novel is a strong exposition of subjectivity, and its expression and construction in language. Head's autobiographical A Question of Power is perhaps the most important of these texts for this thesis, since it attempts to represent the process of self-reclamation in the face of and, simultaneously, from the position of dehumanisation -- as hooks (1995a:78) states, "[d]evaluation of black womanhood is central to the maintenance of white supremacist capitalist patriarchy". The self-conscious, self-interrogating style of Nicol's narrative presents the stereotype for examination principally through the allegorical mode, for example the way in which Fagmie Jabaar's wife marks the absence of black women by being masked and marked as one. As Mamphela Ramphele (1995:i) asserts,

[s]torytelling is a historical imperative ... particularly so for women, especially black women. Women have to find a script, a narrative to live by, because all other scripts are likely to depict them in roles that fit the conventional stereotypes.

However, Boyce Davies (1994:8-9) suggests that "the category Black woman ... exists as multiple performances of gender and race and sexuality based on the particular cultural, historical, geopolitical, class communities in which Black women exist". This echoes Homi K. Bhabha's argument -- which is reiterated often throughout this thesis -- that "[a] repertoire of conflictual positions constitutes the subject [so that t]he taking up of any one position, within a specific discursive form, in a particular historical juncture, is thus always problematic" (1994:77). This concurs with Edward W. Said's argument that in the postcolonial moment

the formation of cultural identities [should be] understood not as essentializations ... but as contrapuntal ensembles, for it is the case that no identity can ever exist by itself and without an array of opposites, negatives, oppositions (1993:60).

As such, identity becomes performative, as well as constitutive, constructed and negotiated within specific discursive formations.

Therefore,

abstracting subjectivity from time and space becomes an impossibility because practices are always open and uncertain, dependent to some degree upon the immediate resources available at the moment they show up in time and space (Pile & Thrift 1995:29)

In this regard hooks (1995b:3) asserts that "[r]epresentation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonization of mind", since it is often in textuality that this performativity is foregrounded and explored. This concurs with Peter Hitchcock's (1993:6) indication that "the inequalities of symbolic exchange always already prescribe a vertical axis of struggles over sign". And as Bhabha (1994:89) avers, "[t]he question of the representation of difference is therefore always also a problem of authority". These statements echo Hitchcock's (1993:12) postulation that "[h]ow subaltern subjects represent themselves (which is itself deeply problematic) never coincides with how they may be represented". This concurs with Spivak's assertion that "the retrieval of subaltern consciousness [is] the charting of ... the subaltern subject-effect" (1987:204). She goes on to delineate how

that which seems to operate as a subject may be part of an immense discontinuous network ... of strands that may be termed politics, ideology, economics, history, sexuality, language, and so on ... Different knottings and configurations of these strands, determined by heterogeneous determinations which are themselves dependent upon myriad circumstances, produce the effect of

an operating subject (loc.cit.; emphasis added).

Historically, in South Africa, access to representation has been the privilege of white writers (Driver 1996; Hassim and Walker 1993; Lewis 1997 & 1993). Stockenström's text could be said to be an exemplary inscription of such a paradigm, since, despite its attempts to engender a subject position for a black woman in an originally Afrikaans text -- Afrikaans as the language of the 'master race' is significant here, as Brink (1992:6) points out -- it cannot but fail to transcend the problematics of the discourse which it inhabits and in which it is constituted, precisely because the black woman of the text is an invention of the white woman writer's imagination. It might even be argued that the text fails to "speak to the question of the subaltern without speaking in place of her" (Hitchcock 1993:xiv). What sets The Expedition to the Baobab Tree apart from many other texts by white Afrikaners representing black female subjectivity (Elsa Joubert's Poppie Nongena is perhaps the most obvious example in the genre for Afrikaans literature) is that it does not pretend to realism. Joubert's text is controversially set up -- like many of the autobiographical texts which, as Driver (1992b) argues, reflect the unequal access to processes and forums for (auto)biographical representation -- as a narrative based on a set of interviews with a phenomenological black woman on whom the chief protagonist is then supposedly based. Such texts therefore lay claim to rather spurious legitimacy by relying on historiographical and phenomenological discourses of truth and subjectivity to lend truth value to the

literary fiction. As Eagleton (1996:117) argues, à propos of Roland Barthes,

[r]ealist literature tends to conceal the socially relative or constructed nature of language: it helps to confirm the prejudice that there is a form of 'ordinary' language which is somehow natural.

Stockenström's text, in contrast, is overtly allegorical, as the slave woman narrator remains significantly nameless, as do the territories between which she moves; the novel also does not specify historical time, and in fact seems to interrogate the impulse for overdetermination inherent in historical time, so that the indeterminacies are moments and modes of resistance to fixity, offering a systematic critique of the position of black women in the contemporary context: South Africa in the 1980s. This relates to earlier arguments about the relationship between allegory and the subversion of censorship.

Catherine Belsey (1985:47) argues that

it is language which provides the possibility of subjectivity because it is language which enables the speaker to posit himself or herself as 'I', as the subject of a sentence. It is in language that people constitute themselves as subjects.

This is a reiteration (and also necessarily an oversimplification) of a much more elaborate argument proposed by among others Jacques Lacan (1977) and Emile Benveniste (1971). This is echoed by Spivak (1987:212), who shows that "the 'self' is itself always production rather than ground". Thus the subject position invoked by these texts -- and therefore also the subjectal space and the type of subjectivity -- is that of "the subject on trial/in process" (Kristeva 1984:58), not the "transcendental subject" (Eagleton 1996:49) of Husserlian

phenomenology, which "was to be seen as the source and origin of all meaning: it was not really itself part of the world, since it brought that world to be in the first place" (ibid.:50). As Hitchcock (1993:8) states, "[t]here can be no absolute monopoly of language or language use because signs as communication are shared (and even if the speaker does not want to share, signs are stolen)". This, of course, invokes Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, which "does not assert the self-presence of the speaking subject, [since] multiple voicing fractures the monolithic and monologic discourse of power ... and calls into question the 'logic' of omnisubjection" (ibid.:xvi). Still, it is significant that in each of the texts it is in the coming to speech, as Cixous (1976:256) would have it, that subjectivity is asserted and reclaimed simultaneously. When the barbarian woman in Waiting for the Barbarians comes to speak for the first time, she is defying the Magistrate's attempt to describe her as blind; the slave woman in The Expedition to the Baobab Tree learns to use language to her own advantage, employing strategies of silence, parroting, and later, assertion, to establish her own identity, her own subject position, a speaking "I". As Belsey (1985:47) states, "it is language itself which, by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning ... it is only by adopting the position of subject within language that the individual is able to produce meaning". And as Eagleton (1996:52) states, "all experience involves language and language is ineradicably social". This also implies that language is historically and discursively situated, so that the subjectivity posited in language is such as well. This concurs with

Said's argument that "no one has the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting the world free from the encumbering interests and engagements of the ongoing relationships themselves" (1993:65). This becomes evident in Head's A Question of Power, where Elizabeth has to admit to Tom that she is mad as a first step towards telling her story in full, the story which is then related by the third person narrator of the text. This relationship between autobiography and third person narration is discussed by Philip Lejeune (1989:6), who argues that "there can be identity of the narrator and the principal character without the first person being used". What results, specifically in the texts by Head and Stockenström, is a subject "that is at the same time inside and outside the ideology of gender, and conscious of being so, conscious of that twofold pull, of that division, that doubled vision" (De Lauretis 1987:10). This echoes the positions of among others Bhabha (1994) and hooks (1984). And therefore, as Hitchcock (1993:9) shows, "subjectivity is a register of potential social change, and not its unconditional guarantee".

The position constituted by the discourse outlined above would be a "subject of enunciation" (Kristeva 1984:22-23) and consequently,

the matrix of enunciation structures a subjectal space in which, strictly speaking, there is no unique and fixed subject ... The subjectal space thus appears as a series of entities, which are infinite to the extent that maternal discontinuity is projected there (ibid.:91).

And, as Hitchcock (1993:10) states, "it is in the processes of positioning that the agency of the oppressed subject can be defined". His argument is in agreement with that of Spivak (1987:197), who holds

that "the agency of change is located in the insurgent or the 'subaltern'". This positioning can be traced in the utterance and enunciation in the texts under examination here: Coetzee's Magistrate's enunciation of his own subjectal space in his utterance which is also his text, shows the impossibility of expressing an Other subjectivity truthfully or 'objectively' within the confining and constricting discourses of the self; Head's Elizabeth attempts to speak that Other-ness, that difference, which Stockenström's slave narrator also attempts to speak. Therefore, "language is the otherness in self and ... the subject is authored in communication" (ibid.:9). This concurs with Eagleton's discussion of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism, where

consciousness was the subject's active, material, semiotic intercourse with others, not some sealed interior realm divorced from these relations; consciousness, like language, was both 'inside' and 'outside' the subject simultaneously (1996:102).

Thus, as Spivak (1987:203) proposes, "subaltern consciousness ... is never fully recoverable ... it is effaced even as it is disclosed".

It is hooks (1995b:3) who argues that "the development of an aesthetics of viewing [is] central to claiming subjectivity". Significantly, this echoes Berger (1972) and Mulvey (1975), who discuss the constitution of subjectivity through the reciprocity of sight. In Coetzee's novel, visibility and invisibility become the positions from which subjectivity is negotiated. The Magistrate feels objectified by Joll's hidden gaze, and is surprised when he realises later that he had been an object in the field of vision of the barbarians when he had thought himself invisible. Bhabha (1994:112)

argues that the oppressed are overlooked (in both senses of the term) by the oppressors, so that they become exchangeable, indistinguishable from one another. The slave woman in Stockenström's novel finds this true, in accordance with Irigaray (1985a). However, as hooks (1995b:xii) argues, "[t]he system of white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy is not maintained solely by white folks. It is also maintained by all ... who internalize and enforce the values of this regime". And the slave woman of Stockenström's novel certainly discovers her own complicity with the system, but the implications of her complicity far outweigh those which the Magistrate discovers in relation to his own in Coetzee's novel. This concurs with Clément's argument (in Cixous and Clément 1986:137) that "the master's discourse -- from the point of view of its political and economic power -- is transferred onto and shapes any discourse dealing with knowledge to be transmitted", which is a reiteration of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic. The slave woman of Stockenström's novel discovers this in her parroting of her masters, first in relation to the other slaves on the expedition, and later in relation to the little people. What can be considered her extreme interpellation of her self as constructed by others -- she drinks the poison of the little people at the end of the novel -- can be said to illustrate Cixous's position that "the only way to bar [the power of mastery] is to execute the master, kill him, eliminate him" (in Cixous and Clément 1986:140). When the slave woman drinks the poison, knowing that it will be her last act, she is ending the discourse of mastery, even though (and probably because) she will never be able to understand the motivations of the little people, as

they remain an enigma to her. This echoes the Magistrate's enslavement to his image of the barbarian woman, and his inability to decipher her self and the scars which he (mis)reads as her self. Just as the Magistrate in Coetzee's novel refuses to learn the barbarian language until it is too late, so the slave woman in Stockenström's novel never learns the little people's "click language", so that they remain unknowable to her, even if it is in a measure by her own choice, her decision not to learn their language.

These texts, therefore, all examine the conflicting and contradictory discourses that are implicated in any subject position, in the negotiation of subjectivity, and how there is constant flux so the subject is truly "in process/on trial" (Kristeva 1984:233).

III. Agency and Writing

Hitchcock (1993:7) argues that "[i]f the oppressed are the major media of dialogics, it is only to the extent that their utterance often upsets the status quo by challenging the logic of dialogue as equal linguistic exchange". This implies that the oppressed have some kind of agency, since the dialogic process "denotes a relational capacity to selfhood (the addressor coauthors and is coauthored by the addressee)" (ibid.:xv). As Eagleton (1996:100) states, "language [is] grasped as utterance, as involving speaking and writing subjects and therefore also, at least potentially, readers or listeners". Kristeva (1984:87) would elaborate that

[w]riting represents-articulates the signifying process into specific networks or spaces; speech (which may correspond to that writing) restores the diacritical

elements necessary for an exchange of meaning between two subjects.

This concurs with Cixous (in Cixous & Clément 1986:72), who posits that writing constitutes itself as a space that does not necessarily reproduce the dominant ideologies of the context out of which it arises and which it addresses, but "invents new worlds". Eagleton (1996:165-166), in concordance with Kristeva (1986), states that "women, and certain 'revolutionary' literary works, pose a radical question to existing society precisely because they mark out the frontier beyond which it dare not venture". These invented worlds of Cixous, and the invented selves that construct them and are constructed in them -- invention here becomes what Eco (1976:245) defines as "a mode of production whereby the producer of the sign-function chooses a new material continuum not yet segmented for that purpose and proposes a new way of organizing (of giving form to) it in order to map within it the formal pertinent element of a content-type" -- are often arrived at through exile. It is significant that all of the novels under examination here, involve their subjects in some kind of displacement. In this regard, Salman Rushdie's (1992:210) characterisation of border and boundary crossing, and its consequences is quite interesting:

To migrate is certainly to lose language and home, to be defined by others, to become invisible or, even worse, a target; it is to experience deep changes and wrenches in the soul. But the migrant is not simply transformed by his (sic) act; he also transforms his new world. Migrants may well become mutants, but it is out of such hybridization that newness can emerge.

This new subjectivity, in its link with migration and displacement also involves the foregrounding of the constructedness of identity

(Rapport 1995:268). Head's Elizabeth, as well as Coetzee's barbarian woman and Stockenström's slave woman, all experience the loss of language and home, the definition of their selves by others, victimisation, and the transformation of their selves by their environment. However, and this is crucial, they also become active agents in these new worlds, transforming not only the ways in which they perceive these worlds and their place in it, but also the ways in which these worlds perceive them -- the barbarian woman's presence and her enigmatic defiance alter the ways in which the Magistrate positions himself within the discourses of Empire, so that he eventually inhabits much the same position that she did; the slave woman's narrative, though impossible phenomenologically, inscribes a radical textual subjectivity that offers a counter-narrative to linear, patriarchal, capitalist history in the world of the text's addressee; and Head's Elizabeth transforms the hostile environment of the Botswana village she lives in, and redefines 'madness' and 'sanity' as patriarchal categories for effecting social control, thereby renegotiating her self in relation to her world, and the place of that self in the world. As Felman (1993:33) states,

[w]ith respect to woman's madness, man's reason reacts by trying to appropriate it: in the first place, by claiming to "understand" it, but with an external understanding that reduces the madwoman to a spectacle, to an object that can be known and possessed.

This concurs with Foucault's assertion that in the seventeenth century, with the medicalisation of the discourse on mental illness, (1965:70), "[m]adness had become a thing to look at". Therefore, these texts engage in an exploratory project where

the search is for places from which the subject can speak in order to change things and this involves a critique of the relationship between power and knowledge (Pile & Thrift 1995:285).

The kind of subject that results from these processes of representation and interrogation, is best characterised by Kristeva (1984:178-189), who states that

[t]his new subject ... explains, cogitates, and knows, but he (sic) is also elusive because he transforms the real. In explaining, cogitating, and knowing, he emphasizes one pole of heterogeneous contradiction over the other: he stresses process over identification, rejection over desire, heterogeneity over signifier, struggle over structure.

Thus, the subject is truly "on trial/in process" (ibid.:23): it is in the process of narrating the self that the self comes to posit its own existence, and paradoxically, that its very existence is questioned, interrogated, examined. And this doubling process, instead of resulting in a self-cancelling non-subject, constitutes the agency of the subaltern subject. As Attwell (1993:24) states, "[a]gency, in the context of a fragmented state of nationhood like South Africa's, therefore serves as an umbrella concept for such notions as legitimacy, authority and position". Spivak (1987:204) complicates this view by showing how "the subaltern's view, will, presence, can be no more than a theoretical fiction to entitle the project of reading". Thus, when, in agreement with Cixous (in Cixous & Clément 1986), Kristeva (1984:210) proposes that "the text as signifying practice points toward the possibility ... of a subject who speaks his (sic) being put in process/on trial through action", it is the action of speech which constitutes the agency which is the ground upon which subjectivity is negotiated, so that "it is irreducibly discursive"

(Spivak 1987:203). The barbarian woman in Coetzee's novel may not be the narrator, but as I show in the second chapter, her willed silence and intractable responses to the Magistrate's questions illustrate the (self) control she practices, and constitutes the agency which implies her subjectivity. The slave woman narrator of Stockenström's novel is an "auto-diegetic narrator" (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:96), so that her agency resides in her narrative act, which is an attempt to engender a textual self, a subject position that is therefore necessarily in process/on trial. As Kristeva (1986:67) states, "textual experience [also] reaches the very foundation of the social". Head's Elizabeth, while extradiegetically narrated, because of the autobiographical nature of the text -- and the relationship between narration and autobiography is examined in detail in the fourth chapter -- has her subjectivity engendered and simultaneously interrogated in the text. Consequently, as Ramphela (1995:i) states, "[o]ne is always ambivalent about telling one's story". Nicol's novel is constructed from various stories and histories told, often in contradiction to one another -- Montague Planke's account of events is in direct opposition to Captain Sylvester Nunes's, and Lady Sarah's stories are an attempt to redress the lies Nunes suspects and she knows the villagers have told him. Thus, as Kristeva (1984:190) argues, the texts examined here show how

[i]n capitalist society, where class struggle unsettles all institutions and where every subject and discourse are ultimately determined by their position in production and politics, to keep heterogeneous contradiction within a simple subjective representation is to make it inaudible or complicitous with dominant bourgeois ideology.

Allegory & Subjectivity

Each text attempts to defy the simplicity of the transcendental subject of Husserlian phenomenology, and offers a "revolutionary critique of the established social order (relations of production -- relations of reproduction)" (loc.cit.) through the positing of subaltern subject positions constituted differently, and in opposition to the (over)determinations of the dominant social order of apartheid South Africa.

Chapter 2

Subaltern States:

J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians

J.M. Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians (1980) offers a seminal and groundbreaking approach to the discourse of subaltern representation in South African fiction, in that its engagement with the allegorical mode offers a remarkable point of departure for an examination of the role of the allegorical in offering a critique of representational politics in South African fiction, and specifically the representation of the subaltern (as) subject.

While many critics have attended to the allegorical aspects of the novel in various degrees of depth and interest (Dovey 1988a & 1988b; Gitzen 1993; JanMohamed 1985; Parkinson Zamora 1986; Penner 1989; Van Zanten Gallagher 1991; Wade 1990), and others have examined the text in relation to discursive practices in Coetzee's oeuvre and its engagement with South African literary and cultural politics (Attwell 1993; Castillo 1986; Eckstein 1990; Haluska 1987; Penner 1989; Treiber 1992; VanZanten Gallagher 1991; Watson 1986 & 1980), no critic, however, has given sustained and detailed attention to the relation between the allegorical levels at which the novel operates, and the critical debates it engenders on the representation of alterity. I develop such an argument through an examination of the text in the following chapter, to articulate the particular

contribution of Coetzee's novel to the larger debate on the representation of the subaltern in Southern African fiction.

I. Other Ways of Seeing

An examination of the ways in which the visual construction of the subaltern subject functions in the interrogation of the binary, hierarchical epistemology of power represented in the novel, and with which Coetzee engages critically throughout his writing practice, is crucial to an understanding of the complexity of the "criticism-as-fiction" (Dovey 1988b:11) of Coetzee's project in Waiting for the Barbarians. Using theoretical debates in feminism on the visual construction of female subjectivity and its denial (Mulvey 1975; De Lauretis 1984), as well as arguments centred on the representation of subjectivity, language and signification (Irigaray 1985a and 1985b; Cixous 1981), I intend to examine, through close textual analysis, the representation of the relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian woman, and how Coetzee's interrogation of issues around agency and constructions of subjectivity in textual discourse.

Cixous (1981:90-91) postulates that patriarchal "[t]hought has always worked by ... dual, hierarchized oppositions". She argues that "[w]herever an ordering intervenes, a law organises the thinkable by (dual, irreconcilable; or mitigable, dialectical) oppositions", and furthermore, that "logocentrism subjects thought -- all the concepts, the codes, the values -- to a two-term system, related to 'the' couple man/woman" (ibid.:91). It is also her contention that this

hierarchization subjects the entire conceptual

organisation to man ... [resulting in a] male privilege, which can be seen in the opposition by which it sustains itself, between activity and passivity ... [so that] woman is always on the side of passivity (loc.cit.).

Throughout the novel, it becomes evident that the Magistrate is for the most part the active agent of his own narrative, at both the levels of narration and structural manifestation (Kristeva 1986:48), and especially in his "curious and, on the surface, unlikely relationship" (Harvey 1981:5) with the barbarian woman. As Minna Herman Maltz (1990:22) demonstrates, much of the narrative is motivated by the ways in which "the Magistrate is disturbed by the inexplicable nature of his feelings for the barbarian girl". The entire novel is a text narrated, as it is composed, by the Magistrate, whose very act of narration is an attempt at control -- at perhaps the most fundamental level -- while he progressively realises that such control is illusory. The reader is constantly made aware of the Magistrate's quest for narrative control, which parallels his desire for the revelation of some greater narrative truth; this dual desire is illustrated by his confession of his "struggle ... with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to [him] why it was that [he] thought it worth the trouble" (24-25). At the same time, paradoxically, in confessing this need for control and its absence, the Magistrate assumes a form of control, the position of power which is that of the autodiegetic narrator, the one who generates his own text (and, as Dovey 1988b and Castillo 1986 show, the text of his self) in the process of speaking it, and more specifically a subject speaking his text of the barbarians (and more pointedly the barbarian woman) as objects in and of his utterance.

This subjectivity, this position of power which he inhabits and assumes, is often asserted around issues of vision, the politics of visibility and more significantly, invisibility -- of seeing without being seen, of looking without being seen to do so. As Michel Foucault (1977:200) states, "[v]isibility is a trap" , and as Berger (1972:7-8) argues, "[i]t is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world", and "[w]e only see what we look at [so that t]o look is an act of choice". Foucault (1973:xiii-xiv) finds that "[t]he residence of truth in the dark centre of things is linked, paradoxically, to this sovereign power of the empirical gaze that turns their darkness into light". In his first meeting with Joll, the Magistrate marvels at

the two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire ... [t]he discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he [Joll] can see through them (1).

Clearly, he is disturbed by Joll's ability to look at him without being seen to do so. Here Joll becomes the subject who possesses the power to look without being constituted as an object open to being seen to be looking. This encounter is significant in that it prefigures some of the Magistrate's own predicaments with looking and being looked at in relation to the fisherfolk and the barbarian prisoners, and most significantly, the barbarian woman with whom he becomes increasingly fascinated. He protests that he would be able to "understand it if [Joll] wanted to hide blind eyes. But he is not blind" (1). In order to minimise the unease which the invisibility of Joll's eyes mark in him, the Magistrate reduces it to the level of

ridicule, but remains haunted by "the image of a face marked by two black glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only [his own] doubled image cast back at [him]" (44). It is important to note that in the revision of the way in which he sees Joll, the Magistrate ascribes non-human eyes to Joll's image, and specifically insect eyes with their capacity for multiplying and diminishing the object being viewed, and in so doing constructing a completely different, a wholly other way of seeing.

The need for reciprocal vision is crucial for the Magistrate, for while his gaze establishes reciprocity for the invisible gaze of Joll as subject, Joll's refusal to provide reciprocity for the Magistrate's gaze reduces the latter to the position of object in Joll's sight. This illustrates Hegel's argument about the Master/Slave dialectic in Phenomenology of Spirit, that "[s]elf-consciousness exists in and for itself when ... it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (1977:111). The Magistrate dreads the lack of acknowledgement by an other of his self, and in the incident with Joll, this affirmation centres on the reciprocity of looking. And as Berger (1972:9) states, "[t]he reciprocal nature of vision is more fundamental than that of spoken language". This is also an important feature of the speech patterns of the interchanges between the Magistrate and the barbarian woman.

The position of power which Joll holds relative to the Magistrate prefigures the Magistrate's own position later in relation to the fisherfolk Joll brings into the settlement for interrogation and torture, and the barbarian prisoners who are captured

subsequently. The Magistrate finds himself one of those who "stand watching them eat as though they are strange animals" (18), and in his power to look, the objects of his gaze are reduced to animals, denied their humanity. Still, he "do[es] not want idlers coming in to stare at them" (18), that occupation being a privilege he has annexed for himself, as he "spend[s] hours watching them from the upstairs window", and like Joll he remains "invisible behind the glass" (19). This structuring of vision recalls Foucault's panopticon, where "in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (1977:202). This is also perhaps the first moment in which the Magistrate resembles Joll. His power to gaze at the prisoners from a superior vantage point is to lead to his first encounter with the barbarian woman when later Joll returns with barbarians, not merely fisherfolk. Thus the fisherfolk, and later the barbarian prisoners, are "in a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (ibid.:201).

Mulvey (1975:436), in her pioneering essay on scopophilia and narrative cinema, argues that "[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female". In this she concurs with De Lauretis (1984:37-38), who argues that

[t]he representation of woman as image (spectacle, object to be looked at, ... and its concurrent representation of the female body as the locus of sexuality, site of visual pleasure, or lure of the gaze) is so pervasive in our culture ... that it necessarily constitutes a starting point for any understanding of sexual difference and its ideological effects in the construction of social subjects, its presence in all forms of subjectivity.

This reiterates Cixous's (1981:90-91) argument on patriarchal language and its impulses of hierarchizing quoted earlier. The relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian woman certainly demonstrates this, as it seems that the barbarian woman's construction by the narrator, the Magistrate, is a significantly visual process represented in language. The role of sight -- in the light of the barbarian woman's "blindness" -- is therefore crucial in examining the discourse on subaltern subjectivity engaged in and critiqued by Coetzee, because, as has been demonstrated by the discussion around visibility and invisibility, looking without being seen to do so, and the ways in which the encounters between Joll and the Magistrate illustrate this, "[t]here is power in looking" (hooks 1992:115).

The Magistrate's first encounter with the barbarian woman is described in his narrative as a moment when she appears as an object in his field of vision. He details how "the shuffling group of prisoners roped together neck to neck, shapeless figures" emerge into the yard, and how "[o]ne of the women has to be helped. She shakes all the time like an old person, though she is young" (24). This becomes the moment of first visual contact which marks (and masks) the Magistrate's real interest in the barbarian woman, since throughout the rest of his narrative he tries to recall and recapture an image of the barbarian woman prior to this, just as he tries to (re)capture the reason for his interest in her. However, as he admits, he can barely "claim ever to have seen them [the prisoners]" given that he did little "more than pass [his] gaze over their surface absently, with reluctance" (24). As Bhabha (1994:112) states, "[i]f discriminatory

effects enable the authorities to keep an eye on them [the subaltern], their proliferating difference evades that eye, escapes that surveillance". The Magistrate recalls the group, but is unable to differentiate between them, and later to recall the barbarian woman as a single unit in that group. The first moment of recognition, of specific interest, though, is when the Magistrate focuses on the barbarian woman's physical description, detailing "the straight black eyebrows, the glossy black hair" (25), exercising his "determining male gaze [which] projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (Mulvey 1975:436). This moment, in which the barbarian woman is significantly figured as an image, illustrates De Lauretis's argument that "what the representation of woman as image, positive or negative, achieves is to deny women the status of subjects" (1984:57-58). This concurs with Mulvey's point that "[i]n their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual ... impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness" (loc.cit.). This display of the spectacular confirms Berger's point that "[m]en survey women before treating them. Consequently, how a woman appears to a man can determine how she will be treated" (1972:46). And yet, despite this singling out of the barbarian woman, or rather, the image he has constructed of her, the features the Magistrate focuses on are ones "of the barbarians" (25) more generally, rather than of the woman specifically. Several critics have discussed the "blankness" which the barbarian woman's image constitutes for the Magistrate (Castillo 1986; Eckstein 1990; Dovey

1988b). As the reader (through the Magistrate) comes to realise, it is an absence, rather than a presence, that sets the barbarian woman apart from everyone around her. As De Lauretis (1984:57) shows, "it is the elision of woman that is represented". It is only when "the next day she is not there" that the Magistrate "speak[s] to the gatekeeper" (25), enquiring after her. Therefore, while she is visually encoded in his narrative, he pursues his interest in her only when she does not appear as an object in his directed gaze. It is also significant that it is in the Magistrate's dreams of the children playing in the snow, that he attempts to reconstitute the barbarian woman's marklessness, as Penner (1989) and Lance Olsen (1985) argue.

However, the barbarian woman is more than simply an object in the gaze of the Magistrate. He describes how "[t]wice more during the day [he] pass[es] her. Each time she gives [him] a strange regard, staring straight ahead of her until [he is] near, then very slowly turning her head away from [him]" (25). It becomes apparent that the Magistrate is himself an object in the gaze of the barbarian woman. Here, it seems, "the woman as icon, displayed for the gaze and enjoyment of men, the active controllers of the look, ... threatens to evoke the anxiety it originally signified" (Mulvey 1975:438), for this "strange" behaviour unsettles and disconcerts the Magistrate. As Berger (1972:9) argues, "[t]he eye of the other combines with our own eye to make it fully credible that we are part of the visible world". The barbarian woman's activity is immediately qualified by the Magistrate as uncanny, Other -- "she gives [him] her strange regard" (25; emphasis added). As De Lauretis (1984:38-39) states,

any image of woman -- is placed within, read from, the encompassing context of patriarchal ideologies, where values and effects are social and subjective, aesthetic and affective, and ... permeate the entire social fabric and hence all social subjects, women as well as men.

Thus the Magistrate's image of the barbarian woman is a construction which is complicit with, as it is implicated in, the patriarchal imperial codes of Empire.

Upon making enquiries, the Magistrate is told that "[t]he woman is blind ... She is one of the barbarians the colonel brought in. She was left behind" (25). The Magistrate still has only a visual conception of the strange, barbarian woman, but she fascinates him (perhaps because he only has a visual image of her). Again, it is interesting to note that while the woman is the object of the Magistrate's active gaze, she is passive even in the explanation of her presence -- "She was left behind" (loc.cit.; emphasis added). It seems that the narrator possesses that "curiosity and the wish to look intermingle[d] with a fascination with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body ... the visible presence of the person in the world" (Mulvey 1975:435).

However, it is when language enters the relationship at the level of speech that the discourse on the issues of control, and the politics of power and agency, become more overt. As Attwell (1993:3) proposes, "Coetzee leans toward a reflective examination of the constitutive role of language in placing the subject within history". For the Magistrate "give[s] orders; [and] she is brought to [his] rooms" (26). Here we see the hierarchy of power clearly demonstrated: the Magistrate issues a command, the barbarian woman is delivered to

him (literally and figuratively); he, utters speech in language, and the woman is brought to him so that she seems to have no active part, no volition even, in her presence before him. This illustrates Berger's argument that "men act and women appear" (1972:47). The Magistrate subjects her to a series of questions during the first interview, during which "she stands before [him] propped on her sticks" (26), and his scrutiny is concentrated on her sight. He recognises her as "the same girl, the same black hair cut in a fringe across her forehead, the same broad mouth, the black eyes that look through and past me", a detailed description of her as she appears before him, an image which he will later lose and struggle to recover. His inquiry is met with a willed silence which unsettles him. Her first words -- "I can see" (26) -- is a revelation for the Magistrate, since it is the first moment she participates in the linguistic framework of Empire. The assertion implies both subjectivity, an "I" that can speak, and agency, the ability to see (when it has been assumed that it was absent). As Benveniste (1971:225) argues, the "speaker sets himself (sic) up as a subject by referring to himself as I in his discourse". What remains crucial though, is that "[t]he pronoun 'I' stands in for the ever-elusive subject" (Eagleton 1996:147). But Irigaray (1985a:25-26) holds that

the predominance of the visual is particularly foreign to female eroticism ... and her entry into a dominant scopic economy signifies, again, her consignment to passivity: she is to be the ... object of contemplation.

However, the Magistrate is still not convinced, and describes how "[h]er eyes move from [his] face and settle somewhere behind [him] to

[his] right" (26). This act evokes a response in him, so that "[w]ithout thinking [he] cast[s] a glance over [his] shoulder" and realises, almost outraged, that "she is staring at nothing but blank wall" (26). Here it is evident that "[t]he man controls the ... fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power ... as the bearer of the look of the spectator" (Mulvey 1975:437). This reiterates the Magistrate's earlier position in relation to the fisherfolk, and in relation to his inability and reluctance to distinguish between the barbarian prisoners. What Irigaray (1985a:175) argues of women can be extended to explain the Magistrate's vision (but not individualisation) of the barbarians: "each one looks exactly like every other. They all have the same phantom-like reality". And this phantom-like presence is something which is illustrated in an exemplary manner by the ways in which the Magistrate is unable to recall the barbarian woman's image from the moment he realises that he is going to return her to the other barbarians to the north of the settlement. Again, this echoes the argument proposed by Bhabha (1994:112) on the surveillance of the oppressed and how their difference is overlooked, in both senses of the word.

Significantly, it is through the Magistrate as narrator alone that we have access to the barbarian woman's presence, and he therefore always subsumes and circumscribes any agency or subjectivity that she may possess. Castillo (1986) discusses at length how the Magistrate constitutes himself through his narrative, but I would submit that because of the complexity and ambivalence of the text,

there are also moments when the subjectivity of others are implied. Thus the Magistrate's pronouncement that the barbarian woman's "gaze has grown rigid" (26) is an important moment in the fragile balance of power between the two. It prefigures perhaps the pivotal moment in their relationship, when she makes an almost defiant, challenging statement to assert her/self. Most of the Magistrate's questions "[s]he meets ... with silence ... staring eerily ahead of her" (26). Because of this enigmatic silence, it is the strange gaze of the woman that then becomes the focus of his curiosity and his questions. When he commands her to "[l]ook at [him]" (26), she responds with a statement that suggests traces of her denied subjective identity -- which is always, and necessarily, only alluded to by and in the text, which is after all a document of Empire, narrated by "a responsible official in the service of the Empire" (8), the Magistrate who has therefore by definition no access to that symbolic system in which the barbarian woman's subjectivity and identity can and may be expressed -- even though it does not establish it. Thus, Coetzee's text, and the Magistrate's narrative, could be approached as a text

to reread ... not univocally but contrapuntally, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts (Said 1993:59).

As the Magistrate admits, "[n]one of us could speak their language" (18), and "[i]n the makeshift language we share there are no nuances" (40), the very nuances which would be crucial for the barbarian woman to express her subjectivity. (Later he is to regret this willed ignorance of the barbarian language, and the function it could have

served had he learned it from her.) As Belsey (1985:47) states, "it is language itself which, by differentiating between concepts, offers the possibility of meaning". When the barbarian woman declares, "I am looking. This is how I look" (26), the reader is only offered a glimpse, a hint of the subjectivity which is inaccessible and inexpressible in the text at hand. As Eagleton (1996:116) argues, "[a] text may 'show' us something about the nature of meaning and signification which it is not able to formulate as a proposition". The ambiguous meaning of her statement, or its duality of meaning, is also significant, for not only does it imply agency and activity -- "I am looking" (emphasis added) -- but also passivity, the denial of agency, and the perception of oneself as an object -- "This is how I look". This illustrates another point of Hegel's master/slave dialectic, which is that the Magistrate as master possesses "the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself" while the barbarian woman as slave is "the other [who] is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or be for another" (1977:115). Brink (1983:72) applies this to South Africa when he argues that "violence denies not only the humanity of the person against which it is directed but also that of the person who practises it". Coetzee (1992:96) himself states in an interview that

[i]n a society of masters and slaves, no one is free. The slave is not free, because he is not his own master; the master is not free, because he cannot do without the slave.

This concurs with Michael Marais's (1996:72) argument that "the colonising subject is no more master of the discourse than he/she

imposes on the colonised than is the colonised him/herself. Just as the colonised is subject to and constituted by this discourse, so too is the coloniser". And as hooks (1992:116) argues, "[e]ven in the worst circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency". It is perhaps this power, the ability to control one's gaze, that Joll's torture attempts to deny the barbarian woman. However, it is precisely because of this new way of looking -- ironically given to her by Joll's torture instruments -- that the barbarian woman causes such unease in the Magistrate. Thus the barbarian woman becomes aware that she is a spectacle for the Magistrate to look at, which concurs with Berger's argument that "[m]en look at women [whereas w]omen watch themselves being looked at" (1972:47). And when the Magistrate doubts her declaration that she can indeed see, he

 wave[s] a hand in front of her eyes ... [s]he blinks.
 [He] bring[s his] face closer and stare into her eyes.
 She wheels her gaze from the wall on to [him]. The black
 irises are set off by milky whites clear as a child's
 (26).

At the close of the first interview the Magistrate, however, still insists that "she cannot see" (27). And, as Mulvey (1975:437) argues, it is evident here that "[a]n active/passive heterosexual division of labour has ... controlled [the] narrative structure" in the Magistrate's text. In "the split between spectacle and narrative [which] supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, [of] making things happen" (ibid.:437), the barbarian woman emerges as an icon, a spectacle, an object on display for the curious,

imperial gaze of the Magistrate. In Berger's argument, "a woman's presence ... defines what can and cannot be done to her" (46), and in the case of the barbarian woman, she can be looked at or not, at the whim of the Magistrate, but the reciprocal act is not allowed her.

At the end of their first interview, the Magistrate imagines that the barbarian woman "understands what [he is] offering" (27), so that, upon her return, he feels obliged to justify himself, saying that "[t]his is not what you think it is" (27), while at the same time being aware of how "[he] prowls around her ... sick at [him]self" (27). The Magistrate realises that "[t]he distance between [him]self and her torturers ... is negligible" (27), not only because as a citizen and official of Empire, he is 'on the same side' as Joll; but his questioning and pursuit of her mystery differs only in methodology from that of Joll and his lackeys. This similarity between the Magistrate and Joll has been commented on by several critics, among them Penner (1989), Dovey (1988b) and Castillo (1986), and the Magistrate's perception of his resemblance to Joll in his relationship with the barbarian woman will be elaborated upon later.

However, the Magistrate insists "that she cannot see" (27), and on her return to his quarters, he asks (or commands) her to "[s]how me your feet ... Show me what they have done to your feet" (28). What follows is a moment in which the barbarian woman is reduced to nothing but physicality, mere corporeal presence. Any hint of agency she possessed before is now stripped from her as the Magistrate "work[s] at the thongs and eyelets of the coat, throw[s] it open, pull[s] the boots off" to reveal "her feet ... swaddled, shapeless" (28). All the

while "[s]he neither helps nor hinders [him]". As Irigaray (1985a:25) states, "[w]oman, in this sexual imaginary, is only a more or less obliging prop for the enactment of man's fantasies". Upon an instruction from the Magistrate to "[l]et [him] see" (28), the barbarian woman begins to unwrap the dirty bandages. What follows is an eroticized description of the Magistrate's ablution of the barbarian woman's broken feet, in which her feet, as fetishised objects in his gaze, become satisfying in themselves. As Mulvey (1975:438) states, "fetishistic scopophilia builds up the physical beauty of the object, transforming it into something satisfying in itself". Hence, significantly, at this point, no sexual intercourse occurs between the Magistrate and the barbarian woman.

The unsettling, uncanny gaze of the barbarian woman has already been established, as has the anxiety that it evokes in the Magistrate. According to Mulvey (loc.cit.),

[t]he male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of the guilty object ... or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish object so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous.

The Magistrate's choice of escape, it can be argued, is a mixture of a "preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma" -- his obsession with how she became scarred and with the specifics of her torture -- and the "disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object" -- his fetishised ritual of washing her feet in a gesture that has mythical associations in the figure of Christ washing

the feet of his apostles. Also, it is significant to note Bhabha's (1994:101) argument that "[i]t is an anxiety which will not abate because the empty third space, the other space of symbolic representation, at once bar and bearer of difference, is closed to the paranoid position of power". And "that space of the other is always occupied by an idée fixe: despot, heathen, barbarian" (loc.cit.). The barbarian woman, and the barbarians on the whole, do function as bearers of meaning, for Empire, but especially for Joll and the Magistrate, as the representatives of Empire in the borderlands -- as the Magistrate states, "the settlers' litany of prejudice [holds] that barbarians are lazy, immoral, filthy, stupid" (38), which the Empire, by implication, is not; significantly, he does not at first distance himself from this system of beliefs.

The night after that first evening of his ritual, the Magistrate reports "watch[ing] her eat ... like a blind person, gazing into the distance, working by touch" (29). Again, he reiterates his disbelief in her ability to see -- "I don't believe you can see" (loc.cit.) -- which elicits an assertion from her that "I can see. When I look straight there is nothing". This demonstrates both her ability to communicate in the language of Empire -- the implication here seems to be that her silence is at times a wilful act, which implies agency, rather than inability -- and the impossibility of her communicating entirely effectively in language altogether when she takes recourse in gesture -- "she rubs the air in front of her like someone cleaning a window" (loc.cit.). It seems therefore that the barbarian woman exists beyond the language of Empire, and sometimes the meanings she

attempts to express are themselves beyond language itself. When the Magistrate asks about the aetiology of the blurred vision, "[s]he shrugs and is silent" (loc.cit.). Again, there is an indication that in her silence the barbarian woman is most powerful, in that her silence belies her ability to decide when and what to speak, and what to withhold from the Magistrate's probing questions (if not from the scrutiny of his probing and curious, not to say questioning, gaze). This would illustrate Foucault's argument that "the examination is at the centre of the procedures that constitute the individual as effect and object of power, as effect and object of knowledge" (1977:192). Though, as Bhabha (1994:123) argues, hers is a "more ominous silence that utters an archaic colonial 'otherness'". As such, her moments of silence become "inscriptions ... that mock[] the social performance of language with their non-sense; that baffle[] the communicable verities of culture with their refusal to translate" (ibid.:124). This prefigures the moment when he has delivered her to the barbarian men in the mountains, and she offers him a mocking and inscrutable smile in parting. And as Bhabha (1994:166) goes on to argue,

[t]he silent Other of gesture and failed speech becomes what Freud calls that 'haphazard member of the herd', the Stranger, whose languageless presence evokes an archaic anxiety and aggressivity by impeding the search for narcissistic love-objects in which the subject can rediscover himself.

As such, this moment also reveals the first instance when the Magistrate consciously realises that he too is an object in the woman's gaze, for, he imagines, "[w]hen she looks at [him he is] a blur, a voice, a smell, a centre of energy ... she does not know"

(29). However, "[w]hen she does not look at [him he is] a grey form moving about unpredictable on the periphery of her vision" (loc.cit.). He realises that the barbarian woman lives in limbo, in ignorance of what her fate is, of what he, the Magistrate, intends to do with or to her. Like the other barbarians and the fisherfolk waiting in the courtyard shortly after their capture, she too is "waiting for whatever was to happen next" (33). In other words, the barbarian woman's existence is very much in a liminal space, between action and inaction, between knowledge and ignorance -- as between articulation and silence, between language and gesture -- just as the outpost is a liminal space, between Empire and the barbarian territory. This analogy between the barbarian woman (and more pointedly, her body) and the territory will be examined further at a later stage. What unsettles the Magistrate supremely is his inability to recover an image of the barbarian woman before her torture by Joll, and this anxiety obsesses him to the end of the novel. In his attempts to recover these images, he also attempts to read the signs on her body, as he attempts to read the sign of her body, and her presence in his life. In order to explore this, I now wish to examine the Magistrate's ciphering and deciphering of the barbarian woman as sign.

II. Reading the Sign(s) of the Subaltern

The relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian woman changes, and moves from the visual to the tactile. Whereas before she simply appeared before him, and his interest in and construction of her remained focused on the visual, the scopic, it now enters the

overtly erotic, if not sexual, and tactile. Therefore, according to Berger's argument, whereas before the Magistrate has looked at the barbarian woman, he now intends to act upon her (1972:46).

The meal is followed by a repetition of the ritual in which he washes her feet, but he explores her body further this time, venturing "up and down her legs from ankle to knee, back and forth, squeezing, stroking, moulding" (29-30). The Magistrate "[t]hen, fully clothed, ... lay[s him]self down head to foot beside her. [He] fold[s] her legs together in [his] arms, cradle[s his] head on them, and in an instant [is] asleep" (30). The feet and legs of the barbarian woman, therefore, have for the moment become sufficiently comforting for the Magistrate not to pursue any more explicitly sexual encounters with her, even though he has realised from the beginning that that was probably one of the reasons for his initial interest her.

On successive nights, for "the ritual of the washing ... she is now naked" (30). At first the Magistrate's "soapy hand travels between her thighs, incuriously", but he "feel[s] no desire to enter [her] stocky little body" (30). He is content to "use her body, if that is what [he is] doing, in this foreign way", but "a week [after] words have passed between [them]", the barbarian woman's "body yields ... [s]he yields to everything" (30). This illustrates Irigaray's point that "woman is traditionally a use-value for man, an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity" (1985a:31). It also concurs with Angela Davis's argument that "[o]ne of racism's historical features has always been the assumption that white men -- especially those who wield economic power -- possess an incontestable

right of access to Black women's bodies" (1981:175). The Magistrate feels that he has tamed her sufficiently so that "under her blind gaze ... [he] can undress without embarrassment" (30), and he reports how, "in the very act of caressing her I am overcome with sleep ... like death ... or enchantment, blank, outside time" (31). After all, he "lose[s him]self in the rhythm of what [he is] doing ... lose[s] awareness of the girl herself. There is a space of time which is blank to [him]" as a result of the ritualistic washing ceremony. The barbarian woman's body therefore becomes the Magistrate's medium for escaping the need to "strain[] [his] ears to hear or not to hear the sounds of violence" (22), or the echoes of these sounds which he later explains to Mandel are in the air.

The Magistrate's close examination of the barbarian woman's physical body leads him to a series of discoveries which to him, as the narrator of the text and the reader of the signs of his world, are particularly significant for his own sense of self, and important in any reading of the novel: the Magistrate's reading of the scars left on the barbarian woman's body by Joll's torture, and the link between this act of reading and the act of reading the signs in his environment.

The Magistrate describes how, "[o]ne evening ... [he] notice[s] in the corner of one eye a greyish puckering as though a caterpillar lay there with its head under her eyelid, grazing" (31). He enquires from the barbarian woman what the "caterpillar" is, "tracing [it] with [his] fingernail" and she explains that "[t]hat is where they touched

[her]", and "pushes [his] hand away" (loc.cit.). In this moment he realises that "[i]t has been growing more and more clear to [him] that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood [he] cannot let go of her" (loc.cit.), and it is also the moment that he first resembles, in his own description, Joll, who "prob[es] for the truth, in which [he has] to exert pressure" (5). But Joll uses torture to exact the truth, to "escape from [the] castration anxiety" (Mulvey 1975:438) of being confronted with the barbarian gaze in the eyes of his torture victims, under the guise of discovering the truth -- and in the Magistrate's words, for Joll "[p]ain is truth; all else is subject to doubt" (5) -- which involves "investigating ... demystifying ... counterbalanced by the ... punishment ... of the guilty object" (Mulvey 1975:438) -- the Magistrate himself tells us that Joll, "[i]n his quest for the truth ... is tireless" (22). And, as the text demonstrates, for Joll "pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt ... asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment" (Mulvey 1975:438), for, as he details his method of interrogation to the Magistrate, he describes how

I have to exert pressure to find [the truth]. First I get lies, ... this is what happens -- first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how I get the truth (5).

Here we see that "[i]n the practice of torture, pain, confrontation and truth were bound together: they worked together on the [prisoner's] body" (Foucault 1977:41). The Magistrate, of course, finds Joll's violent methods -- the results of which are displayed by the corpse of the old man, the scarred bodies of the boy and the

barbarian woman, and later, on the bodies of the captured barbarian prisoners who have their cheeks pierced with wire and are beaten in the public square -- anathema, but he too is in search of truth, of the origin of the scars -- the Magistrate himself wonders whether he too may feel "how her torturers felt hunting their secret" (43). As Penner (1989:79) states, "the magistrate probes her with questions as her torturers had probed her with their implements". Consequently, the magistrate constitutes the barbarian woman as "the object of information, [not] as a subject in communication" (Foucault 1977:200). More significantly, he is in search of that "truth" which is signified by the signs of the scars on the barbarian woman's body; the Magistrate wants the narrative which underscores the mysterious scars. Hence his attempts to read the barbarian woman are also his attempts to understand Empire. And significantly, the author of those scars is Joll, just as he is the one who marks the captured barbarian prisoners with the word "enemy" and then has the word flogged from their backs. As Foucault (1977:34) states, what is enacted here "is a differentiated production of pain, an organised ritual for the marking of victims and the expression of the power that punishes".

As Mulvey (1975:438) states,

[t]his sadistic side [of scopophilia] fits in well with narrative. Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end.

For Joll, marking the barbarian woman was part of the "set procedures [they] go through" (4) to get at the truth. However, it is important to note that while Joll perceives his quest for narrative truth to be

a linear process -- with a clear beginning, a middle, and a satisfactory, though illusionary, ending, a neat sense of closure when "[a] certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth" (5) -- the Magistrate's entire narrative is an illustration of the impossibility of finding narrative truth, of recovering origins, and of the viability of linear conceptions of narrative and history, even as he compulsively searches for them. However, a more detailed analysis of the relation between history and narrative in the text will follow later.

Olsen (1985:51) suggests that "[e]ach of the characters in Coetzee's project is a kind of reader, decoder, interpreter". The Magistrate certainly begins, at the moment of seeing the scars on the eyes of the barbarian woman, a conscious process of 'reading' and interpreting the signs left by Joll's torture on her body. After all, as Foucault (1977:34) posits,

torture forms part of a ritual ... It must mark the victim: it is intended either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy.

This is illustrated by Joll's torture of the old man and the boy, the barbarian woman, and later, the prisoners whom he whips in the square. Consequently, as Penner (1989:78) argues, the barbarian woman "is an enigma to him [the Magistrate] and to the reader". He "part[s] her eyelids [to see t]he caterpillar come[] to an end, decapitated, at the pink inner rim of the eyelid. There is no other mark. The eye is whole" (31). He is incredulous that "gazing back at me she sees nothing ... a hazy circle of light" (loc.cit.), revealing his fear of

not being constituted as presence, of not having his physical self affirmed by that uncanny, strange gaze -- of literally being invisible, overlooked, unseen, especially when she is looking at him. Here, it could be argued, the incident becomes an allegory of centre and margin. The Magistrate cannot conceive of sight in which "at the centre, where [he is, there is] only a blur, a blank" (loc.cit.), so he proceeds to test the veracity of her claim against the sign of her blindness which he has read and her explanation of her strange vision, by "pass[ing his] hand slowly in front of her face, watching her pupils [but he] cannot discern any movement" (loc.cit.). His gentle proddings for information about the torture, paired with his discovery of other signs written on her body by Joll -- "[o]n the edge of oblivion it comes back to [him] that [his] fingers, running over her buttocks, have felt the phantom criss-cross of ridges under the skin" (loc.cit.) -- leads the Magistrate into a moment when language fails him, when "[he] want[s] to say, 'don't make a mystery of it, pain is only pain'; but words elude [him] ... [He] struggle[s] to speak" (32).

The Magistrate then tries "to recover an image of her as she was before ... [when] she was still unmarked" (33). Irigaray (1985a:31-32) argues that "[w]omen are marked phallicly (sic) by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce", and the Magistrate illustrates this when he thinks of the barbarian woman as "marked for life as the property of a stranger" (135). He wonders (wistfully) who "that other girl with the blind face [will] remember: me ... or that cold man with the mask over his eyes who gave the orders and pondered the sounds of her intimate

pain" (loc.cit.), and then whether "I was not in my heart of hearts regretting that I could not engrave myself on her as deeply" (loc.cit.). He concedes, though, that "I must believe she was once unmarked as I must believe she was once a child" (loc.cit.), as in the series of dreams already given detailed critical attention by Penner (1989:81-86), who links the "dream visions" to the Magistrate's quest for an "ethical vision". In other words, as Bhabha (1994:51) states,

the image -- as point of identification -- marks the site of an ambivalence. Its representation is always spatially split -- it makes present something that is absent -- and temporally deferred: it is the representation of a time that is always elsewhere.

And the Magistrate is seemingly aware of this split, for he discloses that

[he] must believe that [he] saw her on the day she was brought in ... roped neck to neck with the other barbarian prisoners ... [his] gaze must have passed over her when, together with the others, she sat in the barracks waiting for whatever was to happen next (33).

The entire narrative, and especially from the moment the Magistrate has handed the barbarian woman back to the men in the mountains, is an attempt to recover an image of her as she was, and also as she was before Joll tortured her. The Magistrate concedes that "[his] eye passed over her; but [he has] no memory of that passage. On that day she was still unmarked" (loc.cit.). This recognition of what triggers his interest in the barbarian woman -- what sets her apart, literally and figuratively, from the other barbarians, are the "points of irremediable damage, the eyes, the feet" (loc.cit.) -- is a crucial moment for the Magistrate, though he still cannot fathom his

fascination with her, since "with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry" (43). This description is almost metaphorical for the process of reading and decoding, and mirrors the conundrum which the wooden slips in the ruins present to the Magistrate, and later to Joll. At this point in the narrative he has still "not entered her ... [his] desire has not taken on that direction, that directedness" (34). Still, his interest in the markings on the barbarian woman's body is sustained, and as he later admits,

if [he] had understood her, if [he] had been in a position to understand her, if [he] had believed her, if [he] had been in a position to believe her, [he] might have saved [him]self from a year of confused gestures of expiation (135).

This is paired with his existential doubts about his own role as object in the gaze of another, for he wonders "what ... they see in [him], if they ever see [him]" (125), which echoes his earlier question about his visibility to the barbarian woman -- her reply, "Yes, we all saw you" (48) is quite telling, since it illustrates Bhabha's earlier argument about the subaltern's evasion of surveillance. Also, while the Magistrate has thought himself invisible, or more pointedly, has not even conceived of the possibility of himself as object for another subject, he muses that "she cannot but feel my gaze pressing in upon her with the weight of a body" (56). The construction of the male gaze is overtly sexual here.

In many respects it could be argued that the barbarian woman, Joll and the Magistrate form a triangle of desire: Joll and the Magistrate both desire a form of truth from the barbarian woman --

Joll desires his truth about the barbarian army about to attack the Empire; the Magistrate wants to know the details of the "set procedures [they] go through" (4) -- but the real tension, as the events of the novel show, is played out between the two men, and the barbarian woman, though crucial, is merely functional. As Spivak (1987:217) states, "notions of kinship are anchored and consolidated by the exchange of women". The barbarian woman is exchanged between Joll and the Magistrate -- the latter "acquires" her through the actions of the former -- and later between the Magistrate and the men in the mountains to whom he delivers her. When the Magistrate invents the fantastic secret narratives in his meeting with Joll, he is again exchanging the sign of the barbarian woman with Joll. After all, he has been the one to link the script on the wooden slips with the marks on her body (31).

At first the Magistrate believes that "[n]othing is worse than what we can imagine" (31), and thinks that he "ought to be filling her with the truth" (41). It is the barbarian woman, however, who imparts hard truths to the Magistrate, truths which he had been told by Joll he "would find tedious" (4), and into which he "never wished to be drawn", in which he "did not mean to get embroiled" (8). She informs him that "[i]t was a fork, a kind of fork with only two teeth. There were little knobs on the teeth to make them blunt. They put it in the coals till it was hot, then they touched you with it, to burn you" (41). However, "[i]n the makeshift language [they] share there are no nuances" (40), and as a result, "[i]t is difficult to explain" (41). Again, this mirrors the manner in which he "wait[s] for a sign that

what lay around [him], what lay beneath [his] feet was not only sand", "wait[s] for the spirits from the byways of history to speak", and of course "[t]he sign did not come" (16). This does not deter him though, and he wonders whether the wooden slips from the ruins with their "painted characters" (15) will reveal the mystery of the ruins, and the barbarians. He muses whether

what I had taken to be characters in a syllabary might in fact be elements of a picture whose outline would leap at me if I struck on the right arrangement: a map of the land of the barbarians in olden times, or a representation of a lost pantheon. I have even found myself reading the slips in a mirror, or tracing one on top of another, or conflating half of one with half of another (16).

In several senses the barbarian woman becomes yet another wooden slip, scripted with characters, and the Magistrate does conflate half of her with half a wooden slip when he inserts her into the fictional translation of the wooden slips to Joll (110-111). This reflects his power, "[his] freedom to make of the girl whatever [he] felt like, wife or concubine or daughter or slave, or all at once or more, at whim, because [he] had no duty to her save what it occurred to [him] to feel from moment to moment" (78). When he adds, wistfully, that "from the oppression of such freedom [he] would ... welcome the liberation of confinement" (loc.cit.), he makes the realisation outlined in Hegel (1977:116), that in annihilating the self of the other he is also annihilating the humanity of his own self.

This leads into a discussion of how the Magistrate, in the wake of Joll, circumscribes the barbarian woman's corporeal presence in his life, and attempts to come to terms with her as "the only key [he has] to the labyrinth" (87).

III. Policing Other Political Bodies

The Magistrate, as subject to and of his narrative, in relation to the barbarian woman, as object in his field of vision and of his spoken discourse, is caught up in an interesting interrogation of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic. While much critical attention has been given to this aspect of the novel (Attwell 1993; Dovey 1988b; Haluska 1987), few critics have examined to any great extent the manner in which the Magistrate, through his narrative act, and in his narrative act, polices the body of the barbarian woman, and perhaps most significantly in the "dream visions" which Penner (1989) links with his "ethical vision". I now propose to examine the import of the Magistrate's attempt to (re)capture in image what he was unable to capture in his phenomenological reality.

The Magistrate is constantly confounded by his interest in the barbarian woman, and especially his interest in her body. After all, he "cannot imagine what ever drew [him] to that alien body" (42), and he admits that they "are an ill-matched couple" (40). His inability to take his interest in her to a fully sexual level, beyond the proto-sexual, erotic interest of the ritual washing, is a source of frustration to the Magistrate, and illustrative of the power politics which inform and circumscribe their relationship. After all, since "[i]t seems appropriate that a man who does not know what to do with the woman in his bed should not know what to write" (58), it becomes apparent that the barbarian woman's body is a means for the Magistrate to "merit three lines of small print in the Imperial gazette" (8), and also paradoxically, "[he] ought to ...stop [his] ears to the noise of

patriotic bloodlust and close [his] lips and never speak again" (104). Yet, he speaks, and his narrative exists.

This contrasts interestingly with his overtly sexual performance with the young prostitute (42), and emphasizes the difference of the barbarian woman for the Magistrate.

While "her body yields ... yields to everything" (30) fairly early on in their relationship, because of his inability to engage in a complete sexual act with her, the Magistrate declares that "[t]hese bodies of hers and [his] are diffuse, gaseous, centreless ... flat, blank" (34). Despite his various attempts to understand her, he confesses that when "I take her face between my hands and stare into the dead centres of her eyes, ... twin reflections of myself stare solemnly back" (41). Seemingly, therefore, "[t]he body of the other [remains] closed, ponderous ... beyond comprehension" (42), so that he begins to "suffer fits of resentment against [his] bondage to the ritual" (41). Her body becomes little more than "the form to which ... [he is] in a measure enslaved" (42). The Magistrate's vision of the barbarian woman's body echoes hooks's assertion that

[t]hey claim the body of the colonized Other instrumentally, as unexplored terrain, a symbolic frontier that will be fertile ground for their reconstruction of the masculine norm, for asserting themselves as transgressive desiring subjects. They call upon the Other to be both witness and participant in this transformation (1992:24).

His inverted vision of the power relations between them -- he becomes enslaved to her -- occurs at a crucial point after he has offered to take her back to the barbarians if she so desires, and it echoes the consummation of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic (Hegel 1977:117-

119). However, it is also at this point that he realises that "something has fallen in upon me from the sky, at random, from nowhere: this body in my bed, for which I am responsible" (43). Again, the patronising, paternalistic relationship which he constructs between himself and the barbarian woman -- and here, specifically, with her body -- reveals the true nature of power between them. As Berger (1972:46) posits, "[t]o be born a woman has been to be born ... into the keeping of men" (46), and the barbarian woman passes from an insubstantial and unexplored relationship with her father, through a relationship of subjection and control with Joll as victim-torturer, and then she becomes "a woman, a left-over barbarian prisoner, a person of no account, the Magistrate's slut" (73). Ironically, of course, she is of the utmost importance, being the key to both Joll's and the Magistrate's labyrinths. She constitutes an enigma for the Magistrate -- he admits that "[w]hat this woman beside me is doing in my life I cannot comprehend" (47) -- but paradoxically and simultaneously, "something which is all surface" (49), which implies simplicity. This simplicity, which he also calls "a state of nature" (9), is one of his own fantastical construction, for when he "ask[s] her about other men", she affirms that "there were other men. [She] did not have a choice. That was how it had to be" (54). Her assertion is highly ironic, for it implies less freedom, more restriction and compulsion in accounting for her presence in the Magistrate's bed, if not in his life. This point is echoed when he hands her over to the barbarian men, and "ask[s] her very clearly to return to the town with [him]. Of [her] own choice" (71).

Paradoxically, while offering her her "own choice", he states that "[t]hat is what [he] want[s]". She, however, is firm, and turns his (demanding, commanding) offer down, asserting that "[she] do[es] not want to go back to that place" (71).

Once he has offered to return her to the barbarians the power balance shifts between them. He admits that "[s]he is as much a prisoner now as ever before" (55), and fancies that "she submits because of her barbarian upbringing", but also has to concede that "what [he] call[s] submission may be nothing but indifference" (56). He is also aware that "[he] might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate" than either the strange way in which he is using her body, or the torture Joll has practised on her body. The positions of power do not only work themselves out in the configurations of visibility and invisibility, of who has the power to look, and who does not. There is also an important discourse on speech, and the power of speech. At various points the barbarian woman "shrugs and is silent" (29), "she makes no sign" (31) of having heard him, "[h]er lips close" (35), "she gives no sign" (42) of being awake; generally, she has the ability to will inscrutability. Her "dead eyes" betray nothing, so that the Magistrate is forced to admit that "of this one there is nothing I can say with certainty" (43). But as hooks argues,

[t]he direct objective was not simply to sexually possess the Other; it was to be changed in some way by the encounter (1992:24).

Of course, the Magistrate is unable to "possess the Other" (loc.cit.), is unable to "enter[] her" (34) or "feels no desire to enter" (30)

her, so that "her incomplete body fills [him] with revulsion" (47). It is only possible for him to engage in a successful, penetrative sexual encounter with the barbarian woman once he is "taking her back to the barbarians" (61), when he realises that "[they] have crossed the limits of Empire ... a moment not to be taken lightly" (70). Then, in competition with the men he has brought along, he can finally acknowledge "the pleasure [he] take[s] in her" (64), for he now sees that "she is not just an old man's slut, she is a witty, attractive young woman" (63). Still, even in this formulation, she is passive, and it is he who "takes" the pleasure: "[s]he is passive, accommodating herself to [him]" (66), especially in his vision of her. However, as a close reading of their sexual copulation in the wilderness shows, much of it is initiated and actively engaged in by the barbarian woman. As hooks suggests, "the presence of the Other, the body of the Other, was seen as existing to serve the ends of white male desires" (1992:24). In his own vision of order, the Magistrate admits that the barbarian woman's body becomes the medium through which "I can reinsert myself into time and space" (64). Also, he is not certain whether it is "she [he] want[s] or the traces of a history her body bears" (64).

Fanon argues that "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (1967:17), elaborating that it

means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization (ibid.:17-18).

The entire text is narrated by the Magistrate, and as I have asserted before, the text is therefore a narrative of Empire, in the language of Empire. Paradoxically, it is also a text against Empire. Still, the Magistrate does not speak the language of the barbarians, and only realises once the barbarian woman is no longer under his control that "she could have spent those long empty evenings teaching me her tongue" (72), for as Fanon points out, "[one] who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language", and "[m]astery of language affords remarkable power" (1967:18). This reiterates my earlier argument about the status of the text as a result of its narration in the language of the Magistrate, which is also the language of Empire. This also implies that the Magistrate could have possessed the barbarian world -- if only for himself, and within his own mind -- if he had bothered to learn the language of the barbarian woman. Instead, he has maintained their relationship in "the patois of the frontier" (3), an interstitial language that mirrors the interstitial nature of their relationship, and of both the barbarian woman and himself -- she is after all a prisoner of Empire, while he admits that "they will outlast us" (51). And as such, "[l]anguage is a meeting place, a point of confrontation, between the individual and the social" (Brink 1983:231-232). Thus, as Irigaray (1985a:179) shows, "commodities [by which she means also women in patriarchy] speak ... mostly dialects and patois, languages hard for 'subjects' to understand".

But as Cixous (1976:250) posits, "[c]ensor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time". And the Magistrate does

not only censor the speech of the barbarian woman by forcing her to reveal the truth of the torture, and in that way circumscribing what it is she is allowed to speak, but he also censors her body, reimagining it at various points as a blank, and then proposing that "in the dark the marks her torturers have left upon her, the twisted feet, the half-blind eyes, are easily forgotten" (64), if only by him. And as Foucault (1977:34) argues,

torture forms part of a ritual ... it must mark the victim: it is intended, either by the scar it leaves on the body, or by the spectacle that accompanies it, to brand the victim with infamy ... torture does not reconcile; it traces around or, rather, on the very body of the condemned ... signs that must not be effaced.

For the Magistrate's "pleasure in her is spoiled until these marks on her are erased and she is restored to herself" (64), a process which he attempts through various acts: acquiring the narrative of her torture, demystifying the motivations for her presence in his life, both his and hers, and returning her to the men in the mountains whom he assumes to be her people.

The ways in which he reimagines her body are crucial in establishing the hierarchies of power in which both of them engage in the disciplining of her body. At the moment that he hands her over to the men in the mountains, he muses that "[s]he is going, she is almost gone. This is the last time to look on her clearly face to face, ... hereafter, I know, I will begin to re-form her out of my repertoire of memories according to my questionable desires" (73). Therefore he is able to reconstruct her, in his re-vision of her, as "a stranger; a visitor from strange parts now on her way home after a less than happy

visit". As Cixous (1986:68) states, "[n]ot only is she the position of strangeness -- inside his universe where she revives his restlessness and desire. Within his economy, she is the strangeness he likes to appropriate". His qualification of her as a "visitor" implies some volition on her part to account for her presence at the settlement, when she is so clearly nothing more than a prisoner of a war neither of them wants to engage in, Joll's war. And from the moment of parting, the Magistrate "find[s] her face hardening over in [his] memory, becoming opaque, impermeable, as though secreting a shell over itself" (75). In the light of Joll's torture, which became her entry into the symbolic of Empire, "she was no longer fully human, sister to all of us" (81). This results in the Magistrate's vision of her as "the irreducible figure of the girl" (81), and he "cannot remember exactly what she looks like. From her empty eyes there always seemed to be a haze spreading, a blankness that overtook all of her. [He] stare[s] into the darkness waiting for an image to form" (86). According to Jolly (1989:72) "he treats her body as a surface, a map of a surface, a text ... finding the explorations of her features an ecstasy", and as the Magistrate himself concedes of his maps of the barbarian territory, "[t]hose maps are based on little but hearsay ... [he has] patched them together from travellers' accounts" (12). In relation to the barbarian woman's body, the Magistrate is reconstructing (patching together) a map of her self using the signs left by Joll, and when he realises the futility of the enterprise, the quest, he begins to "forget[] her ... deliberately" (86). Despite this, he remains "enslaved" to her, even more it seems in her absence

than in her presence. As such, it seems, for the Magistrate, "[t]he territory no longer precedes the map ... it is the map that precedes the territory ... it is the map that engenders the territory" (Baudrillard 1996:76). The Magistrate, at this point, seems to have come to the (ir)resolution of his relationship with the barbarian woman, realising that "it confounds [him], has confounded [him] from the beginning" (71), "from the moment when [he] stopped before her at the barracks gate and elected her" (86). In response, he finds himself "steadily engaged in burying her in oblivion" (86), just as he has earlier expressed that "[i]t would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, if these ugly people were obliterated from the face of the earth" (24). In his case, he is attempting to obliterate, to erase the face of the barbarian woman, and in so doing, the signs on her body, and the sign and value of her body in the narrative of Empire. Again, her body, and the scars that it bears, also become signs of Empire, and consequently the Magistrate is also attempting to obliterate the signs of Empire. Like the protagonist of David Malouf's An Imaginary Life (1978:27), the barbarian woman is "relegated to the region of silence. All [she] can do is shout". As Catherine Clément (Cixous and Clément 1986:28) argues, "women are both sign and value, sign and producer of sign ... it happens that when women talk, that they step out of their function as sign". Therefore the barbarian woman is relegated to the domain of silence in the Magistrate's narrative, the domain of visual blankness. Her physical presence is policed so that she is nothing more than "one of the many wrong turnings on a road that look[ed] true

but has delivered [him] into the heart of a labyrinth" (136). Like the poplar slips, the signs on the barbarian woman's body "form an allegory. They can be read in many orders. Further, each ... can be read in many ways" (112); therefore, what Joll says to the Magistrate of the slips, can also be applied to the reader's decoding of the Magistrate's narrative: "it remains for you to explain what the messages say" (110).

IV. An/Other (Im)Possible Text

Given that Coetzee interrogates subaltern subject representation, especially by an other of a mastering self, several critics have read the "criticism-as-fiction" (Dovey 1988b:11) project as an allegory of "questions regarding colonialism and the relationships of mastery and servitude between cultures and individuals" (Penner 1989:xiii), among them JanMohamed (1986), Jan Charles Haluska (1987), and Dovey (1988a and 1988b). And as Cixous (Cixous and Clément 1986:92-93) argues, "[t]he logic of communication requires an economy both of signs -- of signifiers -- and of subjectivity"; so that while the barbarian woman functions as sign, signifying difference and subjection in the discourse of Empire, she is denied subjectivity in that text, which in the novel is the Magistrate's narrative. As Attwell (in Coetzee 1992:17) states, Coetzee's "work enjoins us ... to examine the authenticity and authority of the speaking subject".

Therefore, "where the girl should be, there is a space, a blankness" (47), as the Magistrate himself concedes. She is nothing

more than a reconstruction of his own imaginary, and hence constitutes a text which remains inaccessible, such that he realises that "[t]here has been something staring me in the face and still I do not see it" (155). Therefore it is interesting that during his own torture the Magistrate comes to resemble the barbarian woman most, since he also becomes marked, and also becomes a sign in the language of Empire. Significantly, he is also feminized, dressed in a shift, "[i]n a woman's clothes" (120). While before the torture he declares that "I will not disappear into the earth without leaving my mark" (112), his torturers, Joll's henchmen, bring him to the point where he, like the barbarian woman, "can feel the weight of a resentful gaze upon me; [but] I do not look up" (124). Still, "like a man who lost his way long ago, but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere" (156), he is trapped within his own particular discourse(s), and quests vainly to decentre himself. As he states, he "wanted to live outside history ... the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects" (154), because "Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence ... in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe" (133), whereas the Magistrate, in narrating his text in the eternal present, subverts that, and is caught in the interstitial flux of being and not being constituted by the defining discourse of Empire, which "dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. One thought alone occupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era" (133). Eventually the Magistrate is forced to realise that "when one day people come scratching around in the ruins,

they will be more interested in the relics from the desert than anything I may leave behind" (155), but any such speculation remains extra-textual, for within the limits of the novel, the Magistrate's is the only text which is accessible: the Other text, the text of the barbarian woman, can only be hinted at, intimated, glimpsed, in various ruptures in the text. Just as with Joll's torture of the barbarian woman, the Magistrate finds that the purpose was not

to force the story out of me of what I had said to the barbarians and what the barbarians had said to me ... They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they have showed me a great deal (115).

He therefore stands in relation to Empire as the barbarian woman was related to him: "She could not understand you. She did not know what you wanted from her" (152) he tells Joll. Therefore the Magistrate's own identity, his quest for selfhood, can never constitute itself as presence; it remains an absence, but as Eagleton (1996:161), à propos of Lacan (1977), would argue:

Once installed within the symbolic order, we cannot contemplate or possess any object without seeing it unconsciously in the light of its possible absence, knowing that its presence is in some way arbitrary and provisional.

This would concur with Olsen (1985:47), and his reading of presence and (as) absence, for "Coetzee's is a writing that dissects, recharts, interrogates, challenges, casts into doubt ... unfolding the repressed, by setting free the absence that dwells in the heart of the country". That absence, I would posit, is also the barbarian woman's selfhood, her subjectivity inscribed as silence, as blank space, in the novel.

Chapter 3

Telling Stories:

Wilma Stockenström's The Expedition to the Baobab Tree

Wilma Stockenström's The Expedition to the Baobab Tree (1983) has received scant attention in South African English literary criticism, and the scrutiny it has been subjected to in Afrikaans literary criticism has not been overwhelming either. Judy Gardner (1988) provides a sustained and detailed examination of the novel in the light of Marxist discourse on the subject's relation to the means of production and feminist theories' examination of the position of women in culture, in representation, and in language. Elsewhere, the novel has been compared to Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians in terms of its import for and impact on South African literature (Olivier 1983:12), and Michael Du Plessis (1988) examines it in relation to Coetzee's In the heart of the country (1977) in terms of bodily signification in French feminism. To compound this comparison, Coetzee is also responsible for the translation into English, and as Brink (1992:6) argues, "the choice of the 'language of the oppressor' featuring in Stockenström's original Afrikaans text is [therefore] doubly significant". As such, the representation of subaltern subjectivity, in an Afrikaans literary text, which is then translated into English, has effects across a wider national literary languagescape than Coetzee's text.

I propose to examine the process by which Stockenström's novel attempts to go beyond Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians in its critical engagement with subaltern subjectivity and its representation in South African literature. It is my contention that Stockenström, in making the subaltern the narrator of the text goes beyond interrogating the exploration of the limits of the constructedness of alterity, to the establishment, however ambivalently at first, of subaltern subjectivity in representation. Whereas in Coetzee's text the Magistrate narrates the barbarian woman, the master authors the slave, in Stockenström's novel it is the slave woman who illustrates that "[m]astery of language affords remarkable power" (Fanon 1967:18) in that she "tak[es] up the challenge of speech" (Cixous 1976:251).

However, as Brink (1992:6) argues, Stockenström's novel is still implicated in the very discourses it is attempting to undermine, in that it participates in the structural privileges of apartheid South Africa which allow white writers privileged access to represent black subjects, often at the expense of black subjects' abilities to represent themselves (Driver 1996; Hassim and Walker 1993; Lewis 1997 & 1993).

I. Other Bodies. Other Stories

Crucial to Stockenström's project, and therefore to the slave woman's narrative, is the manner in which her story, her history, relates to her body, and the position which she inhabits because of the discourses of power which circumscribe that body. The narrator, a black African slave woman, is displaced from her place of origin, and

delivers her story as an alternative narrative to a prescriptivist, linear historiographical narrative of the patriarchal imperialist culture of her masters which inscribes her self (which for them is merely her body) for (and more significantly, against) her. It would seem that for her "storytelling itself constitutes a significant resistance ritual to history" (Hitchcock 1993:xviii), in this case the history her masters would have to tell of a slave woman, which would be a "short history, as self-contained and boring as the history of most of the slave-girls in the city" (27). But as Brink (1992:5) states, "it is impossible ontologically to divorce [the slave woman] from her history. She is her story; her body is the journey of her life". And, furthermore, the importance of this narrative act which constitutes itself as the text of the novel, is its oral nature, so that the narrator is "taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus" (Cixous 1976:251). While Coetzee's Magistrate attempts to write himself into the annals of the history of Empire, as I have shown in the previous chapter, Stockenström's protagonist-narrator attempts to speak her way out of "a place ... which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is ... silence" (loc.cit.). This is a silence that the patriarchal imperial culture imposes on her and those in her position. The nameless slave woman seeks to establish a female history (i.e. "herstory"), her own, and to constitute a position of female subjectivity, again her own; both of these should be read as not merely reactive to the patriarchally defined options available to her, but perhaps also in defiance of these determinants. As such her act of narration allows her to "break

out of the snare of silence ... a domain which is the margin or the harem" (loc.cit.).

As a slave woman in the coastal city, "the city of [her] various owners ... the busy commercial city to which [she] was kidnapped" (55), she is a marginal subjectivity within an already shifting discourse; as hooks argues throughout Ain't I a Woman (1981), and as Davis (1981:3-45) shows, a woman slave is doubly removed from the positions of power in the broader cultural context of a patriarchal society which practices slavery. This is not to say that the woman slave is necessarily powerless, for while the narrator herself states that "[n]o one grows up under such close protection as a slave girl ... [and] no one grows up as ignorant as a slave girl" (9), she is the "shining exception" (loc.cit.). The slave-narrator also "considered [her]self a lucky, privileged person, without rights but not wholly without choice" (57). This point is examined at length by Ampie Coetzee (1984) in a Marxist deconstruction of the novel, in which he demonstrates that she is not entirely a member of the owned class, but sometimes paradoxically inhabits the position and attitudes of the owner class. Therefore it would seem that the limitation of her power does not deter her from parroting the praxes of the master narrative to which she herself is subjected, since "[w]hatever is incomprehensibly huge, [she] reduced to the ridiculous to be able to assimilate it and prove [her] power over it" (loc.cit.). This concurs with Irigaray's argument that "[t]he powers of slaves ... are not negligible powers" (1985a:32). Quite the contrary, it is perhaps because of her privileged position that she realises that "[o]nly

those who have, have security as well. For [her] there was only insecurity" (20).

Before her arrival at the baobab tree she had "the privilege of a slave girl [who has] everything given to her" (13). She is aware that she "was radiant ... an object to be shown off, gloriously young as I first was. My marklessness, my smoothness, my one-time wholeness of skin. I was the envied uncircumcised one. I was the desired" (14), and as such is aware of her own value in the sexual economy of the patriarchal society which she inhabits, even if she is unable to calculate it, to know it exactly. This is an interesting contrast with the barbarian woman, who becomes the focus of the Magistrate's attentions precisely because she is marked. But as Irigaray (1985a:174-175) suggests, "[w]oman's price is not determined by the 'properties' of her body -- although her body constitutes the material support of that price", so that she has really "no idea what [her] value must have been or what it ever was" (13) as a slave in the economic system. She is adept enough however, to recognise "the lot of the lowest [as] so much more complicated than the easy existence of a slave-girl in a generous household" (22). She can therefore be said to have partially interpellated the construction of the world she inhabits, of herself, and of her position in that world, for she seems to have succumbed to "the process whereby a social representation is accepted and absorbed by an individual as her (or his) own representation and so becomes, for the individual, real, even though it is in fact imaginary" (De Lauretis 1987:12). She believes herself to be different from the ordinary slaves because the masters treat her

differently, but it is a belief which she later revises upon discovering other slaves in similar positions to her own. She was, after all, not quite such a "shining exception" (9).

This recalls the moment in her narrative when, confronted with the slaves newly arrived "from the heart of the country" (20), she sees herself as

evil and dangerous ... dried-out ape dugs and fresh slippery ox-eye and peeled-off human skin and the venom of the deadly sea-slug with the sucker mouth ... hatred and hatred's mask ... deformed (43)

The view of herself which she articulates is of someone uncanny, something monstrous and grotesque, but the construction is not without its ambiguities, for this moment occurs at the same time that she identifies with the "[i]tems of everyday use of feminine and masculine gender" (42-43). She details how "the arrival of a fresh consignment of slaves ... attracted no one's attention. Only [she] was all unwilling eyes" (34). She recognizes them as "my fellows in fate .. [t]he untouched girls, my little sisters ... no longer human beings, the survivors of a raid deep into the interior" (loc.cit.). She constructs an association of communality, while she also recognises the difference in their destinies, since "[she] was not condemned as these people were" (36), they being "[her] own people halfpeople may not be people, the compelled, the pitifully strong healthy products" (34). After all, "[she] was the head slave-girl of the richest man [t]here. [She] had more power than many a wife" (36).

This emphasis on her difference from "the damned" (loc.cit.) is

located in "the symbol of [her] owner's pleasure in [her]", which hangs "around [her] arm like a reprimand to those who would like to humiliate [her]" (36). As such she is "marked phallicly (sic)... [a]nd this branding determines [her] value in sexual commerce" (Irigaray 1985a:31). At first, her marklessness is what sets her apart, for she realises that she was "[c]aught young, not yet circumcised, for just that reason sought and caught" (40); later, the ivory band around her arm, the mark of her owner's pleasure, marks her as different. In this way she resembles the barbarian woman: just as the slave woman of Stockenström's novel is set apart by the "mark" of the ivory band, so the barbarian woman is set apart from the other barbarian prisoners by the marks left on her body by Joll's torture, and also the mark which her body constitutes. Stockenström's slave woman also concedes that "to the man who owned [them] ...[they] were all identical labour units" (39), which concurs with Irigaray's point that "each one looks exactly like every other. They all have the same phantom-like reality" (1985a:175). The slave master echoes Coetzee's Magistrate -- it is significant to note that 'Magistrate' derives from the same Latin root for 'master': magister. The position which she inhabits as female slave in relation to her master is later mirrored by the position the little people inhabit in relation to her. Still, she realises that while this first owner is "friendly, ... like a father" (40), there is the knowledge that "[h]e bought the very youngest at the market [and] cracked them as one cracks young pods" (40-41). He is at best, therefore, an "incestuous father" (Brink

1992:7). This also illustrates Davis's argument that in slave societies

a premium was placed on the slave woman's reproductive capacity ... Black women came to be increasingly appraised for their fertility (or for the lack of it): she who was potentially the mother of ten ... or more became the coveted treasure indeed (1981:6-7).

She becomes aware with her second owner that to the masters, "[t]hey were the subordinates of the system, apparently docile ... [they] were all one woman, interchangeable, exchangeable" (24). This articulates Irigaray's point that "women's bodies -- through their use, consumption, and circulation -- provide for the condition making social life and culture possible" (1985a:171). As Spivak (1987:220) shows,

the figure of the woman, moving from clan to clan, and family to family, as daughter/sister and wife/mother, [as slave] syntaxes patriarchal continuity even as she is herself drained of proper identity.

While the first owner only "bought the very youngest [and] broke the soft membrane like a blister" (41), for the second owner the slaves "were acquired second-hand, third-hand, even fourth hand, most still young and healthy, [the] women fertile and rank" (23). This illustrates Davis's argument that

[s]exual coercion was, rather, an essential dimension of the social relations between slavemaster and slave. In other words, the right claimed by slaveowners and their agents over the bodies of female slaves was a direct expression of their presumed property rights over Black people (1981:175).

As such the slave woman becomes aware that she is "an exchange value among men; in other words, a commodity" (Irigaray 1985a:31), and "[w]oman thus has value only in that she can be exchanged"

(ibid.:176). This is not a position which the slave woman either accepts or rejects out and out, though. She is aware of its advantages and disadvantages, and as Cixous (in Cixous & Clément 1986:91) points out, "[n]o matter how submissive and docile she may be in relation to the masculine order, she still remains the threatening possibility of savagery". The slave woman insists that "I kept myself to myself ... kept myself as I had been taught. I did not give in. I did not surrender" (23-24). She retained the power to "preserve his seed and bring it to fruition from the sap of [her] body" (24), a power which is solely the preserve of women in a patriarchal society, while at the same time it remains a power circumscribed by the symbolic order, the laws of men. After all, she realises later that "here in this city I would never become a grandmother. Here I functioned as a mother till my children were as high as my hip, then I lost all say over them" (55). Despite her privileged position, she confesses that "I could not understand why I might not keep my children" (58). There is an unmistakable conflict between the way in which the slave woman perceives herself (as subject, as human), and the perception her masters have of her and her relationship with her children (as goods to be dealt in, products to profit from). As Davis (1981:7) argues,

in the eyes of slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all [but] simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force. They were "breeders" -- animals, whose monetary value could be precisely calculated in terms of their ability to multiply their numbers.

This concurs with Gardner's argument that the slave woman's role as companion, mother and housekeeper is incidental, since she was

primarily a full-time worker, a slave, and as such, she may as well have been genderless (1988:36).

With her third owner, a benevolent man, she describes the process of "becoming possessed with myself" (28), so that "[i]t was almost as if I were learning again to talk" (28). It is in this moment that she "learned to find pleasure in how to look desirable and in the power it was obviously supposed I could exercise to my own advantage in my benefactor-owner's room" (28-29). Whereas before she could only conceive of her own position as object owned by another, she is now aware of herself, even if it is only as others would or could see her. As Coetzee (1984:42) argues, she becomes a partial member of the class of owners. But as she reports, according to the stranger's account, "my kind made him [the third owner] the most powerful person in the city ... My benefactor was a connoisseur in a class of his own and seldom bought lower-grade material" (50). She is thus made aware that as "[c]ommodities, women, are a mirror of value of and for man ... They yield to him their natural and social value as a locus of imprints, marks" (Irigaray 1985a:177). Interestingly, the slave woman is marked by the ivory bracelet as a possession, at the same time that it sets her apart from the other slaves as the "shining exception"; similarly, the barbarian woman in Coetzee's novel is marked by Joll's torture, and it is this marking which sets her apart from the other prisoners so that she becomes the object of fascination for the Magistrate. This illustrates that

when it was profitable to exploit [slave women] as if they were men, they were regarded, in effect, as genderless, but when they could be exploited, punished and repressed

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in ways suited only for women, they were locked into their exclusively female roles (Davis 1981:6).

In Stockenström's novel, the ideology of the third owner therefore "led him to view his slaves as a collection of art objects, meticulously purchased with an eye to investment and sometimes disposed of individually at a profit after he refined them through education" (50). The slave woman realises that she herself is a product (quite literally) of this process.

Here she begins to resemble "the grey parrot that [her] benefactor kept ... [who] turned language inside out so that meaning fell out and nothing could be said" (31). In assuming the position of her masters, first in relation to the slaves on the expedition into the interior, when "[l]ike a real lady [she] sat and watched the multitude labouring" (68), and later in relation to the baboons at the baobab, because she senses that they "do not stay within the limits of their animal nature but want to address [her] on [her] level" (31), she turns the entire system on its head, just like the parrot.

But this is a vanity, a folly which she could afford, since she existed "in perfect privilege, in the security of being preferred ... that select maid-servant of one of the leaders ... the mistress" (68). The irony of this choice of terms could not be clearer. She becomes aware of her "peculiar position as parasite" (79), which in Gerrit Olivier's argument situates her midway between the masters and the slaves (1983:8). In Bhabha's argument, it becomes apparent that "[a] repertoire of conflictual positions constitutes the subject" (1994:77). These interstitial, conflicting positions which she

inhabits as a privileged slave, but a slave nonetheless, leads her to make connections with both the masters and the slaves.

To begin with, the sense of community, of similarity between herself and the other slaves, is entirely of her own construction, and it is a construction that is not entirely without its ambivalences. She explains how "[i]n my worker's language I welcomed them and expressed my commiseration; but it seemed that no one heard or understood me" (35). Still, "I talked to them because I knew of nothing else, and most of all nothing more effective, to do" (35). She attempts to "allay[] fear and terror ... [and] render[] harmless the nameless, the formless" (36) for the slaves, something she had to learn to do and which she would later do for herself at the baobab.

But the reason the slaves do not understand her, is that they are not a homogeneous community, even though the masters see them as such. This is something the slave woman herself admits, and still she seems unable to transcend the limitations imposed on her as initiate into the discourses (and the language) of the coastal city, and more pointedly, of the masters. As Bhabha (1994:112) argues, "[t]hose discriminated against may be instantly recognized, but they also force a re-cognition of the immediacy and articulacy of authority". The slave woman narrator reports how the slaves came "[f]rom far and wide ... [and] spoke a variety of tongues" (23). However, at the coastal city, "[they] got along by mangling the natives' language and turning it into [their] idiosyncratic workers' language" (loc.cit.), the same language which she uses to address the slaves, to initiate them into the ways of the masters. As such, she therefore becomes an

interpreter, in the sense in which Wole Soyinka (1986) and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1997:22) use the term, as a go-between, a translator between two cultures, the imperial-coloniser, and the colonised. According to Coetzee (1984:43), the slave woman inhabits that interstitial position between the masters and the slaves, and as such becomes an interpreter, that go-between who travels between two classes, the owner class and the owned class. But as Louise Bernikow (1980:232) states, "[t]he traveller is the insider, carrying his (sic) insides with him as he journeys to foreign lands, foreign to his culture and to his mind". It could therefore be argued that she inhabits "a 'separate' space, a space of separation -- less than one and double -- which has been systematically denied by ... [those] who have sought authority in the authenticity of 'origins'" (Bhabha 1994:120). This resembles "[t]he liminal space ... opened up by an inadequation between the form and the content of discourse or by an incommensurability between the signifier and the signified" (Derrida 1981:18). Mangling the language of the natives of the coastal city speaks of a revolutionary moment in the text, for in Hitchcock's argument, "although all speaking subjects have heteroglossia available to them, their language use is conditioned and overdetermined by different positions within symbolic exchange" (1993:5-6). This situation of the slave subject -- and the impossibility of that concept, the very paradox which it presents, is significant -- in the babble of languages that define, redefine and subvert the context which makes such subjectivity impossible, is a crucial part of establishing a radical subject position which would undermine and defy

the rules that would circumscribe it. As Irigaray (1985a:179) states, "commodities speak ... mostly dialects and patois, languages hard for 'subjects' to understand". Here, it would seem, "language is seen as a shared body of signs, but access to language and semantic authority are not created equally" (Hitchcock 1993:5). In the experience of the slave woman, the masters have never learned the language of their subjects -- no mention is ever made of any of the masters, not even the benefactor or the stranger, learning any of the languages of the slaves. And as Fanon (1967:18) argues, "[t]he colonized is elevated above ... jungle status in proportion to [the] adoption of the [master's] cultural standards". This is a position, an attitude, which she replicates in her relationship with the slaves during the expedition into the interior, and later in relation to the little people who surround her at the baobab.

But in compounding her names for her "people halfpeople", she seems to question the suitability, perhaps even the ability, of the language of her masters -- and by extension also of herself, for she knows no other way of speaking, no other form of address except that adopted from the masters; the inadequacy of the workers' language is demonstrated by its inefficiency in her encounter with the newly captured slaves -- to speak her self, and the shared history of "a past of pitiless mistreatment or the sarcasm of gifts; [a] present without prospect" (24), and the marginality of slaves in the coastal city. After all, she has "learned to converse quite differently, with a metallic tone of irony at the tail end of a remark" (28), which method of speech she has acquired from her masters. She is reduced to

the banal exercise of babbling into an incomprehending void, a mass of ears unfamiliar with the sounds she is making, just as her own ears are later unfamiliar with "the little people's click language ... a language for geckos and tapping beetles" (66-67).

In her construction, the speech functions as reassurance, but for herself rather than the slaves, who cannot comprehend her anyway. And in Fanon's argument, "to speak is to exist absolutely for the other" (1967:17). The understanding that there is not a void, a blank space into which she pours the words from her tongue, but another world, a world populated by other listeners and speakers, who cannot understand her because that world has a different system of linguistic signification, now lost to her, evades her for the moment, and only comes about when she is herself subjected to an unfamiliar language. The little people who surround the baobab tree, speak "a language for geckos and tapping beetles", so that "[i]t sounds to [her] as if geckos have begun talking ... how could [she] learn it? ... [she] listened attentively but learned nothing" (66-67). This reiterates Irigaray's (1985a:179) argument about commodities and language made earlier in relation to the slave woman and her masters. She renders the little people's tongue as a non-language altogether, a non-human system, disconnected from anything and everything that is human. For even when her own voice sounds unfamiliar, she insists that it "must be the sound of a human being because I am a human being ... a human being that talks" (65; emphasis added), not a gecko or a tapping beetle. She parrots, unintentionally perhaps, the attitudes of the masters to whom she is herself subjected. This illustrates

Hitchcock's point that "the inequalities of symbolic exchange always already prescribe a vertical axis of struggles over sign" (1993:6). Therefore, through her inability and/or unwillingness to learn the tongue of the little people, she denies them the subjectivity which she aims for, just as the subjectivity of her masters is founded upon the denial of that status for her and those others like her in the coastal city. This clearly illustrates the dynamics of power in Hegel's master/slave dialectic in relation to language.

However, the slave woman's dilemma with the click language of the little people is also characteristic of what Foucault (1970:57) describes as "the ordering of things by means of signs [which] constitutes all forms of knowledge as knowledge based upon identity and difference". For the slave woman, the notion of her difference from others is initially crucial to the constitution of her identity. As she herself states, "I did not want to be as they all regarded me, all of them ... like an object in a dispensation" (51-52). She insists that "I was different from what they all thought, utterly different from what anyone might think ... what did they know of who I was, what did any of them know" (52).

The click language of the little people also becomes a trigger for the slave woman's memory of her childhood. But as Bhabha argues, "[r]emembering is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful re-remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (1994:63). This concurs with Fred D'Aguiar's (1994:138) characterisation of "[m]emory [as] pain trying to resurrect itself". An analysis of what the re-

membering of the slave woman's past entails, and how it functions in the negotiation of subjectivity in her narrative, will be pursued in the third section of this chapter. Now, however, I wish to focus some attention on the slave woman's imposition of systems of order upon her world, and her awareness of how she is herself subjected to the order(s) of others.

II. Time and Space: Re-visions

An examination of the process through which the slave woman narrator negotiates her subjectivity must also give some attention to the manner in which she appropriates and creates systems of organisation in order to impose order on the world around her, just as she is herself subjected to such an ordering. In this respect, Hitchcock (1993:xviii) takes his argument about resistance rituals and history further by suggesting that

the importance of oral histories of telling the woman's story ... suggests that the organisation of time in space has different characteristics in the formation of women's community identities.

Here he concurs with Said (1993:xiii) who describes how "stories ... also become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history". The slave woman's expositions on time and space would therefore seem to be crucial in the process of establishing a subjective position from which to articulate her identity, her sense of self. Early on in her narrative she ruminates on how "[i]n the past time often caused trouble when I ... was obsessed with counting and uncertain", but she qualifies that

as "the time before the beads" (7). For the slave woman, "[t]he time after the beads can be handled more easily" (7), since "[w]ith the beads began [her] determined effort at dating" (8). This spatialisation of time, this system of dating, is of course a system of classification, constituting signs which mark time. It is also a logocentric enterprise, since the temporality is constructed in language, in notions of "before" and "after". The beads become her means of imposing some measure of control over the environment around the baobab, so that she "can permit [her]self the luxury of classification, as well as a judicious application of old and newly acquired knowledge" (13). Here the old knowledge would seem to be that which she acquired as a slave in the coastal city, and the new knowledge that which she has had to scabble for in the wilderness around the baobab in order to survive. Therefore she can recognise, retroactively, that "[r]ight at the beginning was no time, for there was no time to devote to sequence and ... categories, since the scabble to survive wiped these differences out" (loc.cit.). This organisation of time and space occurs significantly in language, which marks the site of difference, and which is also the symbolic order. As Foucault (1970:57) points out, "the ordering of things by means of signs constitutes all forms of knowledge as knowledge based upon identity and difference". The slave woman realises that

I can fill my thoughts with all sorts of objects, endless row upon row, not to be counted [since] I ... can think of enough objects to obliterate everything, and ... I can make up objects if the remembered ones run out (13).

This is an exercise of her power in and over language, as it is an exercise in the power of the imagination to invent and then destroy those inventions, and it would seem that the slave woman experiences "between ... the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself ... the pure experience of order and its modes of being" (Foucault 1970:xxi). And this state in-between the ordering codes and the reflections on order is analogous to the in-between state in which the slave woman finds herself. The movement she effects through this interstitial moment and space is crucial though. For the slave woman it involves "liv[ing] in time measured by [her]self, initially with three beads, later with more and more" (15), while at the same time being able and intrepid enough to recognise that "[i]t was already a method to counter the vagueness of time hiding behind the course of nature" (16). In Olivier's view, this is emblematic of her awareness of the arbitrariness of nature, not only in relation to her as individual, but in relation to the human endeavour in general (1983:7). In her initial view

[t]ime threatened me. It wanted to annihilate me. I thought I cheated it by changing my system every so often. Never did time know what I was going to try next [since] I did not know what I was going to try with time (15-16).

The chief concern for the slave woman in dealing with time, it seems, is to combat the antagonistic propensity time seems to have in relation to her sense of identity, of being and of having a self. This sense she has of being threatened by time and her inability to control and read the signs of time in her environment, can be seen as indicative of the slave woman's position between "[o]n the one hand,

the general theory of signs, divisions, and classifications; [and] on the other, the problem of immediate resemblances, of the spontaneous movement of the imagination, of nature's repetitions" (Foucault 1970:58). In order to assert control over her environment, she imposes a system on it, so that, she admits, "I can even reflect on what I am doing. I can let my thoughts run consecutively and regularly" (13). It is significant to note that the system which she uses derives from her exposure to the patriarchal imperial culture of her masters. She clearly links her ability to organise time and control it, to deal with it systematically, with her sense of having a self, and of being in control of that self. This self corresponds to the transcendental subject of Husserlian phenomenology (Eagleton 1996:50), and as such it is a self defined and constructed by patriarchy in terms of the symbolic order. True to the dictates and methods of the patriarchal imperial culture of the coastal city, which has constructed the discourse in which she attempts to create herself, at first seemingly without interrogating its usefulness or truthfulness, she construes her/self as being within time and space, as constructed and viewed in the discourses of the culture of her masters, from which she has been separated at the baobab tree, even as she remains the only survivor of the expedition to represent that culture in the wilderness. She invents the means to deal with the mass of similitudes, a system in which the beads are used to differentiate between the days, harking back to the days before her arrival at the baobab when time was measured for her by others, by masters, so that she herself had no need to organise it for herself --

after all, "[she] was at the time the stranger's property ... [and] felt protected in the company of [her] stranger" (59). But having interpellated the masters' vision of the world (and of herself) and their culture -- it being the only culture she knows, consciously, at any rate -- she sees with an "already 'encoded' eye" (Foucault 1970:xxi), and the baobab tree and the wilderness around it becomes for the slave woman

the space inhabited by immediate resemblances [which] becomes like a vast open book; it bristles with written signs; every page is seen to be filled with strange figures that intertwine and in some places repeat themselves (ibid.:27).

Even before she becomes the sole survivor of the expedition across the wilderness, she encounters "the curious drawings on the rock walls. They seemed to look like people, but also like stick insects, painted aimlessly sometimes in a bunch, sometimes singly, sometimes one on top of another in rust-brown and white" (87). What follows the discovery is the disparaging of the drawings by the eldest son and the stranger, which culminates in the defacement of the pictographs. They remark on the paintings as

too odd ... the lack of finish and the obvious absence of artistic rules in these clumsy attempts. Obviously backward painters from a backward society. Totally amateurish. The work of adult children. Yet not quite (loc.cit.).

These pictographs imply what Roland Barthes calls "the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of the revolution in the propriety of symbolic systems" (1982:3-4). Like the remnants on the koppie, the pictographs are signs that "[h]ere something was utterly annihilated. Here was nothing but sorrow, nothing but meaninglessness and battered

traces of glory" (87). The stranger makes comparisons between the rock art and

paintings on parchment and silk that he had seen on his travels in other lands ... painted by trained artists and classifiable in schools and trends, and valuable possessions too (88).

The pictographs therefore do not cohere with the vision of order that the stranger has of art, and "[w]ith the blade of his dagger he scratched at one of the ridiculous drawings" (loc.cit.). The slave woman relates how the stranger denounces the art as "[s]omeone's way of passing the time ... [i]t has nothing to do with art. It records nothing, it does not mean to communicate anything, or to satisfy aesthetically. It is functionless" (loc.cit.). This illustrates quite clearly the ordered system into which the rock art cannot fit, but it also shows the system in which the slave woman, as commodity, is positioned.

This is consistent with her remarks about the views the stranger, the eldest son, and she herself have of the landscape that they travel through on the expedition. She describes

these koppies with tremendous rocks on top. In our coastal regions we never saw such formations and we could not help remarking on them. It was almost as if we were discussing art-works. We praised their proportion and splendid balance, as it were the craftsmanship and sensitivity with which they were so arranged (85).

Her choice of the first person collective pronoun "we" demonstrates her co-optation into the discourses of the masters, and her interpellation of their attitudes towards the landscape. Here she becomes the parrot she had described earlier, who imitates the master and so turns language inside-out. For them -- the collective of the

stranger, the eldest son, and the slave woman, which significantly excludes the other slaves brought along on the expedition -- the landscape is reduced to art-work, and while they can admire the authoring and craftsmanship that must have gone into the making of the koppies -- which author or craftsman must remain inchoate, non-human, an historical absence rather than a subjective presence -- they can only disparage the evidence of authorship and craftsmanship in the rock art as inferior.

She replicates this system and its processes of interpretation when she admits that "all I found on a thorough investigation of the plateau [was] wind and the background of wind: silence" (97). This silence frightens her, precisely because it is an uncanny silence. During this exploration and discovery, she is confronted by the strangeness, the otherness of the landscape, where "[i]n the unbelievable silence one of the big stones rolled down the cliffside ... fantastic and soundless", so that "[t]he soundlessness gave [her] a fright" (98). Her interpretation of what the sign of silence means illustrates further the uncanniness of the landscape, and the uncanniness which it evokes in her self. She reports that

I no longer heard anything ... I knew that if I were now to speak, something tremendous would happen. The dead would arise ... they would become visible to me, and time would somersault, the earth would tilt, capsize (loc.cit.)

Her fear, and it is a fear that she must overcome, is that her woman's utterance will result in "if not revolution ... at least harrowing explosions" (Cixous 1976:250). Consequently, "possessed by fear and determined to get to the baobab" she articulates her determination "to

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be back in time in the time in which I belonged" (98), and in this flight she senses "behind my back another world growing, I felt that what had existed was extending its realm faster and faster, and felt that soon, in the very act of running, I would move in a wholly other time" (loc.cit.). The fear, which is rendered visceral for the slave woman, is of being subsumed into another time, another frame of being, a state of alterity in which that self which was constructed for her by the patriarchal imperial culture of her masters will perceive itself to be alienated and obliterated, in danger of being excised from existence. Her fear, quite literally, is of being lost in a strange land, an other landscape, a foreign territory which remains unmapped (and, therefore necessarily, unmappable) by her explorations. After all, she has constructed herself as someone "not from here, do not belong here, do not want to be here" (109).

As Foucault (1970:xv) posits, "the thing that ... is demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, that stark impossibility of thinking that". When the slave woman realises that in her system "[t]ime becomes beads and thus rubbish" (110), she has come to see that her system of thought is just as strange and uncanny, just as arbitrary as any other would be. She realises that it only makes sense because she wills it to do so. And, it follows, her making sense of the world through a system which "makes sense" in itself, is as arbitrary and unreliable as the system she makes up for herself in the beads. In this respect she comes "to conclude that [her] way of thinking did not slot in with that of other beings here" (10), and these beings include the humans

-- the little people and those who massacre them -- and the non-humans -- the elephants and the baboons, most significantly among the animals. She comes to realise, as part of the newly acquired knowledge, that "trees did not bud and blossom and bear fruit for [her] to still [her] hunger ... not to please [her] did the greenheart tree drop its nectar" (11). In fact, she learns about the ability of the veld to feed her by imitating the animals, where like "a novice [she] combs the patch of veld where experts have rooted" (loc.cit.).

It could be argued that the slave woman has come to "behave according to unknown laws" (95). This process of resignation to the arbitrariness of organising systems, which is also reflected in what Olivier (1983:7) calls the arbitrariness of her environment -- both in its human and non-human incarnations -- occurs concurrently with the resignation of her desire to control her environment at all.

Therefore, before relinquishing control, she constructed

a table, a tabula, that enables thought to operate upon the entities of [the] world, to put them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences (Foucault 1970:xvii).

She maintains unequivocally that "a human being ... is all [she is]" (100), and this is most emphatically illustrated by her encounter with the baboons. She "fear[s] the baboon's grimace [because] ... He is too much like [her]" (11). She comes to admit that she

fear[s] her recognizable self in his ugly face. I am reminded of my inferior position here, my lesser knowledge. I feel taunted by the mirroring of my moods and desires in his monstrosity, and feel ridicule of my refinement, a demonstration that it is superfluous (loc.cit.).

She admits that she "despise[s] him, his strength, his cunning, his self-evident mastery of this world" (loc.cit.), for

I know too much about them for my taste. In a cage I would be able to laugh at them. As for what they know about me, they reveal nothing in those sidelong glances. I suppose I am no more than a nuisance to them. An outsider, far outside their realm of activity (12).

This feeling of alienation on "their terrain" (11) illustrates, if it does not in fact mirror, the manner in which she feels in relation to her masters. She is forced to live in the coastal city, just as she is forced to go along on the expedition into the interior -- "[she] had no choice but to follow him ... [she] was one driven from circumstance to circumstance" (46) -- and as such she is therefore constantly an outsider. She is doubly outside, because she remains alien to the other slaves on the expedition, given her position as "a peculiarly elevated, untouchable, temporary spectator" (68), while to the masters "[she] was a damaged plaything ... Useful, certainly" (42). It is also because of this realisation of her eternal exile that she

wonder[s] how long a person keeps on till ... there must be a boundary somewhere that becomes clearer and clearer to you, towards which you reach (92).

When in her dating system, she postulates that she "live[s] in time measured by myself ... my arrangement ... determined by mood and chance" (15), she glimpses "the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language intersected space" (Foucault 1970: xvii). She glimpses "the exotic charm of another system of thought", a system of organising which in this particular case is "dating", an effort at controlling time. But the slave woman's means for her attempt to

control time, the beads, "used to be accepted in exchange for things, just as [she] was accepted in exchange for something" (13), so that she becomes aware that they have a value that lies outside of her immediate imposition of meaning, as dictated by need. She concedes that they are "[h]umanware ... [and is aware of a]n incalculable distance between myself and those who had left behind the beads and potsherds, irrecoverable time, unbridgeable estrangement" (96). Here she echoes Coetzee's Magistrate, and his realisation that the poplar slips he finds in the ruins contain meanings that are irrecoverable, lost in time and space. The slave woman's realisation leads her

to discover that these orders are perhaps not the only possible ones or the best ones; ... [she] finds [her]self faced with the stark fact that there exists, below the level of [her] spontaneous orders, things that are in themselves capable of being ordered, that belong to a certain unspoken order; ... in short, that order exists (Foucault 1970:xx).

There seems to be a proliferation of options available to the slave woman after this realisation. It seems that she "has constituted herself necessarily as that 'person' capable of losing a part of herself without losing her integrity ... without annihilating herself" (Cixous 1976:259). So the slave woman concedes that "I yielded to the powers of my environment ... I learned to live with them" (98).

However, the powers of her environment are both human and non-human, and it is her relationship with the non-human aspect of her environment that requires explication here. Her first encounter with the uncanniness of her environment occurs during the initial expedition across the wilderness to the fabled city of the rose quartz. To escape from the deliberations of the stranger and the

eldest son on the rock art, she wanders onto a koppie, where "I felt as if the incomprehensible were about to choke me and I had to hurl a cry into the wind which would vanish in the wind" (88). The necessity for constituting the self in sound, is striking. She relates how "I heard myself say something. Not say. Mumble. Stammer. I heard the words fall from my mouth in snatches over the cliff to be swallowed by the windfilled silence" (88). This seems to constitute "a form of enunciatory, intellectual uncertainty and anxiety ... a strategy for articulating contradictory and coeval statements of belief" (Bhabha 1994:132). While she realises the unmistakable error of the ways of the masters -- the stranger scratches the rock art from the cave wall after denouncing it as ridiculous -- she cannot articulate herself outside of such a discourse with which she clearly does not agree, and, she also comes to realise, that discourse does not agree with her. The self which comments on the moment on the koppie is split from the self which experiences that moment, and thus, "when it was all out of me I ... felt as if something had been gnawing at me and I no longer obstructed the wind and had become without resistance" (89). Also, as Eagleton (1996:147) states, since "the actual speaking, writing human person, can never represent himself or herself fully in what is said", there is also a distinction between the enunciating subject and the self engendered by the narrative act. This illustrates that she has ventured into anonymity, into that space where "I did not give in. I did not surrender. I let it happen" (23). It would seem that she speaks here with her

woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of

ardor ... by smashing the yokes and censors, she lets it articulate the profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction ... mak[ing] the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language (Cixous 1976:256).

Shortly after the incident on the koppie she relates how "[she is] one whole, and divided too and present in everything and everywhere"

(101), so that in the moment of "[s]plitting ... [t]wo contradictory and independent attitudes inhabit the same space" (Bhabha 1994:132), and we find that what emerges is a revolutionary moment in the slave woman's relation to language, history and subjectivity. For in this "split subject"

one takes account of reality, the other is under the influence of instincts which detach the ego from reality ... [so that] the enunciatory moment of multiple and contradictory belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself productive of differentiations (loc.cit.).

When, towards the end of her narrative, the slave woman "heard a groan, or imagined I heard it" (107), she proceeds to detail how she

listened intently and heard nothing more. I concentrated, turned my head carefully away from the direction of the wind to catch the sound and heard nothing. But I knew I had to go and track down the groaning (107-108).

One could argue that "[a]ll that remains is to decipher" (Foucault 1970:132) these signs, and the slave woman attempts this. She resembles Coetzee's Magistrate in this sense, in that they both attempt to decipher the signs of their respective worlds. However, whereas the Magistrate attempts to read the signs of another in order to demystify his own sense of self, the slave woman is primarily interested in her own signs. More than merely going in quest of the origin of the groans, she realises that she is "searching for a groan, a groan without a body" (108).

III. Speaking and Writing

Cixous (1976:245) appeals to "[w]oman [to] write her self", to "put herself into the text -- as into the world and into history -- by her own movement", since this process will allow "woman [to] return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display" (ibid.:250).

In many respects the slave woman's narrative can be read as a response to such an injunction, as well as an exemplum of that "new insurgent writing which ... will allow her to carry out the indispensable ruptures and transformations in her history" (loc.cit.). This is in accordance with Said (1993:xxx), who argues that "narratives of emancipation and enlightenment in their strongest form [are] also narratives of integration not separation, the stories of people who had been excluded from the main group but who were now fighting for a place in it". This notion of writing the self, however, of effecting a movement back into history and specifically textuality, is problematised in Stockenström's novel. After all, Brink (1992:6-7) argues that

[t]his woman herself cannot write ... these thoughts have been transferred, by an invisible mediator, an implied narrator, to a page, translated into a language intelligible to the reader ... At every moment in the narration, in other words (quite literally 'in other words'), there is an invisible but crucial battle between the language of appropriation and the language appropriated -- which in itself replicates another struggle in the text, between ... master and slave.

From the outset of her narrative, the slave woman is intent on declaring her subjectivity, on claiming herself as a subject in discourse. She asserts that "my tongue is meant for me, my tongue, my

mouth, my whole self is mine" (27). The profusion of the first person possessive pronoun "my" is an indication that, contrary to Cixous's argument that "woman overturns the 'personal' ... to see more closely the inanity of 'propriety', the reductive stinginess of the masculine-conjugal economy" (1976:259), the slave woman participates quite happily in this economy of possession, of subjectivity through ownership. This reiterates my earlier arguments about the discourses the slave woman interpellates from her masters, and as Gerardine Meaney argues, "[i]nternalization is precisely what makes it so easy to mimic and participate in the voice of our enemies" (1993:57). It seems that the slave woman practices an economy of self-preservation, and this is illustrated by the processes of self-definition and self-appropriation that she engages in. This remains problematic though, since the self the slave woman asserts is constructed, initially, in the codes of her masters, the very codes which would make such a self impossible. As De Lauretis (1984:106) states, "the very work of narrativity is the engagement of the subject in certain positionalities of meaning and desire", so that the slave woman demonstrates her desire to establish a subject position like that of the masters in her narrative act, even though she realises through that narrative that such a solution remains problematic. While in the service of her second master, she is subjected to sexual assault, when "[a]t night it was legs apart for the owner on his sweaty skin rug" (23). Still, she would be true to the women who initiated her into "the game with men" so that outwardly she would show "the rapture and the torment, but inwardly remain untouched, remain whole, remain

myself" (15). Despite this she acknowledges her own complicity, recognising that "I was a coward and refused nothing" (23), while at the same time declaring, paradoxically, that "I did not give in. I did not surrender" (24). This illustrates that "it is in the processes of positioning that the agency of the oppressed subject can be defined" (Hitchcock 1993:10). In looking more closely at the moment of the forced sexual encounter with the master, it becomes evident how, as Bhabha (1994:132) argues, "[s]plitting ... results in the production of multiple and contradictory belief. The enunciatory moment of multiple belief is both a defence against the anxiety of difference, and itself productive of differentiations". Therefore, since physical resistance to rape is beyond the possibilities available to the slave woman if she wishes to survive, it is possible to discern a "dialogic moment[] ... where the oppressed consciously or otherwise challenge their oppressors" (Hitchcock 1993:xii). In this act of defiance against the patriarchal imperial sexual economy the slave woman becomes aware of how "I struggle to make the spectacle cohere ... [and concede that t]here are connections that evade me" (9). It is also because of this split that the slave woman is able to view herself as slave and as master parrot -- "Like a real lady I sat ... the select maid-servant of one of the leaders ... the mistress" (68) -- at the same time, and later, as neither.

For Bhabha (1994:231), "what is at issue in the discourse of minorities is the creation of agency through incommensurable (not simply multiple) positions". The slave woman, with her paradoxical and contradictory positions of power and disempowerment in the

hierarchies of the coastal city, and later at the baobab, illustrates this argument such that, as Meaney (1993:82) states, "[t]he nature of the subject becomes a question of (possible) positions rather than one of definition or lack of it". The impossible text of her narrative thus becomes a speculative act which posits a possible position of selfhood, and a possible way of negotiating it.

This, in conjunction with the self-reclamation of her demand for that status of the "I", has radical implications for the hierarchy of the social fabric into which she has been b(r)ought and enslaved. In Hitchcock's argument, "when the 'I' is the oppressed, a whole system of oppression is at stake ... [for] the agency resides in the cultural effects of the 'I-slot', the processes of agent position that are at odds with the will-to-silence hegemony" (1993:17). The slave woman consequently becomes, à propos of Cixous (1976:249), "the woman who would hold out against oppression and constitute herself as a superb, equal, hence 'impossible' subject". Therefore she regards her

reflection critically in a calm pool and try to determine how much older I have become. It is not easy, for however motionless both I and the water are, there is a continual fine wrinkling distortion of my image ... I throw a pebble into myself. I rock grotesquely up and down and break up in lumps. Restless ... I withdraw myself from my divided self in the water (66).

This not only illustrates Bhabha's earlier argument on splitting, but also constitutes her as the woman who "break[s] the codes that negate her" (Cixous 1976:249). Negation, as outlined by Cixous (ibid.:247), is a process where "[a]s soon as they begin to speak, at the same time as they're taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black". The slave woman certainly rejects this vision of herself

at the baobab tree, where she "know[s] fully who I am" (12), for she learns that "dreaming and waking do not damn each other, but are extensions of each other and flow into each other" (92). As such she is rejecting the binary codes which organise her world, and her self.

So that, impossibly, she declares in an address to the baobab that

[i]f I could write, I would take up a porcupine quill and scratch your enormous belly from top to bottom ... Big letters. Small letters. In a script full of lobes and curls, in circumambient lines I write round and round you, for I have so much to tell of a trip to a new horizon that became an expedition to a tree (30).

The baobab therefore becomes the upside-down, the impossible tree, "becomes the unheimlich space for the negotiation of identity and history" (Bhabha 1994:198). For while writing remains impossible as an actuality for the illiterate slave woman, it remains a possibility in her dream. And as Hitchcock (1993:7) proposes, the "utterance [of the oppressed] often upsets the status quo by challenging the logic of dialogue as equal linguistic exchange".

The slave woman therefore can only speculate, offer possibilities, of what she would write, if she could. Addressing the baobab, her refuge and her prison, her point of departure and in a particularly significant circularity also her destination, the space from which she describes being "[r]eborn every time ... full of myself" (14), she details how she would

decorate you line after line with our hallucinations so that you can digest, outgrow, make smooth this ridiculousness, preserve the useless information in your thick skin till the day of your spontaneous combustion. And satisfied I put down the porcupine quill and stand back to regard my handiwork (30-31).

This act of dreaming leads her to realise the newly anthropomorphised baobab is "full of my scars ... I did not know I had so many" (31). This conflation of her own body with that of the baobab illustrates the point that she is no longer separate from her environment, and that she has "yielded to the powers of [her] environment" (98). She therefore learns to effect that "emancipation of the marvellous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak" (Cixous 1976:250), initiating a process whereby the "'I' and 'not-I' merge in an identity which at the beginning of the quest was seen to be terrifyingly other, to be death itself" (Meaney 1993:47). With the slippage into the collective first person pronouns and possessives -- "we" and "our" in the original text -- the elision of the boundaries between the self of the narrator and the initially non-self of the baobab, we are confronted with "the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, rhetorics, regulations and codes" (Cixous 1976:256). In transferring the codes and inscriptions from her own body onto the trunk of the baobab, she would be "blazing her trail in the symbolic" (ibid.:258). As Meaney argues, "the body of that writing is the site of a traversal of the in-between of language itself" (1993:56), and the writing of the slave woman is therefore situated in-between being and non-being -- imagined in the slave woman narrator's mind, transferred by the invisible mediator of Brink's argument into the phenomenological text written by Stockenström.

Chapter 4

Beyond Boundaries:

Bessie Head's A Question of Power

Bessie Head has been characterised as "South Africa's profoundest and most intense woman writer" (Goddard 1990:105), and her work -- both the earlier fictional texts, and the later sociological works -- has generated a great deal of sometimes controversial critical attention. It is this industry of revivalist and revisionist scholarship that Lewis (1996:73) argues is symptomatic of and responsible for Head's "recently elevated status in literary studies". This scholarship ranges from inadequate and mediocre quality work -- that of Cecil Abrahams (1990) is perhaps the most obvious example -- through a spectrum of exceptionally perceptive and engaging analyses of Head's oeuvre -- Driver (1990) and Lewis (1996) being but two examples worth citing here. Her writing has been noted for its interrogation of nationalist politics and gender relations (Lewis 1996:73), and A Question of Power, the text which marks the end of the first sequence in Head's oeuvre, is emblematic of this view. As Spivak (1987:245) states, "innumerable subaltern examples of resistance ... [are] often suppressed by those very forces of nationalism which would be instrumental in changing the geopolitical conjunctions".

The focus on Head's work in this thesis centres on the relationship between literary and cultural politics in Southern

Africa, and the representation and negotiation of subaltern subjectivity in her writing. While the two previous chapters examine the inscription and interrogation of South African liberal discourses on alterity and subjectivity in Stockenström's The Expedition to the Baobab Tree (1983) and Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), this chapter focuses on self-representation, autobiography, and the association between subjectivity and textuality in Head's A Question of Power (1974). Consequently, I argue that her importance for allegorical, autobiographical subaltern representation, and its impact on South African politics of representation, remains particularly significant.

I. Origins: Autobiography as Self-Reclamation

Head herself characterises A Question of Power as "totally autobiographical" (1983:24), and several critics have discussed the text as such (Driver 1992b:114; Lewis 1996:73; Stead Eilersen 1995:141-157). It is therefore imperative to situate Head's work, and especially the text under examination here, in the larger context of black women's writing and autobiography in Southern Africa.

Cherry Clayton (1989:1) finds that "Black women ... have been the last group within the country to find a literary platform. Of the more than 140 black South Africans writing in English since about 1920, only seven have been women". This concurs with Ngcobo (1989:ix), who finds that a "[black] South African woman writer in the 1980s is a rare find". In her own research in the area of black women's writing in South Africa, Driver (1996:45) suggests that

"[g]iven the history of racist and capitalist exploitation in South Africa, considerably more writing has been produced by white writers than by black". This also contributes to the context in which "a writer's worldliness expresses itself within a fragmented national context in which positionality is always at issue" (Attwell 1993:3). Significantly, the previous two novels examined in the thesis both contain representations of black subjectivity by white writers: Stockenström's text is narrated by a black slave woman, who is the product of the imagination of a white writer, and Coetzee's novel offers an interrogation of such practices in South African literature, and a discursive analysis of the impossibility of inscribing alterity without circumscribing that otherness in the discourses of the representing subject. In an article that examines the literary history of black women's writing at length -- such writing as was done and published in English, that is -- Driver (1992a:46) concludes that "[t]he novelistic tradition has ... been less hospitable to black women than to white".

The close textual analyses in the previous two chapters show, in concordance with Driver's (1992b:114) argument, how "white scribes take up the pen on behalf of black women, and put into writing the stories these women tell about their lives". This, in conjunction with her point about the inhospitability of the novel as genre for black women writers quoted above, means that "autobiography provides a hospitable genre ... for those who need to assert a voice or claim an identity hitherto suppressed in South African literature" (loc.cit.). Autobiography, therefore, in the field of writing, addresses what

Steve Biko (1978:8) demands of and for black people in a white supremacist context: that "[w]hat we want is not black visibility but real black participation". It therefore becomes crucial for black women to inscribe their selves and their own stories in writing, in the light of their (mis)representation by others in the white supremacist imperial patriarchy of apartheid South Africa. As Head states in her autobiographical writing, "I've just got to tell a story" (1990:8). This concurs with Gilmore (1994:xvi), who argues that "[f]or many women, access to autobiography means access to the identity it constructs". However, an autobiographical text is not only such because a writer has encoded her text as such; it is important to emphasize that the constitution of the text as autobiographical is also the result of an act of reading, a construction in and through the processes of literary criticism. Therefore, I would agree with Driver (1992b:114-115), that

the advantage of continuing to look at much black women's writing in terms of autobiography is that it draws attention to the metaphors of "self" and "community" established under the various ideologies of class, race and gender, allowing the critic to attend closely to the gestures whereby "identity" is produced.

As Lejeune (1989:45) states, "[o]ne could not write an autobiography without elaborating and communicating a point of view of the self".

In this regard, Boyce Davies (1994:21) argues that

[t]he autobiographical subjectivity of Black women is one of the ways in which speech is articulated and geography redefined. Issues of home and exile are addressed. Home is often portrayed as a place of alienation and displacement in autobiographical writing.

For Head, this is multiply significant, since she experiences the displacement of national exile and its consequent rendering of her as

a stateless person, a refugee, as well as the dissonance of parental rejection because of racial discrimination, and the resulting transposition from sanity. The first of these, exile, is characterised by Rushdie (1992:210) as the loss of "language and home, to be defined by others, to become ... a target". As Bernikow (1980:259) states, "exile, in the woman, results ... in profound alienation and victimization". This alienation is impacted upon in Head's writing by the second and third of these processes -- the combination of rejection, racism and designation of insanity -- and results in the "migratory subjectivity" (Boyce Davies:46-47) constituted in black women's writing because of the boundary crossing the establishment of such subject positions involves, as well as the cross-cultural contexts in which black women are often situated. As Isabella Matsikidze (1996:142) states,

A Question of Power focuses on multiple tensions generated by ethnic, gender, as well as class differences when the protagonist finds herself categorized under multiple layers of marginalizing forces.

While the focus in the previous two chapters has been on the analysis of representations of black women by others, this chapter shifts its focus to the analysis of a black woman's quest for self-representation and selfhood. In this regard, Lewis (1996:73) points out that Head constitutes a singular voice in the South African literary landscape because of her disavowal of realism and protest, her fusion of autobiography and fiction, and her exploitation of circuitous narrative strategies. This echoes Alice Walker's (1984:259) characterisation of Head as a writer whose "work deepens

one's comprehension of life by going beyond the bounds of realism". But it is not only the boundaries of form that Head breaks down. Rob Nixon (1993:61) also praises Head for breaking the conventions of her social order, claiming that her writing "convey[s] her keen enjoyment of the freedom -- so rare among South African writers -- to engage with social issues that by-pass binary forms of racial conflict".

In this regard, Lewis (1996:73), in an article that focuses on the posthumously published The Cardinals (1993), reads Head's work as "allegories of self", so that the allegorical project in A Question of Power can be said to intersect with the autobiographical project. As a result, Head destabilises the relationship between the writer of and the represented subject in the autobiographical text, as Susan Gardner (1989:232) points out. Lejeune (1989:37-38) argues that in homodiegetic autobiography, the identity between the protagonist and the author of the text is imposed by the context, and this foregrounds the figurative enunciation of the text. Therefore,

identity, no longer being established within the text by the use of "I", is established indirectly, but without any ambiguity, by the double equation: author = narrator, and author = character, from which it is deduced that narrator = character even if the narrator remains implicit (ibid.:6).

This is elaborated upon by Gilmore in her reading of women's autobiographical practices, when she states that

nonfictional narrative offers voice to historically silenced and marginalized persons, who penetrate the labyrinths of history and language to possess, often by stealth, theft, or what they perceive as trespass, the engendering matrix of textual selfhood (1994:63; emphasis added).

Horace I. Goddard (1990:105), for example, points out that the novel "reflects the fears and struggles of 'self' in a world that denies the outcast a personal identity". This echoes Gilmore's position that "autobiographical writing [is] a site of resistance" (1994:xv).

Elizabeth herself finds that "[s]he had no time to examine her own hell", for "an examination of inner hells was meant to end all hells forever" (12). It could be argued that Head's novel constitutes the "emancipation of the marvellous text of her self that she must urgently learn to speak" (Cixous 1976:250). This concurs with Head's own characterisation of the motivation for writing the novel as follows:

I then decided, this is it, I'm finished with this. I'll write the book and I'll throw [the breakdown] over my shoulder and I'll get through with them. That was really the motivation and drive for writing A Question of Power (MacKenzie & Clayton 1989:25-26).

As such, the text can be read as an attempt to "write her self" (Cixous 1976:250). Head states in an interview that "I thought by writing it out, I'd throw the persecutor over my shoulder" (MacKenzie & Clayton 1989:25). The novel would therefore constitute an attempt on Head's part to exorcise her past, which is the site of the definition of her/self by others as 'mad', and to negotiate a subject position beyond victimhood, to (re)appropriate and re-invent 'madness'. Ramphela (1995:ii) argues that "[s]torytelling is part of the struggle to transcend loss", and for black women it is often a struggle to reclaim the loss of agency, and the denial of discursively engendered subjectivity by the oppressive contextual politics. In the discussion on the new subjectivities proposed by Head in a later

section of this chapter, I examine the positions of victimhood and the negotiation of subjectivity beyond them in greater detail.

Elizabeth's past is rooted in South Africa, which is described as "a country where people were not people" (17). This problematic relationship between the politics of location and the possibilities of locution are central to the concerns of the novel, for Elizabeth

hated the country ... she had also lived the back-breaking life of all black people in South Africa. It was like living with permanent nervous tension, because you did not know why white people had to go out of their way to hate you or loathe you (19).

In this sense Elizabeth's experience of South Africa corresponds with Head's, since she describes it as a place where "we were discounted as a people having anything of value, as though our lives were a blanket of darkness or nothingness" (1990:51). This has interesting resonances in Cixous's (1976:247) characterization of patriarchy's oppression of women as a system in which women "can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous". Furthermore, here "[d]ark is uncivilized, disrespectful of the laws and manners of the light civilization" (Bernikow 1980:228), and this view echoes that of Joseph Conrad's Marlowe in Heart of Darkness, who characterizes Africa as "the biggest, the most blank [space]" and as "a place of darkness" (1902:33), "the heart of darkness" (ibid.:68). But as Head (1981:ix) asserts, "[f]or us Africa was never dark". Despite this assertion, she contends that to be "born in South Africa ... is synonymous with saying that one is born into a very brutal world -- if one is black" (ibid.:66). Head's characterisation of the country as a place where

we find ourselves born into a situation where people are separated into sharp racial groups ... [so that] one is irked by the artificial barriers. It is as though, with all those divisions and signs, you end up with no people at all (ibid.:62),

aptly describes Elizabeth's experience of it in A Question of Power. This echoes Nat Nakasa's statement that "legislation for the separation of people according to racial or colour groups makes life nearly impossible" (1995:12). Elizabeth finds that "a black man or woman was just born to be hated. There wasn't any kind of social evolution beyond that" (19). Here she concurs with Emma Mashinini's declaration in her autobiography, Strikes Have Followed Me All My Life, that "[t]he assumptions and arrogance of white South Africans never ceases to amaze me" (1989:21).

But Botswana does not offer the utopian refuge from racism and oppression which Elizabeth at first assumed it would. Like "[s]o many people [she] ran away from South Africa to forget it or throw it off" (47), and instead, like Margaret Cadmore, the Masarwa in Maru (1971), Elizabeth finds that "wherever mankind had gathered itself together in a social order, the same things were happening" (1971:68).

We are informed that

[i]n South Africa [Elizabeth] had been rigidly classified as Coloured. There was no escape from it to the simple joy of being a human being with a personality. There wasn't any escape like that for anyone in South Africa. They were races, not people (44).

This echoes Head's statement in a later interview that "[i]n South Africa they put you into slots. They would say in South Africa: 'Coloured'. And I would find the box too small for me. So I tended to be outside any box" (MacKenzie & Clayton 1989:17). But in Botswana

Elizabeth finds that "as far as Batswana society was concerned, she was an out-and-out outsider and would never be in on their things" (26). She discovers, like Margaret Cadmore in Maru, that "another variant of the word 'Bushman' ... was also a name they gave to the children of marriage between white and African" (1971:19-20). And in a world obsessed with racial purity, with exclusiveness, where individuals were seen as "races, not people", Elizabeth discovers the Southern African vision of social order Head outlines and critiques in Maru as follows:

Before the white man became universally disliked for his mental outlook, it was there. The white man found only too many people who looked different. That was all that outraged the receivers of his discrimination, that he applied the technique of the wild jigging dance and the rattling tin cans to anyone who was not a white man. And if the white man thought that Asians were a low, filthy nation, Asians could still smile with relief -- at least they were not Africans. And if the white man thought Africans were a low, filthy nation, Africans in Southern Africa could still smile -- at least, they were not Bushmen. They all have their monster. You just have to look different from them ... then seemingly anything can be said or done to you as your outer appearance reduces you to the status of a non-human being (1971:11).

This correspondence between the status of those designated as "Masarwa" and "Coloured" in Maru and A Question of Power is echoed by Elizabeth's torture at the hands of her persecutors, and consequently, shows up the resemblance between the view of black people by the white supremacist discourse of apartheid South Africa, and the view of the 'mad' subject by the Rational discourse of sanity outlined by Foucault (1965:72-75). It is Medusa who points out to Elizabeth that she is considered "[d]og filth" (46), that "[t]hat's your people, not African people" (45). This has interesting echoes in Stockenström's slave

woman narrator, who describes the newly arrived slaves she encounters on the beach as "my own people half-people may not be people" (34). Head elaborates on this dehumanising impulse of racist imperialism by describing how

[t]he stronger man caught hold of the weaker man and made a circus animal out of him, reducing him to the state of misery and subjection and non-humanity. The combinations were the same, first conquest, then abhorrence at the looks of the conquered and, from then onwards, all forms of horror and evil practices (1971:109).

This seems to concur with Conrad's description of the colonial enterprise as "[t]he conquest of the earth [by] taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves" (1902:31-32). This also echoes the description of the eighteenth century asylum in which the 'mad' are displayed as a spectacle for public consumption and regulation (Foucault 1965:246-249). The description Head offers of racist imperialism could be considered an apt description for Elizabeth's breakdown, her "clear sensation of living right inside a stinking toilet; she was so broken, so shattered" (14). In the autobiographical pieces published later, Head states that "[w]e, as black people, could make no appraisal of our own worth; we did not know who or what we were, apart from objects of abuse and exploitation" (1990:66). This concurs with Mashinini's account of her encounter with the South African police, when she finds that "it seemed everyone had an insult for me, that everyone who walked past had a word of insult to say to me. I was just in the centre of a mess" (1989:54). Once again, almost perversely, this illustrates the structural privilege apartheid discourse grants the

white speaker to address and characterise the black subject, as outlined by Driver (1996), Hassim and Walker (1993), and Lewis (1993) -- the black subject (objectified) is open to (ab)use by the white speaker, just as black subjectivity is defined by white discourse.

It also supports what Foucault (1965:274) describes as

that delicate structure which would become the essential nucleus of madness -- a structure that ... symbolized the massive structures of bourgeois society and its values: Family-Child relations, centered on the theme of paternal authority; Transgression-Punishment relations, centered on the theme of immediate justice; Madness-Disorder relations, centered on the theme of social and moral order

Daniel Gover (1990:119) argues that "Elizabeth suffers from the absence of control over her own destiny", and the back and forth shuffling the child-Elizabeth experiences illustrates this: the missionary at the orphanage informs her that "you were returned because you did not look white" (17). This signals part of Elizabeth's crisis in South Africa, because "[t]he details of life and oppression in South Africa had hardly taken form in her mind. The information was almost meaningless to her" (16). It also signals that her rejection by her biological mother was mediated to her as the result of her being black, rather than of her being illegitimate. But when her 'origins' are explained to her -- "Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother" (16) -- she realises that she is caught in "this vehement, vicious struggle between two sets of people with different looks" (19). Elizabeth is rejected as a child for not being thought white, and later, in Botswana, for not being thought black. It is also because of this that she finds herself in danger of being labelled 'mad' -- a category

that is eventually applied to her, and she finds herself like the mad subject of classicism, "between two countries that cannot belong to [her]" (Foucault 1965:11) -- because her mother was designated 'mad', for being a white woman who had sexual relations with a black man. Crucially here, as Foucault (ibid.:58) would have it, "madness ... crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order", in this case, the white supremacist order which proscribes inter-racial sex. The obsession with racial purity in South Africa -- which is reflected in some South African literature, and this discursive manifestation of ethnic and racial purity is discussed in depth by Coetzee in White Writing (1988:136-162) -- and the problems it presents for those like Elizabeth stem from their inability to fit into either of the two categories. Elsewhere, Coetzee (1992:97) describes the Immorality Act as a law

making sexual relations between masters and slaves a crime ... to block forms of horizontal intercourse between white and black [so that] the only sanctioned intercourse was henceforth to be vertical.

As L.G. Ngcobo (1991:343) argues, Elizabeth's biological parents would have conceived her before the establishment of official apartheid laws and the Immorality Act, so that sexual intercourse across the colour bar "might not have been illegal according to the statutes of ... South Africa in 1937, but the social attitudes which made [it] impossible existed then". Elizabeth, the product of the impossible and the unthinkable, the child of a union across the barriers separating these two categories and those that are placed into them, finds herself in

a 'separate' space, a space of separation -- less than one and double -- which has been systematically denied by ... [those] who have sought authority in the authenticity of origins (Bhabha 1994:120).

This "'separate' space" is also the space reserved for the mad, which Foucault (1965:11) describes as "the madman's (sic) liminal position". This discussion will be elaborated on in the second and third sections of this chapter, when Head's examination of 'madness' and sanity, and her proposition of different and new subject positions, are examined.

Head's project in A Question of Power can therefore be said to be an attempt to reclaim her sanity -- and by extension also establish a subject position from which to articulate that sanity, and the 'madness' that preceded it -- through the act of writing, because for Elizabeth, her breakdown means that "mentally, the normal and the abnormal blended completely in [her] mind" (15). Consequently, "[m]adness is here ... an ironic sign that misplaces the guideposts between the real and the chimerical" (Foucault 1965:37), as between the 'mad' and the 'sane'. This concurs with Gilmore's argument that

even in the narrowest and most ambivalent sense, writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for (1994:40).

II. 'Madness' and Power Politics

Much of the criticism generated by A Question of Power has focused on the representation of madness in the text (Rose 1994) -- Gardner, Patricia Sandler and Head herself (in MacKenzie and Clayton 1989:23-27) all point this out in an interview -- and the relation this has to the autobiographical nature of the work acknowledged by Head and

several of her critics. In a particularly perceptive engagement with the text, Davison (1990:19) argues that

madness may be described as the most potentially subversive subject in women's fiction, for the reassessment of female insanity necessitates its corollary -- the reappraisal of patriarchal sanity.

This would concur with Gardner (in MacKenzie & Clayton 1989:26), who situates the novel in the context of the representation of madness in women's writing in the twentieth century more generally. As Rooney (1991:107) argues, "what is dramatised is ... the invasion of the would-be other subject, an invasion by foreign or inexplicable powers".

Gardner (1989:232) describes A Question of Power as "the most difficult of Head's books", while Rose (1994:404) qualifies the text as "writing by battery assault". Perhaps this results from its attempt to record madness, and to inscribe a self designated 'mad' in the language which constructs it as such. This convoluted process may also explain the mediocre quality of much of the criticism generated by the text, and the ways in which many critics flounder in their attempts to fix in the text any one meaning of their choice.

Clément (in Cixous & Clément 1986:5) argues that

[t]he hysteric, whose body is transformed into a theatre for forgotten scenes, relives the past, bearing witness to a lost childhood that survives in suffering.

This feminine role, the role of sorceress, of hysteric, is ambiguous, antiestablishment, and conservative at the same time.

Here she seems to augment Foucault's assertion that "[m]eaningless disorder as madness is, it reveals, when we examine it, only ordered classifications ... language articulated according to a visible logic"

(1965:107). This offers interesting insights into Head's novel. So much of Elizabeth's breakdown is centred on physical torture -- sleep deprivation, the endless mental anguish which eventually takes its toll on her body -- so that her body does indeed become the theatre on which Sello and Medusa, and later Dan, play out their power games. And much of Elizabeth's suffering through her breakdown is related to South Africa, for she concedes that "[s]omething was going drastically wrong with her own life ... the evils overwhelming her were beginning to sound like South Africa from which she had fled" (57). For Davison (1990:21) then, Head's "Elizabeth embark[s] upon the critical and almost impossible quest for self-definition and self-actualization ... and [she] can not (sic) escape madness because [she has] been socially defined as madness embodied". Consequently, as Foucault (1965:182) shows, "the problematics of madness shifts to an interrogation of the subject responsible". This relates to the earlier arguments about Elizabeth as the child of a sexual union across the racial barriers. For Boyce Davies (1994:77), the novel "asserts the link between power and dominance and 'madness' in the context of the oppressiveness of South Africa[]". As Driver (1990:168) suggests, it is the "particular forms taken by the 'madness' of the narrative self ... [which] dramatise the artificial divisions or splits at war in the racist, sexist social order". But as Foucault (1965:193) describes the Rational discursive position,

madness, even if it is provoked or sustained by what is most artificial in society, appears, in its violent forms, as the savage expression of the most primitive human desires.

The desire for selfhood, for subjectivity, I would posit, in agreement with Lacan (1977), is such.

As the narrator informs us, for Elizabeth "[i]t was like living with permanent nervous tension, because you did not know why white people there had to go out of their way to hate you or loathe you" (19). Therefore, one can argue that there is a direct link between location and locution, as there is between place and madness -- it can be argued that Fanon's (1967) declaration that the condition of the native is a nervous condition is explored at length in Head's novel, and Berger (1990) does attempt a critical reading of Head's novel in the light of Fanon's critical insights, with uncertain success. Rose (1994:405) proposes that "[p]aranoia -- voices in the head -- is of course the perfect metaphor for colonisation -- the takeover of body and mind". It is Head herself who states, "I too would care for a brief escape from the permanent madness of reality" (1990:17); later she explains that her life in South Africa was such that "I have continually lived with a shattering sense of anxiety" (ibid.:27). This anxiety is linked overtly to place, to context, and more specifically with the South African sociopolitical reality which drove her to Botswana.

Similarly, Elizabeth's descent into "a state below animal, below living and so dark and forlorn no loneliness and misery could be its equivalent" (14), is characterised as a state where "the barriers of normal, conventional and sane [had] all broken down" (15). Foucault (1965:73-74) shows how, in classicism,

[t]he animal in man (sic) no longer has any value as the

sign of a Beyond; it has become his madness, without relation to anything but itself: his madness in the state of nature.

As a result, "Elizabeth had put tentative questions to many people, testing her sanity against theirs" (14-15). However, she realises that "[i]t was harder to disclose the subtle balances of power between people -- how easy it was for people with soft shuffling, loosely-knit personalities [like herself] to be preyed upon by the dominant, powerful persons" (12). With the breaking down of the barriers between the normal and the abnormal, between the sane and the insane, Elizabeth also experiences "a strange feeling of things being right inside her and yet projected at the same time at a distance away from her" (22). The chaos which results from this means that "the dividing line between dream perceptions and waking reality was ... confused" (22). This echoes Head's description of her breakdown in her letters to Randolph Vigne as "the extreme state where the ego has been violently destroyed. No one can live without an ego. So what I really lived through was death in life" (Head 1991:160). This also illustrates the impact of prejudice in the external environment -- both in South Africa, and Botswana -- on the internal environment, so that the 'mad' subject can no longer differentiate between them. After all, Elizabeth finds that "[h]er exterior life had a painful way of coinciding with her inner torment" (66). Foucault posits that in Rational discourse,

joining vision and blindness, image and judgment, hallucination and language, sleep and waking, day and night, madness is ultimately nothing, for it unites in them all that is negative. But the paradox of this nothing is to manifest itself, to explode in signs, in words, in gestures (1965:107).

Elizabeth's initial torturers, Sello and Medusa, as well as the later one, Dan, then, can be seen as projections of her own crises, arising from the difficulties she has attempting to negotiate an identity, a subject position, in an environment hostile to this. It is hooks (1992:65) who argues that

[f]acing herself, the black [woman] realizes all that she must struggle against to achieve self-actualization. She must counter the representation of herself, her body, her being as expendable.

Elizabeth certainly confronts this in her relationship with Sello and Medusa, finding that "[s]he had to struggle to live, move, and breathe" (36). She also finds that "when they address me I just burst out with the right lines on cue as though I am living with a strange 'other self' I don't know so well" (58). This alienation of the subject from her self mirrors what Cixous (1976:247) argues is woman's construction by racist patriarchy as "black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous". As such, Elizabeth becomes estranged from herself, she literally becomes the "uncanny stranger on display" (ibid.:250). It is Medusa who makes her look "in the mirror. She flinched and looked away. There was an unnamable horror there. She could not endure to look at it" (46). Here Elizabeth seems to resemble Stockenström's slave woman narrator, and her confrontation with the horror of self. Also, as Cixous (in Cixous & Clément 1986:68) states, "[w]omen haven't had eyes for themselves ... their bodies ... have been colonized". The connection between horror and Africa has also been a trope in literature more generally since Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1902), in which Kurtz's

fateful encounter and engagement with the African continent, and his participation in the "unspeakable rites" resemble that of Sello, Medusa and Dan so closely. This construction of her self by others, of her world -- both private and public, interior and exterior -- resembles what Foucault (1965:249) describes as

the organization around the madman (sic) of a world where everything would be like and near him, but in which he himself would remain a stranger, the Stranger par excellence who is judged not only by appearances but by all that they may betray and reveal in spite of themselves.

But Elizabeth's 'madness' is not only symptomatic of her victimisation at the hands of a hostile, patriarchal, racist, imperial social order. It also inscribes her in what Clément (Cixous and Clément 1986:28) characterises as "[t]he place of origins, of feasts, [which] is also the place of exchange. Madman, child, and woman have the word there. Especially, they have the mastery that they do not have in ordinary reality". This view of 'madness' in the novel would hold that, à propos of Foucault (1965), it is one of those

constructions, inventions, labels which society elects to impose on some of its members under specific circumstances, probably as a tool of 'social control' which can be used to justify excluding, locking up and 'operating upon' people (Parr & Philo 1995:208).

If, as Head and her critics propose, A Question of Power is autobiographical, there is a significant split, an important division between the enunciating subject -- Head herself, as author -- and the enunciated subject -- the protagonist, Elizabeth -- of the text. This split between the subject speaking the discourse, and the subject constituted discursively by it and in, mirrors the split experienced by Elizabeth within herself during her breakdown. Elizabeth is

confronted by Sello with "a projection of herself ... [as] a minute image of a small girl with pitch-black hair" (34). Here, it would seem, "[m]adness had become a thing to look at" (Foucault 1965:70). This follows her realisation that "[s]he had seen from the beginning that she had no distinct personality, apart from Sello" (32). This construction of herself as inseparable from her tormentor is crucial to an understanding of her self. It also compares interestingly with the Magistrate's inability to conceive of the barbarian woman outside of her relationship with Joll, in terms other than that of victim-torturer, in Coetzee's novel. But Elizabeth realises that "[m]aybe she made too close an identification with Sello for her own comfort and safety" (25). She attributes her inability or unwillingness to separate her self from Sello to the kind of person that she is. Upon self-analysis, she finds that "[t]here was just this loosely-knit, shuffling ambiguous mass which was her personality" (62), and we are informed from the outset "how easy it was for people with soft shuffling, loosely-knit personalities to be preyed upon by dominant, powerful persons" (12). Sello masquerades, at first, as someone Elizabeth can identify with. She finds that he addresses her in "the kind of language she understood, that no-one was the be-all and end-all of creation, that non-one had the power of assertion and dominance to the exclusion of other life" (35). Despite this, he wields immense power over Elizabeth, principally through Medusa, "a monstrous woman, looming so large that Elizabeth had to strain back to see her face. She looked hideous, with teeth six inches long" (33). It is through this witch-figure that Sello plunges Elizabeth into the depths of her

"pain-torn consciousness" (13). But Elizabeth realises that "[s]he seemed to have no distinct face of her own, her face was always turned towards Sello, whom she adored" (25). She finds that "[s]he was entirely dependent on Sello for direction and equally helpless, like a patient on his (sic) doctor for survival, assuming that the doctor knew his job" (35). This total dependence, Elizabeth realises, is unhealthy, principally because of the true nature of Sello, but also because it denies Elizabeth herself any agency and responsibility in her own fate.

It is important to note that both Sello and Medusa are projections of Elizabeth's consciousness, and any evils they are responsible for, she is in a measure generating herself. As Rose (1994:403) states, "the issue of projection is one of the central themes of Head's book". At the beginning of the novel Elizabeth still "possesse[s] the arrogance of innocence" (12). This would correspond with Margaret Atwood's (1972:36) first position of victimhood, which is "[t]o deny the fact that you are a victim". But this situation is too simplistic, since it represents Elizabeth as a passive victim. After all, "no one had come to terms with their own powers and at the same time made allowance for the powers of others" (35). And Elizabeth is at times presented as someone "Dan had set ... up as the queen of passive observation of hell" (148). It is then that she is made to realise that "[t]here wasn't any detail of her contacts with people left innocent and normal, everything was high, sexual hysteria" (160). As a result, she admits to Tom that "she was stark, raving mad" (162). This in a sense is her first acknowledgement to herself,

as well as to someone else, that Dan "had brought [her] to a state of breakdown" (169). It is during this second major breakdown, as a result of her experiences with Dan, that "she struck an abyss of utter darkness, where all appeals for mercy, relief, help were simply a mockery" (173). In this state of seemingly utter helplessness and despair Elizabeth comes to the realisation that "[s]o few shreds of my sanity remain" (175). As Foucault (1965:107) argues, for classicism, "madness, if it is nothing, can manifest itself only by departing from itself, by assuming an appearance in the order of reason and thus becoming the contrary of itself".

Her first vision of herself in relation to Sello and Medusa is that of a victim. The two nightmare figures

just asserted something and directed it at a victim, regardless of whether it made sense or not: 'You are inferior. You are filth.' Their power of assertion was so tremendous the whole flow and interchange of life stopped before it (47).

But to accept Sello's and Medusa's construction of her as inferior, as "[d]og filth" (46), is to accept "South Africa ... [where] they said the black man was naturally dull, stupid, inferior" (57). This Elizabeth refuses to do. She is designated inferior because, Medusa points out to her in the vision of the dying "homosexual Coloured men" (47), "that's what you are like ... That's your people, not African people" (45). But Elizabeth counters this vision with her belief that

When someone says 'my people' with a specific stress on the blackness of those people, they are after kingdoms and permanently child-like slaves. 'The people' are never going to rise above the status of 'the people'. They are going to be told what is good for them by the 'mother' and 'father' (63).

In this way, the vision of ethnic purity, of racial exclusivism proposed by Sello and Medusa, replicates the racism of South Africa Elizabeth fled from, as well as the colonialism to which the Batswana had been subjected themselves. But Elizabeth counters this bleak vision with the realisation that "[t]oo many people the world over were becoming mixed breeds and shading themselves down to browns and yellows and creams" (63).

Also, Dan's relationship with Elizabeth resembles that of Sello and Medusa, and Elizabeth's relationship with these two, since he too insists on telling her that "you are inferior. You cannot make it up to my level because we are not made the same way" (147). He preys on Elizabeth's feelings of sexual inadequacy by torturing her with images of himself "standing in front of her, his pants down, as usual, flaying his powerful penis in the air and saying: ' ... You haven't got a vagina'" (12-13). As Boyce Davies states, "the politics of conquest and domination are so fundamentally linked to naming" (1994:10), and Dan does not hesitate to name Elizabeth a victim, a sexual freak, "dog filth". This echoes Derrida's position that

[t]o name, to give names that it will on occasion be forbidden to pronounce, such is the originary violence of language which consists in inscribing within a difference (1976:112).

Elizabeth's torment, the inability to negotiate and establish subjectivity which manifests itself as 'madness', centres on her racial and sexual identities in the Batswana social order. However, Elizabeth does not capitulate into silence, but questions their power over her, asking "[w]hy must they choke the life out of me?" (175).

This becomes the first moment of the long process which results in the narrative of the text, the first step Elizabeth takes away from mere victimhood into the challenge offered by speech. As Davison argues, "Elizabeth unweaves the complex web of the victim-victimizer relationship and comes to understand ... the victimizer's various methods for retaining control" (1990:24). As Rose (1994:404) states, "[g]oing mad as a refugee in Botswana -- and then transforming that madness into writing -- Bessie Head violates more than one colonial stereotype and breaks a few rules". As Foucault (1965:288) states,

through the mediation of madness, it is the world that becomes culpable ... in relation to the work of art; it is now arraigned by the work of art, obliged to order itself by its language, compelled by it to a task of recognition [and re-cognition], of reparation, to the task of restoring reason from that unreason and to that unreason. The madness in which the work of art is engulfed is the space of our enterprise.

I would argue that Head's text, A Question of Power, is such a work of art, is engaged in the process of not only writing 'madness', of representing insanity, but is also engaged in the renegotiation of what 'madness' is in relation to sanity, and vice versa.

III. Powers of Speech

Driver (1996:52), in an impressive analysis of Zoë Wicomb's You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town (1987), argues that both Head and Wicomb engage in "a new mode in South African writing, steadfastly insisting on creating more complex subject positions than those of the past, with new subjectivities continually emerging at the critical point between stereotype and representations, and between one discursive subject position and another". This echoes Bhabha's (1994:170) argument that

"it is by living on the borderline of history and language, on the limits of race and gender, that we are in a position to translate the differences between them into a kind of solidarity". .

Brink (1983:231-232) argues that "[l]anguage is a meeting place, a point of confrontation, between the individual and the social", and Head's narrative inscribes Elizabeth's subjectivity in language, it articulates the quest for this subjectivity through the agency implied by the narrative act. In this regard Fanon (1967:18) suggests that one "who has a language consequently possesse[s] the world expressed and implied by that language ... Mastery of language affords remarkable power". Elizabeth's narrative, then, is both an inscription of her self into what Lacan (1977) would call the symbolic order, which for Eagleton (1996:163) "is in reality the patriarchal sexual and social order of the modern class society", and since that self is relegated to the imaginary of 'madness', and speaks itself (and its self) in the language of madness it constitutes an attempt to inscribe the imaginary in the symbolic. Sarah Nuttall (1993:10) points out that the reader's inability to tell fantasy from reality in the text corresponds with Elizabeth's own inability to do so in the world of the text. The text would therefore be engaged in what De Lauretis (1987:25) describes as "a movement from that space represented by/in a representation, by/in a discourse, by/in a sex-gender system, to the space not represented yet implied (unseen) in them". This concurs with Irigaray's argument that "social justice ... cannot be achieved without changing the laws of language and the conceptions of truths and values structuring the social order"

(1993:22). This process constitutes part of the impossible project of A Question of Power. Elizabeth finds that "[s]he seemed to have no distinct face of her own, her face was always turned towards Sello, whom she adored" (25). She also realises that "[s]he had seen from the beginning that she had no distinct personality, apart from Sello" (32). This inability to conceive of herself outside of the victim-persecutor dyad echoes Atwood's first position of victimhood as quoted earlier (1972:36). Elizabeth, when confronted with "a projection of herself [sees] a minute image of a small girl with pitch-black hair" (34). But as hooks (1995a:58) points out, "[t]o name oneself a victim is to deny agency", and Elizabeth ultimately refuses this. In accordance with Hegel's (1977:111-119) analysis of the master-slave dialectic, Elizabeth postulates that "[t]he victim is really the most flexible, the most free person on earth" (84), arguing that she does not have to bear the burden of having continually to invent new chains and new forms of torture. This corresponds with Atwood's (1972:37) outline of the third position of victimhood, which allows one "[t]o acknowledge the fact that you are a victim but to refuse to accept the assumption that the role is inevitable". It is from this position that Elizabeth realises that

She knew what was happening to her. She knew her murderer. She knew he was viciously, savagely, wildly, dangerously evil, but he was top dog. He was revelling in the power of life and death he had over her, something like the way the cat bashes the mouse around, slowly, patiently (181).

While Elizabeth's characterisation of the victim as the truly free subject in the victim-victimiser dyad would be contested by Spivak

(1988:287) and Coetzee (1992), it nonetheless offers some insight into the possibility of Atwood's fourth position of victimhood, that of the "creative non-victim" (1972:38). If, as Atwood posits, "[i]n Position Four, creative activity of all kinds becomes possible" (loc.cit.), then perhaps Elizabeth's deeply problematic assertion regarding the freedom of victims relative to their oppressors is a fictional, creative construct that results from an attempt to negotiate herself to a position where "Victor/Victim games are obsolete ... the role is no longer a temptation for you" (ibid.:39).

Elizabeth dissents (and is decentred) quite significantly from the major power politics of the social linguistic symbolic framework which she inhabits and which constructs (and constricts) her self, in that she realises that "[i]f the things of the soul are really a question of power, then anyone in possession of power of the spirit could be Lucifer" (199). After all, "[o]rdinary people never mucked up the universe. They don't have that kind of power" (190), and Elizabeth's desire is to "be the same as others in heart; just [to] be a person" (26). This disavows hooks's (1981:104) argument that "[i]n an imperialist racist patriarchal society that supports and condones oppression, it is not surprising that men and women judge their worth, their personal power, by their ability to oppress others". Elizabeth's refusal to engage in this kind of power politics stems from her life in South Africa, since "she was essentially a product of the slums and hovels of South Africa. People there had an unwritten law. They hated any black person among them who was 'important'" (26). Because of this, Elizabeth is also drawn to Sello, at first,

for he spoke "the kind of language that she understood, that no-one was the be-all and end-all of creation, that no-one had the power of assertion and dominance to the exclusion of other life" (35). Ironically, it is this insight which is later to save her from capitulating entirely into a position of passive victimhood in relation to Dan.

Elizabeth, in her refusal to capitulate to the annihilation of her self initiated by Sello, Medusa and Dan, engages in a "direct push against those rigid, false social systems of class and caste" (206). And as hooks (1992:45) points out, "[t]o speak against the grain [is] to risk punishment". The crucial point is reached when she realises "the shock of being thought of as a comrade racist" (184) by the psychiatrist at the clinic. The incident "abruptly restored a portion of her sanity" (loc.cit.), so that "[h]er soul death was really over in that instant, though she did not realize it" (188). Her return to sanity, her reclamation of control over her destiny and her self, begins significantly in language use. Its first moments occur during a conversation with Tom, who

seemed to have, in an intangible way, seen her sitting inside that coffin, reached down and pulled her out. The rest she did herself. She was poised from that moment to make the great leap out of hell (188).

During this encounter between Elizabeth and Tom, the meeting that marks the beginning of the process whereby she "pull[s] her mind out of the chaos" (147), "[i]t seemed hours went by with her broken, disjointed talk" (190). The subject therefore seems to speak her way out of insanity, "she blazes her trail in the symbolic ... make[s] of

it the chaosmos of the 'personal'" (Cixous 1976:258). If, as Foucault (1965:175) argues, in Rational discourse "madness ... is the moment of pure subjectivity", and the cure for it lies in the fact that "the subject must be restored to his (sic) initial purity, and must be wrested from his pure subjectivity in order to be initiated into the world (ibid.:176), then Elizabeth attempts to engage in this process of self-reclamation, and the restitution of herself to the world of order and to the order of the world, herself. However, in the process, she is redefining not only her self, but also her world, and the boundaries by which that world defines her self, madness and sanity. She is quite literally constituting herself as subject in language in this moment, as Lacan (1977), De Lauretis (1987) and Benveniste (1971) would argue, but as Eagleton (1996:147) shows, "[t]he pronoun 'I' stands in for the ever-elusive subject". Nuttall (1993:9-10) suggests that it is through reading and writing that control over subjectivity and its recovery is established in the novel, showing how Elizabeth is able to read a book for the first time at the end of the novel. This concurs with the earlier argument about Head's motivation for writing the novel. It is also significant that the reading and writing processes are shown to constitute one another, that the affiliation of the two processes foregrounds their inextricably and mutually dialectical dependence.

The conversation with Tom at the end of the novel also indicated a change within Elizabeth's role as agent in her own destiny. Whereas before, in relation to Mrs Jones, "Elizabeth was forced into the position of silent listener to the old woman's rambles" (170), and in

relation to Kenosi -- the "one relationship [which] escaped a head-on verbal explosion" (160) -- she finds herself "[making] every effort to avoid turning around and snapping ... until she was forced into total silence" (loc.cit.), with Tom she breaks out into speech, and refuses silence. Elizabeth therefore defies what Foucault (1965:251) describes as "the old asylum['s] structure of non-reciprocal observation ... balanc[ed] ... in a non-symmetrical reciprocity, by the new structure of language without response".

Davison (1990:25) argues that "Elizabeth's madness ... acts as a metaphoric period of gestation out of which she emerges reborn". This process occurs because Elizabeth is able, in retrospect, to "disclose the subtle balances of power between people -- how easy it was for people with soft shuffling, loosely-knit personalities to be preyed upon by dominant, powerful persons" (12). She comes to an understanding of how the oppressor-victimiser's mind works, for

[o]nce you stared the power-maniac in the face you saw that he (sic) never saw people, humanity, compassion, tenderness. It was as though he had a total blank spot and only saw his own power, his influence, his self (19; emphasis added).

Here, it is significant to note, the victim does not only speak back, but also looks back. This seems to describe Sello and Dan, and more specifically Medusa, who

express[ed] the surface reality of African society. It was shut-in and exclusive. It had a strong theme of power-worship running through it, and power people needed small, narrow, shut-in worlds. They never felt secure in the big, wide, flexible universe where there were many cross-currents of opposing thought (38).

This relates back to the categories which Elizabeth finds so oppressive, since they exclude her. For it is in her encounter with

Medusa that Elizabeth finds herself "identify[ing] with the weak, homosexual Coloured men who were dying before her eyes" (47). She realises that

the title God, in its all-powerful form, is a disaster to its holder, the all-seeing eye is the greatest temptation. It turns a man into a wild debaucher, a maddened and wilful persecutor of his fellow men (36-37).

It is because of this insight, and her history in the black slums of South Africa, that Elizabeth counters the vision of the poor given to her by Sello and Medusa, realising that

[t]he faces of oppressed people are not ugly. They are scarred with suffering. But the torturers become more hideous day by day. There are no limits to the excesses of evil they indulge in. There's no end to the darkness and death of the soul (84).

This echoes Hitchcock (1993:8), who states that "[t]he oppressed are victims of social injustice; their significance, however, does not reside in the fact of their victimisation but in the possibility that their agency will transform their lived relations". It is in her choice to be ordinary, to disavow "the possession of power of the spirit" (199), while at the same time realising that she is not powerless, that Elizabeth negotiates new ground on which to articulate her subjectivity. After all, "an awakening of her own powers" was required to facilitate "an awakening love of mankind" (35).

As Head points out,

exploitation and evil is dependent on a lack of communication between the oppressor and the people he oppresses. It would horrify an oppressor to know that his victim has the same longings, feelings, and sensitivities as he has (1990:69).

Head's novel therefore becomes the project whereby the victim refuses to capitulate into silence, and speaks her way out of victimhood,

asserting her humanity, her dignity, and her refusal to be oppressed any longer. In this she resembles Mashinini (1989:24), who declares that

I have always resented being dominated. I resent being dominated by a man, and I resent being dominated by white people, be they man or woman. I don't know if it is being politicized. It is just trying to say, 'I am human. I exist. I am a complete (sic) person.'

This disavowal of silence, this coming to speech as a repudiation of victimhood, is a complex task, since, as hooks (1995a:58) points out

[a]ll marginal groups ... who suffer grave injustices, who are victimised by institutionalized systems of domination (race, class, gender, etc.), are faced with the peculiar dilemma of developing strategies that draw attention to one's plight in such a way that will merit regard and consideration without reinscribing the paradigm of victimisation.

The task of self-reclamation, therefore, coupled as it is with the processes of decolonising the mind and asserting subjectivity and agency, is made even more difficult by the relegation of the victim into the marginal space of 'madness'. As such, new subject positions must necessarily be negotiated, and these positions would necessarily "pull down the old structures and create the new" (Head 1971:68). As Hitchcock (1993:8) argues, "[s]trategies of language use, conscious or otherwise, are not in themselves the means to transform society, yet there is no reason to suspect that they cannot facilitate such change".

IV. Breaking Boundaries, Finding New Ground

Boyce Davies (1994:4) suggests that "Black women's writing ... should be read as a series of boundary crossings". In Said's analysis

[g]one are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations and essences are rapidly coming into view, and it is those new alignments that now provoke and challenge the fundamentally static notion of identity that has been the core of cultural thought during the era of imperialism (1993:xxviii).

Similarly, Head's writing seems to propose that the negotiation of identity necessarily involves the breaking down of barriers and boundaries, both of form and of context, and as such, the allegorical mode offers excellent space within which to articulate the processes of negotiating identity and subjectivity in ways that are not generally allowed for in the conventional categories. Rushdie (1992:124-125) proposes that

[t]he effect of mass migrations has been the creation of radically new types of human being: people who root themselves in ideas rather than places, in memories as much as in material things; people who have been obliged to define themselves -- because they are so defined by others -- by their otherness; people in whose deepest selves strange fusions occur, unprecedented unions between what they were and where they find themselves. The migrant suspects reality: having experienced several ways of being, he (sic) understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier.

It can be argued that "contemporary black women writers link the struggle to become subject with a concern with emotional and spiritual well-being" (hooks 1992:50).

Elizabeth finds herself caught in "this vehement, vicious struggle between two sets of people with different looks" (19), both

in South Africa and in Botswana. This complicates the desire to "be the same as others ... just be a person" (26), for clearly, Dan and Medusa point out to her repeatedly, she is "inferior". But as Elizabeth declares, "people who have suffered from the wanton cruelty of others prefer the truth at all times, no matter what it might cost them" (38). The truth, for Elizabeth, costs her at first her sanity, but ultimately she reclaims this, and articulates a new, different subjectivity, "between stereotype and representation, and between one discursive subject position and another" (Driver 1996:52). This realisation of her understanding that "[a]ny assumption of greatness leads to a dog-eat-dog fight and incurs massive suffering" (39), is linked to her breaking down of the victim-victimiser dyad in which Sello, Medusa and Dan seem to trap her. She comes to believe that "[t]he victim is really the most flexible, the most free person on earth", for "[t]he victim of the racial attitude ... isn't the origin of the poison" (84).

The description of the Danish aid worker who

takes the inferiority of the black man so much for granted that she thinks nothing of telling us straight to our faces we are stupid and don't know anything. There's [sic] so many like her. They don't see the shades and shadows of life on black people's faces (83),

illustrates Elizabeth's disavowal of the binary thinking of racism. The "shades and shadows of life on black people's faces" remain invisible to the racist, "their proliferating difference evades that eye, escapes that surveillance" (Bhabha 1994:112).

Elizabeth also discovers, through her harsh, hellish breakdown and torture at the hands of Sello, Medusa and Dan, that

[t]oo often the feelings of the victim are not taken into account. He (sic) is so disregarded by the torturer or oppressor that for centuries evils are perpetrated with no one being aghast or put to shame (98).

But since "[t]he dividing line between good and evil is very narrow" (161), Elizabeth cannot merely disclaim her own implication in the processes of her victimisation. While her breakdown is related quite intricately and intimately with the chaos of her social order -- the racism of South Africa, the ethnic chauvinism of Botswana, the sexism of patriarchy -- Sello, Medusa and Dan, the torturers who torment her "in a tumultuous roar of mental confusion" (160), are all figures of her own imagination. They are "there right inside her and yet projected at the same time at a distance away from her" (22).

Her sanity is reclaimed through her relationships with others, especially Tom and Kenosi, and the work that she does in the garden with Kenosi. Davison (1990:24) argues that Elizabeth's "successful vegetable garden is the external symbol of her creative act of regaining a foothold on life". But it is through her friendship with Tom that she is able to negotiate a subject position for herself in the social order. She realises that

[n]o other friendship she'd ever had had been so clearly defined. She'd never noticed until then their exactly half and half contribution to it. It was as though he had half the pattern of her mental responses. They used to meet each other half way, throwing ideas to and fro (195).

This is in sharp contrast to the vicious power games played by her torturers, who "operated the affairs of the universe in secret behind the scenes" (169), so that she "was like the rabbit trapped in

helpless fascination by the powerful downward swoop of the hawk. It knows its death is near and awaits it, helplessly" (160). Again, here she seems to be moving towards Atwood's fourth position of victimhood, that of the creative non-victim (1972:38-39).

Thus, Elizabeth becomes one of those "[p]eople who think of others before themselves ... freaks" as Birgette, another Danish volunteer, calls them. At the end of the novel, which marks the end of the 'madness', since the novel also marks the madness in the symbolic, Elizabeth disavows the status of a god, and assumes what would be regarded as the lesser function of a prophet. This refusal of control over others comes from her insight that "the source of human suffering was God itself, personalities in possession of powers or energies of the soul" (190). As Head points out in the autobiographical writing published posthumously, since "those of us who have suffered much do not relish the endless wail of human suffering ... [w]e may be at a turning point and need new names for human dignity" (1990:61). This new subject position, then, is "something new and universal, a type of personality that would be unable to fit into the definition of something as narrow as tribe or race or nation" (Head 1971:16). As Boyce Davies (1994:8-9) argues,

the category Black woman ... exists as multiple performances of gender and race and sexuality based on the particular cultural, historical, geopolitical, class communities in which Black women exist.

Her ambivalence towards power, which encompasses the recognition of her power of speech, her power to resist victimisation, to refuse a soul death, is coupled at the end of the novel with her negotiation of

a space within which to establish an identity. When "she placed one soft hand over her land ... [as] a gesture of belonging" (206), the statement is deliberately ambivalent. It indicates that it is Elizabeth who finally belongs to the land, despite Dan and Medusa's insistence during her breakdown that she was not African, just as the land also belongs to her in such a way that it allows her to "pull her mind out of the chaos" (147).

For Head then, A Question of Power becomes what Cixous argues

books are ... a place ... not obliged to reproduce the system. That is writing. If there is a somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where it writes itself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds (Cixous & Clément 1986:72).

This concurs with hooks (1995b:3), who argues that "[r]epresentation is a crucial location of struggle for any exploited and oppressed people asserting subjectivity and decolonization of the mind".

Therefore, in accordance with Foucault (1965:289),

the work [of art] endlessly drives madness to its limits; where there is a work of art, there is no madness; and yet madness is contemporary with the work of art, since it inaugurates the time of its truth. The moment when, together, the work of art and madness are born and fulfilled is the beginning of the time when the world finds itself arraigned by that work of art and responsible before it for what it is.

Head herself says of her own mother's sexual union with a man across the racial divides, "there is no world as yet for what she has done" (1991:65); this world, one could argue, and the possibilities for subjectivity and human dignity opened up by and in it, is created in Head's work, and is described as "a world apart from petty human hatreds and petty human social codes and values where the human soul roamed free in all its splendour and glory. No barriers of race or

creed or tribe hindered its activity" (Head 1971:67). Whereas before, Head states, "I never felt I could write about people in South Africa because they were all torn up and un-representative of any definite kind of wholeness" (1991:27), with A Question of Power she attempts to establish that subject position denied by the sociopolitical realities of her country of origin. That the novel is autobiographical makes it all the more effective.

Chapter 5

Order out of Chaos

Mike Nicol's The Powers That Be

Mike Nicol is one of the more interesting writers emerging in the later years of apartheid South Africa, and could be argued to be a literary descendant of Coetzee, with whom he has been compared (Finnegan 1989:9). Throughout his oeuvre, Nicol is concerned with the relationship between historiography, and forgotten, misremembered narratives of oppressed, suppressed, often forgotten people in South Africa. These concerns are reflected in his revisitation of the 1921 Israelite revolt in the Eastern Cape, and the genocidal suppression of a black uprising in the northern Cape and southern Namibia in 1922 in This Day and Age (1992), Horseman (1994), and The Waiting Country (1995). The latter of these episodes also figures significantly in The Powers That Be (1989), his first novel. In this novel, the text under examination here, I argue that the paradoxical and postmodern inscription and simultaneous interrogation of stereotype, as well as the allegorical mode in which the novel operates, offers interesting possibilities for the representation of subaltern subjectivity, as well as the impractical project of engaging in such an act of representation.

Nicol reiterates many of the tropes engaged in and critiqued by the three writers previously examined in this dissertation, and

interrogates not only the stereotypes themselves, but also the processes and modes through which these are represented.

I. Law and Order

The world of Nicol's novel, "a place that doesn't even have a name, that isn't even officially there. Not even a spot on the map" (163), is ruled by "Captain Nunes, policeman, upholder of law and order, defender of Christian ways" (167), as he describes himself. In this way he becomes an allegorical representation of apartheid officialdom, much like Joll in Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians. It is his belief that "[o]nly with laws do they behave right. Otherwise there's (sic) no morals" (165), after all, "without laws what chance is there of order" (3). These laws constitute, as Foucault (1970:xvii) states,

a table ... that enables thought to operate upon the entities of our world, to put them in order, to divide them into classes, to group them according to names that designate their similarities and their differences -- the table upon which, since the beginning of time, language has intersected space.

And the language of Nunes' regulations, of his order, in its resemblance to the language of apartheid discourse, does organise space as it intersects with it. Not only is the physical space of the village itself affected by his regulatory ordinances, but as a direct result also of the physical re-ordering of the village, the ideological space in which subjectivity is negotiated is also altered.

But his relationship with the village is a peculiarity of his own construction; after all, "he represented law and order and he knew that in this stinking port a great crime was being committed" (3).

Therefore, if as Foucault (1977:194) argues, "power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth", then the crime Nunes imagines and projects onto the villagers is constructed by the very laws he creates in order to prevent such a crime from being perpetrated. As a result,

the captain brought his boot down on the village's neck. And as he'd done to so many helpless victims before, he kept it there while they choked in the heat and dust. It was one way, he'd always found, of getting to the little secrets of a person's life (3).

In this way, again, he resembles Joll in Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians, though because he declares that "I am the judge" (86), he can also be said to assume the role of Coetzee's magistrate. He represents, therefore, effectively both law and order as "he watched for signs of rebellion in the streets" (1; emphasis added). And as Foucault (1977:167) argues,

discipline creates out of the bodies it controls four types of individuality that is endowed with four characteristics: it is cellular (by the play of spatial distribution), it is organic (by the coding of activities), it is genetic (by the accumulation of time), it is combinatory (by the composition of forces). And in doing so, it operates four great techniques: it draws up tables; it prescribes movements; it imposes exercises; ... it arranges 'tactics'.

This description is particularly apt for Nunes's activities in the village.

Nunes's arrival in the village means that "something had been taken away [from the inhabitants] and imprisoned, they were no longer free" (3). The various regulations that Nunes implements are chiefly responsible for this. His first act is to classify everyone in the village according to his two-class schema. Thus, once

Nunes had divided the village into first- and second-class citizens, [he] prepared a list of laws by which each group was ruled (5).

Like the laws of apartheid South Africa -- Nunes's two-class divisions are reminiscent of the Population Registration Act 30 of 1950 -- Nunes's regulations stipulate that "people in the second class ... could visit those in the first class provided they went in the back door" (5). He stipulates that

Fagmie Jabaar was to build a wall down the centre of his shop and to serve people in the first class from one side, and people in the second class from the other (5).

This is perversely like the Separate Amenities Act of apartheid South Africa. His ordinance that "no one from the second class could order a drink at Fagmie Jabaar's tables" (5), is resonant of the liquor laws that prevented black people from buying alcoholic beverages in apartheid South Africa, which is reported by Bloke Modisane in his autobiography, Blame me on History (1986), among others. Most pernicious of all his regulations though, is his version of the Mixed Marriages Act and Immorality Act. He decrees that

[i]n families where marriage had paired a person from the first class with another from the second, they would be classified according to the lower status. And in future such marriages would not be allowed (5).

Like petty apartheid, his regulations pervade every aspect of social life, so that "in church, all first-class citizens were to sit on the right-hand side, all second-class citizens on the left" (5). And then, additionally, in echo of apartheid South Africa's Group Areas Act,

[n]or could the classes live among one another. The hill was reserved for those in the first class, the shores of the lagoon for those in the second (5).

As Nunes declares emphatically, "the law says ... that people must be classified and live accordingly" (6). Consequently, when "he had now finished classifying everybody according to the law ... [Mrs. Vygie Bond discovers] that she, and her family, being of mixed blood, fell in the second class" (4). This illustrates, Foucault's argument that

the ordering of things by means of signs constitutes all forms of knowledge as knowledge based upon identity and difference ... [where] we shall find the signs that have become the tools of analysis, marks of identity and difference, principles whereby things can be reduced to order, keys for a taxonomy (1970:57-58).

When Augustin Shoote protests that "[w]hat you are doing is inhuman. They may be the laws but that does not make them right" (16), Nunes is incredulous and angry, since "he would not tolerate any interference in his affairs, even from the Church. What he decreed was law and not to be challenged" (4).

But the legal restrictions are only one step of Nunes's larger plan to get at the villagers' secret, since "[t]o Nunes they were all guilty, conspirators in a great plot against law and order" (9). As such they seem to inhabit the position assigned to women in patriarchal society according to Clément (in Cixous & Clément 1986:6), so that they are "mad, full of badly remembered memories, guilty of unknown wrongs". Like Joll in Coetzee's novel, Nunes goes on to interrogate the villagers, because, as Cixous (1976:250) states, they "occup[y] the place reserved for the guilty (guilty of everything, guilty at every turn". But, "[t]he interrogations were only part of Captain Nunes's oppressive regime. He had an almost missionary zeal

to reform" (10). The interrogations are also accompanied by torture, which, as Foucault (1977:34) states,

is a differentiated production of pain, an organised ritual for the marking of victims and the expression of the power that punishes.

This idea of reformation was crucial to the early apartheid planners and thinkers, as Brian Lapping (1988) shows, but it was paired with a desire to demonstrate the power of the apartheid state, and its apparatus.

One of Nunes's strategies to uncover the secret conspiracy which conceals the great crime in the settlement is his use of his daughter, sacrificing her and what she means to him in his quest for the truth. In this way she becomes the object of value which Nunes exchanges (or at least, is willing to exchange) for the truth, in accordance with Irigaray (1985a:31). As we are told from the beginning of Montague Planke's narrative, "[e]very morning for the three years that he terrorized the village, Captain Sylvester Nunes had his daughter, Frieda, shave him on the verandah" (1). In this activity Frieda takes the role of her mother, since "[t]he men of this family have always been shaved by their women" (1). The relationship of ownership is reiterated throughout the text by Nunes, and even Frieda "thought: I am now my father's wife" (2). This is doubly ironic, since Frieda's mother, Nunes's wife, died in mysterious circumstances, though it is hinted that he may have killed her in the shaving ritual, as Nunes himself tells Frieda the story of the man who killed his wife for wanting to kill him during such a shaving ritual. Therefore, during

the moment of vulnerability, Nunes indicates to Frieda that it is she who is at risk and subject to his power.

All the while "he was still watching, still planning to discover their secret" (12). And in this project, this missionary zeal with which he searches for the enigma at the centre of the settlement's existence, "if he wanted to see someone, he had Frieda summon them with a curt, 'You must come immediately, the captain wants you'" (13). In this scheme, the villagers are made available to the captain, and more specifically, their bodies are at his disposal in much the same way black bodies are available to the apartheid state machinery, and female bodies are available to masculinist discourses. Therefore, Frieda becomes the tool by which Nunes effects his investigation of the village. At first she is merely his messenger. After all, it is his belief that "[s]he was his. And if she couldn't be his, then she would be nobody's" (15). But it is with Lady Sarah's insistence that Frieda is integrated into village life, that Nunes sees the opportunity to use her in other ways to get at the village secret. At first he is firm that "[n]o father can have a spoiled girl for a daughter" (15), so that, in accordance with the regulations he had pinned up at Fagmie Jabaar's upon arrival, the idea of Frieda and Stevie, "a mere fisherboy from the second class" (17), fills him with revulsion. After all, a sexual union across the legal barriers "is the greatest filth, condemned by God and man, worse even than fucking a goat" (15). This characterisation of sexual relations across the boundaries established by his ordinances relegates the citizens of the second class to what Head calls a "state below animal, below living"

(14). In this way Nunes embodies the dictates of the apartheid state apparatus of South Africa that deemed the sexual union of black and white criminal -- Head's A Question of Power and the discussion on the Immorality Act and Elizabeth's "origins" in the previous chapter are illuminating here. But what redeems Nunes's plan is his view that "Stevie ... could possibly be reclassified by virtue of a doubtful father and grandmother" (15-16). It is also then that he admits that "what else are women for, if not to serve men ... Especially their fathers" (23). Here, women are designated to second-class status, so that they are open to use and abuse by men like Nunes and Mondling.

But even when

Nunes had let almost all his regulations slip, ... he would not tolerate women drinking at Fagmie Jabaar's tables. It was the first step to prostitution, he maintained (22-23).

He has no qualms, though, about prostituting Frieda in order to get at the truth he is convinced the villagers are hiding from him. But the obsession with classification, the distinction between the first and second class citizens resembles more and more the blood and purity obsessions outlined by Coetzee (1988:136-162) in his discussion of Sarah Gertrude Millin's novels. After all, Nunes wonders, "would these insects lie to me when I could have squashed them beneath my thumb ... these mixed-bloods" (51). And as he declares to Lady Sarah, "what I care about is what they are doing. What law they are breaking" (72). Here the world created by Nunes and his regulations resemble Biko's description of South Africa as a place where

[n]o average black man (sic) can ever at any moment be absolutely sure that he is not breaking a law. There are

so many laws governing the lives and behaviour of black people that sometimes one feels that the police only need to page at random through their statute book to be able to get a law under which to charge a victim (1996:75).

Nunes sees the villagers as "people who cannot live without doing wrong. They are anarchists. Subversives. Everything they do is to destroy law and order" (72). It is in the light of these views that Nunes sets out to assert that

[e]ven when he was at his most vulnerable, he still held the power of life and death, he was in charge ... Once more he was in control, once again he could bring law and order to this miserable place ... Now, no matter what it took, he would learn their secret, he would have them tell him, each one of them, he would have them all confess the dark sin they kept close to their hearts (70).

This echoes Mashinini's description of her imprisonment and interrogation by the South African police:

Always they wanted the truth, when I had no more truth to tell. I don't think they ever really understood that in fact there was nothing to give away. But they always tried to find it, this nothing (1989:75).

When Nunes declares, in a moment of anger and paranoia, that "[m]eetings are forbidden. You must disperse. You must disperse" (74), he resembles various police officials during the later years of the apartheid era and the state of emergency. In this regard Lady Sarah's moral indictment of Nunes -- "Like all your type, you imagine a conspiracy ... It is you who are the criminal, captain, you who betray and terrify" (72-73) -- becomes allegorical of the liberal indictment of the apartheid South African state and its apparatus. This also echoes the Magistrate's epiphany in Waiting for the Barbarians, that the true barbarians are not the prisoners captured by Joll, but those figures like Joll within Empire itself who later subject the Magistrate himself to their methods of establishing the

truth. But like the apartheid state, the crisis and Nunes's paranoia only drive him to declare that "[t]here will be new regulations ... Anyone breaking this decree will be shot on sight. By order" (77). What results is that, as Fletcher (1964:214) states, "the contagion may be walled in, instead of walled out". It is also at this moment that he admits that "justice was only for the powerful", and the villagers "were scum and criminals, drunkards and half-breeds, fit for nothing other than scrounge-life" (loc.cit.). Thus the villagers -- especially the fisherfolk of Nunes's second class -- begin to resemble the Khoi and San of the white imaginary described by Coetzee (1988:12-35). This view clashes directly with Augustin Shoote's assertion that "[t]his is an ordinary village with ordinary people. They deserve to be left alone to live out a life that is hard enough" (78). This concurs with Head's Elizabeth in A Question of Power, who desires to "be the same as others in heart; just [to] be a person" (26). But even Shoote's view of the second class citizens is condescending, like the liberal view of black people in South Africa. As he states,

I look at them, these fisherfolk, and I see faith, the simplicity of belief which I cannot share. How can they accept these things without screaming at the sky, without shaking their fists, without crying with rage? Why is it so easy for them (78-79).

Here Shoote seems to reflect Biko's view that "[t]he liberals view the oppression of blacks as a problem that has to be solved, an eye sore spoiling an otherwise beautiful view" (1996:22).

But his is a less harsh, though perhaps not less oppressive, view of the fisherfolk than Nunes's. It is the captain who accuses his daughter of having "slept with a mixed-blood. You have shamed me,

bitch, I shall be the laughing stock of this miserable hole" (79). This seems a revision of what had happened: Frieda is charged with sole responsibility for her relationship with Stevie, when Captain Nunes was the one who introduced them and encouraged her to pursue a relationship with the fisherman. But it is this very relationship which leads him to exclaim, with disdain,

What right had this daughter, a violated woman carrying the child of a mixed-blood, to lie between his sheets, what right had she, now little better than a common fishertype (81; emphasis added).

The incestuous implication here, that Frieda has truly become her mother, her father's wife, is so significant that her relationship with Stevie, even though it is at Nunes's own initiation, becomes an affront to his honour. Thus it would seem that marriage to, sexual relations with, and worst of all, being impregnated by, a man of the second class, results in the woman of the first class being demoted to the lower status. This is how Mad Minnaar becomes what she is, and it is also why Nunes spurns his daughter so utterly. This echoes a more general trope in colonialist discourse, that manifests itself in an exaggerated fear of the sexuality of the colonised; this is also a trope in racist discourse, in which black sexuality becomes an affront to white male sexuality and a threat to white femininity. In disavowing their blood relation, Nunes is attempting to enforce his desire that "there would be law and order again, a proper time and a proper place for everything" (81). Here he seems to be doing the opposite of the protagonists in the previous three novels examined in this thesis. Each of them -- the Magistrate in Waiting for the

Barbarians, the slave woman in The Expedition to the Baobab Tree, and Elizabeth in A Question of Power -- attempted to show how improper their time and place had been, and to deconstruct, to interrogate and turn inside out the very notions of a proper time and place. Again, Nunes reiterates a longstanding view of the Khoi and San when he describes how there would be

[n]o more loitering, as they were now [doing], outside the coolie store, no more of their treasonable meetings in the streets; because wasn't it true that whenever more than two were gathered together subversion and anarchy would only spread and fester (81; emphases added).

This emphases above illustrate the medical structure of Nunes's view, which concurs with the implications of contagion in political dissidence outlined by Fletcher (1964:214). It also echoes the description Coetzee (1988:25-35) gives of the colonialist discourse and its construction of the Khoi and San at the Cape through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Nunes constructs himself as their "saviour from this mire of indolence" (loc.cit.), but this indolence, or "idleness" (Coetzee 1988:16), may be read as one of "innumerable subaltern examples of resistance" (Spivak 1987:245). But this is not the only connection between the Khoi and San, and the people of the settlement. When the history of the settlement is recounted in the second section of the novel, we are told of "two brothers and a young girl thought to be the ancestors of the goatherds who lived down the lagoon" (95), and of "[t]he people ... especially the females, [who] looked more beautiful than the women they [the white sailors] had left behind" (94). These ancestors are also described as "the two brothers and their common wife" (95), so that

later Nunes can describe the villagers as "a bunch of fisherpeople so interscrewed not one of them has a hand of five fingers let alone a straight eye" (164). This does indeed reflect the fear of "taint, flaw, degeneration" that Coetzee (1988:136) discusses in relation to miscegenation and its representation and construction in South African apartheid discourse. It is also because the child conceived by Frieda and Stevie will be what Nunes considers a "mixed-breed", "that evil tadpole" (159), that he forces her to have an abortion. But as he constructs the abortion, it is also a renewal, a rebirth for Frieda and his relationship with his daughter -- he sends her to Mad Minnaar to be "[c]leaned out. Virginal ... Tell her I want to feel a new hymen" (82). This moment reveals precisely how "he had forced Frieda into his bed" (80), because "I went further than other fathers, but all fathers think what I did" (159). And here it seems that as Irigaray (1985a:31-32) states, "women are marked phallicly (sic) by their fathers, husbands, procurers. And this branding determines their value in sexual commerce". As Nunes declares, "[s]he was my girl. Always my girl. Those were my eyes, my flesh and blood, mine" (159; emphasis added). What is also significant here is the duality of the possessive pronouns: they refer to both the genetic links between Nunes and Frieda, as father and daughter, and the sexual ownership of their incestuous relationship.

In this respect he resembles Mondling, the Sudwester, and his relationship with the creature with whom he arrives at the settlement. The villagers ponder whether "[i]f cages were used to capture bad animals then maybe they were also used to capture poor souls" (57),

and the cage on Mondling's ship is suspected of having contained such a creature. It is significant that both Nunes and Mondling characterise those whom they consider their inferiors, as animals -- in this way they resemble the Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians who compares the barbarian woman to a fox; the slave woman in Stockenström's novel who compares herself, uncomfortably, to the animals of the wilderness where she finds herself; and also Sello, Medusa and Dan in Head's A Question of Power, who consider Elizabeth "dog-filth" (46).

But the origins of the creature which Mondling brings to the settlement, "the damned one" (60), are far more sinister than the villagers at first suspect. They imagine "a naked body tormented by demons with red-hot knives and forks, descriptions which nevertheless became the stuff of nightmares" (loc.cit.) when Mondling denies them access to his secret. But later they are confronted with

a naked girl covered in hair, her gums snarling over wolf-teeth, four nipples on her chest, claws for nails, who moved like an animal and stank worse than jackals ... she was emerging on an all-fours lope from the cellar, manacled to a length of chain (loc.cit.).

Like the "devil [Nunes imagines Stevie] was ... breeding in my girl" (159), Mondling's creature, which turns out to be the daughter of his wife Meisie and their gardener, is "a strange specimen, neither one thing nor the other ... a girlwolf large as life chained to a stake" (60; emphasis added). Here she inhabits what Foucault (1965:11) describes as "the madman's liminal position". Even Mondling describes her as "an animal, the devil's practical joke" (61). Here, in Foucault's (1965:72) argument

[m]adness borrowed its face from the mask of the beast ... as if madness, at its extreme point, freed from that moral unreason in which its most attenuated forms are enclosed, managed to rejoin, by a paroxysm of strength, the immediate violence of animality.

The history of the unfortunate Meisie Koekemoer Mondling and the gardener, "the man of Meisie's dream ... the whitest kaffir he'd [Mondling] ever come across" (62), resembles closely the relationship between Nunes, Stevie and Frieda. It is also significant that Mondling reveals this story to Nunes, with whom he presumes, perhaps rightly, to share several beliefs and attitudes. Thus, it is in a measure Mondling who inspires Nunes's horrible suspicions of the child Frieda is pregnant with. It is Mondling who

got it into his head that his daughter didn't look anything like him, looked only vaguely like her mother but had the unmistakably generous nose and mouth of his gardener. This cute child, he realised, was no throwback from some distant union of contrasting skins, no surprise from a genetic stew, this was the product of illicit, adulterous, wicked, totally unforgivable whoremongering (64; emphasis added).

The emphases above reflect the language of the obsession with racial purity outlined by Coetzee (1988:152-156) in Sarah Gertrude Millin's oeuvre. And in this way "the creature, fear in its eyes, trapped in the middle of the yard" (61) resembles Head's Elizabeth who is returned to the orphanage because she did not look white enough. The rejection Head's Elizabeth suffers because of a white supremacist, racist system is similar to the rejection of the girl child of Meisie and the gardener, except that while Elizabeth does grow up to claim subjectivity,

until she died the child ... never learnt to talk, forgot how to cry, became an animal dependent on the scraps thrown to her from the back door or over the fence and the

bowl of water, filled every second day (64).

Of course, as true patriarchs, both Nunes and Mondling blame these events and their significance on "the cunning of women. Those wily, loveless bitches out for nothing but their own pleasure, fickle-hearted sluts" (66). This indictment of women as prostitutes, as conniving and calculating, and as animals, embodies the stereotypes black women have always been identified with and by in racist imperial patriarchies. However, there remains the possibility, hinted at by Montague Planke, that Mondling's daughter, crossing boundaries from beyond the grave, may have been involved in his mysterious death. He tells Fagmie Jabaar that "however Mondling died, it wasn't at the hand of another man" (87; emphasis added), even when Jong Jan tells them that "he'd seen a strange man in the village the previous morning [i.e. the morning before Mondling's death]" (86). The emphasis above indicates the ambiguity of "man": it remains unclear whether he is referring to a male human being, or a more generalized reference to a human being.

II. Stereotypes and Other Monsters

Nicol's novel, though, seems to be engaged in a two-edged enterprise of inscribing stereotypical representations of women at the same time as it interrogates these stereotypes as constructions, as inventions, and as mechanisms of control. In the previous section I have examined at length the ways in which the laws, the regulations instituted and enforced by Nunes, rely heavily on stereotypical views of women and blacks, and also of black women, for their own internal logic. It is

the arbitrariness of this logic that Nicol seems to be foregrounding in his analytical critique of apartheid South Africa's power politics and social relations.

However, paradoxically perhaps, Nicol also inscribes black women -- and this category will be elaborated upon shortly -- in stereotypical roles. Perhaps this is a result of his allegorical project, with its emblematic and symbolic characters, each demonstrating some function or value in a secondary order.

The first stereotypical figure is the white black woman, Mad Minnaar, who is considered second class -- which to all intents and purposes corresponds with the position inhabited by black South Africans in the novel -- by the logic of Nunes's regulations. Through her marriage to the drunken sot, she becomes "Mad Minnaar, the crone ... this strange prophet of doom" (7). The oracular function of women is a trope in western literature that dates back to antiquity, and has its most powerful manifestations in the figure of the witch (for example, in Shakespeare's Macbeth, the three sisters prophesy Macbeth's rise to and fall from power). Most of what Mad Minnaar has to say is "the apocrypha of a soothsayer ... a vast mumbo-jumbo" (7), so that we are provided here with "[h]er association with sorcery ... the lady of dark powers" (Bernikow 1980:228). But she becomes the focus of Nunes's first interrogation session. As Montague Planke informs us in his narrative,

Nunes had deliberately chosen his victim. He must have seen her as all that was bad in the village: a woman enslaved by superstition, who saw signs and omens everywhere, who had committed, to the captain, the unforgivable sin of taking up with a man of the second

class (loc.cit.).

In this way his view of Mad Minnaar and her liaison with her drunken sot corresponds with Mondling's view of Meisie's liaison with the gardener. It is significant that in neither case is the black man named. This too has echoes of Elizabeth's parents in Head's A Question of Power -- Elizabeth is named for her mother, but her father remains nameless throughout her narrative, as the name of Head's own father, in fact his identity, is lost to history.

And it is because of this "unforgivable sin" that Mad Minnaar loses the dubious privilege of being excepted from the torture to which the fisherfolk of the second class are subjected during Nunes's first interrogation sessions. It is only later, when Nunes becomes desperate, that not even citizens of the first class such as Lady Sarah -- who, it could be argued, has forfeited the privilege of first class status because of her undefined relationship with Samuel, the son of Joseph, the "hotnot kaffir" (58) as Mondling calls him -- escape his hideous, tortu(r)ous interrogations and violent abuse. Thus Nunes could dismiss "the crone's fantastic rumblings ... She was raving now, the way she sometimes did when she'd had too much dagga" (7). But as he himself admits, he no longer sought only answers, "all he wanted was their fear" (10). Still, it is Mad Minnaar's prophecy, that "only people with troubled pasts end up here" (31), that becomes the double-edged sword by which Nunes judges the community, and by which they judge him.

But the histories with which Montague Planke provides us derive mostly from the writing of citizens of the first class. Firstly there

is Mrs. Hansen's diary, the journal of a white woman, and there is also Captain Hansen's ship's log, an official document in which various entries record some of the legal and public life of the settlement. We are informed how, for example,

the lives of people like Samuel's parents never found their way into the official history books. After all, they are just ordinary people and what historian is concerned with ordinary people (32).

Unlike Head's Elizabeth, though, Montague Planke offers very little by way of history for the ordinary people. Most of the narrative is taken up by Lady Sarah's account of her own arrival and that of Mad Minnaar and her sister Dorothea, three white women delivered to the settlement after a shipwreck on their way to the Cape from the northern hemisphere, presumably Europe. It is Mondling who describes "the wars of independence ... [as] nothing more than an excuse for mayhem and plunder" (32-33). Here his account reveals the imperial nature of the history of conquest on the subcontinent, and echoes Conrad's characterisation of the colonial enterprise in Heart of Darkness as

just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind -- as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea -- something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer sacrifice to (1902:31-32).

Nunes and Mondling resemble both one another and Conrad's colonisers, in that they believe in the right of white civilisation and the need to conquer the "kaffirs" (53) through extreme violence. And it is

Nunes who, during Mondling's confessional narrative of his own dubious and troubled past, longs "to have lived in those times when the divides were simple, when there were Europeans, kaffirs and a savage land ... How much easier" (56). He is in agreement with Mondling, who states that "if they won't learn then we will exterminate the rubbish" (54). This echoes Kurtz's statement in his report in Heart of Darkness that they should "Exterminate all the brutes!" (1902:87). After all, they collude, Mondling and Nunes, and the latter agrees with the former that "the history books do not have it the way it was. Always they have a bias, the bias of someone with a point to make; but I have no point to make, I simply tell you about the things I saw and felt" (53). But, as Coetzee's narrator shows, the very act of telling is a construction and an interpretation, and it is Lady Sarah who declares that "[a]ll stories are real stories once they're told" (28). It is important to note that it is a woman, Lady Sarah, who provides an alternative value system to Nunes's regime of "law and order", and principally through the creative act of story-telling. These are significant oppositions in a text where the women of the second class, the women who allegorically represent the black women in South Africa, are the singular exceptions to the telling and corroboration of stories. And Lady Sarah's defiance of Nunes's interrogations and their failure to uncover the truth he is seeking, is crucial in this regard. She impels him to listen to her, for, she states,

You've been told many things, captain, but in truth, you know very little. Even with all your interrogations you've not scratched the surface of this place (29).

Thus the story of Samuel's presence in the town and the arrival of his parents, is not told by either of them -- they are significantly dead, along with several of the native inhabitants of the settlement; this is perhaps allegorical of the absence in South African discourse of Khoi and San histories given the decimation of these people throughout the period of colonial settlement -- but by Lady Sarah. What we know of Mary and Joseph -- and their names are allegorically representative of the functions they serve: to bring into being the prophet Samuel, significantly named, as they all are, who keeps a watch out for the arrival of Nunes -- is told to Nunes by Lady Sarah. That "Mary ... found work charring for the Beg-rips and the Hansens" (35), and "gave birth as if she'd had a string of children to ease this one's passage into the world" (loc.cit.) are both indications of her stereotypical status in the novel. She is comparable in her blankness to Fagmie Jabaar's wife, Sheemina, and they are both reminiscent of the blankness which the barbarian girl constitutes for the Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians. We are informed at various points how "Sheemina served them tea ... Sheemina cleared away the cups" (75), and "what else has Sheemina to do, but dusting" (67). That Sheemina is not really Indian, not really a citizen of the second class, only makes the point about the stereotypical, silent and blank representation of black women more powerfully. It is because of her status as a white woman disguised as a black one, a first-class citizen masquerading as a second-class one, that she is as blank as she is. Thus, when Nunes declares to Frieda that "[w]omen should stay in the house. You have no business in the world" (69), he seems not

to be speaking of Lady Sarah, or any of the women of the first class, but more pointedly of the black women, and the white women who have the status of their second-class counterparts, such as Mad Minnaar and Frieda, who are such because of their relationships with the second-class men. He also seems to echo Marlow's sentiments in Conrad's Heart of Darkness, that "[t]hey -- the women I mean -- are out of it -- should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own" (1902:84). Nunes, unlike Marlow, does not disguise his misogyny, founded as it may be on fear, though. He states outright that "I hate women. They spurn me. My mother, even my own daughter, spurns me" (160). Frieda does not speculate about her mother's early death, but the story Nunes tells his daughter before she starts to fill her mother's role in shaving him hints at the possibility that he killed her. In this respect he resembles Mondling who kills his wife, Meisie, then goes about "divorcing father from daughter" (65), the result of which action is the creature he keeps on a chain in his yard. The incestuous relationships between white fathers and their daughters are juxtaposed with the non-monogamous relationships among the second-class citizens. Notable among these are "the two brothers and their common wife" (95) who are the ancestors of the goatherds. We are told how "[a] little bartering must have taken place, as Captain Hansen mentions securing the girl's favours in exchange for some knives" (96). Here the black woman is not only the economic unit which is exchanged for commodity gain, but also the one who engages in what Nunes -- and patriarchal society more generally -- would consider immoral behaviour. She fulfils further

stereotypical functions -- the black woman as nurse, as healer, as mystical medicine woman -- when we are told that during the difficult birth of Mrs. Hansen's first child "the wife of the goatherds ... put the medicines on the stoep, and went off to squat on the dune in a vigil of solidarity" (101). Mrs. Hansen calls her a "witch" (loc.cit.), which label later also incorporates Mad Minnaar, the white woman who has been classed a second-class citizen, as she performs the abortion Nunes forces Frieda to undergo.

The other white woman masquerading as a black woman, the stereotypically blank Sheemina, is defined by her relationship with Fagmie Jabaar, as good wife and mother. But since she is not truly Indian, the Jabaars -- or as they are known in the novel, the Fagmie Jabaars, so that her identity is inextricable from her husband's -- are subjected to

the police, waking them up at all hours of the morning, flashing torches into their bedroom, arrests, court cases, nights in jail. Their crime was that Sheemina wasn't Indian. She was Christian white, and before she met Fagmie her name was Rosalind Mills (116).

The details of her life as a black woman remain obscure, except for the limited, functional roles quoted earlier. And her crime, again, recalls the discussion about miscegenation and the Immorality Act engaged in by Coetzee (1992) and Ngcobo (1991), which is dealt with in detail in the previous chapter on Head's novel and Elizabeth's origins.

It is perhaps Mad Minnaar herself who best encapsulates the crisis faced by and represented in the novel, when she declares "who gives a damn about women" (124). It seems, as Nicol's novel

illustrates, that white women are cared about a little more than black women, even if this does not amount to much.

Finella, who is acquired in a transaction from her grandmother for Boatswain Baleen by Montague Planke and Fagmie Jabaar, fulfils the demands of a good woman. As Planke says to Fagmie Jabaar,

what you're looking for [is a]n untouched woman, pure in body, mind and soul who will be wife, companion, mother to his children; devotee until his dying day. And, most importantly, a woman young enough to train in his ways (131).

Not only does this function as an apt description for Finella -- whose only outstanding features are her tambourine playing, and her fetish for jigsaw puzzles which leads her to reconstruct the shredded paper containing Nunes's name on the beach -- but it also doubles as a description of the function Sheemina serves in her relationship with Fagmie Jabaar. The white women, the women of the first class, such as Mrs. Hansen and Lady Sarah, are keepers of stories that we are told. The former keeps a journal, the latter is given the responsibility of telling the story of the settlement to Nunes. The notable exception, Mad Minnaar, the white woman who has been transformed into a black one, a first class citizen reduced to second class status, is precisely that: mad. Here, again, like Mondling's creature, Mad Minnaar inhabits what Foucault (1965:11) characterises as the mad subject's liminal position in Rational discourse. Like Head's Elizabeth, she embodies all that is bad, and she "remains the threatening possibility of savagery, the unknown quantity" (Cixous in Cixous & Clément 1986:91), like the barbarian woman in Coetzee's novel. She also offers an interrogation of the patriarchal conception

(category) of sanity, as Elizabeth does, for as Foucault (1965:58) states, "madness ... crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order".

III. The Politics of Control

Nicol's entire novel could be said to be an exploration of the politics of control: control over narrative, truth, subjectivity and agency. Just as Nunes controls Frieda, his daughter, and as he once controlled his wife, so he attempts to control the activities of the villagers. The shaving ritual is an exploration of his power to control others, his wife and then Frieda, for it illustrates that "[e]ven when he was at his most vulnerable, he still held the power of life and death, he was in charge" (70). Thus, when "[l]eft and right I pinned regulations on them: don't do this, don't do that, don't go here, don't go there ... People got to have regulations, laws" (165), he is merely extending his wish for control in the domestic sphere as husband and father (illustrated by his characterisation of the shaving ritual), into the public sphere in his capacity as a police officer.

Also, like Joll and the Magistrate in Coetzee's Waiting for the Barbarians, Nunes plays with visibility and invisibility to effect his power games. Augustin Shoote "tried to find beneath the sunglasses that merely reflected his face" (13) a trace of humanity, but fails. It is Nunes himself who "was still watching ... to discover their secret" (12). He is the one who plays games of control, constituting himself as the viewing subject, and the villagers as the viewed objects. This echoes Joll and the Magistrate in Coetzee's novel, and Mulvey's (1975:465) argument on the male gaze as the controlling agent

in the subject-object relations between the male and female in narrative. In his encounter with Lady Sarah we are told how "Nunes watched her the way scientists watched insects: closely, piercingly" (30). This is both a repetition and an inversion of how the Magistrate characterises Joll's hiding behind sunglasses. The Magistrate describes Joll's eyes as insect eyes, yet Montague Planke tells how it is the object of Nunes's gaze that is reduced to the status of an insect. Nunes himself describes the villagers as "insects [who would] lie to me when I could have squashed them beneath my thumb" (51). And later, when he is being interrogated by Nunes, "Augustin Shoote found himself searching for signs of humanity behind the dark glasses. But all he saw was his own reflection" (86). In this respect he mirrors Coetzee's Magistrate and his encounter with Joll: in attempting to mediate between the torturer and the tortured, in attempting to establish a neutral, interested but non-polemical position, the mediator becomes the tortured. After all, Nunes can only think in terms of "[p]risoners ... Or victims ... Or political prisoners" (133), in the language of apartheid South Africa's Bureau of State Security and police force.

But Nunes's power wavers, and is lost when he realises that he too is an object in the gaze of the villagers. His realisation echoes that of Coetzee's Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians, who becomes aware that he does not know, and cannot know, how the fisherfolk and the barbarian prisoners see him; the Magistrate also becomes aware that while he had overlooked them, their individuality, he had been exposed to them in his own singularity. Similarly, we are

told how "[e]very eye in the village followed Captain Nunes ... inscrutable behind dark glasses" (50). The obverse of this view of Nunes, narrated by Montague Planke, is Nunes's own realisation that as he "stood there for some minutes watching the deserted streets, [he became] aware that behind many windows others, with loathing, were watching him" (77). It echoes Lady Sarah's earlier judgement on Nunes, when she tells him that

your perversities ... your power-mongering ... destroy
people, Captain Nunes. You squash them like ants ...
because you are weak and afraid (73).

Here she echoes Head's Elizabeth, who deconstructs the power relationship between victim and victimiser, between the torturer and the victim, to the extent that she can judge the torturer weak. Thus, as in Coetzee's text where the Empire as represented by Joll constitutes the true barbarians, as the masters in Stockenström's novel are shown to be the true slaves to their social trappings, and the torturers in Head's novel come off as the truly disempowered, so in Nicol's text it is Nunes, as the representative of "the powers that be", who is truly reduced to "nothing" (159) in the end, as he self-combusts because of his own hatred. Whereas he sets out stating that "I shall give them discipline ... I shall teach you, miserable half-breeds" (81), it is the settlement that survives the catastrophe of Nunes's terror. When he declares, in his raving, final explosive interrogation of Montague Planke, that "[t]he conspiracy is broken. There are no more secrets" (167), it is a hollow victory, for he is said by Montague Planke to self-combust shortly afterwards, and "the Brothers Kreef ... cleaned him up" (175). The only evidence left

after this cleansing act -- Planke relates how the village rids itself of any reminders of Nunes's presence and his reign of terror -- is ironically Planke's own story, his narrative.

However, it is Augustin Shoote who points to a more sinister and less fantastic end to Captain Nunes, when he "asked the question that was on everyone's lips":

'It was Frieda, wasn't it? Did she throw a lamp at him, is that how the fire started? It must have been, we all saw her come running out of the house like a woman possessed.' (174).

The implication here is that Frieda might have killed her father, and exacted her revenge in a murderous act of self-reclamation, which concurs with Cixous (in Cixous & Clément 1986:140), who states that "[t]he only way to bar [the master's execution of the powers at his disposal] is to execute the master, kill him, eliminate him". Therefore, the possibility that Nunes was killed by his own daughter, just as Mondling's creature, in Frankensteinian manner, murders him, is hinted at in the text, so that Frieda's subjectivity remains uncontained in Montague Planke's text, since its implications are perhaps too horrific for him to deal with. Instead, his narrative elides Frieda from the moment of Nunes's death and ascribes it to self-combustion. And it is also only in his narrative that the settlement survives, for as Fagmie Jabaar declares, "[t]his place has had it" (175).

The apocalyptic ending of the novel, the blank space which the settlement is reduced to -- just as his daughter is reduced to Frieda the Husk, a silent empty shell who sometimes hums incoherently as she

wanders about, seemingly aimlessly -- becomes emblematic of what South Africa threatened to become at the end of the eighties: a chaotic conflagration of violence and self-destruction.

But the most significant blank spaces, the most noteworthy absences in Nicol's novel, are the women of the second class. Their silence is reminiscent of the silence of the women of Conrad's Heart of Darkness. And like that novel's problematic relationship with the imperial enterprise, its critique and inscription of the model, Nicol's The Powers That Be is both an interrogation of the representational politics in South African literature, and ironically, an inscription of the very practices it is critiquing.

IV. Signs and Wonders

Nicol's novel is filled with allegorical signs, and the reading of signs and omens. Mad Minnaar's prophecies depend on comets and meteors, goats running wild, the direction from which individuals approach the settlement upon arrival -- approach from the sea is considered a good omen; approach from the land its opposite. Significantly, Nunes first appears to the villagers as a sign in Mad Minnaar's prophecies, so that he is indeed, as Montague Planke states, "a dark enigma" (14). It is Lady Sarah who informs him that

you came from the land. At least I washed out of the sea.
And you know what Mad Minnaar says: "There is always a bad
wind off the land." (31).

This belief is so strong in the settlement that even Samuel's parents, on their first arrival, are made to row out to sea and re-approach the settlement from the ocean. And even then they are quarantined.

However, the sea does not always offer up good, as the washing up of several strange bodies on the shore proves. It is this apocalyptic event,

the naked, eyeless, wounded remains of men old and young, women, girls, boys who had been tortured, witness: whipped soles, mutilated genitals, lacerations, bruises, burns that weren't the doing of the sea (134),

which signals the horrors that Nunes would inflict on the village. It also indicates the violence that must be occurring in the world outside the village, the world from which "[t]he settlement was lost" (106). Finnegan (1989:9) argues that "the violence of South African history is an ever-present menace -- the terrible tides of contemporary repression wash mutilated corpses onto the beaches". But whereas prior to the arrival of the corpses on the beach, Mondling could state that "this place ... is at one end of the earth, unsullied by official or unofficial plunders, tranquil, paradise amidst mayhem" (34), "[t]hese victims ... Mangled, misshapen, human flotsam and jetsam" (135) are signs that this is no longer the case. The mayhem is centred on the settlement with Nunes's arrival, and the obscure origins of the bodies remain unsolved. It can only be guessed that they may be indicative of the violence into which the world outside -- the greater South Africa -- had been plunged. The most significant of the washed up bodies are the

three young women, by their looks not long dead, not bloated, discoloured or sea-ravaged like the others, still beautiful, still soft-skinned, imaginably warm ... the violated (136),

which reduces the village to utter horror and sadness. The barbarity of their deaths is an indictment of a world which has "the miracles of

the modern age" (176), but practises the barbarities of which it accuses its enemies. As in Conrad, where the true brutes are the Europeans who plunder Africa, and in Coetzee, where the true barbarians are the officials of Empire, so in Nicol's reading of South Africa, true evil in the apartheid era lay with the powers that be, with the torturers and victimisers.

Conclusion

Fletcher (1964:160) argues that "agents ... of allegory are semantic elements, signs which act and represent", and the discussion of the four texts in this thesis shows how the sign of the subaltern subject is representable in the allegorical when and even as it remains inexpressible in the real.

Therefore, as the Magistrate illustrates,

no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances (Said 1996:11).

Coetzee's text, as my analysis in the second chapter shows, is therefore both an inscription and an interrogation of the liberal humanist novelistic discourse dominant in apartheid South African fiction. Consequently, its concern with subaltern representation, which is a crucial part of liberal humanist discourse, is a concern with the structural impossibilities of such an enterprise. As Spivak (1988:287) argues, "[w]hen we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the work cannot say becomes important". The barbarian woman remains a blank, her self inexpressible in the text, so that she is constituted as an image, insofar as an image always recalls an elsewhere, an absence.

Similarly, the Magistrate comes to the realisation that

[w]e can discover the other in ourselves, realize we are not a homogeneous substance, radically alien to whatever is not us ... others are also "I"'s: subjects just as I am, whom only my point of view -- according to which all of them are out there and I alone am in here -- separates and authentically distinguishes from myself. I can

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conceive of these others as an abstraction, as an instance of any individual's psychic configuration, as the Other -- other in relation to myself, to me; or else as a specific social group to which we do not belong (Todorov 1984:3).

Similarly, as I show in the third chapter, the slave woman narrator of Stockenström's novel illustrates the impossibility of the other to speak -- as Spivak (1988:287) states, "'[t]he subject' implied by the texts of insurgency can only serve as a counterpossibility for the narrative sanctions granted to the colonial subject in the dominant groups". Therefore, the allegorical mode becomes the means through which that alterity is posited, not merely represented.

It is in Head's autobiographical A Question of Power that the representation of this coming to speech is most radically attempted. We find that the allegory of oppression in a patriarchal, racist, colonial context is formulated and structured as an allegory of madness. As such, the coming to speech is necessarily a boundary crossing, for as Foucault (1965:76) postulates, madness is linked with silencing and the irruption of animality. What Head's autobiographical allegory of subjectivity illustrates is that in coming to speech, the 'mad' subject re-invents the categories of 'mad' and 'sane' as they are constituted by patriarchy. After all, as Felman (1993:35) states, "[w]hat the narcissistic economy of the Masculine universal equivalent tries to eliminate, under the label 'madness', is nothing other than feminine difference".

In the final chapter, the analysis of Nicol's The Powers That Be, shows how stereotype is interrogated so that it becomes the site which masks and figures subjectivity for the gendered subaltern, in

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that it is the inversion of these representations of the self by an other that situated the agency of insurgency.

Consequently, I contend that it is in allegorical writing that the subjectivity and agency of insurgent subalterns is shown up in terms of the limitations which proscribe it, and the possibilities which are negotiable within these constraints.

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