

ALLEGORIES OF DROUGHT AND OF GARDENS IN THE NOVELS OF
J M COETZEE AND DAMBUDZO MARECHERA

BY

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Abstract

Grant Lilford

Allegories of Drought and of Gardens in the Novels of JM Coetzee and Dambudzo Marechera

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This thesis examines the trope of Allegory in the work of two Southern African writers, JM Coetzee and Dambudzo Marechera. It discusses the trope's use in redefining the dominant theme of the dialectic between scarcity and plenty. In much of Southern African literature, this dialectic is expressed allegorically. Drought represents a physical and spiritual lack while gardens represent human attempts to respond to that lack by creating fertility and meaning.

The thesis is based on the premise that Southern African literature is best understood from as wide a perspective as possible. Coetzee and Marechera redefine the form and the content of a variety of texts, both African and non-African. In order to study this process of redefinition more closely, I have placed the work of each writer within the context of other genres of writing. Many critics view Marechera's writing as modernistic and European. I attempt to establish his unconscious reliance upon African traditional narrative, particularly the Shona *rungano*. Marechera uses Shona orature as a mythic pre-text for the more explicitly allegorical sections of his *House of Hunger*. Similarly, several of Coetzee's novels allegorise concerns around drought found in novels of settlement in Southern Africa. Both writers work within a more global tradition of writing about scarcity and plenty. The garden also appears in Homer, Milton, Rousseau, Voltaire, Dickens and Rushdie, among others, as a site of refuge from poverty and oppression. Contextual chapters examine other texts handling these related themes as background for those chapters which deal with Marechera and Coetzee's work in depth.

The thesis makes use of the twentieth-century theory of allegory, particularly as presented by Edwin Honig, Angus Fletcher and Maureen Quilligan. It examines the relationship between consciously allegorical texts, like those written by Coetzee and Marechera, and the unconscious and ubiquitous use of allegory as an instrument of rhetoric in ostensibly realistic or philosophical texts. Coetzee and Marechera use allegory in critiquing dominant forms of discourse and this thesis uses close critical reading to expose the links between their allegory and its pre-texts.

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Declaration

I declare that *Allegories of Drought And of Gardens In The Novels of J M Coetzee and Dambudzo Marechera* is my own work and has not previously been submitted to any university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Signed by candidate

Grant C Lilford

18/6/1996

18 June, 1996

Acknowledgements

Some of the seminal ideas for the thesis appear as “A History of Southern African Allegory” in *Interaction: Proceedings of the Post-Graduate Conference of the [UCT] Department of English* in 1992. The thesis integrates material from the *Interaction* article into both Chapter 2 and the Introduction. A preliminary version of Chapter 2 was presented as a Staff Seminar presented to the UCT Department of English. An early version of Chapter 6 appears in the proceedings of the 1993 Southern African Society for Eighteenth Century Studies. Please see the bibliography for details. I would like to thank participants in all three seminars for their contributions to the clarification of my own thinking in this thesis.

My first year at the University of Cape Town was supported by a Vassar College Maguire Fellowship and I am grateful to Vassar for awarding the fellowship and to the late Helen Maguire Muller for funding it.

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The participants at the first symposium on Dambudzo Marechera in August 1995 helped me to articulate my ideas, particularly given the current dearth of critical material on Marechera. Thanks to the Marechera Trust, the Zimbabwe-German society and the University of Zimbabwe for organising such an important and timely conference and to the University of Venda for sending me there.

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comprehensive support, Professor Brink also gave me the freedom to pursue my ideas to their limits.

All opinions expressed in this work are my own and are not to be attributed to any person or institution acknowledged above.

List of Abbreviations

(Please see the bibliography on page 207 for full details)

Texts by J M Coetzee

- DL* *Dusklands* (1974)
HOC..... *In the Heart of the Country* (1979)
WB *Waiting for the Barbarians.* (1980)
MK *The Life and Times of Michael K.* (1983)
Foe *Foe* (1986)
WW..... *White Writing* (1988)
AOI..... *Age of Iron* (1991)
DP *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992)
MP *The Master of Petersburg* (1994)

Texts by Dambudzo Marechera

- HOH*..... *The House of Hunger* (1978)
BS *Black Sunlight.* (1981)
MB *Mindblast or The Definitive Buddy.* (1984)
Trib..... *Dambudzo Marechera: 4 June 1952 - 18 August 1987.* (1988)
BI *The Black Insider.* (1990)
CM *Cemetery of Mind.* (1992)
SB *Scrapiron Blues.* (1994)

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Introduction

This thesis looks at the allegorical uses of paradise and gardens in two Southern African post-modern writers, J M Coetzee and Dambudzo Marechera. It places them in the context of other Southern African and European texts which allegorise colonial and post-colonial landscapes. This thesis considers the ways in which ostensibly realist texts become allegorised, how actual conditions become tropes. For this reason I am focusing on the allegorisation of the climatic conditions of drought and gardens from a comparative perspective. The image of paradise is a recurring one in the southern African mythos. A paradise is a naturally occurring fertile spot in the midst of drought and deprivation. A garden occurs when artificial technology produces something resembling paradise. The colonisers journeying into the subcontinent came to see it as a desert wasteland, little realising that the landscape was subject to more complex cycles of rain and drought than their familiar European landscapes. They did not acknowledge that the people already present in this landscape had their own understanding of drought and paradise, using them as powerful metaphors before, during and after the colonial period. As the colonisers settled, their dreams of El Dorado proved unfounded and, as a result of their isolationist policies, they found themselves in a cultural desert which resisted their efforts to turn it into their garden. They hoped nostalgically to return to a more fertile environment. A few of the more enlightened colonisers saw that the drought was of their own making. It came from their attempts to force the landscape and its people into an alien destructive mode. Paradise became a metaphor for the moment of liberation. For the colonised, this was liberation from colonialism. For the colonisers, it was liberation from the unyielding landscape or from their complicity in the act of colonisation.

Coetzee and Marechera foreground and problematise the mythos of droughts and gardens in Southern Africa. While they seem to make a clean break with tradition, particularly as regards the politics of writing in Southern Africa, they write themselves both into and out of the traditions of African writing and of world writing. Both move from fairly specific narratives, located within discrete moments of the history of the sub-continent, to more slippery texts, allegories of the much wider issues raised within their immediate political contexts. Coetzee's first two novels, *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country* examine the development of specific white South African racial myths. Marechera's *House of Hunger* begins by documenting the concrete horror of township life. Even those texts do not limit themselves to local experiences. *Dusklands* contrasts Jacobus Coetzee's actual colonisation of Namaqualand with the metaphysical colonisation practised by Eugene Dawn, a disturbed American propagandist at work on the Vietnam Project. *In the Heart of the Country*'s Magda uses a private language as she tries to transcend her limited life on her father's Karoo farm in order to

communicate with flying machines. Her experience occurs within an almost archetypal Southern African literary setting but she seeks the language which will allow her to communicate with the wider world. *The House of Hunger*'s narrator follows his author into exile and madness at Oxford, and then presents strange allegorical worlds which, as I shall explore in the second chapter, draw upon traditional Shona narrative.

Coetzee's *Foe* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* examine the discourses around race and otherness outside an immediately South Africa context. *The Life and Times of Michael K* moves into a potential future Cape Town, defamiliarised by civil war. Marechera's *Black Sunlight* projects elements of myth, of Zimbabwean history, and of anarchist politics into a new fictive space. Neither author uses the literary text as a political vehicle; they offer none of the easy Manichean choices found in so much of late twentieth century Southern African literature. Each tries to discount the myth of a single colonial subject, suggesting complex differences between the experience of coloniser and colonised (JanMohammed 1986:78-9). They go further, however, exploring the fragmentation within the experience of colonials and post-colonials on both sides of the divide. While both writers explore the fabric of the political life of racially-divided societies, neither limits his influence only to local writing. Both show a wide appreciation of world literature and they share the desire to break free from the confines of writing in Southern Africa.

The two writers differ significantly in terms of style. J M Coetzee epitomises the economical use of language. Each word slots into a carefully determined space and his novels tend to be meticulously crafted. Perhaps his language shows something of the linguist derided in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1973 for analysing "the structure of repetitions" in Beckett's *Lessness* (DP 1). Marechera writes very differently, as David Pattison observes:

...Marechera never revised anything: he was incapable of doing so. He rewrote but never revised. Those critics who call him an experimental writer I suggest are mistaken, he never mastered the craft of writing to the extent that he could develop it by experimentation. As a writer-craftsman he remained a novice, but the lack of revision is not necessarily a disadvantage. The ideas are often raw and unpolished and in that state more closely represent what Marechera was trying to express at the time of writing than a later, perhaps anodyne revised version produced on the grounds of aesthetic appeal (Pattison 1995:2).

The number of alternative versions of *Black Sunlight* supports Pattison's observation. Each version is a different novel and responds to editorial demands that he "rework" his original manuscript. The need to rewrite the text globally, rather than to succumb to any process of line editing, need not, however, make Marechera any less of an "experimental writer". Both Marechera and Coetzee play language games. The

discrepancy between their styles simply exposes the range of approaches available to any experimental writing. The formal aspects of their writing work well with each writer's context as the form becomes an allegory for the landscape. Coetzee's minimal, arid style is appropriate to the desert setting of most of his fictions. Marechera's texts, crammed with language and characters, reflect a more crowded urban setting.

Each style, furthermore, becomes an allegory for the writer's position as anarchist. Coetzee subjects all political and social possibilities to the form of the novel. Magda, in *In the Heart of the Country* appears to murder her father twice and is left to look after him in his old age. These actions make no sense if the novel must serve a mimetic function. They work in terms of a formal structure of repetition. The text moves back to the same point, and the murders serve as Jakobsonian invariables which paradoxically thwart the reader's expectations because of their distance from lived experience. Marechera's apparent lack of structure engages the same sort of defamiliarisation. But is his writing unstructured? Flora Veit-Wild, in her introduction to *The Black Insider*, comments that "what may seem unstructured at first sight turns out to have a strong inner coherence if the reader is prepared to follow the writer along paths of thought which, though intricate, are an intrinsic part of his work" (BI 13). The theory of oral literature suggests that apparently spontaneous texts may rely on a formal structure which may be stronger than in written texts (Lord 1960:30). If Marechera wrote spontaneously without the intermediary of editing, it may be more appropriate to analyse his texts with the same techniques as oral literature looking for formulaic phrases which maintain the narrative.

Both Marechera and Coetzee take a stock of inherited literary knowledge and use it as a basis for allegory. They mobilise language and literary tradition against themselves. David Bunn (1993:57) reads the Mala Mala game reserve as an allegory and gives a useful definition of the trope. "Like all allegories, its symbolic form is organised in relation to another syntax, one that is not immediately obvious but transparent to a certain class of viewer." Coetzee's Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands* disrupts liberal readings of the South African situation. Jacobus is an enlightenment man, often speaking the language of the enlightenment, who enjoys a good afternoon's genocide. Marechera's *Great Black Chief* similarly destabilises utopian Africanist aspirations of an escape from the colonial bind. Each character represents the most extreme form of allegorical figure in a landscape of allegorical meaning. The enlightenment, politics and the self are among the referents in this landscape. In order to understand the process of allegorisation, one must see other forms of the language at work. Therefore, this thesis uses contextual chapters to show sources of the language being allegorised. The writers come closest to one another as they allegorise forms from disparate traditions of discourse.

Biographical Details

Coetzee and Marechera come from two different countries and from different socio-economic backgrounds. Coetzee was born in 1940, Marechera in 1952. Coetzee is a white South African, Marechera a black Zimbabwean. Coetzee “had published nothing” (*DP* 337) before he was thirty. Marechera published both his substantial works while he was in his twenties. The differences between the two writers are considerable. There is, in addition, nothing to suggest that they ever met. Why bring two such disparate writers together in one thesis? My reasons are formal; the answers lie in the structure and content of their work, particularly in their transmutation of history into allegory. Both writers refuse to be categorised on racial or socio-economic grounds. Each rejects nationalism, seeing himself primarily as a ‘writer’ and aiming his work at an international audience. Each draws upon immediate, concrete experiences while striving to transcend them. Both are fairly new-critical in rejecting the links between biography and literature, hoping for the sort of critical reception that will judge their writings in themselves. In spite of each writer’s stance on this issue, it is worth engaging in a moment of comparative biography to pinpoint the many differences and the few significant similarities in the lives of the two writers.

J M Coetzee was born in Cape Town in 1940 and spent his early years in Worcester and other small farming communities in the Western Cape. Although he is of Afrikaans descent, his mother was English and English was his home language. He was educated at “a Roman Catholic Boys College” and the University of Cape Town, where he majored in literature and mathematics (Gallagher 1991:10). In 1962-1963 he worked in England as a computer programmer (*DP* 25). In 1965, he went to the University of Texas at Austin, where he taught Freshman English and worked on a PhD on stylistics in Beckett (*DP* 50). Upon completion of his PhD, Coetzee taught at the State University of New York at Buffalo from 1968-1971 and during this period he wrote his first novel, *Dusklands* (Penner 1989:3-4). He then returned to Cape Town, where, while teaching at the University of Cape Town, he has written seven novels and established a substantial body of critical and theoretical work.

Dambudzo Marechera, who in his younger days took on the Christian names Charles William, was born in Rusape, in Eastern Zimbabwe, in 1952, the third of nine children. His father was an assistant lorry driver, later a mortuary assistant. His mother was a domestic servant (Veit-Wild 1992:49). He attended mission and government schools from 1958 until 1965. In 1966 he obtained a place and a scholarship at St Augustine’s Anglican School in Penhalonga. Also in 1966 his father died in a road accident and the family became destitute. He continued his schooling at St Augustine’s with support from an Alfred Beit Scholarship (50-51). His A-level results were “exceptional”, and he received a scholarship for university study, commencing his

studies at the then University of Rhodesia in 1972 (19). In 1973 he was expelled for his participation in a student demonstration (136). He obtained a scholarship to New College, Oxford where he read extensively, but was ultimately 'sent down' in 1976 for his destructive and anti-social behaviour (160). From 1976 to 1978 he squatted at various places in England and wrote his first work of fiction, *The House of Hunger*, published by Heinemann. He stayed in England for another four years. He was imprisoned in Wales from November to January 1978, "charged with theft, possessing cannabis and overstaying his visa" (192). From February to June 1979, he was writer in residence at Sheffield University but otherwise spent his time in England in various squats in London (185). In 1981, he published his second novel, *Black Sunlight* and, in 1982, Marechera returned to Zimbabwe where he continued to write and to live as a homeless person. Apart from a brief teaching job in Harare he lived off the generosity of friends and from his writing (281). He published a third work, *Mindblast*, in Harare in 1984 but it did not receive the recognition accorded to his first two works. Marechera died of Aids in August 1987. After his death his friend and critic, Flora Veit-Wild, established a trust to publish his as yet unpublished manuscripts and produced a photographic tribute in 1987 and a substantial *Source Book* in 1992. The *Source Book* contains interviews with a wide range of people with whom Marechera came into contact; these include family, teachers, friends, publishers, literary associates and even acquaintances. It also includes documents from throughout Marechera's life, which are presented in unedited form, and several interviews with Marechera himself. Since Marechera's death, Veit-Wild has edited three collections of previously unpublished material. The most recent of these, *Scrapiron Blues*, was published by Baobab Books in Harare in 1994.

The biographical details are complicated by the two authors' differing attitudes towards publicity. J M Coetzee rejects the idea that a writer's life becomes public property. In response to David Atwell's question, "What is it about the interview that troubles you?", he says:

An interview is not just, as you call it, an "exchange": it is, nine times out of ten, ... an exchange with a complete stranger, yet a stranger permitted by the conventions of the genre to cross the boundaries of what is proper in conversation between strangers. I don't regard myself as a public figure, a figure in the public domain. I dislike the violation of propriety, to say nothing of the violation of private space, that occurs in the typical interview...

...

If I had had any foresight, I would have had nothing to do with journalists from the start. Now it is too late: the word is out, passed from one journalist to another, at least in this country, that I am an

evasive, arrogant, generally unpleasant customer. I should have realised from the first the philosophical cleavage between myself and the journalist ... (DP 65).

From Coetzee's perspective, writing is not a public act. A writer must be left alone to discover the truth in isolation. He continues, "truth is related to silence, to reflection, to the practice of *writing*" (65-66). His belief in the essential privacy of writing could explain his reluctance to rush into print and the careful crafting of his writings. A work of art is not released to public scrutiny until it is complete and polished. While Marechera tended to attract publicity, giving interviews to a wide range of strangers, he attempted, like Coetzee, to control it. His attempts at control often took bizarre and violent forms, disrupting a banquet held in his honour in 1979 when he won the *Guardian* fiction prize for *The House of Hunger*. He became drunk and threw plates and glasses at the wall (Veit-Wild 1992:188-189). Marechera returned to Zimbabwe in 1982 with film-maker Chris Austin to make a film of *The House of Hunger*. He disagreed with Austin and finally stormed off the project (282-3). In 1983 he was detained when he clashed with Eddison Zvobgo, Minister of Legal and Parliamentary Affairs, at the Harare Book Fair. He used his appearance at the book fair to make statements attacking the Zimbabwean government. While Coetzee tends to shun publicity, preferring to express himself through his writing, Marechera used public occasions as opportunities to push his own agenda. Unlike Coetzee, he cultivated a public persona. While the techniques are obviously very different, both writers, in their response to publicity, exhibit a desire to speak only on their own terms. In both cases, this involves a refusal to be categorised or restricted.

Both Coetzee and Marechera locate themselves within the struggle for human self-determination without obeying the edicts of political orthodoxy. Coetzee describes his youthful reaction to politics in the third person:

... this person, this subject, my subject, steers clear of the right. As a child in Worcester he has seen enough of the Afrikaner right, enough of its rant, its self-righteousness, its cruelty, to last him a lifetime. In fact, even before Worcester he has seen perhaps more cruelty and violence than should have been allowed to a child. So as a student he moves to the fringes of the left without being part of the left. Sympathetic to the human concerns of the left, he is alienated, when the crunch comes, by its language—by all political language, in fact. As far back as he can see he has been ill at ease with language that lays down the law, that is not provisional, that does not as one of its habitual motions glance back sceptically at its premises. Masses of people wake in him something close to panic. He cannot or will not, cannot and will not, join, shout, sing: his throat tenses up, he revolts (DP 394).

He characterises himself as the writer-as-humanist, the one who will act for the sake of humanity although he will reject any programme of action. The specifics of Worcester and Afrikanerdom aside, many elements of this characterisation apply to the young Marechera. Marechera also, perhaps to a greater degree, witnessed “more cruelty and violence than should have been allowed to a child”. Like the Coetzee family, who struggled to make ends meet without support because they were neither English nor Afrikaans (*DP* 394), the Marecheras were ostracised by their extended family (Veit-Wild 1992:49).

As a student at the University of Zimbabwe, Marechera avoided the mass protests against the Smith regime. Instead, he chose to protest on his own. One fellow student, Katherine Mauchaza, notes that “In the student gatherings, Charles would comment but he was not in a position of leadership. He believed in one-man action and was known for his solitary protest” (113). Another fellow student, Greenwell Matsika says “It’s difficult to say whether he was a political animal but I would say no, he wasn’t, he was just that kind of chap who didn’t like authority, conventional authority” (112-113). Marechera’s attitudes to authority surface throughout his work but crystallise in his later children’s stories, especially “Fuzzy Goo’s Guide to the Earth” (*SB* 239-243). Fuzzy Goo has a dog called Blah, but Blah becomes an allegory for everything that is wrong with society:

Blah is being dragged kicking and screaming to school, to church, to the dining room, to the nation’s flag, to bed without supper. Blah is how big human beings torture little human beings. If you are a little human being you must report them to the United Nations which has fists bigger than your father’s (*SB* 240).

All forms of social and collective action fall under the auspices of “Blah”. Marechera’s distrust of authority extends to that of revolutionaries; he says “I think writers are usually recruited into a revolutionary movement before that revolution gains whatever it’s seeking. Once it has achieved that, writers are simply discarded either as a nuisance or as totally irrelevant” (Veit-Wild 1988:19) In her introduction to *Scrapiron Blues*, Flora Veit-Wild comments that “Publishers found the [children’s] stories ‘unsuitable’ because of the disparity between the child-like narrator and the sarcastic, older voice which permeates the writing” (*SB* xii). Marechera uses the form of the children’s story to expose the destruction of childhood through socialisation. The image of the sensitive child crushed by brutal adult figures is, as I shall explore in Chapters Three and Seven, a recurrent theme in Marechera’s writing. The same image surfaces in Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K*. Like Coetzee, Marechera challenges authority, whether it is the authority of parents, teachers, journalists or commissars.

It is not surprising, therefore, that each author rejects the idea of tribal identity. Coetzee explains that, in spite of his descent, he is not an Afrikaner. He stresses that he belongs to the fairly heterogeneous group which comprises English-speaking South Africans:

What am I, then, in this ethnic-linguistic sense? I am one of many people in this country who have become detached from their earlier roots, whether those roots were in Dutch South Africa or Indonesia or Britain or Greece or wherever, and have joined a pool of no recognisable *ethnos* whose language of exchange is English. These people are not, strictly speaking, "English South Africans," since a large proportion of them—myself included—are not of British ancestry. They are merely South Africans (itself a mere name of convenience) whose native tongue, the tongue they have been born to, is English. And, as the pool has no discernible *ethnos*, so one day I hope it will have no predominant colour, as more "people of colour" drift into it. A pool, I would hope then, in which differences wash away (DP 342).

Coetzee thus rejects the nationalist doctrine of language as a signature of ethnicity and as weapon of nationalist struggle. Like Kafka's Prague German, Coetzee's English fits Deleuze and Guattari's sense of "a deterritorialised language, appropriate for strange and minor uses" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975:17). Coetzee's rejection of a national language, occurring within the specific context of Afrikaner nationalism, is a refusal to belong to a *volk*. He prefers to exist within "a pool of no recognisable *ethnos*", moving away from a tribally constituted identity. Marechera, in his recollections of Vengere township, shows a similar vision of a pool of immigrants, forming their own identity outside the dominant discourse of tribe and ethnicity:

In a township like that, which started as a prison camp for so-called aliens, there was no homogenous community. We were a mixed community. There were people from every place you could think of in the country, as well as people from Malawi, people from Zambia and so on; so there was no common culture at home. The only common thing among all of us was simply work. Work to pay the rent, to get the kids into school, to buy a sack of mealie meal... (Veit-Wild 1992:7).

The "so-called aliens" to whom he refers were "white people like Poles, Italians, Afrikaners who were interned for being suspected of supporting the Germans" (6). The township gains its identity as the place in which outsiders come together and maintains that identity even after the war has ended. Marechera holds the cosmopolitan nature of the place as a positive feature. Otherwise his recollections of his childhood are far from nostalgic. The township never ceased to be "a concentration camp", it simply changed in its demography. He says that after the whites moved away, "blacks were put behind

that fence with their families" (6). In interviews and in his fiction he is very blunt about the township's negative aspects. Marechera's use of the adjective "so called" before "aliens" suggests that his sense of community knows no outsiders. Like Coetzee, he seeks membership in a group which defies ethnic origins and which is open to all.

For both authors the category of writer is just such a group. Marechera states very forcefully that he is not an 'African writer':

I think I am the doppelgänger whom, until I appeared, African literature had not yet met. In this sense I would question anyone calling me an African writer. Either you are a writer or you are not. If you are a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then fuck you (Veit-Wild 1992:221).

Elsewhere he makes the same statement in less polemical terms. He does not reject African literature as such; he rejects the label. His position against the national or ethnic labelling of writers was a consistent one throughout his life. At the notorious Guardian fiction prize ceremony in 1979, among various comments on the situation in Zimbabwe, he was heard to "advocate the removal of such prefixes as 'Irish' and 'African' from the substantive 'writer' (Veit-Wild 1992:189). In this context, especially, it is clear that his refusal to be labelled as an African writer was not synonymous with political disengagement or sycophancy towards the European literary establishment. He drew attention to the situation in the then Zimbabwe-Rhodesia and demonstrated his rejection of the literary establishment and its rituals. Coetzee had no exposure to 'African literature' before his assistant professorship at Buffalo. There he discovered that, for reasons of geographical origin, he should acquaint himself with it:

I had left South Africa to be part of the wider world. But now I discovered that my novelty value to the wider world, to the extent that I had any novelty value, was that I came from Africa. In Buffalo I was invited to offer a course on African literature. I had of course read the better-known South African writers, none of whom I regarded as of world status. But to prepare for the course I reread them, more carefully, and read too what was available in the United States from the rest of Africa. The drama, particularly West African drama, seemed more interesting than the poetry or fiction, though nothing truly gripped me (DP 336).

Coetzee had given little thought to African literature as a category before the exigencies of teaching in an American university forced him to do so. In an essay on Alex La Guma written during this period he quotes Wole Soyinka and Lewis Nkosi expressing their unease at the quality of published African literature (DP 20). Coetzee studied modernist texts at graduate level, preferring to employ a formal mode of analysis. He says, of Samuel Beckett, the subject of his doctoral thesis, "Beckett's prose, up to and including *The Unnamable*, has given me a sensuous delight that hasn't

dimmed over the years. The critical work I did on Beckett originated in that sensuous response and was grasping after ways to talk about it" (*DP* 20). Subsequently, Coetzee has produced several studies of South African writing, including his major critical work, *White Writing*, in 1988. He has resolutely, however, maintained a formalist, modernist position. Marechera acknowledges the influence of modern European literature upon his writing, claiming that as a student he was stifled by the over-emphasis on canonical English literature and so he "tried to insult (privately) English literature by crossing the channel on a translation ferry to continental Europe" (Marechera 1987:99). He defines himself as a modernist writer, along with Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah (Veit-Wild 1992:44).

Allegory

According to the *OED*, Allegory is (1) the "description of a subject under the guise of some other subject of aptly suggestive resemblance"; (2) "an instance of such description; a figurative sentence, discourse or narrative, in which the apparent subjects really refer to the subject they are meant to suggest; an extended or continued metaphor", (3) "An allegorical representation, an emblem." The word comes from the Greek ἀλληγορία, which means "speaking otherwise than one seems to speak". It is derived from ἄλλοζ (other) + ἄγορία (speaking). According to Edwin Honig, "We find the allegorical quality in a twice-told tale written in rhetorical, or figurative, language and expressing a vital belief" (Honig 1959:12) The adjective "twice-told" suggests that every allegory refers back to a pre-text and in doing so, questions its own validity. Honig identifies the pre-text or "first *tales*" as myth (24). An allegorical text is one which suggests that truth is elsewhere or, as Angus Fletcher argues, "allegory says one thing and means another" (Fletcher 1964:2). Religious allegory refers to a higher religious truth. *The Pilgrim's Progress*, for example, constantly leads the reader back to the Bible, augmenting, rather than usurping that text's function as scripture. The Bible itself can be an allegory for the world; "there is the 'good book' and there is the 'book of nature' which it interprets" (Honig 1959:23). Marechera and Coetzee are sceptical and secular allegorists. Rather than referring to an outside, greater truth, each writer grapples with the nature of truth in the text, interrogating the truth value of previous texts.

Allegory is an ancient and widespread trope in European literature and it has always been prone to controversy. It serves as a component of the Homeric epics, where the gods' behaviour above the scenes influences and mirrors the ostensibly historical events taking place below. Xenophanes attacks Homer and Hesiod for impiety because they assign human motives to the gods (Honig, 1959:19-20). Allegory is the lie which gets poets expelled from the republic. Poets rely on "colour and form" to insinuate that they have knowledge (Plato 1955:429). The trope regains some

credibility as a component of biblical exegesis during the middle ages. The Bible is the sacred pre-text for mediæval allegories like *Piers Ploughman* and the *Divine Comedy* (Quilligan 1979:135). According to the scholastics, the Bible, and subsequently other texts, have four levels of reading, incorporated in a “polysemous” meaning. These are, representing Edwin Honig’s (1959:152) definitions by my own schematic:

| | | |
|---------------------|------------|--|
| Literal | Historical | <i>God’s word, the event itself</i> |
| Allegorical | Political | <i>meaning according to belief</i> |
| Tropological | Moral | <i>meaning according to duty</i> |
| Anagogical | Social | <i>meaning according to the divine tendency of the event</i> |

Dante uses the above categories in his *Letter to Can Grande*, in which he explains how to read the *Divine Comedy* (Quilligan 1979:27-8). He explains the reading of Psalm 64 “When Israel went out of Egypt... Judah was the sanctuary and Israel his dominion”. This psalm refers literally to the historical event of the exodus; Allegorically, “redemption through Christ”; Tropologically, the “turning of the soul from sorrow and misery to a state of grace” and Anagogically, the “passage of the blessed soul from the slavery of corruption to the freedom of eternal glory” (Quilligan 1979:101-2). These levels represent the hair-splitting tendency in mediæval scholarship and it is difficult to decide “where one level predominates over another, where one begins and another leaves off” (Fletcher 1964:313). Polysemous reading, however, has survived, with different levels corresponding not to the meaning for a believer, but to the different critical approaches with which it is possible to approach a text (Frye 1957:72).

John Bunyan, probably the best-known English allegorist, begins *The Pilgrim’s Progress* with a disclaimer. His apology warns that the text is a work of deception, a trap or a snare (Bunyan 1678:10-11) and that it uses metaphors.:

This book is writ in such a dialect,
As may the minds of listless men affect.
It seems a novelty and yet contains
Nothing but sound and honest gospel strains (Bunyan 1678:14).

The Pilgrim’s Progress is a sugared pill, or, worse, the worm at the end of the hook. As an allegory it exposes its own deceptiveness and points the reader towards an external truth. The Bible also uses traps to catch unbelievers. Bunyan quotes Hosea, who says: “I have used similitudes” (12:10). But Bunyan does not claim to have written another Bible. He calls for the participation of the reader in determining whether his book is useful to salvation, saying: “... then come hither, And lay my Book, thy Head and Heart together” (Bunyan 1678:14). Bunyan’s logic works on a

version of the doctrine of the elect in which it is the reader who is on his way to salvation and the book will not make much difference either way. The answer lies within the reader and the text is merely a guide. The gospel, to which Bunyan defers, is itself allegorical.

The Romantic tradition in Germany and England deprecates allegory as a controlled and artificial mode which inhibits individual creativity. The Romantics privilege a new form, symbol, over allegory. Symbol's etymology is linked to a unity between signifier and signified; it comes from the Greek $\sigma\psi\nu + \beta\alpha\lambda\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$ which means "to throw together" (Honig 1959:24). Goethe develops the opposition between symbol and allegory by dividing art into two kinds of subjects, the natural and the ideal. The former represents "well known, common things as they are" (Goethe, 1797:395). The latter involves things understood on a higher plane, "divested of all commonality and individuality" and produced by "the human spirit in the most intimate communion with nature". For Goethe, art only involves the natural and the symbolic. Allegory, because it foregrounds itself, detracts from the glory of what is represented:

Now there also exist works of art that scintillate through intellect, wit, gallantry, among which we also include all allegory: of these one can expect the least good because they too destroy the interest in the representation itself and drive the spirit back into itself, so to speak, and remove from the eyes what is actually represented. The allegorical differs from the symbolic in that the former signifies directly, the latter indirectly (Goethe, 1797:397).

For Goethe, the thing represented takes precedence. Any means of representation which draws attention to itself and away from its subject, is, for all its wit and intelligence, a lesser form of art. An important part of Goethe's distinction is that allegory foregrounds itself, it shows its own construction and so an appreciation of allegory is really an appreciation of technical skill, not an appreciation of the subject, natural or ideal, of representation.

Coleridge begins to catalogue the differences between symbol and allegory, demonising allegory in the process. Where Goethe acknowledges some merit in allegorical work, even if the merit is not artistic, Coleridge attributes to allegory every possible negative and inartistic quality. Coleridge's view on allegory can be found in his *Statesman's Manual*, in which he describes the trope as:

but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principle being more worthless than its phantom proxy, both alike insubstantial and the former shapeless to boot (Coleridge 1816:30).

He is deeply concerned that such image-making will lead good Christians to drown themselves as they try to graze on "the sloping orchard or shadowy hillside pasture-

field seen in the lake below" (30-1). Here he allegorically suggests that allegory, which constantly displaces meaning, is only a reflection of reality. Edwin Honig suggests that we should not take these catalogues of charges too seriously. Coleridge is defending "a new literature", which promotes sense and feeling, against its "ultrarational" predecessors (Honig, 1959:44). However, Coleridge more closely defines Goethe's distinction when he discusses "organic and mechanic forms", the former relying on its own inherent structure, the latter on an external structure, impressed upon it from outside (44-45).

Maureen Quilligan asserts that it is "no longer necessary to apologise" for allegory. Various twentieth century critics "have made the argument: allegory exists, it is worthy of the serious critical attention they have given it" (Quilligan 1979:14). These critics include C S Lewis, Edwin Honig and Angus Fletcher. Fletcher's approach has been very useful to this thesis. He suggests that allegory is "omnipresent in Western Literature from the earliest times to the modern period" (Fletcher 1964:1). Fletcher demonstrates the use of allegory in a variety of texts. Quilligan, on the other hand, identifies allegory as a discrete genre, whose focus is upon language (Quilligan 1979:15). This thesis explores the tension between the two approaches. Marechera and Coetzee write conscious allegories, which fit Quilligan's definition because their focus is upon the language itself. Following Honig, however, allegory requires a pretext in the language of other writings which claim realistic or mythic status. Fletcher's approach, which entails exposing the omnipresence of allegory, is useful in interrogating the various pretexts. Exploring the tension between conscious and unconscious allegory is primarily a formal exercise but it has political implications in that, throughout the colonial and post-colonial history of Southern Africa, various allegories have sought to define cultural and political identity.

Allegory functions as a weapon of missionary propaganda which is used to impose an external and alien structure of belief on to African society by appealing to African myth. According to Daniel Kunene (1989:23), "*The Pilgrim's Progress* was the most widely used piece of literature in the work of converting non-Christians to the Christian Faith." The missionaries used traditional narratives as "sermon exemplars", working from within African tradition to find a common message (Kunene 1989:55). The missionary use of allegory is thus formal and subversive. Traditional narratives become a moral pre-text for Christian allegory, while at the same time they provide a formal shell for a new message, based upon the inadequacy of traditional belief and the need for redemption. The new Christian allegory thus undermines the African traditional mythos which precedes it. Missionary allegory therefore traps itself in a double bind, promoting truth through conscious lies. John Bunyan's particularly Protestant allegory is vital to this disruptive process. Bunyan can never admit that his

story is the truth for to do so would undermine the scriptural truth of the Bible and the personal truth of conscience. The missionaries can never accept that their “sermon exemplars” are a complete truth in themselves because to do so would render their efforts unnecessary. The missionaries reverse the relation between myth and allegory, unwittingly leaving themselves vulnerable. Once that primary relation is reversed, the status of myth is undermined. We are left with a circle of allegories which refer back, not to an original myth, but to other allegories. Conscious allegory becomes a tool to interrogate those unconscious allegories which pretend to be myth.

Lukàcs, History, Allegory

J M Coetzee and Dambudzo Marechera are modernists in the face of the enormous influence of Georg Lukàcs upon contemporary African literature. This influence persists in the work of postcolonial critics, like Chinweizu and Amuta. At the crux of the debate is the relationship between the writer and history. Lukàcs advocates the cause of a “dynamic and developmental” realism over a “static and sensational” modernism (Lukàcs 1957:194). Reality, for Lukàcs, is produced through social interaction, and those texts which present the fabric of social relations fall within the tradition of “great realistic literature” (19). Modernism, with its emphasis on impression and form, becomes both experimental and pathological. Working within a grand narrative of human progress, he sees intense exploration of the experiences of isolated individuals as distractive, dangerous and a product of a pathological bourgeois mindset. He is particularly critical of James Joyce and Franz Kafka. Coetzee acknowledges the persistence of Lukàcs in an interview:

I happen to think Lukàcs’ judgement [of Joyce and Kafka] wrong, conditioned by more than a little moralistic prejudice; nor do I think much of what he has to say about Tolstoy and Balzac. Nevertheless the general position Lukàcs takes on what he calls realism carries a great deal of power, political and moral, in South Africa today: one’s first duty as a writer is to represent social and historical processes; drawing the procedures of representation into question is time-wasting; and so forth (*DP* 202).

Coetzee’s observation remains valid when applied to African literature in general. He acknowledges that, when preparing for a career as an Africanist at Buffalo, he read Lukàcs, in addition to Césaire, Senghor and Fanon. Literature on this continent is often treated as a social product, rather than the product of an individual author. It is often treated as a means of liberation from colonialism and neo-colonialism, rather than as an end in itself. Lukàcsian theory is transformed from an attack on “bourgeois” modernism, to an attack on “western” modernism. African writers are expected to write liberating texts in the language of the people, rather than to experiment with form

and structure. Like Coetzee, Marechera rebels against such prescriptive criticism. He expresses his view in the 1986 interview with Alle Lansu:

There are two traditions in African literature: one I will call the traditionalist outlook, whose leader is Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o also belongs to it; then there is the other, I would call it the modernist group, represented by Wole Soyinka and Ayi Kwei Armah and myself. The three of us are always described as individualists, and the word is used in a very insulting way. If people accuse you of individualism, then they are actually saying you are reactionary, you are a capitalist in your approach to art, you are not a writer of the people. The traditionalist group is very strongly approved of here in Zimbabwe, because their writing is very moral, it's easily used in schools as textbooks, and, especially in terms of Ngugi, it is very socialist. I like his works but he disturbs me in one respect: he believes that writing is not a profession but an instrument for the masses to come to power, and that therefore a writer should write about their struggles. Achebe sees the African writer's main job as being a teacher of the community, teaching them their history and traditions and therefore giving them back the self-respect which colonisation and the slave trade took away (Veit-Wild 1992:44).

Both Marechera and Coetzee attack the moralism inherent in the Lukàcsian position. The writer does not speak for any conventional system of social morality, he or she has higher ethical obligations. Marechera challenges Ngugi and Achebe, two of the leading figures in African literature since the sixties, because they perceive writing as a vehicle to something like education, liberation or both. As an anarchist, he is particularly concerned that the traditionalists receive state sanction, becoming a state-approved means of moral and political education. The label "individualist" in African literary circles corresponds directly to the Lukàcsian "subjective". It denigrates those who refuse to produce socially-approved texts. The link between individualism and capitalism is a product of Lukàcs' socialist realism. It is significant that, in spite of his aversion to Ngugi's role as literary commissar, Marechera acknowledges Ngugi as a significant influence in his own development as a writer.

Lukàcs' understanding of the relationship between modernism and history is based on a misreading of Walter Benjamin's definition of allegory. It is Benjamin and the allegorisation of history that lie at the heart of this thesis. Neither Marechera nor Coetzee is an "ahistorical" writer. Neither represents heroes "thrown-into-the-world" and lacking a personal history or a reality outside themselves (Lukàcs 1957:21). One could argue that such heroes do not exist in Joyce, Kafka or Beckett and that they are merely a product of Lukàcs' demonising imagination, but such an argument lies beyond the scope of this thesis. Marechera and Coetzee are modernist and allegorical writers and, for this reason, their work engages with history but not, at least not primarily, with the doctrinaire, deterministic history of the ideologue. As works of

literature, their texts examine the history presented through other texts. Hayden White discusses a growing dissatisfaction with history as a discipline based upon nineteenth-century understandings of science and the novel. The nineteenth century English novel becomes a paradigm for historiography (White 1978:43-44), just as Lukàcs advocates history as a blueprint for the nineteenth century novel. White observes that “historians continue to act as if the major, not to say the sole, purpose of art is to tell a story” (43). Lukàcs demands that the novel tell a historical story and reveal previously hidden historical truths: “it was precisely the searching-out of contradictions, the revelation of history’s labyrinthine course, that was the greatness of critical realism” (Lukàcs 1957:134). Novels and history are thus trapped in a double bind, feeding off one another. Lukàcsian criticism fails to acknowledge that historiographical narrative forms are themselves restrictive and oppressive.

Our understanding of ourselves as subjects constituted within Southern Africa and the world is dependent upon certain texts and certain forms of discourse. Various commentators, striving for a positive, progressive vision of history, have used these texts as instruments of education and of mobilisation. White Southern Africans allegorise a number of experiences in terms of the exploration narratives written about Southern Africa by white male colonisers and their descendants since the seventeenth century. The form and content of such narratives aim to present a progressive understanding of history. The coloniser, through his own wisdom and initiative, brings enlightenment in the form of wealth, education and medicine, into a benighted continent. All acts are explained in terms of this progressive impulse and a mythology grows. A text like Coetzee’s *Dusklands* addresses the formal tension between this mythos and any of a number of possible realities. The actual experience of life at the Cape in the seventeenth century has been reduced to text by those in positions of dominance and so a reader should treat any narrative which claims to reconstruct this experience with some suspicion. The discussion of allegory as hidden history surfaces in the work of Giambattista Vico who treats Roman mythology as an allegory for class and gender conflict in the earliest stages of the Roman republic. Venus, for example, represents “the natural wives of the plebeians” and she is naked because plebeian marriages were not recognised under the Roman system of patrimony (Vico 1744:165). The Roman myths are taken from Greek myths, which may be allegories of other historical conditions, and then adapted to a changing historical circumstance. New systems and conflicts borrow tropes from different sets of myths to create allegories in order to locate themselves within history. The thesis will investigate the use and abuse of those canonical texts which create national and class identity in Southern Africa. ...

Both Teresa Dovey and J P Wade identify the conflict between Lukácsian realism and Walter Benjamin's allegory in J M Coetzee's work (Wade 1990:284-285). Wade also explores South African Lukácsian condemnations of Coetzee's writing (277). The Lukács-Benjamin debate reaches far beyond South Africa. Lukács has had an overwhelming impact throughout the literature of the third world and upon our literary constructions of history. Several post-colonial writers, including Marechera and Salman Rushdie, have turned against the Lukácsian hegemony by mobilising Benjamin's concept of allegory as ruin. Benjamin makes the link between the *Trauerspiel* of the Baroque period and modernist literature. Both forms are allegorical and specifically entail an allegorical approach to history. In the context of allegory, history is necessarily dead and fragmentary:

When, as is the case in the *Trauerspiel*, history becomes part of the setting, it does so as script. The word 'history' stands written on the countenance of nature in the characters of transience. The allegorical physiognomy of the nature-history, which is put on stage in the *Trauerspiel*, is present in reality in the form of the ruin. In the ruin history has physically merged into the setting. And in this guise history does not assume the form of an eternal life so much as that of irresistible decay. Allegory thereby declares itself to be beyond beauty. Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things (Benjamin 1963:177-178).

The metaphor of the ruin is a useful one. It reminds us that history creates monuments and other edifices which crumble with the passage of time. The magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, living in the midst of an inhumane empire, takes solace in some wooden runes he finds in an archaeological site in the desert. They remind him that all empires, including the one he inhabits, are prone to destruction. Coetzee problematises this vision in *Age of Iron*, as the dying Elizabeth Curren attempts to adapt her classical understanding to the chaos of South Africa in the 1980s. Marechera's *House of Hunger* is filled with human ruins, with the traces of humanity destroyed by the Rhodesian government, by their own greed, even by "the twentieth century". These traces often express themselves through the allegory of the stain, a trace of blood or semen representing an actual or potential life which is crushed and wasted. In that case, the stain cannot be erased because the memory of that specific life will not disappear. *Black Sunlight* foregrounds the caves at Devil's End, which are a site of resistance to various regimes throughout history. In the end, history consists of the ruins of various forms of oppression, and only the resistance remains.

More importantly, however, we can understand these ruins as traces of discourse and literature. Benjamin observes that history surfaces as 'script' and allegory specifically deals with the written word in its ambiguity (Quilligan 1979:26). Writing on *King Solomon's Mines*, Bunn (1988:18) comments that "...it suits the *economic*

drive of Haggard's novel to construct a landscape of ruins, for then Africa is once again purged of competing meaning reminding only of a suitably distant epic past." Colonialism uses allegories of ruin in Africa in order to create a monolithic meaning. Ironically, the tradition of 'white writing' in Africa is, from the outset, a hollow ruin of the European literary tradition which produces it. Like other aspects of colonial culture, it involves the catch phrases of metropolitan society without their substance. In South Africa until 1994 and in Zimbabwe until 1980, we saw governments claiming to defend the western institution of democracy while denying the majority of their citizens the right to vote. The French in Algeria spoke of liberty, equality and fraternity while torturing people to death in remote farmhouses. Colonial culture is founded upon such flagrant ironies. Wilbur Smith, perhaps the most important ideologue for white aspirations in Southern Africa, defends massacres like that at Nyadzonia in Mozambique during the Zimbabwe liberation war as a necessary part of the defence of civilisation against barbarism (Lilford 1991:55-56). He does so blissfully unaware of the irony of his position. Writers like Olive Schreiner and Doris Lessing, writing as colonists who inhabit the liberal tradition, tried to expose such ironies. Their position was an uneasy one, one which led, in both cases, to exile. The enlightened liberals were a minority and an élite. They were isolated from white politics because of their views and from black politics because of language, race and social class. During times of relative peace, their presence was used to underscore the myth of democratic debate in settler society. Black Southern Africans lacked the franchise and the education for participation in the colonial system and so the liberals were forced into the position of speaking for the masses, while they lacked the language to speak with the masses.

My analysis, which assumes the dominance of the trope of the explorer journeying into the desert in search of a garden, owes a great deal to J M Coetzee's critical *White Writing*. Coetzee proposes that the opposition of garden and desert was crucial to the European attempts to write themselves into Africa. From about the seventeenth century, the harshness of Africa played desert to the garden-like New World in the Americas, which promised humanity untold wealth and the return to a state of innocence (*WW* 2). This state is that of paradise because it exists before human, particularly European intervention. Southern Africa would return its settlers not to innocence but to barbarism:

...the topos of the garden, the enclosed world entire to itself, is more extensive than the Judaeo-Christian myth of Eden. In its isolation from the great world, walled in by oceans and an unexplored northern wilderness, the colony of the Cape of Good Hope was indeed a kind of garden. But the future promised by the Cape seemed to be less of the perfection of man in a recovered original innocence than the degeneration of man into brute. Again and again visitors to the colony were warned that, from the lack of

any spur to activity in the economically stagnant hinterland, colonists were declining into the idle and brutish state of the Hottentots. Like Joseph Conrad after them, they were apprehensive that Africa might turn out to be not a Garden but an anti-garden, a garden ruled over by the serpent, where the wilderness takes root once again in men's hearts. The remedy they prescribed against Africa's insidious corruptions was cheerful toil (*WW* 3).

The 'cheerful toil' would keep the colonist from moral collapse and hold the wilderness at bay. At least one small section of the bush would become productive as the individual wrote meaning into the landscape. If he were to relax his vigilance for a moment, he would fall into atavism. Coetzee rightly identifies the dominance of the garden in the white Southern African mythos, as I shall explore in my fourth chapter. In addition, the allegorical reading of the colonial venture he proposes in his theoretical work is actualised in his fiction, as I shall examine in Chapters One and Five. The garden mythos stretches far beyond "the Judaeo-Christian myth of Eden", as Coetzee suggests. In that form, however, it is resonant within contemporary African culture, but I suspect that, in order to give it that resonance, missionary education overwrote an older, at times opposed myth of paradise. My second chapter attempts to recover traces of the older myth. The "Judaeo-Christian" garden myth also has a tremendous influence on the development of Romanticism and Realism, as my sixth chapter suggests. The influence of the garden on the development of European literature until post-modernism writes itself into the fiction of both Coetzee and Marechera. *White Writing* hints at the pervasiveness of the garden mythos and its relation to paradise and drought. This thesis will attempt to demonstrate that pervasiveness with specific reference to Coetzee's own writing and that of fellow Southern African modernist, Dambudzo Marechera.

The image of paradise among indigenous Africans in Southern Africa offered a religious or political refuge from the ruins of societies shattered by colonial invasions. Paradise could take the form of nostalgia for the pre-colonial period, faith in a religious redemption or the hope of political liberation. African economic and political systems were destroyed by forced removals from traditional land. African cultural systems were undermined by missionary, then 'Bantu', education. When African traditional narratives are published for a school readership they are sanitised and made into the kind of hollow, moral fable that Marechera attacks so vehemently. The colonial written word attempts to displace the African spoken word. Of particular concern to Marechera is the manner in which the ruins of the old African systems of discourse are occupied and rebuilt by those in authority, the black neo-colonialists as well as the white colonisers. The ruin is thus an abiding image for both white and black southern Africans. Both occupy the ruins of civilisation, the whites because their actions in

defence of civilisation have killed its spirit; the blacks because their civilisations have been destroyed. Benjamin's allegory of the ruins of history has an unusual resonance here.

Summary of the Thesis

The thesis consists of seven chapters. The first looks at Coetzee's fictive handling of the journey of exploration in *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. These texts present the trope of the explorer in the wasteland, suggesting two fundamentally opposed systems of reading the landscape present in the same author. One of these, exemplified by Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*, suggests that the wilderness and its people are a tabula rasa upon which the explorer inscribes meaning. The second system, exemplified by *Waiting for the Barbarians*' magistrate, suggests that the wilderness is a place of hidden meanings to be patiently drawn out in order to ensure one's literal and ethical survival. Chapter Two looks at some of those potential meanings through the analysis of a specific Shona *rungano*, or traditional narrative. It discusses how that narrative, Jane Chifamba's "Vana Vakarasirirwa Mugore Renzara" (Children Abandoned in the Year of Hunger), handles the related themes of childhood, drought and paradise. Chapter Three examines the resurgence of these themes in Marechera's *House of Hunger*, challenging the view that African modernism has no traditional grounding and discussing Marechera's allegorisation of Chifamba's themes. Chapter Four discusses the drought tradition in Southern African narratives of settlement. While it deals primarily with novels by white women writers, specifically Gertrude Page's *The Edge o' Beyond* and Doris Lessing's *The Grass is Singing*, it also looks at Bessie Head's *When Rain Clouds Gather*, a novel by a black South African which deals with newcomers settling in a remote village in Botswana. This chapter identifies ways in which the newcomers respond to the landscape. These involve a cycle of industry, idleness and illness. Chapter Five places J M Coetzee within the tradition of white writing, looking at how he allegorises its responses to drought in his *In the Heart of the Country*, *Foe* and *Age of Iron*. Chapter Six discusses the opposed tropes of gardens and paradise within European realism. It features Milton, Rousseau, and Dickens in a discussion of the continuities between romantic and realist treatments of the idea of paradise in the midst of urban physical and moral blight. Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* is included as a post-colonial novel which continues in that tradition, although, like Coetzee and Marechera, Rushdie problematises European concepts, inverting hell and paradise and representing them through allegorical figures. The final chapter looks at the quest for a resting place amid permanent civil war in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* and Marechera's *Black Sunlight*. It discusses how both novels offer moments of paradise amid the chaos of contemporary history.

Chapter One:

Desert Journeys: *Dusklands* And *Waiting For The Barbarians*

Two men embark on voyages. The first, Jacobus Coetzee, is on a mission of revenge and destruction. He is the violent product of a violent society and a violent age. His story is told as a parallel to that of Eugene Dawn, a static myth maker. The second man, the magistrate, is on a mission of mercy. He hopes to return the crippled barbarian girl, a victim of his empire's torture, to her own people. He is a peaceful liberal lawgiver, who hoped to retire on the banks of the lake before the sadistic practices of a new generation of law enforcers force him to take this one, almost futile action. Their relationships with the people around them are diametrically opposite. The landscape, however, responds to each man in a similar fashion. It is bleak, empty and unaccommodating, in spite of specific geographical differences between the two landscapes. In its resistance to exploration, it resembles the Southern African hinterland from the perspective of European settlers from 1652 onwards (*WW* 1). In both novels Coetzee interrogates the colonial myth of penetration.

Journeys to Destruction: *Dusklands*

Eugene Dawn is a researcher, "an introverted, intense young theorist in the mythography section of a Rand-type corporation which supplies advice on propaganda to the United States Department of Defence" (Penner 1989:33). He is a comic and self-fixated character reminiscent of someone out of Beckett. Like Molloy or Jacques Moran, he analyses and justifies each action he takes and he seems to be emotionally lacking. Unlike the Beckett characters he resembles, however, he has a place in history. His mission may seem as useless as Moran's but he plays a recognisable role in the massive American military campaign in Vietnam. His particular brief involves the propaganda war. He lives a static existence, plotting the destruction of a far-off country from within a bunker:

I sit in the depths of the Harry Truman Library, walled round with earth, steel, concrete, and mile after mile of compressed paper, from which impregnable stronghold of the intellect I send forth this winged dream of assault upon the mothering earth herself (*DL* 28).

The paper and indeed his mind are extensions of the bunker which holds him static. His is a new kind of colonisation in which he controls events from a distance. He has, it appears, never set foot in Vietnam. He knows the country only through the images he processes. He is unlike Jacobus Coetzee, the 18th century Cape frontiersman in the second half of the text, whose experience is immediate and intimate. Jacobus decimates a small village of Khoi people and he describes their suffering graphically. He kills four of his servants who defected to the Khoi, going into the intimate details of their deaths

(DL 103-104). Jacobus and Dawn each epitomises the barbarity of a specific system of colonisation. Each is an educated man with a finely developed, though corrupt, aesthetic sense. Jacobus records human death with the calm objectivity of a professional hunter, chronicling macabre details for scientific reasons. Like Dawn he is a scientist and a philosopher. Coetzee explores the mindset of the mass-murderer, raising the possibility that he can be a thinker, educated according to the liberal tradition. In both cases their chance to experience destruction comes through a journey. Jacobus, as an 18th century explorer, discovers territory in which he is free to let his destructive impulses reign. Dawn enjoys no such freedom. His world is closed in by concrete and books. His own journey is a more pathetic one to a rural motel in which his only possible victim is his young son. His gesture is ironic. Jacobus' memory is preserved and redeemed in a rather tame essay written by a descendant, one S J Coetzee. If Dawn succeeds in killing his only son, nobody will be able, at some stage in the future, to rescue his memory.

Eugene Dawn's journey is a nostalgic one, carrying him back to his "native state of California" (DL 35) with his son Martin. He gives us no details of the journey. We do not even know how far he has travelled. He is attempting to escape from himself, his life, his role in history and the static nature of his existence. The escape amazes him, as he tells us, "I marvel at myself. I have done a deed. It is not so hard after all" (DL 35). His amazement and the insignificance of his deed echo Molloy escaping Lousse (Beckett 1955:55). Dick Penner explores the links between Eugene Dawn and Dostoevsky's Underground man in *Notes from Underground*. Both are "sick" and "spiteful" characters who feel powerless and invisible (Penner 1989:34). Each feels incapable of action and surprised by the ability to act (40). Eugene Dawn is thus the antithesis of Jacobus Coetzee, who is a man of action, Dostoevsky's "*l'homme de la nature et de la vérité*", who "regards his revenge as an act of simple, straightforward justice" (Dostoevsky 1864:13). Jacobus 'knows' his enemy and he returns to kill that enemy. His knowledge, of course is deceptive, because he defines the concept and decides what actions constitute hostility. His prompt and determined action is still antithetical to Eugene's obsessive dithering. Eugene finds enemies everywhere. These include his supervisor and his wife. Like Underground's "offended, downtrodden, and ridiculed mouse", Eugene Dawn "submerges himself in cold, venomous and essentially never-ending spite" (Dostoevsky 1864:14). When his time comes for revenge he is unable to choose an appropriate target and therefore he lashes out at the nearest one, his son Martin, who is perhaps the only being around him who has not, in some way, injured him. Even Eugene's action is clouded by thought and analysis.

Jacobus Coetzee chronicles each detail of his journey. The landscape passes him slowly and he contemplates its passing. The narrative is preceded by recollections of

everyday brutality. Jacobus tells the reader how to hunt “the Bushman”, whom he describes as “a wild animal with an animal’s soul”. He views him as vermin, a nuisance to people and livestock which must be eradicated: “It is only when you hunt them as you hunt jackals that you can really clear a stretch of the country” (*DL* 59). He admits that the “Bushmen” have their uses, but only as herders if they are tamed before the age of seven or eight. They can be transformed from vermin into livestock with the right management and under the right conditions. Ultimately, however, he predicts their demise:

If you want profit out of the women you must make them breed you herders off the Hottentots (they do not breed off white men). But they have a long cycle, three or four years, between children. So their increase is slow. It will not be difficult to stamp the Bushmen out, in time (*DL* 61).

Jacobus Coetzee does not have to theorise or to justify his acts of genocide. He presents these acts as a normal part of life on the frontier. His attitude is chillingly commonsensical. He treats other human beings as animals without questioning his thinking. His brief excursus on hunting “Bushmen”, introduces his character and prepares us for the journey which lies ahead. Penner describes Jacobus in these terms:

...Jacobus is a rather unexceptional eighteenth-century Afrikaner lacking in self-awareness and intent upon carrying out the dual colonial goals of dominance and acquisition. Whereas the hyperconscious Eugene Dawn is finally undone by his guilt over his contribution to the murder of the Vietnamese, Jacobus Coetzee seems totally unaware that his attitude to the indigenous peoples of Africa is in any way barbaric. He assumes a sympathetic audience and adopts the emotionless, pragmatic style of a military field guide (Penner 1989:42).

Jacobus lacks self-awareness because he assumes the objectivity of a scientist. He is, as I have indicated elsewhere, a product of the enlightenment, and his object is to catalogue the landscape as he destroys it (Lilford 1991:26,60). He writes his treatise on killing “Bushmen”, using much the same style as other Southern African hunters like F C Selous to describe his adventures and his techniques. Penner is only right in so far as Jacobus is practising “dominance and acquisition”. Otherwise Jacobus is an enlightened man, describing his exploits in neutral scientific terms.

Eugene Dawn is equipped with additional psychological tools, including Freudian self-awareness. There is no evidence to suggest he feels anything for the Vietnamese. His colonising drive destroys him because he turns it back on himself. He would be a coloniser like Jacobus Coetzee but he lacks Jacobus’s objectivity and distance. He also lacks territory to colonise, as Gallagher comments, “In the twentieth century, ... what

remains to be explored is the human psyche, and instead of mapping rivers and mountains, Dawn sets down body language, dreams and myths" (Gallagher 1991:59). He is forced to colonise minds at a distance. Whereas Jacobus presides impassionately over acts of terror and barbarity at close range, Eugene reads himself into a conflict which occurs a great distance away. He is concerned with the production of a universal myth which will allow America to win the Vietnam war. In his myth "the father cannot be a benign father until his sons have knelt before his wand" (*DL* 26). Jacobus Coetzee actualises the myth, forcing Adonis, one of his rebellious servants, to swallow the muzzle of the gun that will kill him (*DL* 104). By accepting the gun, Adonis accepts Jacobus' mastery before he dies. Jacobus becomes a father, bringing discipline to his prodigal children. Eugene, on the other hand, is a prodigal child. He tells us:

If I must be a martyr to the cause of obedience, I am prepared to suffer. I am not alone. Behind their desks across the breadth of America wait an army of young men, out of fashion like me. We wear dark suits and thick lenses. We are the generation who were little boys in 1945. We are taking up position. We are stepping into shoes. It is we who will inherit America, in due course. We are patient. We wait our turn (*DL* 27)

He views his generation as the clumsy children of the fathers who fought the second world war. They are not yet mature as they have not yet stepped into their father's shoes in order to claim their inheritance. His obsession with occupying the space of the parents is again reminiscent of Beckett. Molloy strives to become his mother, saying, "In any case I now have her room. I sleep in her bed. I piss and shit in her pot. I must have taken her place. I resemble her more and more. All I need now is a son" (Beckett 1955:9). Eugene takes Molloy's personal mythos and makes it into a propaganda campaign. His neurosis becomes American foreign policy. From his own subjective position, he invents the exact myth he attempts to destroy. Similarly, Jacobus takes the personal physical pathology of his boil and projects it on to the Nama. Each man invents an enemy. Eugene has no-one with whom to share solidarity and so he lies when he claims "I am not alone". His project attempts to fragment a Vietnamese myth of solidarity, of group suffering. He strives to make each Vietnamese feel like "the subject singled out for especial punishment" (24). Ironically, he moves into this position through his act of solitary, impotent rebellion. He himself "is vanquished" even though he makes no noticeable impact on the Vietnamese national psyche. Eugene Dawn is the victim of his own myth.

Mastery and Bondage

Eugene's journey is an act of rebellion against the authority of Coetzee, his supervisor and thus his "father", and against the laws of the state. He pays no attention to detail,

assuming that his rebellion has no chance of success and that he will eventually capitulate. He records his most significant slip, changing his name, but not his car registration (36). He has assumed authority by giving himself orders:

“You will pack a bag. You will take your son’s hand and walk out of the house. You will cash a check. You will leave town”. Then I did these things. Giving myself orders is a trick I often play on my habit of obedience. Thirty-three is the mythologically correct age for cutting ties (36).

He rebels by the book and the book is *Molloy*. His instructions to himself echo those of Jacques Moran, agent and hunter, as he orders his son to prepare for the expedition to find Molloy:

Now listen to me, I said. His face took on a look of anguished attention. We leave this evening, I said in substance, on a journey. Put on your school suit, the green—. But it’s blue, papa, he said. Blue or green, put it on, I said violently. I went on. Put in your little knapsack, the one I gave you for your birthday, your toilet things, one shirt, one pair of socks and seven pairs of drawers. Do you understand? Which shirt, papa? he said. It doesn’t matter which shirt, I cried, any shirt! Which shoes am I to wear? he said. You have two pairs of shoes, I said, one for Sundays, and one for weekdays, and you ask me which you are to wear. I sat up. I want none of your lip, I said.

Thus to my son I gave precise instructions. But were they the right ones? Will they stand the test of second thoughts? Would I not be impelled, in a very short time, to cancel them? I who never changed my mind before my son. The worst was to be feared (Beckett 1955:94-95).

Eugene plays both roles. He is the father who gives the orders and the son who obeys them. He strives to replace his father by becoming father to himself. Instead of Moran’s self-doubt, he explains himself mythologically. His role model is an ironic one, since Moran’s son deserts him and Moran fails in his mission. He cannot identify Molloy and he kills the wrong man. Eugene tries to occupy both sides of various power relationships. He wants to be his own father and his own son and to be simultaneously master and servant. He cannot break out of the weaker position. Eugene’s servant mentality is so etched upon his consciousness that he can only hope to escape it by playing the master.

Jacobus’ servant, Plaatje, effectively escapes his role as servant. When Jacobus calls the servants to return with him, Plaatje refuses:

“Master can go”, said Plaatje, “master and master’s tame hotnot. We say goodbye, master, goodbye, good luck. Only master, watch out who you hit next time”. With an index finger he chucked me lightly under the chin. “Watch out master, see?” (92).

Adonis retains his fear of Jacobus, even though the latter is in a weakened position. Their roles do not change when Jacobus returns with soldiers to punish them for what he perceives as treachery. Plaatje remains steadfast: "Plaatje looked at me, he knew he was dead, he did not bother to plead" (101). Adonis, on the other hand, pleads for mercy (103). Teresa Dovey identifies the Hegelian master-slave dialectic as a central motif in *Dusklands*, saying "the fact that Jacobus Coetzee's illness places him at the mercy of the Hottentots, combined with the fact that they fail to respond to him in any systematic way, means that he does not achieve 'recognition' as master" (Dovey 1988:95). He does not receive any special treatment and so he becomes their equal, a fellow Hottentot, and therefore, in his eyes, a potential slave. He strives to develop the boundaries between himself and the Hottentots, exploring the "rings of demarcation" (*DL* 103) between the whiteness of his formerly-clothed skin and his "red-brown" suntan (Atwell 1993:52). His song "Hottentot, Hottentot, I am not a Hottentot" (*DL* 95) is also an attempt to assert his status as coloniser and master. As Dovey observes, "his declaration of independence cannot grant him a completely autonomous identity" (Dovey 1988:108). The ditty shows that his identity depends upon the Hottentots. It is only his return journey that raises the possibility of a new definition.

Eugene Dawn, as I have already suggested, is a static character. He travels from his stagnant position at the Harry S Truman Library, to a static motel, to confinement in an institution. His car journey to California merits no mention. The only trace of movement is his walk in the forest with his son:

Martin seemed to be happy. He stood up well to a tiring walk. Usually he complains and wants to be carried; but that is the effect of his mother. Children will not grow up if they are treated like children. With me Martin is quite the little man. He is proud of his father and wishes to be like him. The walk put colour in his cheeks (*DL* 35).

The walk is a rite of passage which will transform Martin into a man. Like Moran's son, his father believes he can become more masculine only in the absence of women. Moran, a widower, treats his servant Martha as the effeminising influence who makes his son less manly (Beckett 1955:117). Eugene has a similar attitude towards his wife. Both men need the journey into the countryside to prove their own masculinity, perhaps suggesting that their distrust of women is misplaced. The walk makes Eugene more manly, at least in the eyes of his child. The walk is a journey into "nature", which serves as a somewhat pathetic parody of Jacobus Coetzee's journey. Eugene describes the walk in hindsight because he is unable to record the journey in progress, relying on memory and introspection after the fact. Jacobus' narrative, on the other hand, is told from the perspective of one in the midst of a journey. We know the outcome of Eugene's journeys because they have always already happened. Like Martin Dawn,

Jacobus Coetzee develops on his journey back from Namaqualand. He travels with Klauer, his only faithful servant. Even though Klauer is the most servile of servants, he assumes the role of parent to Jacobus. He is older and he begs the Namaqua for food, thus ensuring Jacobus' survival (*DL* 94). Like Eugene Dawn, he provides his 'child' with a knife. Coetzee demands the knife and Klauer gives it. Eugene's use of the knife is more pathetic and sinister. It is a mere fruit knife, echoing Molloy's "vegetable knife" (Beckett 1955:57) and he uses it to stab Martin, who has become his hostage as well as his son (*DL* 42). His act is a bizarre and unmotivated one, something like Molloy's attempt to "set about opening my wrist." Both men attack their own flesh and blood with their knives. In each case they fail to do any permanent damage. Molloy cannot stand the pain; Eugene is overpowered by the police. Jacobus returns home to find a lamb, "an innocent little fellow who had never seen his master and was only thinking of a good night's sleep, and [to] slit his throat" (*DL* 100). The lamb is his property, not his child, but Jacobus' attack on the lamb echoes Eugene's stabbing his son. Each act is a spontaneous act of violence. The lamb replaces the child in the text because Jacobus' actual descendants, who receive no mention in his narrative, must be left both to preserve and to corrupt his story.

Before he has a chance to kill the lamb, a figure for childhood because it occupies a parallel position to Martin Dawn, Jacobus celebrates the death of Klauer as his surrogate parent:

I was alone. I had no Klauer to record. I exulted like a young man whose mother has just died. Here I was, free to initiate myself into the desert (*DL* 95).

His analogy is a jarring one. Why would a mother's death lead a young man to exult? Like Eugene Dawn, he views his trip into the wilderness as an assertion of manhood. He has escaped the world of woman and of coddling and is free to embrace the earth. His embrace is impotent: "I bored a sheath in the earth and would have performed the ur-act had joy and laughter not reduced me to a four-inch dangle and helpless urination" (95). As Dovey asserts "...if Jacobus Coetzee expresses a desire for initiation into the world, this world must be understood as the world of his own, or of the text's own making" (Dovey 1988:106). This new world is a *tabula rasa*, on which the colonising white male is free to inscribe his own meaning. Ironically his freedom only demonstrates his impotence. Eugene Dawn goes into the now-tame wilderness of California to initiate his son into the world of men and his journey leads him into the sterile all-male mental institution.

In each case the act of initiation takes the protagonist into a simpler, more basic state of existence. Eugene Dawn enters a mental institution:

It has all come down to this (I ease myself in and tell over the clear, functional words): my bed, my window, my door, my walls, my room. These words I love. I sit them on my lap to burnish and fondle. They are beloved to me, each one, and having arrived at them I vow not to lose them. They lie quiet under my hand: they wink back at me, they glow for me, they are placid now that I am here. They are my fruit, my grapes growing around for me. Around them I dance my slow fat happy dance of union, around them and around. I live in them and they in me.

This simple place is for men in need of simplicity. There are no women here. This is an all-male institution. Women are allowed in on visiting days, but wanting no visits I have no visitors. I agree with my doctors that I need rest and routine, for the time being, and a chance to work myself out (*DL* 43).

While Eugene's "words" refer to concrete objects in his now curtailed world, he almost immediately makes them metaphysical. His movement among the mundane fixtures of his cell becomes something akin to the music of the spheres. The cell becomes his own allegory for a much wider universe and for society. He must "learn to form stable attachments" (43) with these objects. The absence of society is explicitly the absence of women. His environment is sterile because it is all-male. It is empty of everything except the words which brought him to this point in the first place. He simply continues in his isolation. The mental institution is the research institute in another form. Eugene Dawn has made an allegorical journey reminiscent of Alice and the Red Queen. He has run over a vast tract of territory only to find that "Everything's just as it was" (Carroll 1896:152). The allegory perhaps points to a Foucauldian universe in which surveillance and coercion are internalised and every man becomes his own gaoler.

Jacobus Coetzee's initiation also takes him outside society but, unlike Eugene Dawn, he moves outside all social restrictions. His dance is not a metaphorical dance of the words representing things in a small room. It is an actual dance and one which celebrates his isolation and his love of the objects around him. He shouts:

"...I love everything. I love the stones and the sand and the bushes and the sky and Klawer and those others and every worm, every fly in the world. But God, don't let them love me. I don't like accomplices, God, I want to be alone" It was nice to hear this come out. But the stones, I decided, so introverted, so occupied in quietly being, were after all my favourites (*DL* 95-96).

Like Eugene Dawn, he finds paradise in isolation. Jacobus' isolation, however, occurs within the context of a vast space; one in which his rebellious servants, "those others", become like "every worm, every fly in the world". Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee express the coloniser's desire for isolation from society in general and women in particular. The colonial space must be an empty one, one in which men are free to

create themselves amid objects. Jacobus and Eugene each experience freedom as regression. Eugene regresses into dependence on the staff of his institution. Jacobus regresses closer to a state of nature. He becomes "a white-skinned Bushman" (99) and violates social mores by killing a domestic cow. He is utterly free to do so because he knows that punishment for his crime will be "visited on the unfortunate heads of the Bushmen" (99). Jacobus' descendant misreads him as an explorer on the vanguard of civilisation. Jacobus embraces Hayden White's definition of wildness as the negative of civilisation (White 1978:151). As soon as he leaves the boundaries of civilisation, he enters a state of being which is more savage than that of the Bushman or the Khoi. The change is not a regression, it is a rejection of the artificiality of civilisation. He becomes a "heretic" and a "madman", rejecting the orthodoxy and sanity of the "civilised" Cape. Like Augustine in White's analysis, Jacobus merges anything outside Dutch civilisation with his own heretical behaviour.

Jacobus' journey back to Namaqualand and the subsequent massacre of his rebellious servants and of the Namaqua village are attempts to regain his status as civilised man. He must enforce the law, thus showing that the Hottentots are criminal and unchristian and that he is their opposite. Only by eliminating the other can he assert his identity as civilised man. He becomes the unwilling agent of a God obsessed with justice:

Through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered through the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality. No more than any other man do I enjoy killing; but I have taken it upon myself to pull the trigger, performing this sacrifice for myself and my countrymen, who exist, and committing upon the dark folk the murders we have all wished. All are guilty, without exception. I include the Hottentots. Who knows for what unimaginable crimes of the spirit they died, through me? God's judgement is just, irreprehensible, and incomprehensible. His mercy pays no heed to merit. I am a tool in the hands of history (*DL* 106).

He reminds them of his existence by killing them. In doing so he actualises himself, moving from "pallid symbol" to bearer of "God's judgement". Whereas Eugene alienates himself by becoming his own policeman or his own father, Jacobus subjects himself to an impersonal history. Each is alienated from any notion of cause and effect. Jacobus' sojourn in the desert, while it seems to be an encounter with reality is as unreal as Eugene Dawn's bombardment of the Vietnamese with myths. Each man needs to experience pain and death at first hand in order to live reality. Jacobus Coetzee attains his reality by killing the inhabitants of the village. Eugene Dawn does so by stabbing his son and then by feeling pain as the officers of the court move in to Martin's rescue. Eugene says "Now I am beginning to be hurt. Now someone is really

beginning to hurt me. Amazing" (*DL* 43). He must feel pain in order to know he exists. He speaks as if he is existing in reality for the first time.

Journey without Paradise: *Waiting for the Barbarians*

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate moves beyond the frontier in search of an entirely different sort of self-realisation. He has spent many years as an uninspiring functionary at the edge of a vast empire. Suddenly, with an apparent escalation of a war between the empire and the barbarian people living on its fringes, torturers come from the capital to wring information from the barbarians. The magistrate is horrified at their behaviour. He sets off on a chivalric quest to return one of the tortured, a barbarian girl, to her people. He has sought various ways to atone for the atrocities of his empire by caring for her but she remains elusive. Eventually he tells her, "I am taking you back to your people" (*WB* 58). He writes a note which is obliquely critical of his superiors and sets off into the wasteland. He hopes to catch up with the barbarians so that he can return the girl to them:

My plan is to follow this track till we have skirted the lake to the south, then to strike out north-east across the desert towards the valleys of the ranges where the northern nomads spend the winter. It is a route rarely travelled, since the nomads, when they migrate with their flocks, follow the old dead river bed in a vast sweep east and south. However it reduces a journey of six weeks to one or two. I have never travelled it myself (*WB* 58-59).

The journey will thus take them through unknown and inhospitable territory. Not even the nomads travel in that direction. The nomads' journey is itself a journey through a wasteland, they follow an "old dead river bed". The desolation of the usual route shows how much worse this trajectory is, even if it stands to take four or five weeks off the journey. They leave in late winter, knowing that the barbarians will travel even further north in the early spring. The terrain is cold as well as bleak and barren. As they progress around the lake, the trip becomes more and more miserable:

In these early days of the journey we eat well. We have brought salted meat, flour, beans, dried fruit, and there are wildfowl to shoot. But we have to be sparing with water. The marsh water here in the shallow fingers is too salty to be drinkable. One of the men has to wade twenty or thirty paces in, as deep as his calves, to fill the skins, or, better, to break off lumps of ice. Yet even the melted-ice water is so bitter and salty that it can only be drunk with strong red tea. Every year the lake grows more brackish as the river eats into its banks and sweeps salt and alum into the lake. Since the lake has no outflow its mineral content keeps rising, particularly in the south, where tracts of water are seasonally isolated by sand-bars. After the summer flood the fishermen find carp floating belly-up in the shallows. They say that perch are no more to be seen. What will become of the settlement if the lake grows into a dead sea.

After a day of salty tea all of us except the girl begin to suffer from diarrhoea. I am the worst afflicted. I feel keenly the humiliation of the frequent stops, the undressing and dressing with frozen fingers in the lee of the horse while the others wait. I try to drink as little as possible, to the point that my mind throws up tantalising images as I ride: a full cask by the wellside with water splashing from the ladle; clean snow.... The wind never lets up. It howls at us across the ice, blowing from nowhere to nowhere, veiling the sky in a cloud of red dust. From the dust there is no hiding: It penetrates our clothing, cakes our skin, sifts into the baggage. We eat with coated tongues, spitting often, our teeth grating. Dust rather than air becomes the medium in which we live. We swim through dust like fish through water.

The girl does not complain. She eats well, she does not get sick, she sleeps soundly all night clenched in a ball in weather so cold I would hug a dog for comfort. She rides all day without a murmur. Once, glancing up, I see that she is riding asleep, her face peaceful as a baby's (*WB* 59-60).

For the magistrate and his men, this is a journey without rest. They are exhausted, cold, dirty and sick. The magistrate is acutely aware of the ecological catastrophe that surrounds them; he knows about the minerals seeping into the lake. He is also not as fit as the others and suffers more from diarrhoea. They are all tormented by the salt and the dust. By contrast, the girl has returned to her element. She is not affected by the brackish water and she eats and sleeps well. Colonel Joll has partially blinded and crippled her, yet these disabilities have no effect on her fitness for the journey.

As they travel further, the landscape worsens. From the marsh, they move across a brittle salt pan. The guide and his horse fall through the crust of salt into an icy green slime. He is the expert on the terrain "east of the lake" (*WB* 60-61), the one person upon whom the survival of the group depends, and, ironically, he is the one who falls into the trap. They move on to a sandy, rocky desert and from there into dune land, which slows their progress (61). After the salt-pan, the desert is a relief but it gives them no rest; they must kill one of the pack-horses which refuses to travel further. The journey has taken them through every possible kind of wasteland. When they find a resting place, it is a long-dead oasis, which the guide says is a possible water-source:

What we have stumbled upon is the bank of an ancient terminal lagoon. Dead reeds, ghostly white and brittle to the touch, line what were its banks. The trees are poplars, also long dead. They have died since the underground water receded too far to be reached by their roots years and years ago.

We unload the animals and begin to dig. At two feet we reach heavy blue clay. Beneath this there is sand again, then another stratum of clay, noticeably clammy. At a depth of seven feet, with my heart pounding and my ears ringing, I have to refuse my turn with the spade. The men toil on, lifting the loose soil out of the pit in a tent-cloth tied at the corners (62).

They find pure water and build ovens from the clay to bake bread. For the first time in the journey, they are able to rest. They are no longer hurrying over a crust of salt before it breaks, or trying to force their horses through the dunes. It is luck that brought them to water, just as luck prevented their guide from falling through into a deeper patch of lake. Had he died, they may never have realised there was water here.

In the more relaxed environment of the oasis, the girl begins to communicate with the men. The magistrate falls asleep, jealous, listening to them. When she enters the tent she seduces him, and they have sex, which proved impossible back at the outpost: "...in a minute five months of senseless hesitancy are wiped out and I am floating back into easy sensual oblivion" (63). The oasis is also an allegorical one in their relationship. Since he took her in, they have lived in the same room, though at a distance from one another. He has been unable to find the courage to approach her and has contented himself with washing her feet in an effort to atone for her suffering.

In their past life at the settlement, the magistrate has been tormented by the idea that he is related to those who tortured her:

All this erotic behaviour of mine is indirect: I prowls about her, touching her face, caressing her body, without entering her or finding the urge to do so. I have just come from the bed of a woman, for whom, in the year that I have known her, I have not had to interrogate my desire:... But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel a dry pity for them: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other! (*WB* 43).

The woman and the desert share a common set of metaphors. Both refuse to nourish the man travelling around them. They resist through non-collaboration. Later in his journey, the magistrate will realise the dangers of trying to penetrate surfaces. He will see the salt flat as a thin surface crust lying between them and a horrible death. He and his companions hurry across this surface: "fearful of being lost in a fluid colder than ice, mineral, subterranean, airless" (*WB* 61). The reality of natural surfaces and hidden disasters makes an end to his contemplation of penetrating human surfaces. The allegory collapses when confronted with that from which it is drawn. The barrier between the magistrate and the barbarian girl collapses, however, in the oasis. It is neutral territory, a no-man's land between the magistrate's town and the barbarians' nomadic settlements. It is only in such a space that magistrate and barbarian can consummate their desire. The desire for rest, for water and for one another. The dead oasis becomes a living one for the exhausted travellers.

Once they set off again, the misery returns. A storm carries off a tent. They meet the barbarians and return the girl to them, accomplishing little else. They then travel

back to the settlement. Once there, the magistrate is arrested, tortured and humiliated. He witnesses martial rule and the evacuation of the military. The soldiers desert the town and the magistrate is left, with those of the citizens who are too poor to leave, to await the barbarians. His encounter with the girl in the dried-up oasis has been the magistrate's one true moment of intimacy. Like Jacobus and Eugene Dawn, he has reached a point of communion with his surroundings. His communion, however, brings him close to another human being, more specifically a woman. Jacobus experiences a communion with nature that excludes any potential for human contact. Eugene communes with the sparse furniture of a mental hospital. Unlike the two protagonists of *Dusklands*, the magistrate is able to transcend himself. He only makes contact with the barbarian girl after a long and uncomfortable journey. Unlike Jacobus and Eugene, he travels, not ostensibly for his own benefit, but for the sake of the barbarian girl. He achieves self-hood through obeying his conscience rather than through satiating any desire for action and power.

Contrasting Tropes

Both *Dusklands*' "Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" and *Waiting for the Barbarians* use menstruation as a metaphor for isolation. Jacobus is taken prisoner by the Namaqua people. He is kept in a "menstruation hut":

Klawer came, not so solicitous as I might have wished, and removed me from the spectators to the menstruation hut which, it appeared, had been assigned to me, and in whose sombre privacy I thrice, clinging for support to my foreman's thighs, vented myself into a hemispherical gourd which it was his privilege to empty in the bushes. This charge he fulfilled day after day thereafter. Morning and evening he conveyed to me too the bowl of broth which constituted the foundation of the cure by purge that was being practised upon me by the same crone who had brought me drink, a gloomy Bushman slave with a knowledge of Bushman pharmacopoeia whom I sometimes glimpsed peering at me through the door of the hut and who replied to my questions about the name and prognosis of my illness, the reason for her benefactions, and (weakness this) my fate with churlish silence (*DL* 77).

In the isolation of the hut he must hide the shame of his dysentery from everybody except Klawer, who is already demonstrating his position as care-giver and parent to Jacobus. Jacobus' health is dependent upon Klawer and upon the "gloomy Bushman slave", who refuses to communicate with him. He must trust that the broth she supplies is a cure and not a poison. He is reduced to the status of a child because he cannot control his body. The Nama isolate him because he is a potential danger to them. His isolation is particularly humiliating because it treats him as a menstruating woman.

Jacobus, who believes himself to be superior by race and by gender, is treated as a lesser being.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the harmony experienced at the oasis ends when the barbarian girl begins to menstruate:

The girl is bleeding, that time of the month has come for her. She cannot conceal it, she has no privacy, there is not the merest bush to hide behind. She is upset and the men are upset. It is the old story: a woman's flux is bad luck, bad for the crops, bad for the hunt, bad for the horses. They grow sullen: they want her away from the horses, which cannot be, they do not want her to touch their food. Ashamed, she keeps to herself all day and does not join us for the evening meal. After I have eaten I take a bowl of beans and dumplings to the tent where she sits.

"You should not be waiting on me," she says. "I should not even be in the tent. But there is nowhere else to go." She does not question her exclusion.

"Never mind," I tell her. I touch my hand to her cheek, sit down for a while and watch her eat.

It is futile to press the men to sleep in the tent with her. They sleep outside, keeping the fire burning, rotating the watch. In the morning, for their sake, I go through a brief purification ritual with the girl (for I have made myself unclean by sleeping in her bed): with a stick I draw a line in the sand, lead her across it, wash her hands and mine, then lead her back across the line into the camp. "You will have to do the same again tomorrow morning," she murmurs. In twelve days on the road we have grown closer than months of living in the same rooms (*WB* 69-70).

Like Jacobus Coetzee, the girl is isolated because, according to local tradition, she poses a danger to the men. In this case she depends upon the magistrate, who must bring her food. She is ashamed because she understands the reasons for her isolation, viewing herself as unclean. The magistrate demonstrates his liberalness by acknowledging the customs of the men even if he does not accept them himself. As an amateur anthropologist and archaeologist, he demonstrates his knowledge of local custom through his use of the "purification ritual". The girl explains the futility of the ritual, "You will have to do the same thing tomorrow morning". They become accomplices in a conspiracy to keep up appearances and the magistrate realises that their intimacy has grown in the short time they have been travelling into the interior. He later grows to regret the time wasted in the sterile months spent in town, thinking: "she could have spent those long empty evenings teaching me her tongue" (*WB* 72). By travelling into the interior with the barbarian girl, the magistrate meets her on her own territory. At his house in the town, he struggles to communicate with her; when they travel together he learns that she is better adapted to the interior than he is and they learn to communicate. When the magistrate realises that "she is a witty, attractive

young woman" (63), he regrets that he did not see her more clearly earlier. Penner suggests that the magistrate "transcends his myopic view of her as servant, concubine and wild animal" (Penner 1989:79). Even though the barbarian girl has been blinded by torture, it is the magistrate, who, due to his position as an agent of the empire, has been unable to see.

Jacobus Coetzee is never able to transcend his blindness. Like Eugene Dawn, he moves to the edge of understanding and then takes refuge in dogma. He has a moment of regret during his revenge attack on the Namaqua village. His regret, however, has nothing to do with a lack of knowledge of the other. He notices a rape in progress and comments:

The Griqua was doing things to the child on the ground. It must be a girl child. I could not think of any of the Hottentot girls I might want except perhaps the girl who had fallen so cleanly at the first shot. One could always stroke oneself with an irony like that (*DL* 102).

He regrets only the loss of crude and violent sexual knowledge. He assumes that his penetration of territory entitles him to any women attached to that territory, commenting that "Bushman girls... spoil one for one's own kind. Dutch girls carry an aura of property with them" (61). Bushmen and Nama women fall outside law, regulation and property and thus represent sexual freedom. Like other colonial explorers, Jacobus views the anarchy of Bushman sexuality as an allegory for the unchartedness of the frontier. Like the empty space he explores and colonises, "they exist merely as a cipher, or an absence (Gallagher 1991:65).

While Jacobus' crude romance with the frontier shares some traits with the magistrate's, they differ fundamentally in their basic premise. For Jacobus, the frontier is the place of absence. He is free from social restrictions and it is with regret that he returns to his home: "What dismayed the heart about those three hundred miles was the same road back, the old foot marks, the familiar sights" (*DL* 99). The magistrate views the frontier, like the barbarian girl, her language and the wooden runes he finds at his archaeological site, as the location of a yet-unknown meaning. It is a meaning to be gleaned by patience and study and the Third Bureau only destroys it through their conspiracy theories and their use of torture. Jacobus acknowledges that there may be meaning in the frontier. He hints at the possibility of Hottentot knowledge beyond his understanding:

I am an explorer. My essence is to open what is closed, to bring light to what is dark. If the Hottentots comprise an immense world of delight, it is an impenetrable world, impenetrable to men like me, who must either skirt it, which is to evade our mission, or clear it out of our way (*DL* 106).

Unlike the magistrate, he nurtures no hope of understanding this “immense world of delight”. Because he will never understand it, his mission is simply to “clear it out of our way”. He clings to his belief that the frontier is the place of emptiness and anarchy. Even though he embraces the anarchy for a moment, he returns to a Calvinistic sense of divine order. He cannot remain in a state of chaos, and so he uses “God’s judgement” (106) to create order and meaning in the colonised space. Colonel Joll represents the imposition of order and meaning in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The magistrate attempts to prove to himself and those around him that there is another, deeper ethical imperative to reveal a deeper truth. He hopes to reveal the pre-existent level of meaning that Jacobus Coetzee sees as closed to him.

Conclusion

In both *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the frontier is an allegory for the failure of understanding. There are two responses to the apparent chaos. One is, in the manner of Jacobus Coetzee, to impose meaning upon the landscape, to force it to conform to one’s norms. The other is, following the magistrate, to seek transcendent moments of understanding and happiness in what already exists. These become two opposed allegories. The first is the allegory of the garden, in which one makes one’s own meaning, causing the desert to flower. The second is the allegory of paradise. Paradise is a pre-existing fertile place amid the chaos. The quest for paradise tends to be an indigenous response to the desert, generations of contact with the land promote humility, teaching people that it will never be uniformly fertile, and that when its fertility fails, the logical response is to move on. The desire to build gardens comes with the arrogance of the coloniser, who wishes to see the land demarcated, bounded and controlled but who finds a lingering nostalgia for anarchy. The post-colonial project finds that the colonial demarcation of land is dominant. Land use and movement are restricted and people must fight for dwindling resources within strict boundaries. Within the conflict engendered by the struggle for land, a new understanding of paradise and gardens is required. In the next chapter we shall examine an indigenous African narrative response to the problems raised by drought and the accompanying scarcity of resources.

Chapter Two:

Allegories of Drought and Paradise in a Shona Narrative

Indigenous Africans developed responses to local climatic conditions over thousands of years. While these responses were distorted and repressed by Christian evangelism and colonialism, they surface in a variety of forms, both textual and practical. Any text dealing with these problems possesses at least three allegorical layers. The first of these is the pre-colonial response to the society and its environment. This first layer may correspond to myth, as the pre-text for allegory as a “twice-told tale” (Honig 1959:12). It may also involve allegories for then-current states of affairs but, since the other layers have over-written the first layer, it is difficult to identify these original allegories. The second allegorical layer involves the attempt to integrate the narrative into the new, dominant discourses. The integration is particularly pronounced in written sources, since the missionaries held a monopoly on education. Aspirations towards education and its advantages mean, however, that the second layer may be present in oral sources as well. The third layer challenges the new ideology, suggesting alternatives. On a crude level, a monster living in a drought-stricken region may be seen by missionaries as a figure for the devil or for the African tradition with which they conflated the devil. It may also represent colonialism and colonial displacement. As the focus shifts between one audience and another, the meaning shifts accordingly. It is not possible to peel an oral narrative like an onion or like a biblical text, which has oral and written layers in different dialects. Even if such an operation were possible, I lack the linguistic background to attempt it. Because there is no core narrative from which the traditional truth can be plucked unscathed, the metaphor of layers of meaning begins to fall apart. In order to use traditional narrative effectively, I suggest, one must read with an eye open to all allegorical possibilities. This chapter presents such a reading of Jane Chifamba’s “Vana Vakarasirirwa Mugore Renzara” (Children abandoned in the year of starvation) which appears in her collection entitled *Ngano dzePasi Chigare* (Tales from Olden Times). My translation of the text appears as appendix 1 on page 203 of this thesis.

This *rungano* (plural: *ngano*) or traditional Shona narrative is part of a set of writings which fall somewhere between the written and the oral. It would be tempting to read it as orature, as some pure, authentic voice of a rural past in Zimbabwe. But it is authentic only in that it was written in Shona for a Shona-speaking readership and its immediate author is Jane Chifamba. There is little information on Chifamba other than the details on the back cover. Flora Veit-Wild lists her as the second published Zimbabwe woman writer. The first is Lassie Ndongdo, whose *Qaphela Ingane* came out in 1962, two years before Chifamba’s *Ngano dzepasi Chigare* (Veit-Wild 1993:246). Since Ndongdo wrote in Sindebele, Chifamba was the first woman writer to

have a text in Shona published. Veit-Wild's bibliography lists *Ngano dzepasi Chigare* as Chifamba's only publication (365). It is, however, a fairly successful text as it has been prescribed for use in Zimbabwean schools since its publication. I am not proposing this text as a typical example of orature: it is a written and published text which follows the format of a traditional narrative. Its opening and closing are conventional (Fortune 1974:x-xi) and it deals with the common theme of *gore renzara* (year of hunger) (Mkanganwi, introduction to Fortune 1973:ii). There are significant differences. The songs and dialogue which Mkanganwi identifies as important components of ngano (i) are either removed or incorporated into the text to increase its readability. It is based upon a story which Jane Chifamba heard from her mother in her childhood in the Mhondoro Reserve, near Norton. When an oral text is written down it moves from orature to literature, losing many of its performative aspects in the process. My concern is with themes, tropes and language use rather than with performance, since I am comparing written texts, looking at how the narrative responds to a set of socio-historical and ecological conditions—those of drought, infertility and famine—and how these conditions are transformed into tropes. By beginning with a short and specific narrative, I can then move to related narratives and finally towards applying my findings to a more general theory of tropes and of literature.

Allegory in Africa

Angus Fletcher's famous dictum that "Allegory is a protean device, omnipresent in Western literature from the earliest times to the modern era" (Fletcher 1964:1) holds true for Southern African literature. Bunyan's allegory, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, enjoyed significant popularity from the beginnings of the publication industry in Southern Africa. Daniel Kunene cites Albert Gérard in claiming that, after the Bible, "*The Pilgrim's Progress* was the most widely used piece of literature in the work of converting non-Christians to the Christian Faith" (Kunene 1989:23). Kunene claims that the allegorical form of Bunyan's novel fitted well into the context of traditional African narrative. Missionaries sought out "sermon exemplars" in the tradition in order to build a moral foundation for their church in Africa (55). They made use of traditional narratives, altering them where necessary. As a result of the interchange between traditional and Christian allegory, the lines between the two forms have become blurred. Allegory can have a traditional, as well as a Christian significance.

M F C Bourdillon explores the ways in which Christian mythology is assimilated by people who do not consider themselves Christian. He suggests "that the introduction of Christianity into a society simply adds a range of new ideas into the cultural pool, from which individuals simply choose to meet their cognitive needs" (Bourdillon 1988:120). He explores cases of non-Christian prophets in Shona society

who, at times, appropriate the imagery and language of Christianity. This imagery is often non-specific: one medium, known as Timothy, tells of a spirit, *Dzivaguru* (deep pool), who remains celibate and who cannot be killed unless he allows someone to kill him (126). Such an example holds a very tenuous link to the Christian tradition, but Bourdillon uses it to show that narratives have several sources and that different tellings of the same narrative are not consistent. *Dzivaguru* is usually known as a rainmaker, not as one who miraculously escapes death. The latter quality is usually associated with Chaminuka, who allowed himself to be killed by a child and who called for the first *Chimurenga*, or rebellion against colonial rule (127). Traditional religion is therefore syncretic. Bourdillon cites examples of non-Christians claiming that “a drought would end if people got together to pray to Jesus” (122), thus merging the traditional role of the ancestors in making rain with the Christian practice of praying. Timothy incorporates the story of Abraham and Isaac into another narrative, explaining the origin of “the white people”. Isaac is also known as “Ghana”, adding a political dimension to a synthesis of African and Christian religion (128-129). In this case, names are given and the allusions are made specific. Even when no names are given, an oral text can refer to a dynamic variety of sources. It contains tropes and images which are part of a larger set of references and which will resurface in written literature.

Thomas Mofolo, Southern Africa's first African-language novelist, uses the allegorical form in his *Moeti oa Bochabela (The Traveller of the East)*, in which Fekisi, closely modelled upon Bunyan's Christian, journeys from a depraved, pagan Lesotho towards Christian enlightenment and the white man's wisdom in Natal. His first novel is thus a fairly uncritical endorsement of the missionary project. Kunene comments that it is problematic because: “Bunyan's message: ‘we, humanity are corrupt’ is replaced by the message: ‘We, Basotho, or we Africans are corrupt’” (Kunene 1989:23). As Mofolo's career progressed, he learned to use allegory against his teachers. His best-known novel, *Chaka*, first published in 1925, narrowly escaped destruction because it dealt too even-handedly with the topics of witchcraft and traditional medicine. While *Moeti* uses the Bunyanesque paradigm of the one good man in a village of evil-doers, *Chaka* presents a far more dynamic allegory in which the main character becomes increasingly power-hungry through various temptations. The major source of temptation is the diviner, *Isanusi*, who plays Mephistopheles to Chaka's Faust, feeding his ambition and helping him to fulfil it through the use of traditional medicines. After their first meeting, which involves three days of treatments, Chaka asks Isanusi:

‘Doctor, we have already been together several days now, talking about one thing, but you have not yet told me your name. Who are you?’

'Neither did you tell me yours, I discovered it for myself with my own intelligence. When you call me, say 'Isanusi'.'

'But 'Isanusi' is not your name, it simply describes what you are, whereas what I am asking is your name.'

'You speak the truth, but *I* am Isanusi by name and by deed' (Mofolo 1961, 1981:45).

Isanusi is a Zulu word meaning diviner. The word first appears in the original Sotho text as an italicised second language borrowing, thus underscoring its use as a proper name: "Hape hase ngaka feela, e bile ke *isanusi*, o utlwa ka hloho" (Mofolo 1961:25. Italics in the original). Kunene renders the sentence as "Besides he is not only a doctor, he is also a diviner who receives revelations through his head" (Mofolo 1981:25-26). The use of the Zulu word is not apparent in the translation. The word given as doctor in the English appears as *ngaka* in the Sesotho. 'Ngaka' has an exact Zulu cognate in *inyanga*. Later, Isanusi tells Chaka not to use the word 'ngaka' in summoning him:

'You must not say 'doctor' when you speak to me, you must say 'Isanusi'. Be careful not to say 'doctor' when you summon me, and thus make it impossible for me to hear your call' (Mofolo 1961,1981:45).

His objection to the use of the word 'ngaka' has two possible meanings. The first is a simple question of status. Isanusi replaces an earlier doctor, a woman, who, realising that Chaka is destined for greatness, sends a messenger to inform his mother, Nandi, that she is not strong enough to serve him and that a greater doctor will soon arrive: "That woman, your doctor, did everything with medicines only, whereas the one who is coming sometimes uses the divination of the head" (Mofolo 1981:26 1961:25). The diviner receives a calling and so his skill is superior to the learned skills of the doctor. Secondly, Isanusi is not a doctor because he cannot cure Chaka. He can predict a course of action and warn Chaka of the consequences. Once the course of action is taken, however, he cannot reverse it. He is greater than a doctor because he can communicate with the ancestors, using their knowledge to predict and influence events but he is less than a doctor because he cannot heal. The extended significance of his name is pure allegory.

However, like other characters in Mofolo, Isanusi is not the static *visibillum* of European allegory. He functions like a realistic character in a realistic setting, which looks nothing like Bunyan's dream landscape. He and Chaka have spent three days near a river, doing concrete things with herbs to make Chaka stronger. This river, however, also hides a fantastic monster. Mofolo's allegorical style, blending concrete mimetic detail with the fantastic, foreshadows the work of, among others, Bessie Head and Dambudzo Marechera. In *Chaka*, Mofolo moves away from the European Protestant allegorical tradition, in which the allegory refers to a narrow doctrine. He

adopts a wider vision, which I believe to be widespread within oral traditions in Southern Africa. A single text can include realistic detail alongside social and environmental allegories.

Kahari notes that much of Shona literature is characterised by an opposition between urban and rural. He sketches this opposition in both 'Old World Novels' (set in the remote past) and 'New World Novels' (set in the cities). This is in keeping with the missionary view of the countryside as site of innocence and the city as place of corruption (Kahari 1977:92). In the novels of Patrick Chakaipa, according to Kahari, "the city encourages individualism to the detriment of the family and ultimately the nation" (93). Marechera makes Kahari's point more polemically in a 1986 interview with Alle Lansu, a Dutch Journalist:

After UDI in 1965 Ian Smith deliberately created the Rhodesia Literature Bureau to promote a certain kind of Shona and Ndebele Literature which would be used in the schools and perpetuate the idea that racism is for the good of the blacks. And we had writers who were writing the very books Ian Smith wanted the blacks to read. In primary school I was taught Shona literature which caricatures black people and which was in line with the specific political policies before independence. One of the main themes ... was the story about a person coming from the rural areas thinking that he'd have a good life in the city. Then he or she comes to the city and goes through hardship and decides to go back to the rural areas because that's where heaven is. Now this was in direct line with the urban influx control policy. Blacks were being discouraged by the city council and by the government to come to the cities (Veit-Wild 1992:38).

Marechera is never a reliable historical source. As the footnote to this interview points out, the Literature Bureau was actually founded in 1953 and, as Kahari shows, the development of the ideology of 'rural as heaven' predates Ian Smith. Under Smith the Literature Bureau may have become more overt in its propaganda function, but the ideological framework existed from the earliest use of Shona as a literary language. Literature was seen as a 'moral force', whose function was to promote communal values over individualistic ones. This view is in keeping with Ngugi's ideal of Gikuyu orature promoting co-operative virtues; and his desire to return to this standard (Ngugi 1981:10). This is not to suggest that Ngugi and the missionaries share an agenda. Moral values change as different people promote them. The similarity of conclusions reached questions the use of literature as the purveyor of a set moral ideal. It also shows that communalism can promote 'western values'.

Limits of the 'Oral Text'

Harold Scheub, in his introduction to A C Jordan's *Tales from Southern Africa*, warns that an oral narrative loses its soul when transferred on to paper, that the performer compensates for a variety of attributes missing from the text of the performance:

...the performer seldom provides verbal descriptions of characters. She is herself the character, her body and voice giving the character dimension and detail. There is thus no need to describe the character in words, for the artist becomes that character through the magic of her performance and by virtue of her very presence, her very being. When the text of her performance is written down, however, her body and voice are gone, there are only the words—without intonation, without the music, without vocal and body drama, without the richness created by non-verbal artistic tools. Characters thus become 'flat' on the written page, they lack body. But this is not an artistic flaw in the *ntsoni* tradition; it is one of the many problems involved in the translation of an oral art form into a written genre (Jordan 1973:11).

Orature studies assert that text cannot be separated from context. As technology progresses, analysts use increasingly sophisticated audio and visual equipment to get closer and closer to the moment of performance in all its complexity.

The desire to move closer to the source is basic to theories of literature and society. It is not a concern that originates with Harold Scheub and Ruth Finnegan. It has its origins in attempts to destabilise the hegemony of the written word, a project which may well be as old as Plato. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates catches Phaedrus hiding Lysias' speech under his cloak and insists on hearing it. Phaedrus reads the speech and asks Socrates for his opinion, the latter replies:

More than wonderful, my friend, divine; it quite took my breath away. It is you who are responsible for this effect on me, Phaedrus. I concentrated on you and saw how what you were reading put you in a glow; so, believing that you know more about these things than I do, I followed your example and joined in the ecstasy, you inspired man (Plato 1973:234c).

This passage stresses the importance of performance in filling out a written text which is somehow lacking, a point not far removed from Scheub's. Plato claims that the lack is in any written text; as Derrida observes, 'The *Phaedrus* (277e) condemned writing precisely as play—*paida*—and opposed such childishness to the adult gravity [*spoude*] of speech' (Derrida 1967a:50). At first sight, this point does not seem relevant in discussing a narrative form intended both to entertain and educate children, but a more detailed look at the statement may prove instructive. Socrates claims that:

Nothing worth serious attention has ever been written in prose or verse—or spoken, for that matter, if by speaking one means the kind

of reiteration that aims merely at creating belief, without any attempt at instruction by question and answer (Plato 1973:277e).

This would seem to be the passage to which Derrida is referring, but it complicates Derrida's point. Socrates suggests that not only writing is play, play is any attempt to assert a fixed ideological position. Any written or oral text can involve "the kind of reiteration that aims merely at creating belief". It is only those allegorical texts that raise the possibility of dialogue, through their many potential readings, that can hope to transcend it.

The only texts which fall outside such a category are the platonic form of the Socratic dialogue (the original discourse, not Plato's transcription) and the original unwritten model for this *rungano*. This is a platonic *rungano*, occurring as part of a free discourse in a free community. Hearers and tellers must be equal so that no one person can exert control over others in order to force them round to his or her way of thinking. The narrative is created in a moment of performance somewhere between teller and listener as they respond to one another and to their social imperatives. Perhaps this ideal is not too distant. Because the *rungano* is treated as play, the need to coerce a listener around to one's own viewpoint is minimised. It is also deliberately fictional, making use of fantastic imagery to diminish its claim to realistic truth. The *rungano* in its unmeditated moment of performance is the ideal towards which the oraturists strive. However, as soon as it is recorded or written down it loses its presence or immediacy and becomes yet another way to convey frozen ideology. It is the critical practice that begins to return the oral text to life. But it may be a life very different from the previous one. My agenda is not to recreate a hypothetical moment of performance; it is to examine the text as trace of such a performance and to find the aesthetic and social factors of its production. Throughout the course of my reading, I shall try to show how issues raised in the text are dealt with in other texts, both oral and written. I hope that this reading will serve to expand other readings of traditional narratives and work towards a dialogue of oral and written texts, leading to new readings and new writing.

The Text as Drought Narrative

The *rungano* is set, as the title suggests, in a year of hunger (*mugore renzara*). It is the story of a poor family who have been unable to obtain food. The children cry and demand food but there is none to be had. It is an 'Old World' narrative, as is shown by its formulaic beginning: *Kare kare, kwaiva...* [Long, long ago, there was...] (1, para 1).¹ It is set among a community of farmers. The children define men's and women's

¹. Page numbers in brackets refer to Chifamba's Shona original, paragraph numbers to my translation.

roles in terms of agricultural production. They will later find grain left on the road by mother and father. For a subsistence farmer, such mass starvation usually occurs when the rains fail. Drought and famine are important tropes in the study of Southern African literature.

Musaemura Zimunya claims that drought is a persistent trope in Zimbabwean writing of the 1960s and 70s:

The absence of freedom and happiness, the destruction of our culture which ensued, alien domination and the loss of identity caused something metaphorically akin to *drought*. Thus, we shall find that our people long remember the prophecy of Chaminuka in which he said that the land would be without rain for as long as the white man was ruler. Samkange and Mutswairo refer to it in their historical novels in order to explain the *drought* and pestilence of 1896 - which coincided with the war, and was partly responsible for the Chimurenga. The fate of Ndhala's Jikinya is decided by this very *drought*. The burden of Mungoshi's titles - *Coming of the Dry Season* and *Waiting for the Rain* - as well as the substance of these books is to delineate the *drought* that was encroaching on the soul of the people of Zimbabwe. This spiritual *drought* culminates in Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*. At this point it cannot be too presumptuous to talk of drought as the basic archetype running through all these works (Zimunya 1982:4).

These writers are working from a set of historical and social conditions, which include colonisation and drought. Zimunya refers to the speech by Chaminuka, the spirit who taught the Shona how to grind grain. A version of this speech appears in Samkange's *Year of the Uprising*:

A pestilence in the form of white men, afflicts you
Because
You have committed
Acts contrary to nature's benevolent course
And inimical to the perpetuation of the race (Samkange 1978:40).

These acts are the sort of thing most deities frown upon: ignoring the religion, neglecting holy days and the like. Chaminuka tells the assembly to stop trading with the whites and prepare for war. The whites are initially a symptom, according to Samkange's version, of a malaise in the society. They, in turn, cause new problems and drought becomes a metaphor for the hunger of relocated people and for the harsh, pragmatic choices which must be made in a time of famine. It also expresses an intellectual condition, becoming a metaphor for the writing itself. The drought narrative is not limited to the Shona tradition; it recurs throughout the literature of Southern Africa. Jordan (1973) and Cancel (1989) give examples of hunger narratives in the Xhosa and Tabwa traditions respectively.

In Jordan's collection, the *intsomi* "Nomabhadi and the Mbulu-Makhasana" (Jordan 1973:155-177) tells of a young girl who lives in a village which is 'visited by drought and famine' (155). Things get gradually worse and the inhabitants of the village die. One of Nomabhadi's brothers, Ngubendala, kills the other brother, Sihlele, after the latter drinks all the soup (157). When they discover the crime, the parents quietly kill Ngubendala and bury him, then they send Nomabhadi to stay with her mother's brother (*uMalume*). The mother warns Nomabhadi not to cry out or the wicked and ugly mbulu will take advantage of the situation. As Nomabhadi leaves, she sees that her parents have set fire to themselves and all their possessions; she cries out and the mbulu hears her, joins her and tricks her, passing itself off as Nomabhadi. It then appropriates her relatives and birthright and Nomabhadi must prove her identity and then work together with the relatives to trap the mbulu. During this time she also is initiated and becomes a grown woman. This tale shares several characteristics with our *rungano*. Under the extreme conditions of drought, people behave in extreme ways. In Jordan's *intsomi*, the greed and jealousy of the brothers is contrasted to the self-sacrifice of the parents. In Chifamba's *rungano*, the parents give up hope and the children prove resourceful. In both stories the hope of a benevolent uncle provides relief; *sekuru* in Shona can mean maternal uncle or grandfather. However, in Chifamba's case, the *sekuru* is a ruse to lure the children into the bush. In both stories the children confront monstrous creatures and outwit them. Each child initially treats these beings with kindness and respect. Nomabhadi shares her food with the mbulu, who of course eats it all (Jordan 1973:167). The boy greets the large man with four heads (*zirume remisoro mina*) as *changamire* (chief, sir) (Chifamba 6, para 28) and demonstrates apparent trust in him by agreeing to go hunting with him. Chifamba's character is less naive, he leaves his dogs on call as insurance should the man prove untrustworthy. Each move is important because it gives the villains a chance to prove their wickedness and serves to remind the listeners not to judge people at first sight.

Robert Cancel records several versions of a Tabwa narrative (*inshimi*) whose moral revolves around drought and greed. The story is called 'Man Denies Food to Wife'. The performer, Dorothy Mutoono, tells of a man who plucks out his eye during a time of great drought and plants it some way off from the village. A tree grows from this eye and he shares its fruit with his family, except for his greedy wife, who has refused to pluck out her eye. One young child takes pity on her and leads her to the tree. Instead of asking the tree for fruit, as the man does, she simply takes all the fruit from the tree. The tree dies and the man retaliates by plucking out the wife's eye, which proves 'completely useless' (Cancel 1989:175). Cancel analyses the narrative as follows:

The father and mother constitute positive and negative poles. He sacrifices his eye for the sake of the children, then keeps them supplied with food. That his relationship with the wilderness is harmonious is evidenced by the way in which his eye grows into a nutritious fruit tree during a famine. His wife, conversely, refuses to donate her eye to the family's cause. Her discordant tie to nature is illustrated by her failure to make the tree drop its fruit, then by her destruction of this only source of food. When the eye is forcibly removed by the father at the narrative's conclusion it proves to be 'completely useless', in contrast to his own fertile eye. These actions develop a selfish/selfless and infertile/fertile set of oppositions. Spatially, the wilderness, or nature, is associated with the father's positive mediation, whereas the mother breaks this vital link with her self-serving mediatory attempts (176).

Cancel's reading supports my earlier proposition that drought creates polarised behaviour, with the oppositions between positive and negative intervention brought more clearly into focus. The fertile/infertile opposition need not be a specifically male/female one. Another version of the tale, this one told by Rosemary Mwaasha, has a greedy husband and a good wife. In this case, the eyes show a propensity to selflessness or greed. Both parents plant their eyes and the father's rots (177). The use of a single plant to reflect a state of being occurs in the *rungano*, as the castor oil plant tells the sister of her brother's fortunes beyond the well (Chifamba 4-5, para 23). Another Shona *rungano*, *Mukadzi nemurume* (Wife and husband) (Fortune 1974:1-4, discussed v-ix) features a virtuous wife and children who co-operate in order to obtain food and a greedy husband who hoards his own supplies.

The variation in Tabwa narratives shows that the recorded version of a story need not be the only version. This is an important point because it suggests that there are many possible roles and conclusions within a single tale. I would suggest that by adding the detail about the ogres (*magandanga*) who previously occupied the house in which the children settle (2, para 12), Chifamba is raising the possibility of an alternative ending. Even if the story never ends with the return of an ogre, the audience is at least kept aware that one could return. In this manner, she maintains a degree of narrative suspense.

Parents and Children

As in the Tabwa and Xhosa drought narratives, this *rungano* sets codes for responsible family behaviour in a time of crisis. The opening has the children crying and troubling their parents and demanding food (Chifamba 1, para 1). This is a far cry from Nomabhadi's quiet and selfless response to the starvation in her village; she does not cry out until all is destroyed. In the Tabwa story, it is a child who takes pity on the mother, although this pity is misplaced and sparks a crisis. In this case, it is clear that

the children, through their behaviour, precipitate the parents' desire to abandon them, as is shown by verb changes:

Vana vakavamba kuchema nekunetsa vabereki vavo kuti vavape chekudya. Vabereki vakanetswa kwazvo vakadakara vakarangana zvokuti varase vana ava kuti vazorega kutambudzika nekuona vana vavo vachichema (1).

The children began to cry and to trouble their parents so that they would give them food. The parents were so troubled that they finally plotted to abandon their children to end the suffering caused by seeing their children's continuous crying (para 1).

The children begin actively to annoy their parents (*vakavamba ... kunetsa vabereki vavo*). The parents are greatly annoyed (*vakanetswa kwazvo*). The verb has shifted from active to simple passive with the *-wa* ending. Hannan defines *-netsa* as 'vex, annoy, afflict, worry, weary, tire'. These children are not only upset but they do their best to upset their parents. *Kwazvo* means 'entirely, really, very much' (Hannan). Finally annoyance moves into a constant state of being. Chifamba achieves this by her use of the 'neutral species of derivative verb stem' (Hannan) or *-ika* ending with the radical *-tambudza* which is a synonym for *-netsa*. The *-ika* ending serves as an intransitive passive; it is opposed to the simple passive *-wa* ending in that the latter usually takes an object. The parents are now troubled. This analysis, in establishing a connection between grammar and narrative, also shows the importance of repetition in orature. By repeating the same and related verbs, Chifamba is able to intensify her effect. The parents want an immediate end to this state of being troubled. The imperative form of the verb *kurega* is also used to form negative commands. It expresses urgency, as in '*Regai kuchayira, murwendo mumwe awira pasi!*' (Stop driving, a passenger just fell out). It expresses their need for an immediate end to their problems. This is a cautionary tale, to warn children what happens to troublesome children in times of need. It can be set against an exemplary tale, like that of Nomabhadi, which tells young listeners how to behave by showing a character who behaves correctly.

Moving Towards Paradise

If the children are normal hungry children, then the parents are very wicked. Compared to them, even a crocodile has pity (*'Garwe riya...rakanzwa tsitsi'* (1, para 4)). The parents have abandoned their children in a sinister place, where dark water says '*svi-i, kusvipa*' (1 para.2). These sounds are not only the 'ideophone of growing dark' and the related verb 'to grow dark' (Hannan), but they also give the water a whispering feeling of things lurking in dark mysterious pools. The pool is black, and thus infinitely deep, and it is isolated. Its strangeness causes confusion; once the children have

crossed the pool, they wander off in the wrong direction. It is also the first of two pools in the story, each of which serves as a gateway to a new existence. This first pool contains a crocodile, who is waiting to catch any living being that falls its way. The innocence of the children, and the contrasting callousness of the parents, are further expressed by the fact that the children can sleep in such a place. The parents abandon them to their fate. This is the moment of movement from drought to paradise. The children get lost and perplexed, but from here on, all their needs are met. The crocodile serves as a bridge to a country where food, houses, shirts and blankets are theirs for the taking.

Mofolo's Chaka, while still a young boy, meets a large snake while bathing in a similar ominous, hidden pool:

...It was very early in the morning, long, long before the sun was due and he was bathing in an ugly place where it was most fearsome. High up from the place where he stood was a tremendous waterfall, and at the bottom of that waterfall, right by him was an enormous pool, a frightening stretch of water, dark green in colour and very deep. In this pool the water was pitch dark, intensely black. On the opposite bank, directly across from where he was, but inside the water, was a yawning cave, a dark black tunnel which stretched beyond one's vision, flooded by the water and sloping downward. It was not possible to see where that immense pool ended because, a little way down from where it began, the water was covered by a very dense growth of reeds which grew on both of the inner sides of the river; and on the opposite bank, a forest covered the flank of an adjoining hill, and came to brush against the river's edge (Mofolo 1961:19-20, 1981:21).

The pool demonstrates Chaka's courage in that he goes alone to such a sinister place to wash himself. As in Chifamba's narrative, the description emphasises the great depth of the water, and the pool's isolation from human society. If Chaka vanishes from this place, no-one will miss him except his mother who has been warned not to look at him or to help him while he is bathing. Isanusi's predecessor warns Chaka's mother, Nandi, that, when he washes in the river, she must wait for him where she cannot see him. If he encounters anything strange "...he must not run away" and that she must never "ask him what he has seen; rather let him volunteer on his own accord" (Mofolo 1961:8 1981:9). The pool underscores that Chaka is cut off from the rest of humanity, thus becoming an allegory for his life as an isolated leader. His meeting with the snake tests him; by maintaining his composure he proves himself fit to govern. In the Xhosa *intsomi*, "The maidens of Bakhuba," Princess Nomtha-we-Langa and her friends go swimming in the hidden "Lulange pool whence there's no return" (Jordan 1973:61). A slimy monster lies on their clothes and the other girls sing to it, politely requesting the return of the clothes. He returns them to each girl after hearing the song. Nomtha-we-

Langa is rude and the monster bites her, changing her into a monster herself. The inhabitants of pools thus reward courage and punish insolence.

The monster in the hidden pool echoes the Shona myth of the *njuzu*, a spirit with the head, arms and torso of a man and the tail of a fish. *Njuzu* are pale in complexion with long, straight hair. They inhabit deep pools and seize children. If the parents cry, they destroy the children, if not, the children return to their families as powerful healers. The *njuzu* will, however, destroy any such healer who begins to exploit his or her power for selfish reasons (Reynolds 1990:319-320, 333n). In *Chaka* as well as according to the *njuzu* tradition, parental stoicism and childhood innocence allow the child to pass through a liminal zone, becoming more powerful. The Chifamba narrative has negligent parents contrasted to children who are so innocent that they cannot see evil. They are not frightened by the menacing pool or its crocodile and thus pass unscathed. Each story recounts a trial by ordeal, a special form of initiation which not only works as a rite of passage; it also serves as a gateway to prestige and power.

The pool holds specific religious significance within the Shona tradition. It is possible that by leaving the children by a dark pool (*nedziva dema*), the parents are, perhaps unconsciously, leaving them in divine or ancestral hands. The pool as place of water in a time of drought has some supernatural significance. The very uncharacteristic behaviour of the crocodile also suggests something miraculous. According to Lan:

Many spirit provinces contain pools of water sacred to the ancestors and protected by lions. These pools will run dry if a tin mug so much as touches their waters. Only a gourd or wooden bowl may be used to draw water from them. Such is the advance of white society into Dande that many pools which in the past were full even in the driest of dry seasons are today merely depressions in the sand (Lan 1985:144).

A pool is, in this sense, a link with the past. The pool and its guardian protect the children, even as their living parents have deserted them. Pools are specifically sacred to the *Mhondoro*, the spirits of departed chiefs who take the form of lions and protect the land's fertility, insuring rainfall (Lan 1985:32-34). By passing through two pools, the boy becomes a very great chief (*mambo mukuru kwazvo*) with the implication that he will eventually himself become a *Mhondoro*. While *Dzivaguru* (great pool) is a particular spirit among the Korekore, renowned as a bringer of rain, the name is also more generally used as "a praise name for High God Mwari" (Auret 1982:175). So the pool may be a refuge for ancestral spirits while, at the same time, it is an expression of the High God and his willingness to protect his children. Among the Korekore, *Dzivaguru* was given virgins as brides (Auret 1982:175) and perhaps in this respect it is significant that the girl does not marry even after her brother finds a village of men.

Pools and water have also a significant relationship to childhood.

...the process of human ageing is imagined by the Shona as a process of drying out. At birth a child is thought of as thoroughly wet. The first stage of a child's development is marked by the closing of the fontanelle, the soft-skinned gap in the centre of a baby's skull. Until this happens, the child is thought to be especially susceptible to the evil thoughts of witches. Medicines are rubbed on the skull and protective charms strung round the waist until the fontanelle has closed and the head is hard. It is no coincidence the word for fontanelle in Shona, *dziva*, is also the word used for a pool of water.

Burial practices make these conceptions especially clear. Young children who die before their teeth have emerged must be buried in the wet soil on the banks of a river. If they are buried in dry soil this will cause a drought. Adults, by contrast, must be buried in dry soil (Lan 1985:93).

Water is the element of children and it is appropriate that their parents leave them near a pond. This abandonment may even be read as a symbolic burial. The parents can no longer keep the children alive and so they give them up as dead. It is perhaps the children's intimacy with the water and its inhabitants that keeps them alive. The pond as a site of children and of the ancestors also suggests that the children are somehow closer to the ancestors. Drought, on the other hand, is the province of adults. The implication may be that adults cause the drought and that children provide a means of escaping from it.

The narrative comments upon the ideals of parenthood when the children begin to encounter piles of grain. When they discover a pile of *zviyo* (finger millet), the boy says, '*Hona, zviyo zvakasiywa namai*' (Look, this grain was left by [a] mother) (2, para 7). It is unclear whether he is talking about their mother or any other married woman. As in many other African languages, the Shona word for mother, '*mai*' or '*amai*', is used as a term of address for any married woman or any woman old enough to be one's mother. At this point, their own mother could have left the grain for them. The sister's reply closes off this possibility, '*Tora uise munhava yako tinopa amai*' (take some and put it in your bag; we will give it to mother) (2 para 8). They still hope that they will return to their mother, even if they know that she is not the one who has left food for them. They do not eat immediately, but save the food in case they find their parents again. The children show themselves to be good and selfless, in contrast to the selfishness of their parents.

The choice of the word *amai* over *mukadzi* (woman) or *murimi* (farmer) is allegorical and tells us of the nature of parenting in African society. Ideally, if a parent fails in her or his responsibilities, others will step in. The communal nature of parenting is shown in Bessie Head's short story 'The Collector of Treasures' set in rural Botswana. The good mother, Dikeledi Mokopi, is married to the abusive and

frequently absent Garesego Mokopi. Dikeledi brings up her children, at first single-handedly, but later with the aid of her neighbours, Paul and Kenalepe Thebolo. Garesego, who is notorious for affairs, dismisses Dikeledi when she comes to ask for school fees for their eldest son, Banabothe. He accuses Dikeledi of having an affair with Paul (Head 1977:99). Later, Garesego wishes to return home 'for some sex' (101). He writes to Dikeledi:

Dear Mother, I am coming home again so that we may settle our differences. Will you prepare a meal for me and some hot water that I might take a bath. Gare.

Like everybody else, he addresses her as 'mother'. In the village she is widely known by the honorific *Mma-Banabothe* (mother of Banabothe), which serves to acknowledge her efforts in bringing up her children. Garesego expects to be mothered. Dikeledi replies, 'Sir, I shall prepare everything as you have said. Dikeledi.' By using her name, she indicates a refusal to be his mother. By addressing him as 'Sir', rather than as father or *Rra*, she cuts him off as progenitor of her children, just as she will murder him by cutting off the instrument of procreation (102). She emasculates the sleeping Garesego with a kitchen knife, lets him bleed to death and sends Banabothe to call the police. Before they arrive, Paul Thebolo comes to her yard and tells her, 'You don't have to worry about the children, *Mma-Banabothe*. I'll take them as my own and give them all a secondary school education' (103). By addressing her as 'Mma', and promising to take the children 'as his own', Paul shows that he views parenthood as a social, not a biological institution. He is worthy of the title of *Rra-Banabothe*, but it is never applied, since it would question Dikeledi's morals.

Chifamba's narrative shows that fathers are also expected to minister to their children's needs in an ideal society. When the children find the next heaps of grain, in this case, '*chibage*' (maize); the girl asks '*Asi baba vakaenda nesaga rakabvaruka?*' (But did father go with a torn sack?) (2, para 9). Their earlier optimism is gone, generosity is now an accident, since they have seen no sign of any people. As the children continue on their path, they find more food in many little heaps (*tumurwi*) (2, para 11). This plenty is in sharp contrast to their home. Nomabhadi makes a similar movement, her uncle's village is a place of 'meat, milk and pumpkin' (Jordan 1973:165). Under these new conditions the children of this *rungano* mature. They save their food to share with their parents. But they have wandered too far away from them and must now attend to their own needs.

Just as the sun is setting, they arrive at a large mysterious house. It is a house of both wealth and danger. The house is the home of ogres or robbers (*magandanga*) who kill people and steal their possessions. These are always a potential menace, but it serves to remind us that paradise has a history. The surplus of goods and food is a

product of theft and violence. The children once again unknowingly enter a place of potential evil but, through their innocence, remain unharmed and, in fact, prosper changing the evil place into a place of plenty. Paradise is made through the actions of the good. It is not pre-existent. The battle between people and *magandanga* has ended and the two small children occupy the house. They acquire the trappings of a settled lifestyle (four dogs, some blankets and shirts) and 'they bring each other up at this house' ('*vakarerana pamba 'pa'*') (3, para 15). The functioning of the castor oil plant (*mupfuta*) epitomises their relationship to each other and to nature. This relationship may function as an allegory for parenting as the boy plants the seeds and the girl nurtures them (3, para 15). They maintain their sexual innocence even though they play house to the extent of reproducing themselves. The castor oil plant will later possess a mystical link to the boy, reflecting his progress in his battle with the monster. It begins life as a metaphor for reproduction within the closed system and develops into allegory because of its function as an essential part of the plot. This miraculous offspring is no substitute for endogamous marriage and actual human children. By growing plants, even if their roles mimic those of parents, the children provide only for their own sustenance. Agricultural production must make way for reproduction if the family is to survive.

Leaving Paradise

The children live a peaceful and harmonious existence until the boy grows old enough to marry. His desire and curiosity disrupt the order. Desire for the woman in the well causes him to leave his own village and cross over to a large village of only women ('*nzanga yevakadzi chete*') (5 para 26), presided over by a large man of four heads ('*zirume remisoro mina*'). If the excess of women represents a positive disorder which will enable the boy to make his fortune, the presence of this giant is a negative one. Ngugi identifies such beings as symbols of greed and gives an example from the Gikuyu narrative tradition:

...dove, after being fed with castor-oil seeds, was sent to fetch a smith working far away from home and whose pregnant wife was threatened by these man-eating two-mouthed ogres (Ngugi 1981:10).

He cites this as an example of '[c]o-operation as the ultimate good in a community... [which] could unite human beings and animals against ogres and beasts of prey'. This theme surfaces in the *rungano*, since it is the boy's four dogs who kill the giant (Chifamba 6, para 38). Ngugi's example shares two other details with the *rungano*. The use of castor-oil seeds suggests a symbolic value which may stretch between communities and requires further investigation.

The other trope is more wide-spread in orature; it concerns distance. The narrative action occurs when men and women are separated. The boy has crossed a second water barrier, this time alone, to go to the village of only women. He has left his sister at the well watching the castor-oil bean plant for news of his progress. Such imagery may become more poignant in a time when men are leaving to go to the cities in search of work and money. Separation is a feature of pastoral societies; in Bessie Head's village of Golema-Mmidi the women form a co-operative as the men are out herding for much of the year. In the year of drought, the cattle die and the co-operative saves the village (Head 1968:146). This division of lives and labour is intensified as people enter the cash economy. This change is expressed as traditional tropes change to confront the new situation.

According to David Coplan, Sotho auriture uses cannibalism to reflect social disruption, like the Shakan *lifaqane*. Shaka, as tyrant, is 'conceived by his unfortunate neighbours as a kind of Lord of Chaos who both devoured the people of the region and set them to devouring each other' (Coplan 1993:86-87). Coplan traces the development of cannibalism as both a positive and negative trope of chieftainship but he goes on to deal with the evolution of the trope in his analysis of a young man's self-praises celebrating his initiation:

...At the mines, cannibal is a metaphor both for the earth itself, which consumes the miners in its belly and for over-eager black team leaders ('boss boys') and white miners who push black workers to the point of exhaustion in their gluttony for power and higher pay. In the case of these praises, the phrase "cannibals of war" conjures up in parallel the bloody chaos of Shakan times and the bloodsuckers who await the (illegal) migrant in South Africa. In addition, the image of war is invariably associated in contemporary song with the battles between fierce factions of Basotho *marashea*, (eg: "Russian") gangsters who formerly both defended and terrorised Basotho communities in South Africa's urban location. In woman's bar songs, the "Russian" gangsters are often referred to as cannibals (103).

Cannibalism thus becomes a trope for destruction of the social fabric. It is the ultimate expression of a time in which resources are scarce and people are forced to make difficult decisions. Within the Basotho tradition, such a time has more or less continued from the *lifaqane* until the present day. The metaphor survives, even if the means of expressing it have changed. Coplan shows that it is impossible to separate the oral tradition of the Basotho from the Nguni and colonial invasions. These disruptions had such an effect on the society that they obliterated the memory of what came before. Starvation and cannibalism are the backdrop to a particular stream in the Sotho tradition and they allegorise a sense of desperation. Orature thus does not take us back

to a pre-colonial utopia; it leaves us engaged in the machinations of the present. The *zirume* of “Vana Vakarasirirwa Mugore Renzara” may well be a metaphor for colonial brutality. He is non-specific and thus open to the kind of interpretation given by the performance. The performer could whiten him, for example, by speaking through her nose. He could also develop the kind of mannerisms which liken him to a particular chief or a particular uncle.

The signified of a particular aural allegorical figure becomes more apparent when the aural is contrasted to possibly related written traditions. Marechera makes use of cannibalism as trope in a section of *The House of Hunger* entitled “The Writer’s Grain”. Mr Warthog forces Andrew to eat anthropomorphic salads as part of a strategy to implicate him in the inhumanity of the twentieth century (*HOH* 119). In Marechera’s usage, as we shall explore in the next chapter, cannibalism becomes a trope for a culture of consumption. The cannibalistic ogre in the *rungano* may point to an allegorical reading in which those in power maintain their position by consuming their subjects. The allegory here may serve as a critique of either traditional or colonial authority, just as Coplan’s analysis comprises a critique of mining as cannibalism. The earth becomes dangerous and unnatural because it consumes human beings. In doing so it assumes some of the characteristics of people and social forces traditionally seem as dangerous. In the case of the earth, however, its cannibalism is enhanced because it has the potential literally to swallow miners.

What Happens to the Children?

The children, through the boy’s cleverness, defeat the dangerous force which lurks in paradise and return to the patriarchal order of things. The boy has grown up into a man, who, like his father, forms a file (*-ronga mudungwe*) to lead the women back to the surface (7, para 32). This echoes the beginning of the narrative in which the family forms a file: ‘*Vakaronga mudungwe baba namai pamberi, vana vaviri vachitevera mushure*’ (1, para 2). It is true that the women form their file (*mudungwe*) voluntarily, and that the boy leads from behind. Nonetheless it is a return to traditional leadership. The monster is dead; long live the king who killed him. Like Chaka, the boy has undergone an ordeal and has been rewarded with leadership. Chifamba’s hero has passed through two pools. The first proves his purity which renders him blind to the various expressions of evil around him. By the time he comes to the second pool, both he and his sister are aware of danger. He acts out of courage, while his sister, terrified, weeps for him. He crosses the first pool and actually dives into the second, swimming through it.

The personal details of the story end after the boy has told his sister of his adventures. She is never mentioned again but perhaps we can conjecture that it is she who preserves the history as a *rungano*. The boy becomes a chief, his sister becomes a

storyteller. Each has moved into a socially-defined role. The mutual support of their time in the garden is over. He now makes his fortune by speculating in bride-wealth (*pfuma*) and grows to become a great king, who is feared by all (*mambo mukuru kwazvo aityiwa nevazhinji*) (7, para 36). The return to social order has its costs. The children's fear of the crocodile is replaced by the brother's ability to generate fear. Because he becomes a king, he will become a royal ancestor or *Mhondoro*. He will thus gain control over the rain, protecting those who respect him from the fate suffered by his parents.

Conclusion

Paradise in the terms of this narrative is neither a beginning nor an ending. It is an interlude, which carries its own menace, in a series of dramas around human power and other harsh conditions. Paradise in several Southern African traditions is also accessible only to those who, through their courage and innocence, are prepared to undergo certain ordeals. Unlike the Christian tradition, which treats paradise as a place from which humanity comes, and to which good people will return, this narrative points to paradise as specific and transitory moment in time. It is a moment which provides a breathing space but which will eventually entail a return to the problems of the world. This trope has particular bearing on the writings of J M Coetzee and Dambudzo Marechera, who, rather than anticipating a social and political settlement that will solve all our problems, present us with quite bleak landscapes, punctuated with moments of great beauty and ecstasy. This point will be problematised and explored further in future chapters.

Chapter Three:

Childhood and Drought in *The House of Hunger*

Musaemura Zimunya states that Marechera's *House of Hunger*¹ follows the trend, prevalent in Zimbabwean literature, of representing a barren and deprived human condition through the image of drought. He sees this as a "spiritual drought" (Zimunya 1982:4). Actually Marechera's drought takes two forms, the familiar rural condition of deprivation of rain, and an urban drought which has more to do with spiritual barrenness and with stains which cannot be washed away, because there is no water. The absence of rain as an allegory for other forms of poverty links Marechera to the tradition epitomised by Chifamba. Sections of *The House of Hunger* are rich in allusion to the oral tradition and to pre-colonial material conditions. Drought occurs in these sections, but it is different from the kind of drought which occurs in the more urban settings of the narrative. In the latter case, the drought is not only the lack of water, it is the lack of art, of history, of anything which is not directly needed in the struggle for survival. The urban drought produces human scavengers, related to the cannibals identified in the last section. These prey on others through treachery, prostitution and sheer intimidation. As they battle for resources, the weak suffer. As in Chifamba's narrative, children are central victims of the drought. They inherit this barren literal and figurative landscape.

Fading Memories of Rural Drought

The House of Hunger is an essentially fragmented narrative and it is only fragments of fragments which are devoted to any sort of a mythic pre-colonial existence. Marechera is extremely cynical about attempts to mythologise the past, viewing romantic tales of rural life as attempts to sweeten the Rhodesian government's policy of urban influx control. He refused to write in Shona, claiming, at times, that restricting Africans to their own languages was an imperialist missionary plot aimed at preventing them from communicating with the wider world (Veit-Wild 1992:307). Going against the grain of his utterances, however, one finds evidence of an intimate knowledge of tradition, which surfaces from time to time in the course of the narrative. In spite of Zimunya's claim that Marechera's "consciousness empirically dates its genesis" from the moment of colonisation (Zimunya 1982:109), it is possible to discover traces of an earlier consciousness.

¹ I am here treating *The House of Hunger* as a unified narrative, rather than as the collection of short stories suggested by the Heinemann African Writers' classification. Flora Veit-Wild shares this assessment (Veit-Wild 1993:187). The different sections of the work are linked to one another not only in terms of style and theme but also in terms of more explicit narrative connections and the narrator/hero of the work remains a consistent persona whose development parallels Marechera's biography. My reasons for treating the whole work as a single novel will become clear as the analysis develops.

The older world, no less complicated than the urban present in which the narrator, for the most part, exists, is also a dry and dusty one. It serves both as an allegoric parallel to the present and as a collective memory. Some of this world resurfaces in stories told by the old man in "The House of Hunger" (HOH 1-82), the first and longest section of the narrative. The past receives the most extended attention in the subsection of "The Writer's Grain" entitled "Protista" (127-133). It tells of a man and his wife exiled to a remote area, called the Lesapi Valley, by a tribunal. That action speaks more of a European state like France or Russia in which political prisoners were exiled to penal colonies. The setting, however, is explicitly Zimbabwean and its details initially locate the story in a time outside or before colonialism. The Lesapi valley is an anglicised name of the valley which contains the Sawe or Sabi river. This valley also includes Rusape, the town in which Marechera was born and spent much of his childhood. The narrator tells us, "I had named the valley Lesapi after my birthplace" (HOH 129). The naming suggests that the story has a double meaning, that its drought and exile refer to the other forms of barrenness and exile found in the text as a whole. The story has one explicit parallel with "Vana Vakarasisirwa Mugore Renzara". The narrator's wife, Maria the huntress, leaves him:

But before she left she had drawn a circle in red chalk on the wall by my bed and said: 'If the circle begins to bleed and run down the wall that means I am in danger. But if it turns blue and breaks up into a cross then that means I am coming home' (HOH 127).

Her use of the circle mirrors the boy's use of the mupfuta or castor oil bean plant in Chifamba's narrative. He leaves his sister behind to watch the plant, which expresses his fate. In this case, however, the genders are reversed. The active partner, the one who goes out to hunt, is a woman. The one who stays behind and watches signs is a man. The use of the cross suggests that the circle has a Christian interpretation. Maria becomes the narrator's messiah as she sacrifices herself for him. The circle both forms a cross and bleeds, and Maria returns as a skeleton, holding "between her front teeth a silver button" (132). She keeps her promise but she is trapped in a state between life and death, something like an *ngozi* which is the angry spirit of a dead person who has not been properly buried. The cross and the circle suggest that both she and the narrator are caught between Christianity and tradition.

The section makes more explicit references to traditional practices in its discussion of the manfish. The narrator fantasises about his youth in the real Lesapi valley "where once I had learned to fish, to swim and to lie back into the soft green grass and relax" (HOH 129). He remembers the watery paradise of his childhood, including the fact that he grew up in a place of racial segregation, where "white people" put up "a notice about trespassing" (129). From what appears to be a distant mythical past, he

own
harmful
ngozi
from water
Gaming - 2012/12/16

remembers a more immediate Rhodesia of the 1960s and 1970s. Here he suggests that traditional narratives are as much a product of the present as of the past. While remembering all that water, he remembers its ominous side, that somebody drowned, and his father warned him away from the river, because the dead man had almost certainly become a manfish "and he would want to have company in the depths of the waters" (129). The manfish is Marechera's version of the traditional "njuzu" (Reynolds 1990:333). The boy begins to have nightmares:

My first nightmare was about a white manfish which materialised in my room and licked its great jaws at me and came towards my bed and said: 'Come, come, come with me', and it raised its hand and drew a circle on the wall behind my head and said, 'That circle will always bleed until you come to me.' I looked at his hand and the fingers were webbed, with livid skin attaching each finger to another finger. And then he stretched out his index finger and touched my cheek with it. It was like being touched with a red-hot spike; and I cried out, but I could not hear my own voice: and they were trying to break down the door, and I cried out louder and the wooden door splintered apart and father rushed in with a world war in his eyes. But the manfish had gone and there was a black frog squatting where he had been. The next day the medicine man came and examined me and shook his head and said that an enemy had done it. He named Barbara's father, and my father bought strong medicine which would make what had been done to me boomerang on Barbara's father. They then made incisions on my face and on my chest and rubbed black powder into them, and said that if I ever come near water I must say to myself: 'Help me grandfather.' My grandfather was dead, but they said that his spirit was always looking and watching over me. They made a fire and cast the black frog into it, and the medicine man said he would seed its ashes in Barbara's father's garden. But he could do nothing about the circle on the wall, because although I could see it clearly no one else could (HOH 130).

The past of the narrator's memories is linked to his present exile by the bleeding circle on the wall. He tells his story as if unconscious of the links between the two circles. The memory of both is present; the connection between them is repressed. Maria the huntress is somehow related to the manfish. She herself becomes a nightmarish figure when she returns as a skeleton to offer him a button. But her horrible nature is inspired by love and self sacrifice. The manfish is there because of a plot to hurt the narrator. The passage is fairly explicit in discussing the medicine used to reverse the spell. The boy is protected through incisions and incantations. The ashes of the frog are scattered across the yard of the person accused of creating the spell. The accusation is never proved. The accused is not well known to the victim. The boy knows his persecutor only as "Barbara's father". The reversal of the spell does not entirely cure the boy, since he still sees the circle, a hallucination related to his experience, and his cheek

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becomes infected where the manfish touched him. Even after his mother has treated the wound, he is left with a "little black mark". The latter is a visible sign that his experience was not simply in the realm of imagination and dreams. The episode is told in the breathless manner of a small child recounting a horrible experience. The sentences are long, joined by many "ands". The horror builds when the body of Barbara's father is found in the river:

Soon afterwards Barbara's father went mad and one day his body was fished out of the river by police divers who wore black fishsuits. There were various abrasions on his face and the body was utterly naked, and something in the river seemed to have tried to eat him—there were curious toothmarks on his buttocks and his shoulders had been partially eaten; the hands looked as though something had chewed them and tried to gnaw them from the arms (HOH 130-131).

The small boy seems to have witnessed the sight he describes so graphically. The police divers in their "black fishsuits" are a visible reminder of the manfish. Apart from the obvious gory details, the appearance of the body is a cause for more subtle horror. Because Barbara's father's guilt is never proved the boy is left with a sense that he is responsible for the death of someone he hardly knows. The boy is also aware that such a horrible death was really intended for him. If he had followed the manfish, he too may have met such a fate. The black mark on his face links him to the abrasions on Barbara's father's. His mark is a trace of more substantial damage. There is always the possibility, realised in the story, that his fate has been deferred for a moment, that, at some stage in the future, the manfish will return.

Marechera's brother, Michael, claims in an interview that their mother carried a family curse because her grandmother was "a very dangerous witch". Her community "tied her to a tree and left her to be torn apart by wild animals" (Veit-Wild 1992:53). Her powers were then passed on to specific descendants, who had to use them, or be cursed. Michael Marechera links the death of his father to the curse. Mrs Marechera had to pass the curse on to one of her children, and, in Michael's words, "She chose Dambudzo" (Veit-Wild 1992:54). Michael tells this story to explain why his brother was an outcast and an exile, and why, on his return to Zimbabwe, he refused to see his mother. It is family history, perhaps apocryphal, but it tells us something about possible sources for the narrative. It is not important whether or not Dambudzo Marechera believed he was cursed. His hearing of voices in his youth (Veit-Wild 1992:68) is also featured in his narrative (HOH 28-29), and was treated by European observers as evidence of psychiatric disturbance. Within a traditional African conceptual framework, the voices may serve as evidence of spiritual possession. Marechera refuses to accept entirely either understanding. His narrative both expresses the conflict between belief systems, documenting it and using it to create powerful fictions. In

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fiction blended
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to own man
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He knows his
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"Protista" he imagines the childhood curse being realised. As the end of the narrative approaches, he finds menfish everywhere, even in the stars. One day he meets Barbara's father in the valley. He bites the button that the skeletal Maria gave him and turns into a crocodile, becoming at this moment both victim and attacker, confusing time in such a way that the two events, the discovery of the body and his meeting the ghost precede one another. Barbara's father vanishes and a voice says "You thought it was all politics, didn't you?" (HOH 133). This voice suggests that the world is more complicated than it appears, that there are certain types of occurrence which are beyond politics or science. The end of the narrative finds him saying "I have been a manfish all my life" (133). His *rungano* does not involve the simple dichotomy between good and evil found in Chifamba. It is possible for Maria to be both dead and on her way home, and so the circle and its message are shifting. It is also possible, as he becomes an adult, that the narrator is also implicated in the production of evil. As he says "—all grown-ups are menfish, but remember perhaps there is still a chance that the children—" (133). This section of the narrative shows some faith in the innocence of children. In this respect it differs from the more urban parts of *The House of Hunger*, in which even children find innocence difficult.

Urban Drought

In the township scenes of *The House of Hunger* Marechera allegorises the physical condition of drought as an emblem of the many metaphorical and literal hungers and thirsts brought about by colonialism. Whole lifetimes occur within an almost unbroken drought and its resulting spiritual emptiness. The entire landscape has become saturated with heat and dust:

Life stretched out like a series of hunger-scoured hovels stretching endlessly towards the horizon. One's mind became the grimy rooms, the dusty cobwebs in which the minute skeletons of one's childhood were forever in the spidery grip that stretched out to include the very stones upon which one walked but also the stars that glittered vaguely upon the stench of our lives.... And whatever insects of thought buzzed about inside the tin can of one's head as one squatted astride the pit-latrine of it, the sun still climbed as swiftly as ever and darkness fell upon the land as quickly as in the years that had gone (HOH 3-4).

Marechera has moved from the Zimbabwean drought-tradition to create an allegory which links the mind and the drought-stricken landscape in a series of moves. He transforms the colonial allegory of Africa as degraded body (see Bunn 1988:12) into a new allegory of the township as both latrine and degraded mind. This allegory is specific in dealing with the township as a particular kind of landscape, but the township stretches out infinitely between horizons, producing a hallucinatory sense of this

progression of hovels, of pit-latrines, of flies. All this detail is turned away from realistic description to express something other, the mind of the narrator which is alternatively portrayed as a hovel, a tin can and a pit-latrine. Mind and landscape are intermixed, each feeding off the dust and infertility of the other. Landscape is both mind, which conceptualises the body, and the excrement which the body produces. The colonial transformation of the landscape means that bodies are effaced completely and action becomes impossible. Later, Marechera further personalises and shrinks the image, saying that, "My life—my life is a spider's web; it is studded with the minute skeletons of genius—My life" (*HOH* 46). The desiccated soul of the author is compared to the desiccated exoskeletons of insects in a spider's web. Likewise childhood is already trapped and desiccated in this condition of spiritual drought.

Marechera's use of drought resembles that of J M Coetzee in *In the Heart of the Country*. Coetzee's heroine, Magda, fantasises about giving birth to a weak and sickly child. She contrasts her own barrenness to the fecundity of her despised stepmother, 'Already the seed must have been planted, soon she will be sprawling around in her mindless heat, swelling and ripening, waiting for her little pink pig to knock' (p 10). Her own child 'would be thin and sallow, would weep without cease from aches in his vitals' but would be the messiah to the farm workers:

...Antichrist of the desert come to lead his dancing hordes to the promised land. They whirl and beat drums, they shake axes and pitchforks, they follow the babe, while in the kitchen his mother conjures over the fire or tears out the guts of cocks or cackles in her bloody armchair. A mind mad enough for parricide and pseudo-matricide and who knows what other atrocities can surely encompass an epileptic fuhrer and the march of a band of overweening serfs on a country town from whose silver roofs the sunfire winks and from whose windows they are idly shot to pieces. They lie in the dust, sons and daughters of the Hottentots, flies crawl in their wounds, they are carted off and buried in a heap. Labouring under my father's weight I struggle to give life to a world but seem to engender only death (*HOC* 10-11).

Here, infertility of a female figure is linked to the infertility of the landscape. This landscape shares Marechera's dust, heat and flies. Coetzee's little houses are more picturesque; 'sunfire winks' from their roofs. But their aesthetic appeal is deceptive. They hide an enemy who is able to 'idly' massacre the serfs. Coetzee reacts to another tradition in his writing. Magda is located within the pastoral novel tradition of white Southern African colonial women as well as within a more recent, more introspective tradition. Marechera shares Coetzee's drought and introspection, but each author is reacting to a different set of social and historical problems. Both Marechera and Coetzee react to the trope of infertility of the land by exploring its consequences for

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like colonialism
temporary measures
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to come some day
Use of colonial power
by imperialist countries

delay
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of violence

human fertility. Southern African literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is full of barren women and orphaned children. For Marechera, birth is still possible, but children are born into a dry and dusty world which cannot hope to nourish them. Marechera, at various moments in *The House of Hunger* and elsewhere, identifies himself as a child in a world of foul and frightening cannibalistic adults. Childhood becomes a complicated allegory representing human potential and the creative urge which makes writers. On the other hand the world of children is a microcosm of that of adults. Children mirror the violence of adults. Their victims are the most childlike beings, the eternal children like the narrator and his friend Edmund.

Childhood amid the hunger

Children in *The House of Hunger* are not only victims of different forms of abuse. They are also themselves potential and actual abusers. They play a knowing part in a violent and destructive society in which no one generation holds a monopoly on sadism. All stages of childhood, from birth to adolescence, in this way both reflect and create the text's social setting. Even when the image of cleanliness and innocence is used, it is undermined and contaminated by social conditions. Nestar, a prostitute, gives birth to her son Leslie "in the bush". She later becomes a high-class prostitute with a tastefully decorated flat and a clientele which includes a famous artist. The birth itself involves a sort of painful purity, she tells the narrator exactly where it occurred:

'At the head of the stream. There was blood everywhere but he looked like a new smooth stone when I washed him.'

...
The pain, blood and emptiness of that birth made her there and then decide to 'fight into the thick of the money'. Money, she said, was power. There is nothing worth while that has no gold in it, she said (HOH 51).

The birth itself is described as a romantic event, a moment of paradisaical closeness to nature. The beginning of a human life is linked to the beginning of a stream, perhaps with the implication that as the stream becomes a river, so the life of the boy will broaden and expand into something great. Nestar washes the baby in the stream so that he looks like "a new smooth stone", one that has been washed and polished by the flowing water. Marechera problematises the naturalistic rhetoric of streams and rivers. Discussing the chaos and corruption of the house of hunger, he tells us: "What began as a little stream of moral experiment had swelled into the huge Victoria Falls of a cancerous growth" (HOH 7). The head of the stream seems pure and innocent, a place of clean origins, but the river that follows is polluted and deadly. Leslie, the son, has grown up as a thug and a rapist and the narrator is visiting Nestar to find Leslie so that he and a friend can beat him up. While Nestar is telling him about the birth he

Childhood and Drought

remembers, "I did not want to talk about him because of what Philip and I were going to do to him" (HOH 51).

Nestar, even as she fondly recalls the birth, is retreating from it. Not only does this sublime moment of closeness to an original nature belie the pain and danger involved, it also obscures her history, that she conceived her child at the age of twelve. The father of her child beats her up when she goes to him for help. Her own father beats her and expels her from her home. She gives birth in the bush simply because she has nowhere to go. She realises after the child is born that she must fight to earn money to survive and she builds herself a life by humiliating herself and by watching other people's humiliation. The birth is thus a moment of purity in an otherwise corrupted life. Marechera resembles Chifamba in showing paradise as a brief stopping point in a life's journey. In this case, however, paradise is itself characterised by pain and bloodshed. Most impressions of childhood in *The House of Hunger* show childhood as infected with the same violence and hopelessness that characterise the lives of the adults. Children cannot hope for refuge from the horrors of their society; in fact they contribute to making the society more horrible. While Peter, the narrator's brother, beats up Immaculate, his girlfriend, and then the narrator in the House of Hunger, a group of children are torturing the narrator's cat to death in the street outside. The various noises, Peter's abuse, Immaculate's retorts, the narrator's nervous laughter are cut with the howls of the cat and the utterances of the children (HOH 4-6). The sadism of children parallels adult violence. While Peter's abuse is understood, if never condoned, as a product of his prison experience, the children kill the cat for no apparent reason. Their violence is aimless, it lacks a particular history and serves as an escape from boredom. Marechera heralds the arrival of a new kind of violence which makes even the Peters of the world appear to be peaceful and comprehensible. The children's sadism arises, not from particular causes, but from a fabric of violence in which the war, the increasing sadism of the police state and the related incidents of domestic violence all serve as contributing factors.

Violent children, like violent adults, justify their behaviour in various ways. The school bully, Stephen, uses African Nationalism as a pretext to torment Edmund, a sensitive child with a passion for Russian literature and music. Edmund, like Leslie, is marked by his mother's occupation. She is a prostitute, and Stephen exposes her to his schoolmates:

One day he let it be known that Edmund's mother was a 'common drunken whore' and that he, Stephen, had screwed her nuts and she had certainly used some of the money to pay for Edmund's fees (64).

Edmund challenges Stephen to a fight, and Stephen accepts, citing Nkrumah that "Africa always rises up to every new challenge" (65). He beats up Edmund so badly

Indicts colonialism
- Creating hopelessness in Africa: life
no land, income = frustration, moral decay, bitterness, teenage pregnancy, family breakdown, child psychologically damaged by poverty, immorality, violence
- All cor life is meaningless by hardships imposed by colonialism - Cash economy ref. to school forms of Argentina

despises
of money
uses to be
ruined by
of money
childhood
y. with man!

meaninglessness of
dispossessed peo.
eg SA? - no
respect for life
classism sadism.
a culture, even
new SA, persists
cor socio-economic
no change of a
fundamental nature

Violence?
Colonial Frankenstein
monster. S.A. ought
to view it in its
context. No other
to address root cause
not symptoms!

that he is permanently scarred. Ironically, Edmund grows up to become a guerrilla in Zimbabwe's war for independence and when the narrator next sees him, he has been captured by the Rhodesian security forces and displayed with the bodies of his former comrades-in-arms. The same determination which led Edmund to challenge Stephen's bullying has also led to his challenging the Rhodesian state. The bully and the state are conflated; both are masquerading as moral policemen, protecting the innocent against corruption and immorality. In spite of their rhetoric, they only succeed in victimising the innocent. Edmund is then the eternal innocent; his innocence is not restricted to his childhood, instead it makes him stand above the crowd. The narrator comments on his stature:

I stared hard at the photographs; the corpses looked as if they had been dead for quite a while. One face seemed to be nothing but a mass of flies. And Edmund stood morosely among them. Sole survivor. At school he had stood out among us in such a manner and had, it seemed, doggedly lived out his tortured dreams in the face of humiliation. I do not know why he liked me, but he did (61).

Edmund's worship of Gogol is appropriate. His determination and his aesthetic sense make him truly alive whereas his schoolmates are dead souls, serfs to be bought and sold even after their death. Only their market value makes them worth anything.

Marechera comments on the serfdom of the African writer in his last section, 'Are There People Living There?' (*HOH* 149-151). The writer becomes a vehicle to sell products and services. Stephen is a consumer of second-hand ideology and of the African Writers Series. Where Edmund identifies with the isolation and alienation of Russian artists, Stephen uses "cultural authenticity as a tool of personal promotion" (Foster 1992:60). Only Edmund maintains his independence. Edmund is linked to the narrator in several ways. Stephen bullies Edmund because he reads Dostoyevsky and Gogol. Peter beats up the narrator because he buys "Some books by Robert Graves" (*HOH* 27) with the beer money Peter gave him to reward a good report. Both are abused because they choose literature over the normal pursuits of beer and politics. The narrator also finds himself on display like Edmund when he arrives in England. As he tells us, in 'Black Skin What Mask', "My skin sticks out a mile in all the crowds around here. Every time I go out I feel it tensing up, hardening, torturing itself" (*HOH* 93). In exile, his pigmentation becomes a physical and visible version of the metaphysical and invisible quality which set Edmund apart from his class-mates and his comrades-in-arms. Edmund thus becomes a kind of ideal for the narrator, something of a hero. He represents a potential in terms of his independence and his difference from the other schoolboys. This potential is destroyed by the war and other forms of violence in the society. Edmund will never achieve his potential to become the sort of thinker and teacher that Zimbabwe needs. The narrator lives as his shadow, the one

who almost approaches his greatness, but whose own potential is also severely compromised.

There are a number of noteworthy biographical similarities between Edmund and his author. Marechera also grew up in poverty, his father dying when he was thirteen, and, as Flora Veit-Wild informs us in the *Source Book*:

After Mr Marechera's death the poor living conditions of the family deteriorated even further. Their subsequent eviction in 1969 brought even more hardship. When Mrs Marechera lost her job at the crèche, she started drinking heavily and resorted to prostitution to feed her family and to secure the schooling of her children (Veit-Wild 1992:51).

Edmund's home environment shares some similarities with Marechera's. Marechera also resembles Edmund in that, throughout his life, Marechera, who was small and short-sighted, often had physical fights with people much larger than himself (Veit-Wild 1992:110, 335). Other obvious links include their passion for literature. Of course, like Stephen, Marechera also read the Heinemann African Writers' Series (Veit-Wild 1992:66). The novel is closely autobiographical. The lecturer in 'The Writer's Grain 1' refers specifically to a "student with the peculiar name Marechera" (HOH 102), reminding us that the narrator's journey from a slum in Zimbabwe to Oxford, echoes the writer's own experience. At times, as in the above example, Marechera moves to the third person, seeing himself as others might see him. The resulting self-image is often one of author as perpetual child. The child is different from all the other children and has enormous creativity and sensitivity. The child may grow up to become a freedom-fighter, but even in doing so, will remain childlike in his creativity, his innocence and vulnerability.

Scrapiron Blues, the final posthumous collection of Marechera's work, shows him moving towards children's literature as a genre. In "Fuzzy Goo's Guide to the Earth" (239) and "Tony and the Rasta" (213), a cynical narrator uses the naive tone of children's writing to present such topics as sex and squatter camps. This later fiction suggests that literature should not shelter children from the more sordid details of life. *The House of Hunger* presages the later work by showing children grappling with the ugly, naturalistic facts of poverty and violence. They are not simply victims but they engage with the world around them, either creating escapes, as Edmund does, or becoming participants, like the children who kill and burn the narrator's cat. In his realistic moments, the world of children is a microcosm of the harsh and ugly world of adults. Marechera also presents a more idealistic view of childhood. As in *Chifamba*, the figure of the child may be an allegory for innocence. The writer often identifies himself as a wide-eyed, curious child confronting a brutal and repressive world.

Allegorical Children

The most obviously allegorical section of *The House of Hunger* is the second part of "The Writer's Grain" (HOH 116-125). In this section, a small boy called Andrew wakes up in a strange and torturous paradise, complete with a snake called 'Old Nick' (119). "The Writer's Grain" is in three sections: Andrew's narrative falls between the ramblings of an academic in a pub and the drought narrative, 'Protista' discussed above. This particular sequence moves from a mundane, if tormented, academic existence, into a moment of paradise and from there into a drought. The idea of paradise as a refuge from drought is reversed. The narrator's exile, even with its manfish, is a haven after the sensual bombardment of section two.

Paradise has been commercialised and occupied by the mass media and Andrew finds himself interrogated by a talking Warthog. The section has no intradiegetic narrator as it is told in third person. The narrative includes such fantastic features as consumerist dinosaurs that speak with American accents. They exist in a world of supermarkets and television sets in which "a panel of greybeards [talk] about how children's book [sic] contain too much fantasy and too little modern reality" (117). The academics contend that children must be exposed to the truth of Idi Amin and the Holocaust and Andrew's experience illustrates the manner in which children can be shown such truths. Mr Warthog tries to indoctrinate Andrew into believing that he is personally responsible for the horror and violence of the world. His techniques are subtle and Pavlovian. When Andrew asks for food, Mr Warthog feeds him a salad which looks like human body parts. The "salad" makes the philosophical point that even vegetarianism is no escape from our responsibility for the state of the world. The boy initially revolts against the idea of eating this anthropomorphic salad, but Mr Warthog persuades him to eat, claiming parental authority:

'You must trust me,' Mr Warthog said. 'All little boys have to trust to their parents' judgement. I did not make it so. You do trust me a little, don't you?'

The boy, after a great deal of thought, slowly nodded his head.

Mr Warthog broke a piece of the salad brain and gave it to the boy. The boy, with eyes screwed shut, crammed the human brains into his mouth and chewed vigorously. And when he choked on it, Mr Warthog obligingly thumped his back for him (HOH 119).

Mr Warthog appeals to the boy's trust and obedience in getting him to eat the salad. He lies, the boy has never seen him before and therefore has no reason to accept that he is his parent. Andrew is a little boy like "all little boys", and Mr Warthog will, like any concerned parent, thump his back to ensure that he swallows his macabre meal. Once Mr Warthog asserts his parenthood, Andrew's resistance ends, and he becomes a participant, albeit unwilling, in the inhuman business of eating brains. A little later in

the section, Mr Warthog forces Andrew to watch a four-hour film in which “Nazis [are] frying eggs and eating them while with their bayonets they [prod] an endless line of naked children into a huge sulphuric acid tank” (125). He then gives Andrew fried eggs, once again implicating him in inhumanity through his need for sustenance. Because Andrew does not become sick, he must also see himself as a Nazi, a mass-murderer of children. In this section, Marechera uses a dark satirical allegory to explore the conditioning of children into a state of inhumanity.

The setting of the section is taken from a fairy tale or perhaps a *rungano*. Andrew, after his fall, finds himself in a little house in a clearing. The house could originate either in ‘Hansel and Gretel’ or in ‘*Vana vakarasirirwa Mugore Renzara*’. It is a deceptive place of refuge in a dark forest, “a little house with a bright green roof” (116). When he arrives, he eats the childhood meal of bread and milk and goes upstairs to sleep. It is only later that he discovers he has been “sleeping on a bed of creaking human skulls” (116). Like Chifamba’s house of refuge, which previously belonged to ogres, Marechera’s has an ominous history. Chifamba’s children lose their parents and must thus make their own future. Andrew has no memory of his past or his parents. He is orphaned into the twentieth century and its horrors. When he awakes, he discovers Mr Warthog destroying art by eating musical instruments.

The central ideal behind this particular allegory is that of consumption. Mr Warthog consumes a violin and a cello. Andrew consumes human brain salad, the apples from the edenic tree of knowledge, Nazified fried eggs and Lysistrata. It is unclear whether the latter is a literal or a metaphorical consumption because Andrew begins “to hungrily devour Aristophanes” (125). Maureen Quilligan identifies a kind of allegorical pun in which the distinction between a word’s literal and metaphorical meanings are blurred (Quilligan 1979:26). Because we have been presented with different examples of strange and unsettling objects being consumed, when we find Andrew devouring Aristophanes, we cannot be sure whether his devouring is literal or metaphorical and, furthermore, since cannibalism features prominently in this section, we do not know whether the author or his work is devoured. In Quilligan’s words (applied in her case to Spenser), Marechera makes “words mean exactly what they say they mean” (Quilligan 1979:35). Quilligan is quoting Humpty Dumpty in *Through the Looking Glass* (Carroll 1896:196), a text which has some relevance here. Like Alice in her conversation with Humpty Dumpty and the Red Queen, Andrew is a child trying to deal with the oppressive logic of adults. Marechera’s vision is bleaker and more disturbing than Carroll’s. Andrew is implicated in the world of adults because he is forced to participate in their cannibalistic rituals. In this case, the consumption of artistic works, is linked to cannibalism as a dehumanising activity and the reader cannot be sure whether he is a reader or a cannibal.

Marechera points out the poor taste implicit in the word “consumption” whether it is applied to goods, services or culture or to the producers of these things. This concern is echoed towards the end of the text in “Are There People Living There?” (149-151), which explores the life of an author who contributes to the culture of consumption. The author/narrator, his large family and their many pets live in a hovel in a township. The house is disorganised and dirty, but family relations are harmonious; any breakdowns in the harmony are due to a lack of money so the author dreams of making ends meet by contributing to the fiction of the family of black consumers in an independent state. This family is an advertiser’s ideal in that all families are expected to aspire to its state of perfect consumerism. Its idealism is reflected in the perfection of each member of the family who simultaneously consumes all the products and role models available to the black consumer:

...What would the ideal modern black modern home be like? A ten-bedroomed villa surrounded by elegant acacia trees? A cocktail bar somewhere in it? Foam rubber seats and cushions and poufs and folding beds? On a use-now-pay-later basis, of course. A television. A giant radiogram. And on all the walls, portraits of such heroes as Cecil Rhodes and Chief Tugela. I would have a whole wardrobe of clean underwear. Clean socks, for once. And we would polish everything with Mr Shine. And eat rice and roast chicken until we felt sick of it. My eldest son would be a credit to the family. Three cars in the garage at the back. And house-servants to clean up after us everywhere we went in the house. Advertisement agencies would desperately want us to pose for photographs recommending Ambi Skin-Lightening Cream, Coca-Cola, Castle and Lion Lagers, Benson and Hedges, Pure Wool Suits, and, yes, Fanta Orange Tastes So Good (*HOH* 151).

The passage satirically examines the effacement of identity that occurs as people attempt to live the lives scripted for them by advertisers. This is another paradise, especially when set against the crowded, drought-stricken sections of the text. It is, however, also a false paradise. In this case consumption of products and services also consumes meaning and individuality as vastly conflicting images are placed in close proximity. The advertisers celebrate the blackness of the family while selling them skin-lightening cream. The portrait of Cecil Rhodes, a coloniser, hangs next to that of Chief Tugela. The passage exposes the myth of competition in that the family promotes two brands of Rhodesian beer—Lion and Castle—which are both produced in the same brewery. They also promote Coca-Cola and Fanta, competing brands of fizzy drink, which share a common bottling plant. Fanta Orange is known not only by its brand name, but by its advertising slogan, “Fanta Orange Tastes So Good”. The family’s idiosyncrasies and the difficulties of writing in a state of poverty make way for a dull and uniform system of conflicting brand names. Hidden amid the products are one or

two human images. One is the statement that "My eldest son would be a credit to the family". We are not told what he has achieved to become a credit. It is enough that he now fits comfortably into the cliché. He is no longer the delinquent yet considerate child who "only tears pieces from the margins [of his father's manuscripts] to roll his cigarettes and dope with" (*HOH* 150). He has become a product, an object desired by every middle class family. The other humans in the picture are the servants who would "clean up after us everywhere we went in the house". These follow after the three cars in the garage, and thus fall into the category, like the eldest son, of status symbols. The juxtaposition and the dangling prepositional phrase "in the house" produce the image of servants following the family who drive from room to room in their three cars. The servants have no identity besides that of servants. Their presence in the mansion raises the question that, if all families must resemble the ideal of the consumer family, what about the servants' families? Can the servants themselves expect servants? Or is there a class of people excluded from the advertisers' vision?

Consumption becomes an all-consuming monster which digests everything, whether physical or metaphysical:

We would consume the Christian religion until our jaws ached. We would consume chunks of sermons, chunks of earnest prayers, and consume to the hilt the knowledge of our station in the human hierarchy. (I would have to stock lots of medicines for the constipation, the heartburn, and the inevitable worms.) We would consume every sugared stick of Family Planning and screw each other only when there was a sword between her loins and my loins. We would utter speeches condemning the practise of polygamy, the evils of lobola, the superstitions of magic and witchcraft, and, in short, cast out— (*HOH* 151).

This is the book's final prose paragraph and it speaks of the utter acceptance of the colonial religion with its imperative to limit family size. It also talks of the pain of this consumption. The medicines listed all assist the effective digestion of a strange and unhealthy diet. Family planning becomes a medicine made more palatable because it is disguised as a "sugared stick". The sugared stick becomes the sword between the loins of Tristan and Isolde. In this case, however, the author and his wife actually attempt to copulate through the sword. Their sexuality, complicated by their real and omnipresent large family, is effaced by the fantastic world of the consumed African life style. The family is also effaced. No children can be born if the parents only have sex through the sword of family planning. There is therefore no eldest son to become a credit, no nine children to fill the ten rooms of the villa. The family becomes a hollow and empty thing, consumed along with the religion, the lifestyle and all the other products.

Andrew is consumed in the same manner as he is implicated in the consumption of human salad and of children by sulphuric acid. Mr Warthog plays a satanic role in

serving as intermediary between Andrew and the snake. Andrew consumes blood-stained apple eggs and drinks blood out of a skull (*HOH* 120-121). He is consuming the knowledge of good and evil, but this knowledge implicates him in the evil. Mr Warthog forces him to become a part of the images he sees and of the nourishment he consumes. As a child in the twentieth century he ultimately consumes himself, literally, in that it is his own mind he is eating, and figuratively, because he consumes himself with guilt. He is eaten up with the angst of belonging to the century of mass destruction.

The image of the small boy consumed with the horror of an unfriendly world recurs in Marechera's writing. In *Mindblast* this figure becomes more autobiographical as a character called Grimknife Jr is interrogated by a Mr Warthog-like figure called Rix the Giant Cat (*MB* 45-72). The setting and description of events are far less allegorically dense and far less effective than "The Writer's Grain", but several concerns from *The House of Hunger* resurface. Rix is a "Reorientation Officer", Grimknife Jr a dissident. It is Rix's responsibility to ensure that Grimknife Jr fits into the P.E. or Progressive Effort and becomes "a useful citizen" (*MB* 45). This category of person is as vague and clichéd as "a credit to the family". In one of his last interviews, Marechera criticised the Zimbabwe government's demands on writers, saying: "there has not yet been a comprehensive socialist programme which writers are expected to follow, so most writers do not know whether what they are writing at any given time is acceptable politically or not" (Petersen 1988:36). It is unlikely that Marechera supports such a programme. He is saying that the government leaves the writer in an uncomfortable position. He or she is not told what are "appropriate" subjects, while at the same time any inappropriate utterance may offend those in power. In the same interview, Marechera cites examples of writers whose work has been banned since independence. In one case, a play was banned shortly before it was to be performed at the Zimbabwe Book Fair. In both cases the Zimbabwe Union of Writers was unable to assist the writers (35-36). The figure of the small boy facing a monstrous cat becomes a metaphor for the writer faced with an authoritarian state whose demands are final but not specific. Marechera is allegorising the capriciousness of power. The figure of Mr Warthog is more effective because it is not limited to an allegory of the writer in an authoritarian state. Andrew is a less specific small boy and his interrogation is an indictment of a whole system of education which manifests itself in schools and the media. Its *rungano*-like quality suggests that the indoctrination begins far earlier than the first day of school, it begins with stories told to very small children by mothers and grandmothers.

Marechera continues to experiment with the form and language of children's stories in "Fuzzy Goo's Guide (to the earth)" started in the back page of his notebook

during the 1987 Book Fair (Veit-Wild 1987:22-23). Rain appears in this narrative as a cleansing force, closely related to love:

The Rain was smiling water through bright blue lips. Fuzzy Goo, at the window, thought of his dog. The sad rain made him love his dog even more. Rain is lonely. Rain is memories. Rain is cool in a hot brain. Rain is love of Fuzzy Goo's dog. He loved that dog. Love is bright green grass on a warm breezy day. Love is sunlight smiling brightness through lips that are brown and blue. Brown is not a boy but the land. Land is just soil made of dead things and dead human beings. Fuzzy Goo is a human being but Fuzzy Goo does not like going to the toilet. Human beings have to go to the toilet because they eat dead things and drink something horrible called water. Fuzzy Goo does not like being a human being. Human beings hide their horrible bodies in things called clothes. Clothes get torn and dirty. If you are a little human being and your clothes get torn and dirty, then all the big human beings shout and beat you up. Fuzzy Goo's dog likes to beat up other dogs. But it does not beat up Fuzzy Goo. That is why its name is BLAH. Blah means a dog that does not beat up Fuzzy Goo (SB 239).

Marechera parodies the form of the children's story, complete with explanations of how things work and characters with droll and apparently meaningful names. Adorno notes that children's stories "contain incomparably more eloquent ciphers of history" than does consciously historical literature (Adorno 1951:151) and Marechera underlines this tendency by presenting society from the "cross-grained, unassimilated and opaque" (151) perspective of its most disenfranchised inhabitants, its children. In this case, the image of a drought stricken and violent social order stands in contrast to a peaceful and loving natural order. Once again, even the sympathetic characters, in this case Blah the dog, are implicated in the violence. Within the social order, dirt is inevitable. It is contained in "the land", which is linked to a boy through his brownness. The phrase "Brown ... is the land" sounds like a Chinese revolutionary song and the narrative criticises the ideal of the land as a platform for political campaigns. The land is sullied by human life and death and thus contaminates even water, which is pure and loving when associated with the rain but becomes "something horrible" when human beings drink it. Sex, religion, parents and pregnancy are symptoms of the "blahness" of society. "Blah" is not only the name of a dog, it also stands for all unpleasantness, dirt and nausea in the social order. The drought is an absence of the rainfall which represents love and purity in Marechera's texts. This absence of rain produces a secondary presence, as it leaves the dirty traces of human existence on everything. It is for these traces that "all the big human beings shout and beat ... up" children. This is the children's book alluded to in the "Writer's Grain" which contains a healthy dose of "modern reality" (HOH 117). The stain is a major allegorical construct throughout

Marechera's writings; it serves to remind humans of the messy origins and endings of life.

Stains: Traces that will not wash away

The stain, Marechera's surrogate for an afterlife, recurs at frequent intervals in *The House of Hunger*. A stain can be the trace of semen on the sheets which serves as evidence of masturbation or sexual intercourse. It can be all that remains of a human being crushed by a literal or metaphorical train. The stain is thus a metaphor for destroyed human potential. Marechera very cynically tells us that we move from stain to stain but that if we are lucky, we may just pass through paradise en route. The stain is eternal, because it cannot be washed away. It also functions as a trace of illicit sexuality and of the ever-present physical and psychological violence which characterises the text. Like paradise, the stain is also a product of the self.

Stains are a relic of the narrator's masturbation, discovered by an angry mother. His mother views his continued masturbation as abnormal, because it is set against a "norm" of promiscuous sexuality, including that of the narrator's brother, Peter:

When Peter became twenty-one father gave him, for a present, a new anti-VD set. Mother merely warned him not to get involved with married women. And I—rather grudgingly, for I was extremely jealous—gave him my dubious blessing.

I was by then more experienced in books and masturbation than in girls and street-fights and throwing dice. Whenever mother took away my sheets to wash them she would make me explain every single stain on them. Since they were invariably stained with semen she would contemptuously give me a long sermon about how girls are 'easy' and 'why don't you get on with laying one or two?' or three. or four. or five. 'There is nothing to it,' she said. 'You stick it in the hole between the water and the earth, its easy. She splays out her legs and you bunch your pelvis between her thighs and strike! right there between her water and her earth. You strike like a fire and she'll take you and your balls all in. Right? Up to your neck. When you come you'll see it misting her eyes. Don't stop; go on digging. Digging. And she'll heave you in up to the hairs on your head. See? Now. Why don't you get on with laying one and stop messing my sheets? You were late in getting off my breast; you were late in getting out of bedwetting. Now you're late in jerking off into some bitch. You make me sick up to here, do you understand? Up to here. It must be those books you're reading—what do you want to read books for when you're finished with the university? Yes, up to here (HOH 78-79).

The discovery of the stains is a product of living under surveillance in the township. One's parents are omniscient, as Marechera shows elsewhere. In an article on children and evil, Pamela Reynolds explores the theme of parental control in the *Protista* section of 'The Writer's Grain,' looking first at the episode of the boy travelling to the

ends of the earth and writing his name, trying to rebel against his father. The boy eventually returns home and his father comes to meet him, saying "All the time you thought you were actually away from me, you have been here right in my palm" (*HOH* 128). He then reveals the name written in his hand. Reynolds explores the narrative in the light of the importance of naming, and of parental authority and youthful rebellion; the episode expresses the conflict "between a search for identity and ties to kin" (Reynolds 1990:332). The more esoteric control over words and naming has become a somewhat sordid control over sexuality. In the township, the parent uses her authority to force her son into conformity with the norms set by his brother. The narrator's search for identity entails reading and the avoidance of casual sex. By literally taking his sexuality into his own hands he keeps himself out of the hands of parental authority and social norms. He must still, however, submit to surveillance and the ensuing lectures. The mother views the narrator's continued masturbation as one of many signs that he has failed to mature. He sees his masturbation as proof of his independence; she believes that it shows he is still attached to her. He should by now be making other women cope with the consequences of his stains. The mother describes sexual intercourse using primal natural metaphors, in terms of water and fire and earth. She also believes that reading is linked to both masturbation and his failure to mature.

The stains function as a Derridean trace. In his analysis of Rousseau's confessions, Derrida equates masturbation and writing. Masturbation is, for Rousseau, one of a set of practices which supplement nature and pervert it. In *Emile*, wet nursing is identified as such a practice (Rousseau 1762:57 discussed in Derrida 1967:147). The list includes mining, and other technological advances which complement and thus replace humanity's senses and abilities (Derrida 1967:148). Natural Man uses his body only for the purposes for which it was intended. Artificial or technological man uses his in different and supplementary ways. He destroys himself in doing so. Citing Rousseau's *Rêveries*, Derrida makes the link between mining and blindness and goes on to discuss writing as one of those mythological constructions which 'kills the father and light' (148, 339n). Both can be classed as 'that dangerous supplement' (Derrida 1967:150). For Rousseau, masturbation is characterised by guilt and shame and takes place at the risk of madness and other damage to the masturbator's health:

The experience of auto-eroticism is lived in anguish. Masturbation reassures ... only through that culpability attached to the practice, obliging children to assume the fault and to interiorise the threat of castration that always accompanies it. Pleasure is thus lived as the irremediable loss of the vital substance, as exposure to madness and death (150-151).

Marechera's narrator suffers no such guilt; although his mother attempts to shame him by using his stained sheets as evidence of his habit. Like writing and reading, the

narrator uses the solitary activity of masturbation as a substitute for social interaction. The narrator's stains are a mark of his inability to mature, of his inability to function as a social being. Marechera's narrator refuses to participate in the life of the township. He is instead an observer, a reader. He, unlike his mother and Rousseau, views his masturbation and his reading not as symbols of fallen innocence, but as proof against corruption. His refusal to participate in the normal male activities of the township protects him against infection and violence. Sexually transmitted diseases are so much a part of life for his father, a lorry driver, and his brother that the presentation of 'a new anti-VD set' has become a rite of passage. Girls are viewed in the context of dice throwing and knife fights and so normal sexuality is linked to township violence. The narrator stays healthy and non-violent through his masturbation. The stain, usually associated with dirt and corruption, becomes a trace of his purity.

But the stain is also the trace left by victims of the various types of violence. Peter continuously reduces his girlfriend, Immaculate, to a stain by beating her up. Since a spell in prison he is increasingly embittered and violent and she becomes the receptacle of that violence, just as she had been the receptacle of his seed:

The lives of small men are like spiders' webs; they are studded with minute skeletons of greatness. And the House of Hunger clung firmly to its own; after all, the skeletons in its web still had sparks of life in their minute bones. The girl, of course—and how I felt for her—clung rebelliously to her own unique spirit. The severity of the beatings could not stamp the madness out of her. And though he finally beat her until she was just a red stain I could still glimpse the pulses of her raw courage in her wide animal-like eyes (*HOH* 4).

He is attempting to beat something out of her, as he acknowledges a moment later. That something could be, on a literal level, the unborn child which has lost him his job as a teacher and which compromises his freedom (2). This possibility is ruled out a moment after he leaves. Immaculate comments that "he didn't touch the baby" and the child is suddenly heard screaming in the next room (5). We realise only at this point that the child has already been born. Peter's violence is directed at a more abstract quality in Immaculate. He is working allegorically, trying to beat out that infuriatingly persistent spirit which his brother, the narrator, identifies. The spirit survives like a spark of life of an insect in a web or as the "raw courage" of a tortured animal. It is the one quality of Immaculate which lies beyond the reach of his violence. Her name is an allegorical representation of the quality. She is innocent, believing in pure love in spite of the violence around her. Peter's violence aims to sully both spirit and name. It is possible to grind her to a stain and only name, stain and spirit are left, the name serves as a visible sign of the spirit which cannot be erased or eradicated.

The narrator is himself implicated in the manufacture of stains as relics of violence. He and his friend Philip beat up Leslie, the son of Nestar the prostitute. The story follows the stream of consciousness of the narrator's reminiscences. He is talking about sexual education in the township when he recalls Nestar as a schoolgirl, he reports her rise to fame as a prostitute and then finds his way into her apartment where he is interviewing her about her experience. The son returns and, having identified him, the narrator telephones Philip, noticing that "[m]y dialling finger was stained with the ink I had used to jot down Nestar's story" (*HOH* 54). This is the first of his stains. In this case the stain is a mark of his treachery and hypocrisy. It tells him that he has entered this place under false pretences. Because of the disjointed nature of the narrative, it is the first time that the reader sees the real reason for his visit to Nestar. Philip comes in to beat up the son. Having done his job and settled a score with Philip, the narrator leaves, making his feelings on stains explicit:

I slid my knife back into my coat and walked upstairs, leaving Philip to smash the boy into a stain. Stains! Love or even hate or the desire for revenge are just so many stains on a sheet, on page even. This page. Growing up involves this. And Philip was crunching into him (55).

His own stains, the trace of his masturbation, are also involved in the act of beating up the son. He is implicated in the production of this stain just as his sexuality implicates him in making stains in women. He says of Julia, his friend the prostitute, "Something stirred in my nether regions, turning her into a mere receptacle for the stains that had made everything nasty" (46). Everything at this stage of the story has thus become a stain, even the act of narrating. Writing is simply making indelible stains on the paper.

Many of the best and most noble characters in the novel become stains. Peter reduces Immaculate to a stain and she is only concerned for her baby. The Africanist bully Stephen reduces Edmund to a stain. The narrator finds Stephen in the bathroom: "There was blood on his shirt; a rather large stain which seemed in outline to be a map of Rhodesia" (*HOH* 65). The narrator finds Edmund, his face smashed, "gibbering" in the playground. Shortly afterwards Ian Smith makes a unilateral declaration of independence. The narrator tries to compare the two events in a short story but fails to do so (66). Edmund's blood, the trace of the fight which occurs off-stage because the narrator is not there to see it, forms a map of Rhodesia. The country is thus stained with the blood of sensitive poetic people like Edmund, who is a victim of a facile African nationalism and of the Rhodesian state.

The narrative links the destruction of a second poet to the machinations of the state. Richter is a silent white Rhodesian, a poet at the university. He has always been somewhat strange and mystic, but he is made more so by his army service:

Then the military had got hold of him and when the whole length of it was through with him, there was almost nothing left but locust-like raspings of wings on his mind. He had become one of those characters upon whom silence rather than intellect bestows a certain transcendental dignity. At times, however, he meticulously dissected that silence for us, scalpel-like, cutting it to its very entrails and with a sterile pin pointing out to us organs of interest. These were invariably harrowing accounts of atrocities he had either witnessed or taken part in, in the operational area (*HOH* 69).

The destruction of Richter also takes the form of a drought. In this case it is the emptiness left by a plague of locusts. The horror of his military activities has left him unable to speak, except in the distant and clinical manner in which he recounts his atrocities. His silence and distance foreshadow his own violent death, he dies “crunched to a stain by a train as he wandered about in the early hours through the town in a drugged and drunken stupor” (69). As with Edmund, his personality seems to contribute to the circumstances surrounding his death, but the final responsibility for his death lies with the state. The “whole length” of the military, which crushes his spirit, resembles the train which crushes his body. Both the final stain and “the locust-like raspings of wings” are traces of Richter’s self.

But it is not only poets who become stains. Others are also crushed into stains. In a conversation with Julia, the narrator says “the old man died beneath the wheels of the twentieth century. There was nothing left but stains, bloodstains and fragments of flesh when the whole length of it was through with eating him” (45). Once again, we find the image of a starving monster reducing a human being to a stain. In this case, it is not only the country which is at fault, it is the entire twentieth century. The old man is a storyteller; he is a homeless wanderer who befriends the narrator and who is later, like Richter, killed by a train (9). Musaemura Zimunya follows the progression of stains, linking Richter to the old man, and the stains to the stains on the leg of the prostitute (Zimunya 1982:104). The stains, bloodstains in the case of Richter and the old man, semen stains in the case of the narrator and the prostitute, serve as an important link between apparently disparate sections of the text. Zimunya explains the stains thus:

...the most vivid thing about sex is the “stain”. The stain is a metaphor for horror, guilt and shame, and moral sin — and nausea too. We are back at the ubiquitous corruption of all values, the slime at the heart of the Rhodesian crisis (102-103).

Zimunya’s examination of Marechera’s obsession with stains is part of an exercise compiling evidence that he has deviated from an African literary norm. Marechera, even as he is present at the birth of Zimbabwean literature, is “private”, “cynical”, “naïve”, “narcissistic” and European. He continues, “the artist carries favours and succumbs to the European temptation in a most slatternly exhibition” (126). What

begins as an examination of motifs in Marechera ends with name-calling and the facile, stereotyped rejection of Marechera's writing. One can with some justice suggest that Marechera is private and cynical. It is harder to make the accusation of naïveté stick, especially since Marechera explores elements of Zimbabwean society and politics which many of his peers have glossed over. Narcissism is more difficult still, since the narrator hardly views himself as a beautiful and self-righteous epitome of African manhood. To accuse Marechera, one of the most prickly and outspoken characters in Zimbabwean history, of "currying favour" with anyone, is quite simply ludicrous.

It has become fairly commonplace for Africanist critics to attack the more experimental African writers as depraved and modernist. The attack is neither uniquely African nor particularly original. Both Stalin and Hitler attacked experimental art, claiming it had alien origins and contributed to permissiveness and cynicism. Marechera's writing, even as it resembles European modernism, recalls a happy and heroic African past, saying, "The bulldozers have been and gone and where once our heroes danced is nothing but a hideous stain" (*HOH* 45). The quest for heroes opens up an interesting set of critical debates. Kevin Foster claims that the search for authentic African heroes is part of the narrative's authenticity. Many figures within the narrative allow themselves to be lead astray by "Negritude", which, according to Foster, is a deceptive movement which creates self-styled heroes who themselves are caught up in a manichean European opposition between black and white. According to Foster such characters as Stephen the bully are examples of the false heroes negritude creates (Foster 1992:59-60).

"Burning in the Rain" and "Black Skin What Mask" are concerned with questions of blackness and identity, both of which are represented as indelible stains. The friend in "Black Skin What Mask" views his Africanness as a stain which no amount of washing can remove:

He was always washing himself—at least three baths every day. And he had all sorts of lotions and deodorants to appease the thing that had taken hold of him. He did not so much wash as scrub himself until he bled.

He tried to purge his tongue too, by improving his English and getting rid of any accent from the speaking of it. It was painful to listen to him, as it was painful to watch him trying to scrub the blackness out of his skin (*HOH* 93).

He views his black skin and his African accent as marks to be purged. This friend, who is never named, tortures himself in order to be more English and yet, ironically, he lectures everybody, including the narrator, on African politics. His political beliefs include the idea that black people should live up to the standard he has set himself. They too must erase the stain of blackness. In "Burning in the Rain", however, it is not

blackness but whiteness which becomes a stain. The protagonist is obsessed with the image of an “ape in the mirror” (83). The ape does terrible things in the room, causing the protagonist to suffer memory lapses. After one such lapse “he woke up to find that he had painted himself with whitewash and was wearing a European wig. It took him hours to get rid of the paint and for days afterwards he reeked of nothing else” (86).

Whitewash in this case is the prevalent stain. The houses are painted with it. In the opening paragraph we see that “The whitewashed barrack-like houses squatted gloomily on both sides of the street” (83). The houses reflect the depression of the protagonist’s life. As the narrative progresses, the narrator and his beloved Margaret find common cause in a world in which the very houses persecute them: “The whitewashed houses on either side of the street seemed to have changed, too, to have become slightly menacing. Slightly evil” (87). The gloom and the menace of the world are expressed in a pervasive whitewash. Like the other stains in *The House of Hunger* it will not be erased. Marechera’s use of the stain is allegorical rather than metaphorical because it is a persistent image, returning in various forms throughout the narrative. The stain is an emblem of drought because it is dried into place. It will not wash away.

The allegory of the stain assumes a life of its own as it moves throughout the text, recurring and linking apparently unrelated moments. The allegory of the stain here builds a relationship between drought, sex, death and literature. Maureen Quilligan suggests that allegory functions as wordplay and that a single word, appearing in different contexts throughout an allegorical text links the narrative together (Quilligan 1979:33). The stain certainly functions in this manner, linking debates around war and feminism, around bullying and blackness. The image takes on more epic and dynamic proportions, recalling Angus Fletcher’s discussion of allegory as progress or battle (Fletcher 1964:151-159). The narrator’s progress through the text becomes an endless struggle against the stain, which is the trace of past wrongs. It is a losing battle, requiring more powerful intervention. At various moments in the text, storms arise, trying to obliterate actual and psychological stains.

Breaking the Drought

Nestar the prostitute has white customers who attempt to violate the rigid Rhodesian racial laws through their involvement with her. In one case, a customer tries to atone for the inhumanity of the Smith government by humiliating himself before, or perhaps behind, her. This takes the form of a storm:

... Then he would make me stick my arse right out into the sky of his face with my head between my knees and he would breathe it in like a god accepting incense and then the baptism would come when he’d sort of writhe and cry for me to urinate into his face. Like rain. A sort of storm scene (*HOH* 51).

The storm is a break in the drought of Rhodesian life. It involves a form of contact, however debased, between a white man and a black woman. In this case, the man feels he must humiliate himself by allowing the woman to urinate on him. Throughout this display, however, he maintains his position. He is described as "a god accepting incense". He occupies a higher seat in the social strata and he has deigned to debase himself. He has a choice and chooses to play these games; Nestar is forced to participate in the humiliation in order to survive. Marechera problematises the idea of the cleansing effects of a summer storm. In this case the customer is trying to use romantic storm imagery, combined with his own debasement, to escape his particular historical burden. Even after his little metaphorical storm has passed, he is still a white Rhodesian man exploiting an African woman. He cannot buy his way out of history, no matter what language he uses to describe his act. Elsewhere in the text, storms are more effective at breaking the drought.

"Burning in the Rain" contains several small storms. Margaret and the protagonist feel refreshed and cleansed by one rainfall. They flee her grandmother, who shouts "Whore" as they leave. Here the rain cleans the metaphorical filth of her accusation. It becomes "Drops of God's water" (*HOH* 84). It is gentle and it brings back memories of a swim in the river, where the "river gods" had blessed them as they swam. The protagonist "had dived a deep breathtaking dive at the deepest side where the manfish lived" (84). He faces death and tempts the evil forces in the river but the gods protect him. As elsewhere in Southern African literature, a deep pool is a liminal zone, in which the hero confronts death and emerges stronger. Perhaps death is the only way to completely eradicate the stains of life. The protagonist's dive is reminiscent of Swinburne's "The Lake of Gaube", in which a diver dives deep into a volcanic lake, feeling the delicious sensation of being near death and becoming more alive when he surfaces. Pauline Fletcher describes this moment in Swinburne as "a rhapsodic invocation of the realm of death" (Fletcher 1983:221-223). Marechera may be close to Swinburne here, in believing that death is the only true purity. The dive echoes not only Swinburne's dive, it also echoes that of the boy in Chifamba's *rungano*. In the latter case, the boy risks his life to enter the village of women. Marechera's protagonist tempts death not only by drowning, but also at the hands of the manfish, who surfaces elsewhere in the narrative as a truly horrific cause of death. The narrator's love for Margaret dares him to take risks and protects him, just as in "Protista", Maria's love gives him the magic means of protecting himself from the crocodile. While Marechera falls into a cleansing and liberating setting, here reminiscent of Swinburne, the liberation is deceptive. He must leave this moment of sublime happiness and return to other, more emotional storms. The final storm is both an argument and an actual

storm, as the mirror which has been tormenting the protagonist begins to torment his beloved:

... There was a row; their first real argument. And for the first time they swore at each other.

‘You fucking bitch!’

‘Shit!’

‘Up your arse!’

‘Fucking shit!’

And she burst into tears. It had all been so sudden.

Now the little rocks of rain crashed faster upon them like a child tugging for attention. The whitewashed houses on either side of the street seemed to have changed, too, to have become slightly menacing. Slightly evil. And the pattering of the rain sounded like the microscopic commotion of six million people fleeing a national catastrophe.

Shivering at it, their arms tightened around each other (*HOH* 87).

The storm and the world become more serious, more menacing, because of their clash. Their emotional storm, their storming at each other, changes the nature of the actual storm. Without each other, the water becomes something terrifying, and they realise their mutual need. The rain, because it sounds like six million people, evokes the holocaust, hence the title “Burning in the Rain”. Their disagreement also takes the form of the storm of obscenities found in the relationship between Nestar and her client. They shout obscenities at each other, perhaps hoping to clear the air, only to find that they have contaminated it. Their relationship is a microcosm of all the destruction expressed in the storm and, overcome with horror at this destruction, they cling to one another for comfort.

Margaret becomes angry when she discovers the role of the mirror in her lover’s life. It is a reflection of the destructive, self-deprecating side of his psyche. In the main narrative, “The House of Hunger”, the narrator finds this role expressed by voices in his head, who say “something obscene about my mother’s morals” (*HOH* 29). These voices are an internalised version of the voice of Stephen, who provokes Edmund until he fights. For the narrator, however, there is no escape, no way even to try to defend himself against the voices and their accusations. They laugh at him, and their laughter torments him further: “It reduced my whole life to a turd. Its stench got into my food, my painting, my reading and my dreams” (30). The laughter contaminates the narrator’s life, reducing it to a foul stain, and he has no hope of cleaning the contamination away. At least, that is, until the storm breaks. The storm can only wash the stain out of the world by washing everything away.

The squalor and the stains which have permeated Rhodesian life can only be washed away in an almighty storm. Such a storm, however, has more of an impact on the oppressed than on their oppressors:

The rain, it broke down upon the workers' compound; it felled the huts with its brute knuckle-duster. It knocked down the mud walls and brought the flimsy roofs crashing down upon the unlucky inhabitants. All over the compound men women and children fought for their homes that night, rebuilding, rebuilding, groaning against its blows until once again the walls of that malice came crushing down. And still the skies dribbled convulsively upon the earth (*HOH* 32).

Marechera combines a romantic passion for the destructive and revolutionary powers of nature with a realistic documentation of their effects on ordinary people. He gives the sense of a community uniting to fight a futile battle against natural destruction. Ironically, this is not nature at its worst. As the community struggles to survive, the skies are merely dribbling.

The narrator views the storm with detachment. He can comment on the power of the storm because he is not fighting to preserve his house. He watches the battles for survival from the brick safety of a mission school. He experiences the internal subjective effects of the storm: the rain's "inflammation seared like a flash of pain; a bolt of intuition beating the madness out of me" (32). The flashes and bolts of lightning trigger internal flashes of discovery. While less privileged people—"the workers"—deal with the physical manifestations of the storm, the narrator discovers its metaphysical significance. It brings him to a state of awareness, cleansing the "gut-rot". At the narrator's moment of awareness, his friend Harry starts to sing:

Shure kwehure kunotambatamba haa!
Shure kwehure kunotambatamba haaa!

Kanandazofa ndinokuchengetera nzvimbo haa!
Kanandazofa ndinokuchengetera nzvimbo haa! (32-33)

The buttocks of a whore wiggle haa!
The buttocks of a whore wiggle haaa!

When I die I will reserve a place for you haa!
When I die I will reserve a place for you haa!²

The stanzas give us some insight into Harry's character. He is a mere schoolboy now, but he will become a womaniser, continuously dancing behind prostitutes. He will also be a police spy. "Chengeta" means to keep, guard, look after, preserve (Hannan). The suffix "era" gives the act of watching a specific location. Harry will become morally dead by prostituting his allegiances and will try to lead others to occupy that same space. The storm unleashes a cosmic psychic force which transforms both Harry and

² Thanks are due to Greenwell Matsika for helping me to correct this translation. He tells me that the singer praises the desirability of the whore, promising to preserve a place for her near him when he dies.

the narrator. They have spiritually died, like initiates in a traditional school, and will be reborn as something different. This force is not necessarily positive; Harry becomes a loathsome character. It does not affect everybody; Steven, the Africanist bully, is not transformed. He continues to shout the same slogans about Nkrumah. A moment after the change, Harry precipitates a fight with the narrator by throwing a rubber snake on to his book, and they roll out into the storm. Their action is dangerous; they know that someone has already died: "A drunken teacher who recklessly dared it was never seen again" (32); but they are not driven by knowledge. There is something primal and desperate about their battle, even if it takes the form of a friendly wrestling match:

... The storm grabbed me around the body and hurled me after Harry. Utter blackness alternated with flickerings of eel-like lightning. The rocks of rain had immediately drenched me to the marrow. And then something jumped upon my back and I fell face flat into the churning mud of the night. I grabbed for a leg and twisted. Harry cursed as he fell. And then we went for each other like madmen. But neither gained any advantage. We fought and plastered each other with mud and blood while the massive rocks of rain hurled themselves down on our bare heads. We fought until we were so tired that our blows could not have flattened ice-cream; indeed, our blows seemed like a lover's teasing and our struggles had become embraces. Our kicks were mere coquetry. And then something supremely white, blindingly so, erupted at the heart of the storm, striking us down in a heap in all that mud. I began to laugh. Harry began to laugh. We were both helpless as if the laughter was the final say of the storm. It was a new clarity—the kind that overcomes Pauline travellers on the road to Damascus. We shed our clothes as we laughed and began to paint each other's bodies with handfuls of mud. Earth to earth (33-34).

Their actions are at once desperate, comic, religious and erotic. The narrator and Harry are a twinned pair of characters representing conflicting forces in their society. A fight between two schoolboys is also an allegorical battle between collaboration and moral purity, among other things. The boys are moved to action by a force far greater than themselves. The storm seizes the narrator "around the body" and hurls him after Harry. It later renders both boys helpless with laughter, "the final say of the storm". The religious elements are both in the anointing with mud, a feature of traditional initiation ceremonies throughout Southern Africa, and in the Christian imagery of the conversion of Paul, also brought about by a blinding light. In Paul's case, however, the light is divine and unexpected. Here it is the light of lightning, a natural feature of the storm. The scene becomes erotic as blows become "embraces" and kicks become "coquetry". The eruption "at the heart of the storm", with its blinding whiteness, becomes an immense orgasm. The moment of conversion, of awareness, is a sexual one for Marechera. Once that moment has passed, however, it is replaced with a spirit

of play, in which the schoolboys revert to childhood and begin to paint each other's bodies with mud.

This storm occurs early in Marechera's narrative. It is a break in the drought of his story, but one with positive and negative consequences. The storm exorcises the voices in his mind but that particular brand of madness passes on to a history master who witnesses this ritual. "The daemon had been exorcised and gone into the Gadarene swine" (34). In this case, however, the swine are a human being. The narrator no longer suffers the torments of his voices, but somebody else does. The sum total of madness in the world remains constant. The narrator's madness will find expression in a number of other hallucinations and, like Marechera, he will later be faced with the choice of psychiatric treatment or expulsion from Oxford (*HOH* 98). Harry will become a police spy for purely mercenary reasons. He is a traitor who will sell information to maintain his style of white chicks and crimson jackets (Foster 1992:59). Harry is concerned with appearances and comfort. The narrator is an ascetic philosopher. Their clash is the clash of values, echoed at various times in the narrative. It is expressed in "Are There People Living There" (*HOH* 149-151) when the narrator contemplates the kind of lifestyle he could expect were he to prostitute his talents. Harry is a version of himself who has sold out and the external conflict represents a psychic, internal battle, a psychomachia over the soul of the hero (Fletcher 1964:22).

The narrator and Harry are intimate enemies. As a young child the narrator borrows Harry's books, having destroyed his own (14). As adults they will walk: "arm in arm, the way Jesus and Judas must have been when they both knew each other's secret" (10). The messiah and the traitor are dangerously close to one another, perhaps because they inhabit the same psyche. Their existence is somehow outside the national struggle represented by the growing consciousness of the other schoolboys. When Harry and the narrator return to their dormitory, they find that their colleagues have developed a political consciousness. The other students are revolting against the authority of the school and of the Rhodesian government. Harry's obscure, obscene and ambiguous song is taken up as a "political one" (37). The revolution begins and the narrator passes out. This sequence of events perhaps represents Marechera's sense of guilt that his internal, philosophical struggles preclude participation in the action of national liberation. When the struggle begins, he is outside in the rain.

Conclusion

The narrator senses that the transformation needed is something far more fundamental and lasting than a thunderstorm, however awesome, in the midst of a drought. Marechera merges African tradition with European Romanticism but ultimately rejects both, producing a sense that the stains on the landscape require a thoroughly new treatment, because they have been ground in over generations starting long before

colonialism. Paradise is contaminated by a materialist mass media and storms will only stir up mud and dust without removing the underlying stains. Paradise represents escapism; the storm represents revolution. Rejecting both solutions, Marechera proposes a perpetual destabilisation of meaning and order, which he expresses in *Black Sunlight*. When we return to Marechera in the final chapter, we shall see that, like Coetzee, his consciousness deals with a much broader set of traditions in literature and historiography. Marechera is not only interrogating the essence of drought within Zimbabwean literature, his project questions the oases of world literature. He questions the erotic gardens which writers have created as refuges from a bleak and dry world.

Chapter Four: Nostalgia for Drizzle: Drought and Colonial Writing

Failure of Rain/Failure of Reason

According to J M Coetzee, white explorers lose their ability to interpret landscapes when faced with the interior of Southern Africa. The well-watered diversity of Kirstenbosch, later to be the site of the botanical gardens, leaves William Burchell in rhapsodies. He describes the different light, colours and harmony of the gardens. Once, however, he enters the Karoo, his discrimination fades, leaving him unable to see anything but “sterile brown” (*WW* 36-37). His choice of adjective points again to the link between landscape and reproduction. “Sterile” suggests that nothing can grow in such a landscape. The test of the coloniser is his ability to bring fertility to this desolation. At best, he only succeeds for a moment, creating a fertile garden on a vast plain of waste. The landscape finally tames the coloniser rather than the other way round and the dry savannah becomes a metaphor for the cultural and emotional sterility of the people on the land. This collapse of meaning, at least for explorers of English descent, has much to do with their dependence on features and changes in climate which depend on a certain rainfall pattern. In the United Kingdom, changes in season follow predictable patterns due to more or less predictable rainfall. In Southern Africa, this need not be the case. While there is a wet and a dry season in most areas, the wetness and dryness are relative, varying from area to area and from season to season. Drought or the absence of precipitation thus becomes the new arrivals’ primary sign in interpreting the landscape. It influences not only their literature, in which it becomes a major trope, but it also influences other fields, like agriculture, which depend on a certain understanding of climate. The inability to understand and interpret these changed conditions meant that science, a traditional area of male dominance, is undermined. Men can no longer use their control over nature as a sign of superiority.

Women writers use this newly revealed weakness as a fault line, challenging patriarchal notions of control and knowledge. It is women who replace men as the mappers and explorers of the landscape. Where science has failed, narrative steps in. Page’s *The Edge o’ Beyond* shows male power at the point of collapse and then returns it to a more controllable environment, under the guidance of the right kind of woman. Doris Lessing shows how women are implicated in the colonising process. Mary in *The Grass is Singing* has freshly arrived from town and refuses to accept the way that the white man in her life and his black workers have adapted to one another and to the landscape. Bessie Head in *When Rain Clouds Gather* shows how newcomers, a South African exile and an English volunteer, can serve as a catalyst for change. They enable the women of the village of Golema Mmidi to begin to take

charge of their own lives and to break out of the cycle of patriarchal oppression. Like Lessing's and Page's novels, Bessie Head's tells of newcomers arriving in a dry and hostile environment. It is thus also a narrative of settlement. Head's text, however, also serves as a critique of colonial writing. These newcomers encounter a hostile landscape but a friendly community, which assimilates them, helping them to adjust to the society while making use of their skills. As in many of her other writings, Head claims that contact between people apparently divided by apartheid and ethnicity is only a short distance away. Her novel is thus one of reconciliation rather than of alienation.

According to Angus Fletcher, popular novels like Zane Grey's *Black Mesa* are extremely allegorical in the way in which they link the actions of the characters to their setting. He states that "the conflicts of the cowboy hero and the bandit villain, as in the detective thriller, are drawn according to a dualism of good and evil—a defining characteristic of the mode [allegory] from the earliest period of Occidental literature" (Fletcher 1964:7). The battle takes place within a landscape which is itself allegorical. The popular *Edge o' Beyond* confirms the values of Rhodesian settlers and glamourises and defends their position to an overseas readership. The struggle is between the dry, humourless Oswald Grant, who allegorises the Protestant work ethic, and the cheerful "irresponsibles", who represent a more relaxed, idle British approach to colonisation and farming. In the more critically aware *Grass is Singing*, the relationship between character and landscape changes. The struggle is between husband and wife, and the reader's sympathies are more evenly divided. Characters no longer catch fevers in the hot wet summer, for example, but in the cool dry winter. This does not make Lessing's novel any less allegorical, however. The device, as I shall later explore, brings the relationship between characters into sharp relief. Lessing uses her contrast with this conventional wisdom to express the disorder in her characters' universe. She works within a tradition of writing about disease, drawing upon the relationship between character and landscape.

This chapter follows de Man in interrogating "the fallacy of realistic fiction" (de Man 1979:189). Simply because a character is described in some detail, does not mean that he or she is not a representative for an ideal construct, like, for example, illness or Puritanism. As I contrast the three novels selected for this chapter, a series of recognisable types will begin to emerge. These types function as figures in allegorical conflicts between ideals. As such, they may represent internal conflicts within a single human psyche as it adapts to a new environment.

This chapter will explore how the ideals of Industry, Illness and Idleness are allegorised in Page's and Lessing's novels. The settler reacts to the cycles of drought and paradise in the African landscape in an obsessive sequence. She is struck by the sublime beauty and horror of this landscape. The drought is something more ghastly

than anything she has ever known before; the rainfall is more beautiful. Her sequence (and I use 'her' because it is women writers who document the relationship between settler and landscape with the greatest degree of awareness and sensitivity) follows three phases. The first stage in the cycle is industry, as the settler attempts to control the landscape, to limit the drought and to extend the garden into the desert. The second is illness, as the landscape retaliates, infecting the settler who is weakened by his efforts. The third stage is idleness, as the settler learns to adapt to the rhythms of the landscape, achieving humble results with a minimum or utter lack of effort. At this stage the next settler arrives and accuses his or her predecessor of going native, of letting the side down. The newcomer forces the old one out of the way and recommences the cycle. Bessie Head uses allegory to break out of the cycle. She suggests that the three states of being co-exist, representing the themes through particular characters. She also challenges the suggestion that a characteristic like idleness or illness is a symptom of race or of gender. The idle British policeman, George Appleby-Smith is a friend of the idle Tswana chief, Paramount chief Sekoto. Appleby-Smith's idleness is not a product of atavism, he is not 'going native'. He is simply, like Sekoto, a privileged man who has no need to work very hard.

These novels of settlement differ in their treatment of the relationship between natives and newcomers. For Page, the focus is entirely on the settlers, with natives thrown in here and there for comic relief. Lessing's settlers, for the most part, anxiously try to pretend that the natives are invisible. The tabooed and undefined relationship between a white woman and a black man challenges the assumptions on which the settler community exists. Head's novel presents a vision of a possible Southern African society in which the personal taboos have broken down and in which people must learn to co-operate across lines of ethnicity in order to confront both the landscape and a deeply entrenched tradition of corruption. Also important is the relationship between women and men. In both *The Edge o' Beyond* and *When Rain Clouds Gather*, marriage serves as the first stage by which an alienated character is socially integrated. In Page's novel, the eccentric, independent Dinah Webberly eventually marries the more conventional Major Ted Burnett and they return to England. Dinah's brother Billy does not marry, and it is a mark of the continued eccentricity which suits him to Africa. In Head's novel, two outsiders, Makhaya and Paulina, marry and their marriage is the culmination of the villager's attempts to break out of the cycle of rain and drought. *The Grass is Singing* challenges the myth of marriage as harbinger of social and environmental cohesion. Dick and Mary marry because they feel lonely and misplaced. Their marriage destroys both of them.

Industry, Idleness and Illness as dominant tropes

Each of these novels is written by a woman in Southern Africa. They are very different in terms of style and content because they are products of different approaches to writing and different historical periods. However, each novel uses the cycle of industry, idleness and illness as a dominant trope. I am using Jakobson's definition of the dominant. He tells us:

The dominant may be defined as the focusing component of a work of art: it rules, determines, and transforms the remaining components. It is the dominant which guarantees the integrity of the structure (Jakobson 1987:41).

Jakobson speaks of the dominant in terms of both grammar and genre. It occurs within the grammar of a given poetic tradition. He discusses changes in the Czech tradition where first rhyme, then metre, was dominant. For the Czechs at a certain moment of history, rhyme was all that mattered, metre was optional. Later this order was reversed. Another example of a dominant is that of a dominant genre like visual art in the Renaissance or music during the romantic period (42). The dominant I am discussing lies between the grammatical dominant and the dominant genre. It is a thematic or tropic dominant. I am suggesting, taking three fairly diverse texts, that there is a dominant set of themes in Southern African writing. These themes, I will suggest later, recur as part of the enlightenment project in a variety of different texts. Here, however, I will start with thematic similarities and differences in a few specific examples. I plan to demonstrate how these themes function as part of a set of ideological constructs.

The novels thus differ in terms of their history and their geography. Page's and Lessing's are related in that they deal with the isolation of settler farm life, Lessing's and Head's in that they deal with race relations in more or less contemporary Southern Africa. The three novels are far denser and more diverse than any summary can indicate. However, I will begin with a plot summary of each novel and proceed to discuss the related themes and their allegorisation.

The Edge o' Beyond

Page's novel tells the story of Dinah Webberly, an emancipated young woman of the 1890s, and her adventures in Southern Rhodesia. Dinah's independence and her refusal to be categorised make her the most important character in the novel, whose focus is on the importance of resisting social pressure. Dinah is the central character both in terms of her importance to the novel and in terms of her location between extremes. Dinah is a moderate. She is not as idle as her brother Billy, nor as psychotically industrious as the sanctimonious Oswald Grant. She is not as religious as Oswald, nor is she an atheist, like her friend Dr Cecil Lawson. Unlike Billy and Oswald she is able

to fall in love; unlike Joyce Grant and Cecil Lawson, it neither changes her life nor causes a scandal.

The novel opens with Oswald Grant sowing his seed under the koppies and congratulating himself on how industrious, pious and clever he is. He works hard, doesn't drink and has 'managed to obtain one of the comparatively few well-watered farms [in Rhodesia]' (Page 1908:11). Like Englishmen a century earlier, he strives to create order on his farm, rejecting the "boundlessness" of "tropical savannahs" (Barrell 1972:144). All these things mean nothing. We return to the image of Oswald sowing several times in the course of the novel but we will never see him harvest anything. His industry is wasted. Meanwhile, back at the farmhouse, his young wife Joyce is weeping bitterly because her pony Mischief, her only surviving link to her happy childhood in Devon, has died of horse sickness. Joyce's role centres around illness. Her horse is sick and dies; then she sickens and has a child. The child sickens and dies. She runs away to Devon with her lover Cecil Lawson who is, appropriately, a doctor; then she eventually sickens and dies. She is the tragic character in an otherwise comic novel. She bears the brunt of her husband's puritanical insensitivity and of the inhospitable Southern African climate.

Dinah meets Dr Cecil Lawson on the ship from England to Cape Town and then again on the train from Cape Town to Rhodesia. He is on his way to visit Captain Ted Burnett, an old schoolmate from Harrow. She is on her way to visit her brother Billy and his lazy co-farmers, Jim and Beauty, who are collectively known as the irresponsibles. The irresponsibles also remain static. Towards the end of the novel, Billy comes to London to get a gun, rather than the traditional wife. Life in Southern Rhodesia is, for them, one long hunting and shooting party.

Dinah and Ted fall in love. They function as ordinary romantic characters amid a crowd of allegorical visibilia. They cannot exist permanently within the harsh Rhodesian climate with its extremes of both weather and characters, so they return to England, and set up a rather amateurish farm in Somerset. Cecil and Joyce return to Devon without Oswald's permission for a divorce. They spend a few happy years there, but Joyce dies weakened by the experience in the colonies and because a turn-of-the-century novelist cannot allow a fallen woman, however sympathetic, to live happily ever after.

The Grass is Singing

After the murder of Mary Turner, her 'house-boy', Moses, surrenders to the police. Her husband, Dick, is wandering around with his dogs while the neighbour and a policeman conduct a sort of investigation. Tony Marston, a newly arrived Englishman, is baffled by what he sees and the novel goes into flashback to tell us what has brought events to this point. Unlike Page's Dinah Webberly, Mary Turner has no hope of a

return to England. She is entirely Rhodesian; the child of an alcoholic railway worker and his scrimping wife, Mary carves out a niche for herself as a secretary in 1940s Salisbury. As she gets older her friends see her independence as a liability. She overhears them gossiping about her one night and is so embarrassed that she begins actively to pursue men, in the hope of getting married. She marries Dick, a poor farmer, and finds herself trapped in a marriage as poor and demeaning as her parents'. She takes out her frustrations on a series of domestic servants who, one by one, become fed up and leave.

Dick farms in a haphazard manner. He tries various new projects, including pig farming and bee keeping. His main crops are maize and pumpkins, which several characters mention as evidence that he is 'going native'. By contrast, his neighbour, Charlie Slatter, is efficient and wealthy. Charlie destroys the fertility of the land in order to grow tobacco. Because his soil is exhausted, he has designs on Dick's farm. Mary tries to force Dick to change his way of doing things and Dick becomes ill with malaria, paradoxically in the coolest time of the year.

While Dick is ill, Mary takes over the running of the farm. She replaces his easy going style of labour management with a more tyrannical one, docking wages from workers for various infractions and finally striking one worker, Moses, with a sjambok. She sees the apparent insolence of the workers as evidence that Dick has spoiled them, not realising that maintaining a farm work force requires either diplomacy or utter brutality. When Dick recovers she manages to persuade him to take out a loan and grow tobacco. A drought hits the farm and the crop fails. He refuses to take the same risk again. Mary gives up on the farm. She wants to have children. Dick refuses, citing the costs. She is left lonely and isolated.

Moses becomes Mary's new 'houseboy'. He still bears the sjambok scar on his face. She is fascinated by his huge muscles and scant clothing. Mary has never experienced desire for Dick; she married him to escape ridicule. Her desire awakens in the presence of Moses as she is drawn to the stereotype of the virile African man. She becomes a voyeur, watching him wash himself. He seems to be entirely passive but, when she becomes too demanding, he calmly gives notice. She hysterically begs him not to leave. He gives her a glass of water and puts her to bed. He becomes paternal and compassionate, bringing her breakfast in bed. She has nightmares that he touches her. When Dick becomes ill again, Moses nurses him, allowing Mary to sleep.

Charlie sees the Turners' level of deprivation and is concerned that the natives can also see that whites live under these conditions. He makes Dick an offer for the farm, allowing him to remain as manager but insisting that he and Mary take a holiday. Tony Marston arrives from England to serve as Dick's leave replacement. One morning, he

finds Moses dressing the semi-catatonic Mary. Moses leaves but returns on the night before the Turners are due to leave and apparently murders Mary.

The novel exposes the failure of conventional colonial relationships. The white man, Dick, functions neither as husband to his wife, nor as boss to his workers. His wife, Mary, usurps his position as boss while a servant, Moses, usurps that of husband. Moses also replaces Mary's absent alcoholic father as a father figure. Lessing suggests that isolation in the colonies is profound. Certain settlers are cut off from their supposed peers by conformity and from the black people around them by white taboos. It is this isolation that causes the society and its individuals to malfunction.

When Rain Clouds Gather

By contrast, Head's novel is about assimilation. The social norms in the village of Golema Mmidi are complex, but those who are prepared to learn them are welcome to join the community. The novel tells of two newcomers, Makhaya, a South African exile, and Gilbert, a British volunteer who has fallen in love with the country. Gilbert assimilates very rapidly into the Batswana community, accepting its norms. Makhaya, a South Africa refugee, struggles, for various reasons, to assimilate. His struggle is ironic, given that his name means "homes" in the Zulu. His name has an allegorical connotation. He has two homes yet he does not fit into either. The rapidity with which the two men marry local women serves as an index of assimilation. Gilbert marries in the middle of the novel, once he has worked out Batswana courtship rituals. Makhaya does not marry until the end of the novel. He marries Paulina Sebeso, a physically and emotionally strong young woman from the North, whose first husband committed suicide. Like Makhaya, Paulina has a history from which to recover. She is also an outsider. For Head, the terms 'insider' and 'outsider' are relative.

The novel critiques the corruption which masquerades as tradition. Both idleness and illness are symptoms of this corruption and its practitioners, Chief Matenge and his brother, Chief Sekoto function as corruption personified. The actions of the former in particular leave people trapped in poverty. Cattle and their diseases are also presented as a symptom of too heavy a reliance on tradition. Cattle are not only vulnerable to cycles of drought and disease, they also provide a means for chiefs like Matenge to become wealthy purely through their access to infrastructure. The cattle famine is linked to the death of Paulina's son Isaac, a promising sculptor who lacks access to schooling and medicine because he must herd his mother's cattle.

Head claims that too strict a reliance on traditional structures leaves communities trapped. There are always those, like her Chief Matenge and Lessing's Charlie Slatter, who are prepared to exploit the cycle for their own ends. As Head notes, an evil mind in Botswana is one 'so profoundly clever as to make the innocent believe they were responsible for the evil' (Head 1968:31). Head's heroes Gilbert, Makhaya and the

women of Golema Mmidi, meaning “to grow crops,” defeat the evil through collective action. These characters realise the name of the village, which moves from a drought-prone pastoral system to one in which the women use more sustainable technology to cultivate cash crops. Head’s collective action thus provides a contrast to the solitary struggles of characters like Joyce Grant and Mary Turner.

The Themes and their Allegories

As I have suggested in the preceding summaries, certain characters represent allegorical values through which they express industry, illness or idleness. In *The Edge o’ Beyond*, Oswald Grant can be read as a visibilium for industry, Joyce for illness, Billy Webberly and his fellow irresponsibles for idleness. Each functions, in addition, in opposition to or in harmony with a personified landscape, which is another feature of allegory. It is more difficult to place the characters in *The Grass is Singing* into such rigid categories. Once the categories have been established, however, they serve as a guide to various characters’ behaviour. Lessing consciously works away from a reading of the landscape that would blame nature for human problems. Joyce’s child gets malaria in the rainy season, when people usually get malaria. Dick Turner, on the other hand, gets malaria in the dry season because his immunity is worn down by the abuse he suffers from his wife. Head moves between human and natural causes for events. Unlike Page, however, she suggests that people have the capacity to overcome even the most arduous natural problems. I will now examine the three themes, showing the different way in which each novel handles them.

Idleness

To Gertrude Page’s characters, life in Rhodesia is a party for those with the sense of humour to appreciate it. Dinah Webberly stays with her brother Billy and his friends, collectively known as the irresponsibles. The irresponsibles live in squalor and marvel at the inability of the ‘houseboy’ to make cakes and steak pies. When Dinah loses patience with this cook she refers to him as ‘an ape’ (Page 1908:43) and ‘a bally chimpanzee’ (43). The irresponsibles point out the hypocrisy of her self-righteousness by telling her that she cannot cook either. She responds that they cannot farm:

... ‘Why you know as much of farming as I do of cooking. I’ve not seen you do anything since I’ve been here but laze and smoke and sleep!’ (43).

Dinah, the unnamed cook and the irresponsibles make a happy, though idle, menage. Page’s hilarity at this state of affairs stands in marked contrast to an earlier generation of writers, who were shocked and disgusted by what they perceived as a Boer ‘lapse into sloth’. The parallel between the stereotyped black domestic worker and the increasingly indolent Europeans who surround him or her is, as Coetzee reminds us, a

characteristic of White Writing in Southern Africa as a genre. According to Coetzee, 'the true scandal of the nineteenth century was not the idleness of the Hottentots (by now seen as inherent to the race) but the idleness of the Boers' (WW 28). Observers like John Barrow reacted with horror as they saw the Boers acquiring what he perceived as Hottentot habits. Idleness has become assimilated into the Boer nature and 'Barrow suggests that the colony will not become productive until this 'nature' is changed, or, failing that, until the Boers are replaced with more industrious and enterprising settlers (Barrow 1:32, 2:118, 1:386 cited in WW 29).

Page presents us with replacement settlers at the turn of the next century. With the exception of Oswald Grant, they are neither industrious nor enterprising. They share many of the failures of Barrow's frontier Boers and it would seem that, rather than having lapsed into idleness, they arrived with their idleness intact. Rather than cause for scandal, idleness is fashionable in England, at least for certain classes. Here are two examples from Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*:

Lady Bracknell: Do you smoke?

Jack: Well, yes, I must admit I smoke.

Lady Bracknell: I am glad to hear it. A man should always have an occupation, There are far too many idle men in London as it is (Wilde 1895:266).

And later:

Algernon: What shall we do after dinner? Go to a theatre?

Jack: Oh no! I hate listening.

Algernon: Well let us go to the club?

Jack: Oh no! I hate talking.

Algernon: Well we might go round to the Empire at ten?

Jack: Oh no! I can't bear looking at things. It is so silly.

Algernon: Well, what shall we do?

Jack: Nothing!

Algernon: It is awfully hard work doing nothing. However, I don't mind hard work where there is no definite object of any kind (271).

Wilde is satirising the attitudes of indolent young people in London in the 1890s, just as Page will satirise those of similar people in the colonies. Idleness as a fashion has moved from the centre to the margins.

Jonathan Dollimore suggests that Wilde resists a 'depth model'. While André Gide is liberated by discovering his 'essential' and 'natural' homosexuality, Wilde offers a kind of liberation by rejecting anything that is essential or natural. Wilde replaces the authentic with the artificial, the serious with the facetious (Dollimore 1991:14-15). Page is operating under the influence of this anti-depth position. Her sympathies lie more with the frivolous irresponsibles and the agnostic Cecil Lawson than with the

serious and religious Oswald Grant. When Oswald's crops are eaten by locusts, Dinah and the irresponsibles make fun of him. Dinah says:

...Let's get a board and put one up for him: 'Dearly Beloved Locusts, a Saint lives here, who works twenty-five hours a day without a murmur, drinks only limejuice, and never says 'Damn'. It is therefore requested that you leave his forage untouched, and pass on to that of the Three Scoundrels who live next door. They being young and lusty, and full of beans, do no work at all, abhor limejuice, and use expressions that darken the atmosphere and set fire to the grass. Attend, O Locusts, and fret not the Lord's anointed!' (Page 1908:98).

Dinah's speech not only privileges idleness over virtue, it is actively blasphemous. The proposed notice opens like a sermon and ends like a psalm. It mocks Oswald's religion as well as his social affectations and suggests, as the novel on the whole does, that piety and virtue are not sufficient to stave off agricultural disaster. Oswald's ravings simply provide the irresponsibles with entertainment. Beauty says 'he had a great deal to say about the Agricultural Department that was unconsciously very humorous' (98) and Billy sardonically applauds the department's ability to do nothing at all. Faced with Oswald as an avatar of the Protestant work ethic, Billy reverses the idleness/industry opposition until even bureaucratic incompetence is valorised over Oswald's humourless industry.

Oswald is also important in that he lends humour to any occasion. Because he does not understand jokes, he is an easy target. Beauty reports on one exchange:

Lawson and I solemnly assured him that there was only one road to success, and that was the worship of the Mammon of Unrighteousness. He got up shortly afterwards, and we wondered if it was a sudden recollection of the inadvisability of breaking bread with sinners. Before he left he remarked that it would be a good idea to prop up that side of the forage shed that is falling down, to weed the lucerne, and to plant barley below the orange trees. I said I'd mention it to you two.

'Sounds horribly like work!'-from Jim. I don't mind telling the boy to plough if you chaps will do the rest.'

'It seems a pity to prop the shed up now,' added Billy, 'because it's been like that so long that we've got used to it....' (99).

The irresponsibles take the opposite position to any that Oswald assumes. Even while speaking to him, they stress their own idleness. By comparison to his apparently ordered farm, their sheds are falling down. They exploit black labour, he insists on doing everything himself. They have reverted to Africa; Beauty even jokes about 'turn[ing] cook-boy'(99). Page's heroes are attracted to the negative, colonised poles of the binary oppositions between coloniser and colonised. Abdul JanMohammed

defines colonial literature in terms of “the manichean allegory—a field of diverse yet interchangeable oppositions between white and black, good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery, rationality and sensuality, self and other, subject and object” (JanMohammed 1986:82). Even within the Victorian metropole, writers privilege the negatives of those oppositions, working against the dominant discourse. Such a move is certainly more unusual in the colonies, where the colonial writer usually defends her civilisation against the immediate threat of atavism. In a reverse of Fanon’s paradigm, in which the coloniser tries to mask himself or herself as coloniser, Page has her colonialist characters begin to appropriate an identity they perceive as that of their colonial subjects.

Lessing’s white characters share a similar concern that idleness is a form of atavism, that white characters who do not work are somehow reverting to blackness. This concern is most manifested in Mary’s attitude to Dick, but it also surfaces at various descriptive moments in the novel. When Mary discovers the extent of Dick’s mismanagement of the farm, she is outraged. While he becomes ill, she manages the farm and evaluates his practices:

Here it was a piece of land that had been half-stumped and then abandoned so that the young trees were growing up over it again; there it was a cowshed, half made of brick and iron and half made of timber and mud. The farm was a mosaic of different crops. A single fifty acre land held sunflowers, sun-hemp, maize, monkey nuts and beans. Always he reaped twenty sacks of this and twenty sacks of that with a few pounds profit to show on each crop. There was not a single thing done properly on the whole farm, nothing! (Lessing 1950:144).

To Mary, and to Charlie Slatter, the chaotic state of Dick’s farm is a sign of his inefficiency. Charlie’s model of efficiency is an entire farm dedicated to tobacco, with no trees and huge gullies. Dick’s farm reflects his undisciplined state of mind. The various crops reflect his various projects, pigs, bees and the like. Neither Mary nor Charlie realise that Dick is farming in such a way as to preserve the land. He is ‘intercropping’, growing leguminous plants (sun-hemp, beans and monkey-nuts) together with non-leguminous ones (sunflowers and maize). His particular crops are not unlike those used in the Deccan in India, a drought-prone area (Mollison 131). The legumes fix nitrogen, replenishing the soil. When they die, legumes become a ‘green manure’, supplying a nitrogen-rich fertiliser to other plants (17). Sun-hemp traps nematodes (eel-worm) in its roots, thus protecting the other crops (110). While Dick’s system of farming is chaotic and undisciplined it is ultimately more sustainable, and less costly in terms of fertilisers and pest control. As Bill Mollison says of permaculture gardening:

There is no attempt to form the garden into strict, neat rows; it is a riot of shrubs, vines, garden beds, flowers, herbs, a few small trees (lemon, mandarin), and even a small pond. Paths are sinuous, and garden beds might be round, key-holed, raised, spiralled, or sunken (90).

This image is antithetical to Mary's vision of healthy, green, orderly tobacco which leaves her 'thinking of those flat green leaves transformed into a cheque of several figures' (159). Permaculture, as a legitimate, scientific method of farming, is a product of the 1970s and has only received recognition in recent years. It is a reaction to the kind of monocropping practised by the Charlie Slatters of the world. Dick Turner is farming in the 1940s; how then does he know about harmonious relationships between crops? Permaculture draws on existing, if neglected, traditional knowledge of farming, and by attempting to follow a more natural relationship between plants. Dick's farming has come to resemble traditional African farming practices and his inability to sustain attention means that he is allowing nature to take its course. He is practising permaculture by default.

Dick allows his farm-workers to make decisions while he dreams. He is unable to articulate what he does on the farm, for example, he never tells Mary that the workers receive a five minute break in every hour (Lessing 1950:137). Dick's life follows certain routines and rhythms that are inscrutable to any outsider. Mary grows to regard his way of doing things with disgust, not realising that there may be order in the apparent chaos. His farming methods are not English and the organisation of the landscape, which blurs boundaries between houses and veld, white farm and black compound, living space and cultivated space perplexes her. Like an early nineteenth-century advocate of enclosure (Barrell 1972:75), she finds unbounded land ugly. The boundlessness stretches from the land to its owner. Everything about Dick appears to be accidental, even their meeting. He is a 'spare, sunburnt, slow-voiced, deep-eyed young man who had come into her life like an accident' (59). She sees the same accidentality of things when she goes to the farm compound to find the workers, absent since Dick has been ill:

The huts were slowly clustered over an acre or two of ground. They looked like natural growths from the ground, rather than man-made dwellings. It was as though a giant black hand had reached down from the sky, picked up a handful of sticks and grass and dropped them magically on the earth in the form of huts.

...The smoke from the fires inside percolated through the thatch or drifted in clouds from the doorways, so that each had the appearance of smouldering slowly from within. Between the huts were irregular patches of mealies, and pumpkin vines trailed everywhere through plants and bushes and up over the walls and roofs, with the big amber-coloured pumpkins scattered among the

leaves. Some of them were beginning to rot, subsiding into a slow festering ooze of pinky stuff, covered with flies (133).

The visit to the compound is Mary's descent into hell. She is struck by the dirt, the poverty and the chaos of the place. Like the farm in general, it seems not to be the work of mankind, but of a black god or of nature. The compound is an extreme; its inhabitants are even poorer than Mary's parents, poorer than Dick. Mary has never really seen the dwellings of black people before, she is used to comparing herself with more affluent whites. Her first crossing of the boundary between the societies is as shocking as is Elizabeth Curren's in Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, a crossing I will explore in more depth in the next chapter.

When Charlie Slatter comes to visit for the last time, it is with a similar sense of crossing a boundary. The Turners have been isolated from the farming community; nobody knows what it is 'they do' (208). Mary is mad; Dick is mentally absent; Moses seems to be running the house. He is horrified and remembers the 'first law of white South Africa, which is: 'Thou shalt not let your fellow whites sink lower than a certain point; because if you do, the nigger will see that he is as good as you are' (221). His concern is not with the tragedy of two utterly incompatible people attempting to live with one another, but with his neighbours' prejudices. He also covets Dick's farm as grazing land (210). By the time Charlie arrives, it is too late, Moses knows the truth about the Turners; he has looked after them in their illnesses and seen their frailties.

Mary has tried to resist atavism from the beginning. As a single woman in Salisbury, she breaks away from the poverty of her childhood. When she accepts peer pressure and marries Dick, she is horrified to see that she has returned to that poverty and that Dick shows no ambition. Atavism for her not only represents a return to a more primitive past but also a regression to childhood. Schooled in the Darwinist ideology of white Southern Africa, she believes implicitly that black people represent a lower order on the intellectual, social and economic scale than whites and that whites must actively resist backsliding into darkness. She also sees Dick's poverty as a return to that of her parents. When she first arrives at the farm, Mary's struggle takes the form of an active resistance to idleness. She is no longer an urban working woman, but an isolated rural housewife, and cannot imagine how she is to keep herself occupied. She cleans, she embroiders, she sews, she cooks. Soon all of the sewing is finished, and she discovers that Sampson, Dick's first cook, is a better cook than she is (73). When Dick becomes ill she tries to manage the farm, but she fails, because she never learns that farm management is a more subtle skill than office work. Her attempt to influence Dick to grow tobacco fails with the first crop. As the novel progresses, she loses interest in everything. Dick will not allow her to have children, because he feels that they cannot afford them and he does not want his family to regress to the level of

'Charlie's Dutchman', an Afrikaans-speaking farm manager with thirteen children (165). She come to realise that her life is utterly empty, devoid of even fantasy:

For even day-dreams need an element of hope to give satisfaction to the dreamer. She would stop herself in the middle of one of her habitual fantasies about the old days, which she projected into her future. There was nothing. Nil. Emptiness (163).

She is expected by her husband and her society to do absolutely nothing with her life. Mary has become an entirely useless appendage. According to Olive Schreiner, she is now a parasite. Schreiner (1911:33) warns that unless women receive training to engage in new kinds of work, the human race will regress. Ruling class women especially, are moving away from their traditional productive functions. Machines and servants are replacing them. In the metropolitan centres and the regional capitals, like Salisbury, women began a struggle to lead more productive lives. Mary's job in town is an example. On farms, a growing dependence on cheap black labour meant that women were increasingly alienated from production. In Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), set in the previous century, even the unpleasant and idle Tant Sannie has a set of tasks and an area of responsibility. For example, she is investigating the loft when she discovers that Bonaparte Blenkins is wooing her cousin Trana (129). Mary, on the other hand, has nothing even to supervise. The work in her house is done quietly and efficiently by black servants who know their job better than she does. She is, for example, locked out of her storage cupboards. As Sampson explains during her first tour of her new house, 'Boss has keys' (71). By the end of the novel she has given up the struggle and literally regressed, with Moses, as paternal figure, dressing her (230). She has broken all taboos, as Tony Marston, who witnesses this moment, asks, 'It's not customary in this country, is it?' (231). Tony has also crossed a boundary. He has seen isolated people in a corner of the country defining an order which runs contrary to everything he has been told. His liberal ideas on 'the colour bar' and the conservative opinions on race that he has heard have no space for such a relationship as exists between Mary and Moses.

Bessie Head writes of another kind of idleness. The women and men of Golema Mmidi never have the option to become parasites. They are engaged in a daily battle for subsistence. Their struggle is not to find something to do but to find more effective ways of doing things. They must learn to make their work more productive. Their task is made more difficult by a gang of hereditary idlers who manage to extract a surplus from the people around them. These idlers include Chief Sekoto, Chief Matenge and the politician Joas Tsepe. For Head, ordinary Africans do not represent a standard of idleness to which white people lapse. The opposite is true. For certain classes of people in Golema Mmidi, idleness is proof of upward, rather than downward mobility.

It is an ideal towards which one aspires, perhaps because it is associated with white people. Head turns white southern African conventional wisdom on its head.

One of the types of idleness in *When Rain Clouds Gather* is that exemplified by Paramount Chief Sekoto. Head describes him:

Even those who did not like chiefs had to concede that Paramount Chief Sekoto was a very charming man. His charm lay not so much in his outer appearance as in his very cheerful outlook on life. In fact, so fond was he of the sunny side of life that he was inclined to regard any gloomy, pessimistic person as insane and make every effort to avoid his company. It was his belief that a witty answer turneth away wrath, and that the oil of reason should always be poured on troubled waters.

Chief Sekoto had three great loves: fast cars, good food, and pretty girls. All of the good food had made him very fat, so that he gave the impression of waddling like a duck when he walked. And one of the pretty girls had caused a disruption in his life... (Head 1968:49).

Chief Sekoto leads as comfortable and unproblematised a life as he possibly can. In this way he mirrors Page's irresponsibles. Why worry about petty politics or collapsing sheds if one does not have to? Like the irresponsibles', Sekoto's idleness is not presented in an entirely negative light. He represents a stable force in the novel. He resolves the trial of a woman for witchcraft in a fairly direct, expedient and sympathetic way (50-1). His complacency also means that he acts as an effective foil to his brother, the ambitious chief Matenge. He is friends with George Appleby-Smith, a lazy, yet benign colonial police officer. It is Appleby-Smith, or another of his type, whom Makhaya first meets. The policeman is sitting under a notice saying: 'WORK FASCINATES ME. I CAN SIT AND WATCH IT FOR HOURS.' (19). Chief Sekoto and George Appleby-Smith represent an old order which is idle but not obstructive.

More dangerous, according to Head, are people with the ambition to improve their social status, but without the motivation to do it themselves. Such people are the real parasites. Gilbert's first main clash with the chieftainship comes when he encourages people to form a cattle co-operative, thus putting Matenge out of business. Matenge had been able to use his access to transport to buy cattle at his own price and sell them to the abattoir at a higher one. The co-operative allows people to skip the middleman and sell the cattle at their own prices (26). Matenge loses the battle when Pelotona, his cattle agent, joins the co-operative. Matenge is teamed with Joas Tsepe, an apparently radical politician who, like Matenge, resists innovation. Matenge and Tsepe represent a potentially emergent order of corruption and thuggery.

Industry

While Page's character Oswald Grant presents an allegory for the Protestant work ethic, instructing his neighbours in the virtues of hard work, he is not a particularly successful farmer. He is not to be found propping up sheds or ploughing fields. Throughout the course of the novel he repeats a single action; he wanders around his farm 'casting his seed in modulated curves' (16). His seed, in all its potential representations (seed, ideas, semen), falls on dry ground. His crops fail, his neighbours make fun of his morality, his child dies and his wife eventually runs away with an atheist. Oswald Grant is a coloniser that fails (to add perhaps a new category to Albert Memmi). He follows Job and the Calvinist ideal in bearing his misfortunes with fortitude:

Various diseases ever and anon attack us: at one time pestilence rages; at another we are involved in all the calamities of war. Frost and hail, destroying the promise of the year cause sterility, which reduces us to penury; wife, parents, children, relatives, are carried off by death; our house is destroyed by fire. These are the events which make men curse their life, detest the day of their birth, execrate the light of heaven, even censure God, and (as they are eloquent in blasphemy) charge him with cruelty and injustice). The believer must in these things also contemplate the mercy and truly paternal indulgence of God (Calvin 1559:2:15).

Oswald remains the good Calvinistic believer in that he never blames God for his misfortunes. Instead, he takes out his sufferings on those close to him. He oppresses his wife's horse, his wife and his child and he treats all of his neighbours with an extremely judgmental bad humour. In the cold certainty of his faith, he drives other people away and makes himself an object of mockery.

Oswald is a stereotypical 'unlucky farmer'. Every farming community has stories to tell about the neighbour who had a tree fall on his new tractor during the thunderstorm and the one at whose boundary line the rain stops. In this respect, Oswald resembles Lessing's Dick Turner, who is known as 'Jonah' to his neighbours because of his endless stream of disasters (Lessing 1950:56). Dick tries a wide variety of projects, all of them guaranteed to make money with little or no capital expenditure. In a very short space of time Dick moves from bees to pigs to turkeys to rabbits to chickens to a trading store (107-115). He is a dreamer and his inability realise his dreams makes him a Jonah. Each character is a type, based upon a biblical forebear, Dick is Jonah, punished for his lack of faith, which renders him unable to sustain his projects. Oswald is Job, whose faith is tested by an indifferent God. Dick's bad luck comes from his poor management. By contrast, Dick's neighbour, Charlie Slatter, is hard-working, ruthless and successful. He makes money because he exploits land and labour to their maximum potential. Charlie criticises Dick for planting trees, while his

own farm is 'a monument to farming malpractice, with great gullies cutting through it, and acres of good dark earth gone dead from misuse' (Lessing 1950:98). While Dick shares Oswald's bad luck, Charlie shares his function as a representative of industry. Both are callous to their environment as they pursue profit and recognition.

Oswald Grant experiences misfortune as a struggle with an allegorical landscape. The kopjes and fields around him actively resist his efforts. In a letter she writes after Joyce has left him, Dinah Webberly casts Oswald in a mythical light:

I have an extraordinary feeling at times that he has been sowing seed from Past Eternities, and will go on sowing it in Future Ages. Is this hallucination or do you think he really has? Perhaps he is a myth for all time, like Tantalus, and destined to sow and sow for ever and never reap. I wonder the kopjes don't rise up and fall upon him; but doubtless he would only emerge with a more aggrieved air than ever, and sow over them (Page 1908:260).

Oswald is a quasi-mythical figure who acts in terms of a particular function. He is The Sower. His industry is wasted because he simply repeats the same action. He is unable to break out of his particular mould. He is the opposite of Dick Turner, who wastes his energy in a hundred fruitless endeavours, and also of Charlie Slatter, who shares his monomania but succeeds in making money.

Lessing and Head present cash-cropping, more specifically the growing of tobacco, as effective industry. They express differing attitudes towards this effective industry, however. Dick Turner stays out of debt and lives in a happy, if lonely, poverty until he gets married. His farming practice consists of growing many 'little crops'. Such practice never produces high yields, but never depletes the soil. His farm is a harmonious one until Mary joins him. Industry, for Page, is represented by monomania as Oswald Grant endlessly repeats the same action. For Lessing, it is represented by monocropping. Success as a farmer requires that one grows a single crop, like tobacco or maize (152). In both cases it involves focusing attention on one thing, and it is presented in a negative light. Oswald may be industrious, but he is not successful. Charlie may be successful, but his farm is on the brink of destruction; he will not be able to sustain his success and he therefore covets Dick's farm, which has been more carefully husbanded. For Mary, she has defeated Dick, poverty and idleness, when the tobacco emerges:

The rains came—unusually enough—exactly as they should, and settled comfortably into a soaking December. The tobacco looked healthy and green and fraught—for Mary—with promise of future plenty. She used to walk round the fields with Dick just for the pleasure of looking at its sturdy abundance, and thinking of those flat green leaves transformed into a cheque of several figures (Lessing 1950:159).

The tobacco brings Dick and Mary together for the first time. In most of the novel they are isolated, not only from the communities around them, but also from one another. Dick spends his time in the lands; Mary spends hers in the house. When Dick is ill, their positions are reversed. The tobacco brings not only the promise of wealth, but the promise that Dick and Mary will meet one another. If the tobacco succeeds they will grow closer together. Their relationship depends on the success of the crop. The crop fails. The first sentence of the paragraph is heavily ironical. For Dick it is unusual that the rains behave as they should. The normal rainy season for the rest of the country is Dick's time of drought. The rains are also ironical in that they do not really predict a good rainy season. Drought will arrive and the plants will die. Dick will refuse to risk money on tobacco again. Successful farming, for Lessing, requires sustained rain but also sustained effort. If the rain fails, the farmer must have the stamina to take the same risk again. Dick lacks that stamina, and thus fails as a farmer.

Dick opposes the profitable fashion of growing tobacco because it represents industrialisation.

He hated the thought of tobacco; he always had, it seemed to him an inhuman crop. His farm would have to be run in a different way; it would mean standing for hours inside buildings in steamy temperatures; it would mean getting up at nights to watch thermometers (154-155).

Dick is a romantic, who farms because he enjoys the freedom of farming. He does not want to be a factory farmer. He is content to experiment with crops and techniques and to survive. Marrying Mary is a mistake, because she has entirely different expectations and thus curtails his freedom. While she is a refugee from rural poverty; he is escaping a 'pinched' and 'squalid' childhood in the suburbs of Johannesburg (163). Each has created a life for her- or himself; but it is a life marked by different needs and expectations to the spouse's. Dick's yearning to be free of industrial society need not be a symptom of idleness. Head's Gilbert is escaping a different modern problem:

'I like it here,' ... 'I'm running away from England. You know what England's like? It's full of nice orderly queues, and everybody lines up in these queues for a place and position in the world. I let all that go hang and hopped out (Head 1968:31-2).

Dick and Gilbert represent a legitimate desire to escape the restrictions of modern Europe. It is also a desire that surfaces in *The Edge o' Beyond*. As Dinah tells her Aunt Truda, who has just suggested that Ted become a bureaucrat:

'Occupation in a Government Office! Really Truda, you're positively imbecile! Why, he'd be potting at 'bus drivers and chauffeurs in no time. No-one in their senses would dream of inflicting themselves

with an ex-Rhodesian colonist, unless he had a bit of land to strut about on with a gun! That's why we're going back to the land (Page 1908:270).

The white men in all three novels resist the order and mechanisation which is supposed to be a product of white-manliness. Ted is, of course, a less extreme example. While the irresponsibles are unable to settle anywhere in England, Dinah and Ted set up a farm in Somerset. Joyce and Cecil move to rural Devon. They 'go back to the land', a phrase which recurs on pages 271, 273, and 275, but find themselves land in England. They are looking for a rural community which does not require the choice between extremes of atavism and Puritanism.

In his introduction to *White Writing*, J M Coetzee discusses the colonial failure to find Eden in Southern Africa (*WW* 2-3). These colonials return, like future post-colonials, to the scene of 'the English weather.'

To end with the English weather is to invoke, at once, the most changeable and immanent signs of national difference. It encourages memories of the 'deep' nation crafted in chalk and limestone; the quilted downs; the moors menaced by the wind; the quiet cathedral towns; that corner of a foreign field that is forever England. The English weather also revives memories of its daemonic double: the heat and dust of India; the dark emptiness of Africa; the tropical chaos that was deemed despotic and ungovernable and therefore worthy of the civilising mission... (Bhabha 1994:169).

It is this weather that makes Page's characters essentially English. The weather represents an England which is far older than crowds, clerks and omnibuses. So many of Joyce's homesick fantasies of Devon concern the struggle between English people and the weather. The weather represents an almost vanishing natural Englishness, one which still serves as a point of resistance to crowds and artificiality. Even Head's assimilated Gilbert is not immune to homesickness for the English weather:

But thoughts of home, of England, had struck Gilbert with a sudden, deep loneliness. The feel of the still, blue, Botswana winter day had the same feel of the February days in England when the snowdrops came out. He stood up and pulled Maria by the hand, and together they walked away far into the bush where the scarlet and gold birds talked to each other in low, soft tones (Head, 1968:103).

Gilbert remains in Botswana because he can recognise the similarities between climates. He finds something English in a winter day in Botswana. Gilbert also remains because his link to the country is more concrete than an abstract link to a climate or a landscape. Through his marriage to Maria and through his work, he is now part of a community. Like his friend Makhaya, he relies on marriage to complete him and to integrate him into Batswana society.

Gilbert shares a yearning for freedom from modern industrial society with the White characters in Page's and Lessing's narratives. Unlike those characters, his need for freedom is not misanthropic; he is quite happy to settle in an African community. Some of his views—on democracy, for example—are conservative. But he stands open to discussion and correction (Head 1968:82-83). Alone among the white male characters in the three novels, Gilbert is capable of growth. Unlike Lessing's Dick Turner, Gilbert does not resist tobacco. He actively encourages the women of Golema Mmidi to grow it along with their other crops as a source of cash. He does not view it as a symbol of the industrial society he wishes to escape. The tobacco provides an alternative means of existence. When the men return from their cattle-herding, many of the cattle are dead from disease or dying; they find that their wives have planted a 'tiny experimental plot of olive-green tobacco leaf' (173). This tobacco, unlike Dick Turner's, survives the drought because Gilbert has designed polythene-lined dams. The experimental plot causes great pride among the men, and persuades them to shift from beef to tobacco production as a means of earning a living. Unlike Lessing, Head does not tell us whether the crop has succeeded or failed. The tobacco represents hope for a more diverse future with people growing crops for both subsistence and cash.

Illness

In all three novels, illness expresses disruptions in the order of things. The death of Joyce Grant's child epitomises the manner in which Oswald neglects his family. Dick Turner's illness occurs because of the pressure of his marriage. Paulina Sebeso's son Isaac dies of tuberculosis while herding his mother's cattle far from home. His death is an indictment of subsistence agriculture and of the corruption of an elite which places large expensive cars before decent schooling, ignoring the children of the poor.

Joyce loses first a horse and then a child to tropical illnesses. Both deaths serve to illustrate that Joyce and her kind are unsuited for life in the tropics. Both deaths are indirectly Oswald's fault. He has hit the horse on the day that it dies. He refuses to allow Joyce and her child to move to Salisbury during the rainy season. At the beginning of the novel, while Oswald is doing his planting and thinking about his aristocratic forebears, Joyce is weeping bitterly at the loss of her pony, Mischief. He has died of the 'dreadful African horse-sickness that carried off half the horses in Rhodesia' (Page 1908:17). Mischief is a Devonshire Pony, a 'wedding present to her from the squire of her father's parish'. He is thus a link to her home, which she misses dreadfully now that she is stranded in the colonies. Their reactions to Mischief's illness and death expose Joyce and Oswald's characters. Joyce is sensitive, misplaced and caring. Oswald is engrossed in his work, complacent and uncaring. It is Oswald who notices that the horse is 'off-colour'. But for all his much-displayed expertise in

African agriculture, Oswald fails to recognise the symptoms of horse sickness, which is, as the novel makes clear, a fairly common killer of horses in the region.

Oswald's insensitivity to illness marks him throughout the novel. He writes a frantic note to Dr Cecil Lawson to tell him that his wife has suddenly become ill (36). Oswald attributes this illness to 'fretting' because the pony dies. He is 'distracted' and 'incoherent' because 'for some unaccountable reason the sufferer [grows] worse if he [is] anywhere near her' (37). She has a serious fever and Cecil must battle to keep her alive. He delivers her of a baby boy (41). Neither she nor Oswald has noticed that she is pregnant. Joyce's ignorance can perhaps be attributed to naïveté, Oswald's to the fact that his wife is basically invisible to him.

Oswald's failure to act results in the death of the child to whose conception and gestation he appears to have been oblivious. Cecil falls in love with or develops a strong sympathy for Joyce from the first. When he is called across to save her life he hears her stories of Oswald's cruelty and her homesickness for Devon. When he has succeeded in saving her life, Ted comes in and asks if he can get Cecil anything: 'The doctor smile[s] whimsically. 'Sleep,' he [says]. 'Sleep and a forgetting.' The novel does not tell us here whether he wishes to forget what he has heard or to forget his awakening feelings for Joyce. Cecil nurses Joyce through her final illness. They have been living together out of wedlock in Devon and Joyce has had a dream in which God exonerated her for abandoning Oswald (269). She dies of influenza brought about either by the shock of losing a child or by the shock of a rather nasty letter Oswald has written to her. The novel makes it quite clear that Oswald is, once again, at fault (280). Cecil has done all he can to protect her and they have had 'five dear years' together. It is, however, even in the 'Dominion of Dreams' (264) impossible to escape the after effects of a harsh life in the colonies upon a sensitive soul.

Dick Turner becomes sick for the first time in the winter. It is Mary's favourite season of the year, 'a brilliant, cool, cloudless June' (127). Dick's illness stands in contrast to Joyce's child's. The latter gets sick, as is to be expected, during a particularly rainy February (Page 1908:191). It is an excess of rain, another extreme of the African climate, that kills the child and also washes the crops away. Dick becomes sick during the healthiest time of the year. Winter is a dry and healthy season. Mary enjoys the coolness and the frost as a welcome break from the harsh summer under a hot corrugated iron roof. Malaria is a summer disease. It has the same effect on Dick's body as the rainy season does on the landscape. It brings wetness and extremes of temperature:

At ten in the morning, with the fever sweat pouring down his face and neck and soaking his shirt, he crawled up the hill and got between blankets, half unconscious already (p 131).

He is hit by the disease as if by a sudden storm. It soaks him and exhausts him. It is entirely unexpected, and its course is unpredictable. The illness, like the drought which destroys his only tobacco crop, is a sign that Dick cannot control his environment. Like other such signs, the disease strains his relationship with Mary. The winter allows them to grow closer together, to begin to understand one another but, just as they are 'moving gently toward a new relation; ... more truly together than they [have] ever been'; illness strikes and the marriage once again disintegrates. It is 'not yet strong enough to survive this fresh trouble' (130). The illness brings many social symptoms, the doctor orders remedies which are not available to people as poor as they are and Mary must manage the farm workers. Both of these symptoms serve to remind Mary of Dick's weakness and she despises him more than ever.

Dick becomes ill as a result of his marriage. The novel makes it clear that he is ill 'for the first time' (126). Mary's expectations weaken his immune system. He has just had to travel to Salisbury to beg Mary to return to him. The illness and the marriage become part of a vicious circle. He is ill because he cannot deal with new pressures and the illness increases those pressures. It confirms Mary's suspicion that he has lapsed into a more primitive state:

There he lay, in all the helpless terror of a person suffering from his first bad illness, with his face turned to the wall and a blanket over his head. 'Just like a nigger!' said Mary in sharp scorn over his cowardice; she had seen sick natives lie just like that in a kind of stoical apathy (132).

While Dick is ill, Mary is able to take over the running of the farm. It is during this first illness that she comes into contact with Moses, striking him with a sjambok when he asks her in English for water (146-7). Her order of things has been subverted, the white boss is lying in a sick pathetic gesture she deems typical of blacks. The black worker is speaking English, after failing to communicate in 'his own dialect'. The first illness presages the second, which will entail further social disruptions. By the time Dick becomes ill for the second time, Moses has become Mary's 'house-boy'. As the illness progresses, exhausting Mary herself, Moses replaces her. He takes care of Dick (196). Mary now abdicates all responsibility, allowing Moses to dress and feed her until they are discovered by Tony Marston. Finally Mary accepts her murder; her apathy has itself become an illness.

In *The Edge o' Beyond*, Oswald's negligence kills a horse and a child. In *The Grass is Singing*, Mary's thwarted expectations cause Dick to become seriously ill. In *When Rain Clouds Gather*, Paulina Sebeso's son Isaac dies through a combination of negligence and expectations. Unlike Page and Lessing, however, Head does not pinpoint a single culprit. There are many people and factors in the novel which

contribute to Isaac's death. The first is the society's expectation that young boys must travel great distances to look after the cattle, an expectation which stems from the village's perceived economic reliance on cattle. Paulina believes that she needs the cattle in order to survive. She tells Makhaya that she cannot send Isaac to school because she cannot afford someone to look after her eighty cattle. He tells her to 'sell the damn beasts' (Head 1968:141) and to put the money in the bank. She rejects this idea as non-traditional, thinking, 'A Motswana without any cattle at all might as well be dead' (141-2). This belief is ironic, given that her child will die looking after the cattle. Paulina has tried to help her child, sending him a cap and cough mixture, thinking he has a cold, not realising that he has tuberculosis (120-1). The absence of adequate health care also contributes to Isaac's death and to the deaths of other children. Chief Sekoto rules that the village of Bodibeng is negligent in allowing its children to die of pneumonia and then accusing Mma-Baloi of killing them with witchcraft (52-53). The problem of neglected children dying thus surfaces early in the novel. More negligent than Paulina is Rra-Rankoane who realises immediately that Isaac has tuberculosis and tells him to take his cattle home. Rankoane refuses to look after Isaac's cattle when he is gone and leaves the boy alone, thinking that he will find his way home. He tells Isaac that he is coughing blood because of the dust 'because he [does] not want to alarm the boy who [looks] like a thin bony scarecrow in his father's oversized jacket' (150). Rankoane has made the wrong decision, not realising Isaac's determination and/or the extent of his illness.

Isaac's illness occurs within a context of natural and social chaos. The cattle and the wild animals in the bush surrounding Golema Mmidi are all dying. At first the herdsmen do not respond to the deaths, thinking they are drought related (147). As the cattle continue to die, the herders return home. Gilbert accepts the deaths of the cattle as a new beginning, a time to move away from pastoral and subsistence production and towards a mixed food crop/cash crop economy (156). The disruption is positive in that it represents a break with old stagnant ways of doing things. This disruption, however, has its casualties. When Gilbert, Paulina and Makhaya arrive at the cattle post, they find vultures. All of Paulina's cattle are dead (161). They would have been more valuable had she taken Makhaya's advice and sold them. Nothing is left of Isaac but his bones, and some poignantly beautiful carvings. Makhaya shows his concern for Pauline and thus his integration into the society when he goes into the hut to save Paulina the anguish of seeing her dead son (163-4). Makhaya takes responsibility for disposing of the body and refuses to allow Paulina to follow 'our custom'. The death of Isaac cements the relationship between Paulina and Makhaya. It represents a break with tradition and it is this break which shows the extent to which Makhaya has been assimilated. He is no longer a stranger who must simply follow custom for its own

sake. He is now a member of the society, and thus has the privilege of being able to interpret tradition. The village accepts his choice. When chief Matenge sends a servant to bring Paulina in for questioning following the death, all the villagers go with her to Matenge's kraal. Matenge commits suicide and Makhaya also goes in to that house to find that body (178). Isaac's illness is related to a larger and more fundamental illness in the society. Corruption and the deaths of children are intertwined.

Conclusion

In her *Counterfeit Idyll*, Gail Finney concludes that gardens provide an escape from various forms of social pressure. Thus far, in this thesis, I have examined gardens in opposition, not to society, but to an infertile landscape. Finney's analysis is, however, relevant to my research since heroes of both colonial and post-colonial novels come to Southern Africa seeking an escape from the queues and the crowds which characterise western Europe. They occupy a new space far from all the people, and they attempt to recreate "the garden enclave they have lost" (Finney 1984:136). Dickens' characters, according to Finney, do so behind moats and on rooftops and they must suspend disbelief to ignore the smoke and noise which filters into their paradise (134). Dinah Webberly and others in Page's *Edge O' Beyond* escape the noise and the bustle and discover emptiness. In various ways they attempt to recreate society, to rebuild human companionship. Any attempt to do so in Africa is doomed, at least for Page, because there are no other human beings there. There are only Africans, who are pre-human; and fools and missionaries, who are super-human. Page must send her characters back to England so that they can seek their little paradises in Dorset and Somerset. Lessing's Mary Turner discovers the humanity of Africans, breaking the barriers. But social pressure is such that she becomes insane. Only Bessie Head, whose European character, Gilbert Balfour, rejects convention, presents us with a character who can assimilate and survive.

Industry, Idleness and Illness are responses to a climate which resists an easy understanding or control. New arrivals attempt to take on the climate and they gradually succumb to it. As this chapter has attempted to show, the tropes occur in a variety of ideological settings. All idlenesses, industries and illnesses are not equal. They have different causes, symptoms and effects. They are inter-related. Illness, for example, can occur as a product of overwork or of working without hope. Idleness is relative, based on different conceptions of achievement. For Lessing's Mary Turner and Charlie Slatter, idleness is a function of poverty. For some of Head's characters, it is a function of wealth. In the next chapter, I will examine the relationship between these tropes in the writings of J M Coetzee.

Chapter Five:

Industry, Idleness and Illness in the Novels of J M Coetzee

In much of his fictional work, J M Coetzee builds on the colonial opposition between drought and fecundity. He moves, however, from a realistic mode to a more consciously allegorical one. He shows narrators using allegories in attempting to create meaning in their lives. We see this tendency in *In the Heart of the Country* in which Magda, a demented spinster, identifies herself as a type in the life and fiction of the colonisers:

I was in my room, in the emerald semi-dark of the shuttered late afternoon, reading in a book or, more likely, supine with a damp towel over my eyes fighting a migraine. I am the one who stays in her room reading or writing or fighting migraines. The colonies are full of girls like that, but none, I think, so extreme as I (*HOC* 1).

“The colonies are full of girls like that” refers to a cloistered style of writing. Many colonial women write out of the confines of a darkened house in an arid landscape. The house represents their own bondage, their isolation from the world of ideas. Teresa Dovey examines *In the Heart of the Country* as a feminine balance to the more phallic *Dusklands*. While *Dusklands* is concerned with penetration and occupation, *In the Heart of the Country* centres around a gap, lack or hole (Dovey 1988:153). This lack is a feature of much Southern African women’s writing. It is a vague general sense of something missing. It expresses itself in the death or absence of the mother but also in the behaviour of heroines, who seek that which would give meaning to their lives. The lack expresses itself as a bondage that Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm* rebels against and the search for activity that drives Mary Turner in Lessing’s *The Grass is Singing* mad. The arid landscape in such novels is a lack, which Coetzee describes in his essay on “Farm Novel and Plaasroman” as “a wholesale absence” (*WW* 64). Men attempt to make this absence fertile. Women, on the other hand, are integrated into the absence. The figure of Magda is an allegory of a tendency, in *The Story of an African Farm* and *The Grass is Singing*, among other novels, for women to become an expression of the landscape. They begin to echo its sterility and its irrationality.

J M Coetzee uses a woman narrator in three of his novels: *In the Heart of the Country* (1978), *Foe* (1986) and *Age of Iron* (1990). The first is, as I shall argue, very closely linked to a tradition of introspective women’s drought writing, drawing on Schreiner and Lessing, as well as, perhaps, lesser known writers like Page. In the subsequent two novels, Coetzee develops the themes of the first. Taken together, the three novels constitute a sequence. The first is set at the beginnings of a Southern African myth. Magda is a figure for the colonial woman in literature. She appropriates

features of characters in earlier novels. The chronological setting of *In The Heart of the Country* is not specific and Magda links the age of horse carts with that of aeroplanes. She becomes an eternal figure on the landscape. *Foe* moves back in time, to another kind of woman narrator, a relatively emancipated traveller of the 18th century and one whom the novel suggests will be silenced, her voice replaced with the voices of bitter spinsters like Magda. *Age of Iron* examines questions of sterility and fecundity in the Cape Town of the 1980s. By changing settings, Coetzee renders the concerns of the drought novel more abstract. Drought becomes a clearer allegory for a state of existence. *Age of Iron's* narrator, Elizabeth Curren, shares Magda's introspection. Where Magda contemplates a variety of imaginary ills and psychotic fantasies, Elizabeth is dying and she imagines the cancer that is killing her; it becomes a child which parallels her actual child who has left her. All three novels deal with barriers and journeys. The most significant of these journeys is, perhaps, Elizabeth Curren's descent into a fiery township. She acknowledges that there are people in a landscape her predecessors have seen as empty. For many South Africans, there is nothing strange about journeys, real and imagined, to far flung corners of the globe, but there are spaces close to home which are taboo and thus impenetrable. Elizabeth's journey takes her out of a lifetime of Magda-like introspection and into a neighbouring landscape in which she is forced to contend with Africans.

Idleness in *In the Heart of the Country*

Magda, the narrator of *In the Heart of the Country*, owes a great deal to the fictional and theoretical thought of Olive Schreiner. The novel is linked to *The Story of an African Farm* in Magda's introspection, following Lyndall's and Waldo's. Teresa Dovey also develops the link between Schreiner and Coetzee, discussing *The Story of an African Farm* as "a novel which combines the liberal and pastoral modes and from which the liberal tradition in English South African writing derives" (Dovey 1988:150). Coetzee uses Schreiner's style and characters as the basis for an allegory of this liberal tradition. The figure of Magda, as infertile spinster, mirrors the infertility of the land; each represents a state of intellectual drought in South Africa. It is possible to find a number of stylistic variables and invariables between Coetzee's and Schreiner's novels.

Coetzee's style is closest to the section of *The Story of an African Farm* entitled 'Times and Seasons'. Here is an excerpt from Schreiner's novel:

I

The year of infancy, where from the shadowy background of forgetfulness start out pictures of startling clearness, disconnected, but brightly coloured, and indelibly printed on the mind. Much that follows fades, but the colours of those baby-pictures are permanent.

There rises, perhaps, a warm summer's evening; we are seated on the doorstep; we have yet the taste of bread and milk in our mouth, and the red sunset is reflected in our basin.

Then there is a dark night, where, waking in fear that there is some great being in the room, we run from our own bed to another, creep close to some large figure, and are comforted (Schreiner 1883:137).

This section involves a break with the style of the rest of the novel. The most obvious marker is that the narrator has switched from third person singular, in which she speaks of Lyndall and Waldo and other characters, to a first person plural. The first section of this chapter begins with the image of Waldo lying "on his stomach on the sand" and switches to more philosophical speculations about the difference between years of a maturing soul. To illustrate these differences, Schreiner moves to the more lyrical and introspective style of the numbered paragraphs. She recalls, perhaps, images of her own childhood. Her use of the first person plural merges reader, author and character. We can no longer be sure to whom she is referring. The chapter contains some apparently universal images of childhood, the fear of the dark which causes one to take refuge "with some large figure", for example. On the other hand, there are images which are not so universal. She speaks of "the taste of bread and milk in our mouth"; bread-and-milk seems to have been a common food for young white children in the nineteenth century. Schreiner must make use of details which, even as they make her narrative richer, locate it in space and time.

Magda's recollections of childhood are similar, if more embittered. Schreiner's characters have lost their mothers and at best retain a very vague memory of them. Magda's memory is more developed but it is at odds with visions of freedom and happiness amid a mythical tribe of "servants":

16. I grew up with the servants' children. I spoke like one of them before I learned to speak like this. I played their stick and stone games before I knew I could have a dollhouse with Father and Mother and Peter and Jane asleep in their own beds and clean clothes ready in the chest whose drawers slid in and out while Nan the dog and Felix the cat snoozed before the kitchen coals. With the servants' children I searched the veld for khamma-roots, fed cowsmilk to the orphaned lambs, hung over the gate to watch the sheep dipped and the Christmas pig shot. I smelled the sour recesses where they slept pell-mell like rabbits, I sat at the feet of their blind old grandfather while he whittled clothespegs and told his stories of bygone days when men and beasts migrated from winter grazing to summer grazing and lived together on the trail. At the feet of an old man I have drunk in a myth of a past when beast and man lived a common life as innocent as the stars in the sky, and I am far from laughing. How am I to endure the ache of whatever it is that is lost without a dream of a pristine age, tinged perhaps with a violet of melancholy, and a myth of expulsion to interpret my ache to me? And mother,

soft scented loving mother who drugged me with milk and slumber in the featherbed and then, to the sound of bells in the night, vanished, leaving me alone among rough hands and hard bodies — where are you? My lost world is a world of men, of cold nights, woodfire, gleaming eyes, and a tale of dead heroes in a language I have not unlearned (*HOC* 6-7).

Coetzee's images are more concentrated and specific. He also makes use of the numbered paragraphs and the same introspective style. This passage is a break with the narrative in that it shifts from present into past tense. The break is not so sharp because the entire novel is numbered and introspective. Its most significant break with Schreiner's narrative is that Coetzee does not try to lure the reader into thinking that this is a typical childhood. "Typical" is attacked as stereotypical through the metaphor of the dolls' house. The dolls in the dolls' house are sleeping; even their animals are asleep. They all have stereotypical names: Peter and Jane and Felix the cat. They do nothing and are thus contrasted to the activity of the little Magda and the servants' children. The cleanliness and order of the doll's house brings the "sour recesses where [the servants sleep] pell-mell like rabbits" into sharp relief.

Schreiner presents a nameless "large figure" not unlike the terrifying "great being" who is a source of security for the terrified child. This large figure could be a mother, father, older sibling, cousin or grandmother. The figure does not necessarily inspire confidence. There would seem to be a tough choice between it and the nameless terrifying being which lurks in the room. Coetzee describes a "soft scented loving mother" whose adjectives flow together creating an impression of warmth and security. Throughout the novel the mother is a vague impressionistic memory. She is also recalled as "a faint grey frail gentle loving mother" and "a frail gentle loving woman" (*HOC* 2). The first is Magda's recollection of her mother, perhaps, as she admits, an imagined one, since she cannot be entirely sure when her mother died. The second, a few lines later and in the next numbered section, re-describes the mother as Magda's father's wife. Once again, adjectives are bundled together to create an impression, although "grey" could almost imply the absence of smell and "frail" would make it more difficult for the mother to be the purveyor of love and warmth. The mother is both all-encompassing and weak and frail. She functions as two different types, and is more a recollection of an allegory of motherness than a mother *an sich*. The softness of the mother figure interrupts Magda's wild childhood among the servant children, bringing her into a soft house which in some way echoes the doll's house. The mother in *In the Heart of the Country* is an absence. She is remembered only as a scent and a softness. The stepmother is a usurper because she does not fit into the ideal and stereotypical role that Magda has created for mothers. The loss of the mother is tied to the loss of the servant's children and the freedom they represent.

The little Magda could have adventures on the farm all day and return to the warmth and security of her mother. The grown-up Magda has no such privileges.

The Story of an African Farm is also marked by an absence of a maternal figure. There is the greedy stepmother Tant' Sannie and a father who has already died of consumption but no mention of a mother. As Coetzee notes in his essay "Farm Novel and Plaasroman", Tant' Sannie's sterility parallels that of her farm (*WW* 66). Even the "large figure" remains nameless. Lyndall gives birth to an illegitimate child but it dies and then she dies. Southern African white women's writing is filled with orphaned little girls and barren women. Andrina du Toit in Pauline Smith's *The Beadle* is an orphan raised by two great aunts (Smith 1926:7). Joyce Grant in *The Edge o' Beyond* gets married and moves out to the colonies because she has lost her own mother; she gives birth and her child dies. Mary Turner in *The Grass is Singing* has two parents, but her mother is hardly soft and scented. She is a "tall, scrawny woman with angry, unhealthy brilliant eyes" who expects her daughter to mother her through the many crises brought on by her husband's drinking (Lessing 1950:39). Mary's siblings die, leaving her with "a profound distaste" for sex (46). She has no children of her own. Coetzee's portrayal of Magda as a barren orphan thus follows a whole set of precedents in white writing. The absence of a mother in all of these works has both realistic and allegorical significance. This absence reflects that childbirth in the colonies was a dangerous business and that many women, like Mary Turner, came to associate sex with disease and death. The lack of a mother means that Magda and her surroundings lack many of the qualities associated with mothers. Her world is cold, rough and barren and therefore more masculine. This masculinity is itself an absence, complicating Dovey's lacanian perspective of Male presence/female absence. The absent mother signifies Magda's lack of those qualities associated with a feminine principle. She and her environment are thus thrown out of balance.

Linked to the loss of a maternal figure is a loss of mythos. Myth lies before allegory. Fletcher suggests that a myth is a "paradigmatic story," one which serves as a form around which a society builds itself (Fletcher 1964:232-233). Allegory is a retelling of the story, often to achieve a different set of goals. As a child, Magda caught a glimpse of another world—the world of "the servants". They are now labelled by their servitude even though their grandfather recalls an earlier, pastoral freedom which gave his people an epic greatness. The grandfather is now relegated to Magda's memory. She becomes the receptacle of the servants' mythos since Hendrik and Klein-Anna, the servants in the present, seem to have no recollection of their ancestry. The world of the servants is itself a myth for Magda but it represents loss. She recalls having the freedom to cross the racial barriers of her society but she was a mere visitor there. Her mother would lure her back to her own house with the promise of warmth,

softness and milk. Her mother's death meant that the promise was unfulfilled and Magda was left between conflicting memories, both of which centre around things now unattainable. The loss of this mythos can also be linked to the growth and loss of religious belief in "Times and Seasons". As the section develops we see changes from a belief inspired by a heroic identification with biblical characters to other more subtle forms of belief and disbelief. Included in all of this is a scientific awareness, prompted by the dissection of "a gander [which] drowns itself in our dam" (Schreiner 1883:153). This awareness becomes the new mythos and the child believes in new myths which centre around order, science and reason. The old religious myths are replaced by a better, brighter vision which has some practical applications. Philistines like Bonaparte Blenkins may destroy the books which inform this myth and the machines which are its product. But Waldo retains his faith in technology. At the end of the novel, he perceives himself as "an uncouth creature with small learning, and no prospects in the future but that of making endless tables and stone walls" (299). There is the implicit hope that more learning would have made him a better person. His faith in knowledge is belied by Lyndall, whose education makes her a misfit, something like Magda. Lyndall has the time to educate herself because she is a woman and is therefore not expected to participate in the more rigorous physical work of the farm. Her gender, which gives her this leisure, restricts her as she reaches maturity. As a nineteenth-century woman, she is not allowed to go further. Waldo shares Lyndall's pursuit of knowledge; they are actually male and female versions of the same character. His potential is crushed by the bigoted Blenkins and by the mind-numbing work of the farm. Both Lyndall and Waldo are stifled by social expectations based on gender. Magda, on the other hand, is caught between conflicting myths. She is left with only memories, she does not even have the ambition, found in Schreiner's main characters, that knowledge and reason will lead to progress. She only remembers a utopian past, unaware that the survival of either object of myth would mean the extinction of the other. The mother took her away from the servants. The hardness of men replaced the softness of the mother.

Magda's father is a faceless set of rituals. Magda only describes his actions, that "he drinks his brandy ceremonially" and that "before meals he washes his hands with soap" (HOC 31). He is a series of rituals and she exists in relation to those rituals. She cuts his hair and draws his bath, allowing him to live a perfectly regulated life. His activities on the farm are a mystery to her. In this respect, their relationship is like that of Lessing's Dick and Mary Turner. He farms; she stays at home and becomes demented. Unlike Mary Turner, however, Magda never gets involved in the running of the farm. Even after she has killed her father, her usurpation of his position is restricted to the activities in and around the house. *In The Heart of the Country* strays between

the worlds of Magda's fantasy and her reality to the extent that the reader is constantly flipping back to find out what actually happens. She kills her father twice (11-12, 61) but he grows senile next to her in the final pages of the novel (137). He returns with a stepmother before his first murder and then, after that murder, he returns without one. In one interview, Stephen Watson asks Coetzee to respond to charges that Magda does not behave entirely like a nineteenth-century spinster and Jacobus Coetzee, in *Dusklands*, does not behave like an eighteenth-century frontier farmer. Both are too modern in their consciousness. Coetzee replies that:

... (a) Jacobus Coetzee is not an eighteenth century frontiersman and
 (b) Magda is not a colonial spinster.
 Watson: Who are they then?
 Coetzee: Figures in books (Coetzee 1978:24).

Based on this response, it is impossible to speculate on the borders between the factual and the fantastic in the novel. *In the Heart of the Country* is real only in as much as it parodies realism. Magda's narrative wildly contradicts itself because many of its characters and events serve a parodic and allegorical function. Magda's relationship with her father does not reflect a real relationship, it is an allegorisation of several myths about fathers and daughters. According to Dovey:

In *In the Heart of the Country* the Oedipal struggle is articulated, thematically, in the form of a violent disruption of the family romance, in which Magda's repeated killings of the father replicate the pattern of Schreiner's novel, which has disposed of the father from the outset (Lyndall is an orphan), and which produces and gets rid of father figures in the form of Waldo's father, old Otto, and Bonaparte Blenkins, who, in wooing Tant Sannie, usurps the father's position. The triangular structure of the Oedipal drama is made explicit in Magda's reference to herself 'crouching in the cinders, stabbing [her] finger at father and stepmother' (thereby alluding to the archetypal structure of the fairytale)...(Dovey 1988:161. Dovey's reference is to *HOC* 4).

The allegorisation takes place on three levels. All the fathers in Schreiner's mostly realistic novel are merged into a single ideal father in Coetzee's allegory. The allegory becomes Freudian, claiming universal significance, as it enacts an "Oedipal Drama". Magda represents all children killing all parents. Finally, the allegory draws upon the old European myth of Cinderella. It is a struggle between a maiden and her stepmother. The maiden wins, not by her beauty and delicacy (Magda does not embody either quality), but with the aid of a hatchet. Magda, as narrator, describes herself in terms of the Cinderella myth, but she becomes a malignant Cinderella, not pure and beautiful, but ugly and destructive. In order to become Cinderella, she needs a stepmother, so she creates one.

The father, like mother and stepmother, is also vague. He says little and his character is mostly Magda's conjecture. He is an absence at the centre of the text, Magda calls him "the absence of my mother" (*HOC* 37). The absent relative is a recurring theme in Coetzee. In *Age of Iron*, Elizabeth Curren writes to a daughter in North America. We see only traces of the daughter in the form of photographs. Elizabeth lacks memories of her daughter's childhood. In his most recent novel, *The Master of Petersburg*, Fyodor Dostoyevsky arrives in Petersburg after the death of his son, Pavel. He visits Pavel's grave:

The mound has the volume and even the shape of a recumbent body. It is, in fact, nothing more or less than the volume of fresh earth displaced by a wooden chest with a tall young man inside it. There is something in this that does not bear thinking about, that he thrusts away from him.... (*MP* 8).

The mound is the only tangible trace that Pavel existed and Dostoyevsky doubts its veracity. He banishes it from his thoughts. Throughout the novel he envisages Pavel as a small boy and as a floating corpse. Much later in the novel, he recalls the grave, which has become a metaphor for his own refusal to allow his son to rest.

...He knows now why he has not gone back to Yelagin island. It is because he fears to see the soil tossed aside, the grave yawning, the body gone. A corpse improperly buried: buried now within him, in his breast, no longer weeping but hissing madness, whispering to him to fall (234).

His hope that his son has not died has become a fear of the same. He fails to see, because he refuses to see, the young man that Pavel has become. Pavel has joined the anarchist Nechaev, and the police have discovered lists of people to be assassinated in his room. As part of his conversion, Pavel has disowned Dostoyevsky, who is actually his stepfather, weaving romantic stories about his biological father Isaev. Other characters constantly remind Dostoyevsky that his references to Pavel as "my son" are self-deception. He arrives in Petersburg under the name of Isaev, and is forced to unmask himself before the bureaucrat, Maximov (*MP* 33-34). Nechaev taunts him with the knowledge that Pavel was only his stepson (119). It is finally when he reads Pavel's journal that he confronts his own lie. He has created a son, just as he creates characters in novels. It is thus important that he is an author. Magda is likewise the author of her environment. She creates characters and destroys them as the need arises. She also forgets those characters who are no longer necessary.

While the murders of stepmother and father are graphic and brutal, the servants quietly fade away. Magda's recollections of childhood are full of servants, crowded into sleeping quarters. In the present tense sections of the novel we only see Magda,

her father, her stepmother and two servants: Hendrik and Klein-Anna. The people she remembers from early childhood: the mother, the servant grandfather and the other servants who slept crowded together "like rabbits", have vanished. At times, it is difficult to ascertain exactly how many people are in the house. Magda speaks of "the servants" (HOC 7) and their bickering as if their were many servants. The number of extras in the novel seems to be perpetually changing. Spare characters appear and disappear but late in the novel, only Magda, Klein-Anna and Hendrik remain. There is a whittling down of characters from a surplus, crowding into the novel's spaces, to the three required for a ménage à trois. The novel's present is a condition of drought. Magda alludes to previous moments of fecundity through her mother and the large population of servants. The servants are linked to a metaphor of fecundity because they are described as "rabbits". Magda herself is now barren. She is obsessed with the barrenness and with the contrast she makes to her father's new wife. She is hard and dry, impenetrable, like the earth in a drought. Her infertility is a reflection of the depopulation of the farm. Once again, she is only the most extreme case of a common condition. Neither the stepmother nor Klein-Anna has children.

Dovey uses the images of mother, phallus and lack to identify Coetzee's novel as a "psychoanalytic reading of *The Story of an African Farm*" (Dovey 1988:152). Her focus on the psychoanalytic aspects of the allegory, while informative, is somewhat limited. My analysis examines these novels as texts which waver between the realistic and the allegorical. Schreiner's novel precedes a tradition of writing in Southern Africa; Coetzee's follows this tradition. The texts which occupy the space between the origins and the present, as I have tried to show in the last chapter, claim to be realistic. The allegory in Coetzee's novels challenges the ontological claims of his predecessors. Coetzee actually returns to the origin by retelling Schreiner's seminal work. His more introspective narrator retells Schreiner's novel from a number of different theoretical perspectives. As well as Freud and Lacan, one can find Hegel and Memmi in the novel's discourses around masters and servants and colonisers and colonised. Coetzee is not simply allegorising *The Story of an African Farm* from a Lacanian perspective. He is using the novel as a means to allegorise the theoretical thought of Schreiner. Magda is a figure for Schreiner's "parasitism", which she warns is the fate of increasingly alienated middle class women, who have lost their old sphere of domestic production to servants, and who are not allowed to compete with men in the labour market. Coetzee locates parasitism in a specific geographic and historical context, a South African setting not unlike Schreiner's Karoo.

In *Woman and Labour*, Schreiner warns that women are becoming parasitic because their old sphere of domestic labour has gone and they are not allowed to enter into new spheres of mental labour. The book is a manifesto exhorting women to

continue to produce value. It challenges many myths of women's inferiority by using historical examples of women's physical, mental and emotional strength. The target of *Woman and Labour* is the kept woman, whom Schreiner describes as "the sex parasite" (Schreiner 1911:77). "Sex parasitism" is that which will "reduce [woman], like the field tick, to the passive exercise of her sex functions alone" (78). Magda herself does not qualify as this sort of parasite. The closest figure to a sex-parasite in the novel is her stepmother: "...the new wife, who lies late abed" (HOC 1). The following section describes her in more detail:

The new wife is a lazy big-boned voluptuous feline woman with a wide slow-smiling mouth. Her eyes are black and shrewd like two berries, two shrewd black berries. She is a big woman with fine wrists and long plump tapering fingers. She eats her food with relish. She eats and sleeps and lazes (HOC 1).

Like the mother, the stepmother is described with long strings of repeated adjectives. Her adjectives, however, make her the antithesis of the mother. She is not pale and weak and suffering but fat and content. For Schreiner, the prefix 'step-' or suffix '-in-law' added to the root 'mother' causes the epitome of loving and caring to develop "the most sinister and antisocial significance" "in almost all human languages" (Schreiner 1911:171). The stepmother is the antithesis of the mother and motherhood; she corrupts and usurps the maternal position. Neither figure in *In the Heart of the Country* is productive, however. The mother is unsuited even to reproduce. Because of her frailty, she dies in childbirth: "too frail and gentle to give birth to the rough rude boy-heir my father wanted, therefore she died" (HOC 2). The stepmother is lazy and fecund—the perfect sexual parasite. She is "the effete wife" who has replaced "the active labouring woman" (Schreiner 1911:81). The working woman is Magda herself, who describes all the effort she once expended to draw her father's bath, for example (HOC 9). The stepmother fits all the descriptions of the sex-parasite:

...in place of the active labouring woman, upholding society by her toil, has come the effete wife, concubine, or prostitute, clad in fine raiment, the work of others' fingers; fed on luxurious viands, the result of others' toil, waited on and tended by the labour of others. The need for her physical labour having gone, and mental industry not having taken its place, she bedecked and scented her person,...

(Schreiner 1911:81).

Schreiner's response is Marxist in suggesting that all people must work to produce value. At the same time it is Calvinistic, linking idleness to sin and corruption. Both of these trends seem implicit in her turn-of-the-century feminism. Magda echoes Schreiner's disgust at parasitism, referring to the stepmother's just-conceived child as "a little pink pig" (HOC 10). She subscribes to the social Darwinist belief that the child

inherits the qualities of the mother. The stepmother's child will be fat, idle and greedy; her own "would be thin and sallow" (*HOC* 10). This view also echoes *Woman and Labour*, as Schreiner says, "only an able and labouring womanhood can produce an able and labouring manhood; only an effete and inactive male can ultimately be produced by an effete and inactive womanhood" (Schreiner 1911:107). Faced with this threat to the well being of "the race" (Schreiner 1911:33), Magda cuts her stepmother's reproductive function short with a hatchet, weapon of choice of another radical turn-of-the-century feminist, Carey Nation. The "little pink pig" is never born.

Magda finds fulfilment in labour, or in imagined labour, the macabre labour of cleaning up bloodstains and getting rid of bodies. Sections 153-166 (*HOC* 81-85) record Hendrik and Magda's destruction of the bedroom in which Magda has shot her father. Initially, Magda gives basic instructions and Hendrik explains the most effective way of doing things, of bricking up a window, for example. Hendrik then, at least in the beginning, actually performs the task. By section 156, a change has occurred, which Magda notes with satisfaction:

Hendrik shows me how to saw through bricks and mortar. We use the rip saw that hangs in the stable. The teeth of this saw never go blunt. We saw through the walls that hold the bedroom to this house. Our arms grow tired but we do not pause. I learn to spit on my hands before I grip the saw. Our labour brings us together. No longer is labour Hendrik's prerogative. I am his equal though I am the weaker. Klein-Anna climbs the ladder to bring us mugs of coffee and slices of bread and jam. We crawl under the house to saw through the foundations. Our honest sweat flows together in the dark warmth. We are like two termites. In perseverance lies our strength. We saw through the roof and through the floor. We shove the room off. Slowly it rises into the air, a ship of odd angles sailing black against the stars. Into the night, into empty space it floats, clumsily since it has no keel. We stand in the dust and mice droppings, on ground where no sun has shone, watching it (*HOC* 82).

This passage parodies socialist realism as Hendrik and Magda achieve unity through their labour. They become almost equal. This apparent equality is deceptive because Magda is still the mistress and Hendrik the servant. By participating in his work, Magda enters a sphere of existence previously closed to her. She has transcended the parasitism of her specific caste and gender. This is the kind of honest, dedicated teamwork which Schreiner says builds great Gothic cathedrals (Schreiner 1911:140). The image of man and woman working side by side, joining in one another's sweat is a Schreinerian ideal: "Side by side, the savage man and the savage woman, we wandered free together and laboured free together. And we were contented" (Schreiner 1911:34). Coetzee's moment of unity through work echoes this ideal. The scene becomes fantastic, underscoring its parody, however, when the sliced-off room sails

out into the darkness. The moment of Schreinerian unity, of socialist realism passes. Some new reading must come in to replace it. The moment stresses that the text is not a blueprint for a better society. It is fiction, and the reader is forced to seek allegorical meanings for the room itself and the act of cutting it off. This allegory can be seen as self-reflexive, entailing the search for a writing that escapes the myth of realism. The link between labour and writing becomes more explicit in *Foe*.

Industry in *Foe*

Cruso's terraces, like Magda's body, are non-productive. He resembles Page's Oswald Grant in his diligent agricultural labour, preparing fields that he will never reap. Cruso, however, is conscious that he is producing nothing. His fruitless industry is, later in the novel, paralleled to that of the writer Daniel Foe who is an unproductive writer before Susan Barton intervenes in his life. Susan is unable to end the island's actual drought but she can end Foe's metaphorical drought, making him more fecund.

Here is Susan Barton's description of the terraces:

The terraces covered much of the hillside at the eastern end of the island, where they were best sheltered from the wind. There were twelve levels of terracing at the time I arrived, each some twenty paces deep and banked with stone walls a yard thick and at their highest as high as a man's head. Within each terrace the ground was levelled and cleared; the stones that made up the walls had been dug out of the earth or borne from elsewhere one by one. I asked Cruso how many stones had gone into the walls. A hundred thousand or more, he replied... (*Foe* 33).

The terracing is designed with an agricultural function only in that it is sheltered from the wind. Dovey identifies this function in saying that the terraces represent a "utopian desire projected into an anticipated future" (Dovey 1988:352). Cruso anticipates future farmers who will come and plant the actual seeds. The terraces are also monumental. Cruso is working on a doomed colonial enterprise, he hopes to die on the island and he makes no attempt to leave instructions for the use of the terraces. Their function, like that of Stonehenge or Great Zimbabwe, is not immediately obvious and, in fact, they could be mistaken for such an indigenous monument. Susan Barton later links the terraces to the pyramids of Egypt; "those tombs the emperors of Egypt erected for themselves in the desert..." (*Foe* 83-4). Cruso's terraces are a monument. He intends them to remind future generations of his resistance to atavism; that he will not have reverted. As he tells Susan Barton:

"...Clearing ground and piling stones is little enough, but it is better than sitting in idleness." And then, with great earnestness, he went on: "I ask you to remember, not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart."

His need to remind Susan and other castaways not to behave like castaways is reminiscent of Oswald Grant telling the irresponsibles in *The Edge o' Beyond* that their farm is a disgrace (Page, 1908:99). Both men have set examples for their fellow colonists and become alarmed when those colonists will not follow their examples. Meaningless industry has become a mark of the colonial project. Joseph Conrad's Marlow encounters a hole in his wanderings:

I avoided a large artificial hole somebody had been digging on the slope, the purpose of which I found impossible to divine. It wasn't a quarry or a sandpit anyhow. It was just a hole. It might have been connected with the philanthropic desire of giving the criminals something to do. I don't know (Conrad, 1902:44).

Pointless work to occupy time and to set a good example seems to be a standard practice for the colonisers. The huge stone walls of Cruso's terraces are therefore bulwarks against atavism. As long as he is building them, he will not lapse into idleness. While he is building his walls, however, Friday gets on with the real work of feeding them by catching fish. His work is not labour intensive. Susan finds him scattering petals over the water and she, perhaps wrongly, attributes this practice to superstition (*Foe* 31). He finds other activities, which, whatever their significance, keep him from boredom. Susan herself makes her own shoes, after asking Cruso to make them and being continually put off. He is too busy at his industry of moving rocks about to free her from the confines of the house (24-25). She uses her spare time to observe the activities of the other inhabitants of the island. She does not lapse into atavism or boredom. Ironically, it seems that Cruso's industry, which in many respects is a fictional industry, renders him useless. Not only is he accomplishing nothing by building the terraces, but his devotion to his work keeps him from other, more useful, activities like, for example, making the sandals.

As Cruso piles up rocks, so Daniel Foe piles up papers. Susan Barton can make as little sense of this activity as she can of the terracing:

Your papers are kept in a chest beside the table. The story of Cruso's island will go there page by page as you write it, to lie with a heap of other papers: a census of the beggars of London, bills of mortality from the time of the great plague, accounts of travels in the border country, reports of strange and surprising apparitions, records of the wool trade, a memorial of the life and opinions of Dickory Cronke (who is he?); also books of voyages to the New World, memoirs of captivity among the Moors, chronicles of the wars in the Low Countries, confessions of notorious lawbreakers, and a multitude of castaway narratives, most of them, I would guess, riddled with lies (*Foe* 50).

Susan Barton's last comment, "...most of them, I would guess, riddled with lies", is ambiguous. Does it refer solely to the castaway narratives, or to all of the paperwork? These papers are the archives of an historical novelist. Some of them are statistics and reports, naked facts. At present he is unable to write but, inspired by Barton, he will use them to fabricate fictions, the lies which so concern her. The accumulated paperwork gives us some insight into the techniques used by a writer such as Daniel Defoe or perhaps J.M. Coetzee in compiling texts. The multitude of castaway narratives is sampled and condensed until it becomes one *Robinson Crusoe*. Susan Barton's narrative style is that of one who wants to tell the truth, who refuses to create fictions—a laudable quality in a fictional character. She documents events exactly as she sees them. To her, compiling data in the eventual interest of creating a fiction is as nonsensical an activity as building terraces on a barren island.

Susan Barton's attitude towards fiction changes as the novel progresses. She begins to write about the "strange circumstances" of her voyage to the island. Her attempt comes to nothing; she realises that, because she has lived through these "circumstances", they cannot be all that strange:

Dubiously I thought: Are these enough strange circumstances to make a story of? How long before I am driven to invent new and stranger circumstances: the salvage of tools and muskets from Cruso's ship; the building of a boat, or at least a skiff, and a venture to sail to the mainland; a landing by cannibals on the island, followed by a skirmish and many bloody deaths; and, at last, the coming of a golden-haired stranger with a sack of corn, and the planting of the terraces? (67).

These events correspond to events in Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Each is used to build suspense and to prove Crusoe's industriousness and ingenuity in the original novel. For example, Crusoe salvages equipment by swimming around the ship until he finds a convenient piece of rope and using that rope to haul himself up. He then builds a raft out of odd spars and catalogues in great detail the process of loading it (Defoe 1719:68-69). He makes several journeys, the last one just before a storm which breaks up the ship (Defoe 1719:75). Coetzee thus un-writes Defoe's narrative, making it less like an adventure story and using the exercise to explore the making of fiction. The process is deceptive; rather than returning to a less fictive source, he creates a third layer of fiction.

The difference between Defoe's and Coetzee's narratives is therefore not an ontological one. For all her commitment to the truth, Susan Barton is a fictional character. She is herself a lie, a figment of an author's imagination. Coetzee's text is a fictional answer to a question in Defoe's. Crusoe asks:

Then it occurred to me again, how well I was furnished for my subsistence, and what would have been my case if it had not happened, *which was a hundred thousand to one*, that the ship floated from the place where she first struck and was driven so near the shore that I had time to get all these things out of her. What would have been my case if I had been to have lived in the condition in which I first came to shore, without necessaries of life or necessaries to supply and procure them? Particularly I said aloud (tho' to my self), what should I ha' done without a gun, without ammunition, without any tools to make any thing, or to work with, without clothes, bedding, a tent, or any manner of covering? (Defoe 1719:80-81) (*italics in the original*).

Coetzee's text responds that his Crusoe could have survived. The loss of guns, clothes and other civilised articles need not be lethal. What is lost is not life, but meaning. For example, Defoe's Crusoe devotes an enormous amount of time and effort to protecting his gun powder from damp and lightning. This activity is meaningless if one has no gun or powder. Elsewhere he finds cereal plants growing where he dropped some seed. He very carefully husband the seed; he keeps his first harvest and plants those seeds, leading to greater returns in the next year (Defoe 1719:94). Without seed any farming activity would appear as strange as Coetzee's Crusoe's terraces. Most importantly, Defoe has his protagonist secure the necessary pen and paper to keep a journal; he records the details of his life on the island, giving meaning to each activity. He is thus conscious of his history on the island. Coetzee's Crusoe has no tools. When Susan Barton suggests that Friday dive to the wreck to look for tools, Crusoe responds "as if tools were heathenish inventions" (*Foe* 32). Deprived of the products of civilisation for so long, he has lost any desire to improve his position. All of his activity is directed towards proving that he is not a castaway, but without Defoe's providence, he is a complete castaway, lacking a sense of history or achievement.

Friday has a history but it is a hidden one. Lacking a tongue, he is unable to communicate and he cannot initially understand Susan Barton. Their first meeting is marked by an utter failure of communication:

'There I lay sprawled on the hot sand, my head filled with the orange blaze of the sun, my petticoat (which was all I had escaped with) baking dry upon me, tired, grateful, like all the saved.

'A dark shadow fell upon me, not of a cloud but of a man with a dazzling halo about him. "Castaway," I said with my thick dry tongue. "I am cast away. I am all alone." And I held out my sore hands.

'The man squatted beside me. He was black: a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool, naked save for a pair of rough drawers. I lifted myself and studied the flat face, the small dull eyes, the broad nose, the thick lips, the skin not black but a dark grey, dry as if coated with dust. "Agua," I said, trying Portuguese, and made a sign of drinking. He gave no reply, but regarded me as he would a seal or a porpoise thrown up by the waves, that would shortly expire and might then be cut

up for food. At his side he had a spear. I have come to the wrong island, I thought, and let my head sink: I have come to an island of cannibals (*Foe* 5-6).

The passage is important because it exposes Susan Barton's preconceptions. She is thrown up on the beach, dying of thirst and in pain. Her first impression of Friday is "of a man with a dazzling halo about him". As he moves closer, she realises that this is a black man. From this description, we see that he is African, with all of the stereotypical characteristics that mark African blacks. Her description is a deliberate contrast to Defoe's description of *his* Friday:

... He had a very good countenance, not a fierce and surly aspect; but seemed to have all the sweetness and softness of a European in his countenance too, especially when he smiled. His hair was long and black, not curled like wool; his forehead very high and large, and a great vivacity and sparkling sharpness in his eyes. The colour of his skin was not quite black, but very tawny; and yet not of an ugly yellow nauseous tawny, as the Brasilians, and Virginians, and other natives of America are; but of a bright kind of a dun olive colour, that had in it something very agreeable, tho' not very easy to describe. His face was round and plump; his nose small, not flat like the negroes, a very good mouth, thin lips, and his fine teeth well set, and white as ivory.... (Defoe 1719:208-209).

Defoe is at great pains to tell us that his find is not a negro, or any "nauseous tawny" being from the Americas. He describes Friday in negative terms, according to qualities he lacks. He does not have woolly hair nor a flat nose. Defoe also shies away from attributing any smell to him. He is bright-eyed and he is European in his features. Crusoe has very fortuitously stumbled across man in a state of nature, a dark and handsome European who belongs to this Eden. Crusoe's first glance at Friday informs him that he is a gentleman. Friday's initial gestures demonstrate that Crusoe need not fear him. After Crusoe has rescued him from his captors he goes through a ritual of swearing life-long allegiance to him:

... he kneeled down again, kissed the ground, and laid his head upon the ground, and taking me by the foot, set my foot upon his head; this it seems was in token of swearing to be my slave forever;... (207).

Crusoe immediately and thoroughly understands the gesture and he and Friday communicate from the beginning with the ease that flows from their sympathetic minds. Coetzee turns the tables in a number of ways. After the initial halo effect, Susan Barton sees nothing in Friday to inspire confidence. He is clearly African. His eyes do not immediately signify his intelligence, they are "small dull eyes". Susan suspects that he is a cannibal when he touches her; she experiences horror at the touch of the other. It is his smell, "of fish, and of sheepswool on a hot day" which seems to calm her. She

is at his mercy where Defoe's Friday is at the mercy of Crusoe. She has difficulty communicating her thirst and her pain. She hobbles after him until he offers to carry her, to which she says "I hesitated to accept, for he was a slight fellow, shorter than I" (*Foe* 6). Whereas Crusoe has a tall, like-minded noble savage volunteering to become his slave for life, Susan Barton is dependent on a short African who struggles to understand her and does not show any great desire to communicate with her.

Friday eventually realises that Susan has difficulty walking and offers to carry her, offering her his back. Because of his stature, they make a fairly ludicrous sight as they hobble into camp. Once there they meet a man of indeterminate ethnicity; he is "dark-skinned and heavily bearded" (*Foe* 8). He gives his identity away without speaking. Susan Barton asks him for water and "[h]e gestured to the Negro, and I saw I was talking to a European" (8). Crusoe marks himself as European with an unconscious and unspoken order. Friday must get the water. On Coetzee's island, Europeans are not marked by "sweetness and softness"; they are instead betrayed by their idleness and their imperious manner. Susan Barton is quickly drawn into the assumption of Friday as servant:

I was woken by the drumming of rain on the roof. It was morning; Friday was crouched before the stove ..., feeding the fire, blowing it into life. At first I was ashamed that he should see me abed, but then I reminded myself of how free the ladies of Bahia were before their servants, and so felt better (*Foe* 14).

She now assumes, without being told to do so, that Friday is her servant. Friday only seems to understand the language of servitude, he understands Crusoe's word "firewood" but not the word "wood" (21). Crusoe has quite literally equipped him with the language required to be "hewer of wood and drawer of water", he obeys orders without question because he cannot speak. Even in England, she only succeeds in teaching him to wash laundry, to dig plant beds and to trim hedges (60). Susan thinks that Friday is an "imbecile" until she learns that his tongue has been cut out (22). He has a hidden history which he is unable to tell and, which, like Crusoe, he has no desire to tell. Penner describes Friday as a "speechless but gentler Caliban" whose "inaccessible silence ... forces attention on his masters, first Crusoe, then Barton" (Penner 1989:116). Because Friday cannot answer her, Susan Barton must invent her own answers. At one point in London she realises the artificiality of her attempts at communication, saying "I talk to Friday as old women talk to cats, till at last they are deemed to be witches, and shunned in the streets" (*Foe* 77). Friday's silence forces her to interrogate her questions. She tries to establish who removed his tongue, showing him pictures of Crusoe and of a slaver cutting out the tongue of a black child. When he

fails to respond she questions her own assumptions and the accuracy of her representations:

‘Yet even as I spoke I began to doubt myself. For if Friday’s gaze indeed became troubled, might that not be because I came striding out of the house, demanding that he look at pictures, something I had never done before? Might the picture itself not confuse him? (For, examining it anew, I recognised with chagrin that it might be taken to show Crusoe as a beneficent father putting a lump of fish into the mouth of child Friday)...’ (*Foe* 68-69).

Like a contemporary anthropologist, she is concerned that she may have influenced the outcome of her experiment through her manner. She may perplex Friday, influencing her understanding of his response. Her picture may invoke an entirely different response from the one desired because it is crude enough to be misread. When she presents him with a similar picture of a “Moor”, she realises that she may be limited by her own racial stereotypes: “Are Moors all tall and clad in white burnouses” (69). It is Friday’s silence that provokes her doubt. Any gesture on his part, any sign of recognition, and she would accept that she has made some rudimentary communication. She does not challenge her methods *a priori*, she only challenges them *a posteriori*, once they have failed. The slightest sign of success and she would accept that her findings give her more with which to work. Friday represents the failure of the enlightenment because he resists any readings. He gives her the false hope that she is communicating when he plays the flute with her.

The task of the author, then, at least according to Susan Barton, is to create meaning. She is more selective than the author Mr Foe in the kind of meaning she is allowed to create. *Foe* is post-colonial since it lacks Defoe’s missionary/colonial optimism. *Robinson Crusoe* is a handbook of colonisation which celebrates the coloniser’s ability, with the help of providence, to create order and meaning in the most adverse circumstances. Coetzee ridicules colonial order by removing providence and meaning from the picture. Crusoe practices meaningless order and his only monuments to himself and his values are ruins and lies. *Age of Iron* is a more compassionate novel. A dying liberal woman strives to create meaning as she struggles to understand her death and the collapse of her values.

Illness in *Age of Iron*

The central allegory of Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* is cancer. Elizabeth Curren is dying of cancer and she writes a long letter to her daughter, describing the situation in Cape Town in the late 1980s. Where, in the earlier works of fiction, disease comes out of the landscape, Coetzee reverses this process. In *Age of Iron*, the disease infects both Elizabeth Curren and the landscape. In dying she learns that the country around her has

cancer. Her death is an allegory for the death of a certain kind of South African liberal system of values. For Elizabeth Curren, childhood should be innocent and the aged should be respected. She is alone in the novel in believing these things and she is dying. She sees dying both as an escape from the pain of her own and South Africa's disease and as an abdication of her maternal responsibilities. An elderly derelict called Vercueil arrives to lead her through the landscape of disease and into death, the only possible freedom.

Elizabeth Curren's cancer has always been with her, at times she views it as the only stable and loyal force in her life. Perhaps it was a crab looking out of a box camera at her when she was two. Unlike Magda, she has two-dimensional images to recall her childhood. These images, however, are only reminders of a brooding present. She describes a photograph which leads her to reflect on her disease:

Is that why my brow is furrowed, is that why I struggle to reach the camera: do I obscurely know that the camera is the enemy, that the camera will not lie about us but uncover who we truly are: doll-folk? Am I struggling against the reins in order to strike the camera before it is too late? And who holds the camera? Whose formless shadow leans towards my mother and her two offspring across the tiled bed.

Grief past weeping. I am hollow, I am a shell. To each of us fate sends the right disease. Mine a disease that eats me out from inside. Were I to be opened up they would find me as hollow as a doll, a doll with a crab sitting inside licking its lips, dazed by the flood of light.

Was it the crab that I saw so presciently when I was two, peeping out of the black box? Was I trying to save us all from the crab? But they held me back, they pressed the button, and the crab sprang out and entered me.

Gnawing at my bones now that there is no flesh left. Gnawing at the socket of my hip, gnawing at my backbone, beginning to gnaw at my knees. The cats, if the truth be told, have never really loved me. Only this creature is faithful to the end. My pet, my pain (AOI 103).

Coetzee makes a link between technology and death, a link which will be developed several times in the course of the novel. The camera is a device with a number of ominous effects. It could be the home of the crab; it is that which reveals Elizabeth and her family as hollow people, as "doll folk". Magda, we recall, in *In the Heart of the Country* used a dolls' house as a metaphor for her sterile and secure white existence, as opposed to her adventures with the servants' children. Elizabeth seems constantly to remark on a South African hollowness. Her transformation resembles that of Changez Chamchawala, Salhuddin's dictatorial father, in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*: "Salhuddin virtually lifted him to his feet, and was astonished at Changez's lightness. This had always been a weighty man, but now he was a living lunch for the advancing cancer cells" (Rushdie 1988:526). The transformation is not only physical; cancer also changes Changez's character: "...it had also stripped him of his faults, of all that had

been domineering, tyrannical and cruel in him, so that the mischievous, loving and brilliant man beneath lay exposed..." (524). Cancer functions in each text as an allegory. The disease changes the character as it changes the body. Changez's cancer brings his son back to India and his transformation enables a reconciliation with his son. Elizabeth Curren's cancer forestalls any hope of reconciliation with her daughter because it expresses the emptiness of white South African society. Her body has been rendered hollow by the disease linking her to the hollow people who produced apartheid, the system which drove her daughter away.

The only solid people in *Age of Iron* are black children, the children of servants, once again. Bheki's friend "John" is described as "stolid" (AOI 124). Elizabeth is amazed at the amount of blood when Bheki and John are injured in a bicycle accident (57). She contrasts their blood to her dryness, describing the cancer as "the sickness that now eats at me is dry, bloodless, slow and cold, sent by Saturn" (59). The amount of blood in John and Bheki shows her up as dry and powdery. She compares her memories of the bodies of white people, dying in bed as "...dry and light..., rather papery, rather airy. They burned well..." (114) to the image of Bheki's body lying in the rain:

'Whereas these people will not burn, Bheki and the other dead. It would be like trying to burn figures of pig-iron or lead. They might lose their sharpness of contour, but when the flames subsided they would still be there, heavy as ever. Leave them long enough and they may sink, millimetre by millimetre, till the earth closes over them. But then they would sink no further...' (114).

She contrasts her hollowness to the heaviness and solidity of Bheki. Her disease is consuming her from within, finally just leaving a papery husk, which will burn away and then nothing will be left. By contrast, the martyrs of the civil war around her, in their deaths, leave something heavy, something which will not go away. The two kinds of death are allegories of memory. The death of old white people is soon forgotten, as Elizabeth's example shows. In fact, she has been forgotten while still alive. The deaths of the young combatants weigh on the memory of those left behind. Their bodies are an incitement to further combat. They are not remembered as individuals but as faceless martyrs, however, as the loss of "sharpness of contour" shows. They are blurred but solid. They are unlike Magda's mother, who is also an abiding presence in a memory, with clear features but no concrete existence. Elizabeth views dying as a loss of self, either, in her case a total destruction, or in Bheki's the sacrifice to a supposedly larger cause. The cancer continues a process that has already started. As an isolated old woman, Elizabeth Curren has lost meaning, has begun to lose her identity, become hollow. The cancer is the final stage in a process of effacement.

The disease is portrayed on several occasions as a perversion of motherhood. Not, as in *In the Heart of the Country*, where motherhood is corrupted from the perspective of the child, but in a corruption of gestation. Talking to Vercueil, Elizabeth describes cancer as a child:

‘And I am sick too,’ I said. ‘Sick and tired, tired and sick. I have a child inside that I cannot give birth to. Cannot because it will not be born. Because it cannot live outside me. So it is my prisoner or I am its prisoner. It beats on the gate but it cannot leave. That is what is going on all the time. The child inside is beating at the gate. My daughter is my first child. She is my life. This is the second one, the afterbirth, the unwanted....’ (AOI 75).

Elizabeth imagines her cancer as a perverse child, consuming her from within. Her actual daughter has abandoned her, leaving the disease as her only child. She and the cancer are trapped in a mutual gestation. In a sense, they are waiting to give birth to each other. The relationship between cancer and daughter is important. It is something like the relationship between step-mother and mother, according to Schreiner’s definition. The merest addition of a qualifier makes the step-mother into a grotesque parody of the other. In the same way the cancer is almost like the daughter. It is that which Elizabeth carries expectantly within her. But the blessed event is not birth but death. Unlike *In the Heart of the Country*, there is not the pure distinction between the term and its close parodic relative. The daughter herself represents two possibilities, which Elizabeth describes as twins. One possibility is that she will one day return to South Africa, the other is that she will not (69). She has left because she is disgusted with the country and will return only when the old order is defeated.

The daughter has left, disgusted at the government and its policies. Elizabeth shares her disgust, and for this reason she will not ask her to “go back on her vows” (68). The novel takes the form of a letter to this daughter, to be posted by Vercueil after Elizabeth’s death. The letter both condemns the unnamed daughter for abandoning Elizabeth and confirms her horror at what is happening to the country. South Africa itself is portrayed as cancerous and so Elizabeth’s illness becomes an allegory for the country as a whole. At times Elizabeth attacks the forces which are corrupting the country. The figures of politicians, for example, become parasites of every conceivable sort:

...The parade of politicians every evening: I have only to see the heavy, blank faces so familiar since childhood to feel gloom and nausea. The bullies in the last row of school-desks, raw-boned, lumpish boys, grown up now and promoted to rule the land. They with their fathers and mothers, their aunts and uncles, their brothers and sisters: a locust horde, a plague of black locusts infesting the country, munching without cease, devouring lives. Why, in a spirit of

horror and loathing, do I watch them? Why do I let them into the house? Because the reign of the locust family is the truth of South Africa, and the truth is what makes me sick? (25).

This "locust horde" is to the country what the crab of cancer is to Elizabeth. They have bred and multiplied, like cancer cells, reproducing themselves and nepotistically filling the positions around them with their relatives. The passage moves between levels of metaphor. The first level describes the politicians as school bullies. This level is closest to realism because one can conceive the politicians as former school bullies, inarticulate, thug-like. As they grow up literally, their power grows in a more metaphorical sense. They never grow up entirely since they do not have children, they share power with other relatives but the passage seems to suggest that they are a doomed generation. Elizabeth does not believe that parents can sacrifice their children. She lectures John on the sanctity of human life as a mother, claiming that her words "come from my heart, from my womb" (133). She echoes Schreiner, who says that, because of "woman's" function of mother, and of the agony she endures in childbirth: "no tinsel of trumpets and flags will ultimately seduce women into the insanity of recklessly destroying life" (Schreiner 1911:171). According to both Elizabeth Curren and Olive Schreiner, parents, especially mothers, must hold life sacred. The politicians are, in the early stages of *Age of Iron*, disqualified from parenthood. They are portrayed as sterile mutants, unable to produce offspring who will share their power. The metaphor moves further from realistic representation and the politicians become less human.

At the second level of metaphor the politicians become locusts. When Elizabeth compares politicians and "raw-boned lumpish" "bullies", she points to many characteristics in common. Both are relatively large, both are human, they may share similar features. Pik Botha may look like an actual bully from primary school. Politicians and locusts have fewer features in common. These politicians are described as locusts because locusts literally devour resources and the politicians metaphorically do so. The single feature in common is more sharply defined. Locusts and politicians are greedy. Both represent an excess which shows nature or society out of balance. Locusts are a biblical plague, a punishment on the rulers of Egypt for oppressing the Jews. Here plague and oppressors are bound together; they are the same. The image of locusts is a metaphor but it makes allusions to other uses of the same metaphor. The passage becomes allegorical when Elizabeth asks, "Why do I let them into the house? Because the reign of the locust family is the truth of South Africa, and the truth is what makes me sick?" The metaphor of politician as locust takes on a life of its own thus becoming an allegory. The figure can enter houses, bringing illness. The locust-like qualities of the politicians become a "daemoniac agent" (see Fletcher 1964:40-41),

which in turn becomes the cause of all the society's ills. Elizabeth wonders whether the parasite which is infesting and destroying the country has anything in common with that which is infesting and killing her. The politician-locusts are then inscribed into the extended metaphor of the book. A woman is dying of cancer, which is a disease that corrupts her and consumes her from within. Around her, a landscape is also corrupted and consumed. The novel's allegory is in the relation between character and landscape.

The allegory is made more explicit through the figure of Calvin:

What a nightmare from beginning to end! The spirit of Geneva triumphant in Africa. Calvin, black-robed, thin-blooded, forever cold, rubbing his hands together in the afterworld, smiling his wintry smile. Calvin victorious, reborn in the dogmatists and witch-hunters of both armies (AOI 47).

Calvin as the personification of South African intolerance is linked to the politicians. He wears black robes, they are black locusts. Both are presiding over the funeral of the society. Calvin is primarily the bringer of coldness. He is "the spirit of Geneva", a cold wind blowing from a cold place, rendering Africa the warm continent, cold and lifeless. He has a "wintry smile". Elizabeth is dying through a similarly cold disease, she is not killed in anger, through hot bullets which shed warm blood. Her death is "dry, bloodless, slow and cold" (59). She tells John, "I have cancer from an accumulation of the shame I have endured in my life" (132). Calvinism is a religion of shame; adherents must be ashamed of their physical nature, of their humanity. Elizabeth is ashamed of the atrocities in her country. These atrocities are not only those of the government, she is horrified when John and Bheki attack Vercueil, because they, like good Calvinists, disapprove of his drinking:

Florence is openly proud of how Bheki got rid of the good-for-nothing, but predicts that he will come back as soon as it starts raining. As for me, I doubt we will see him as long as the boys are here. I said to Florence. 'You are showing Bheki and his friends that they can raise their hands against their elders with impunity. That is a mistake. Yes, whatever you may think of him, Vercueil is their elder (44-45).

Florence's and Bheki's disgust at Vercueil is part of the same Calvinism that Elizabeth condemns in the Afrikaners. It is Calvinism and social Darwinism which dictate that only the fit and able have a place in society. These beliefs condemn drunkards and old people as parasites. Florence says that Vercueil is "rubbish" and "good-for-nothing" (44). In their condemnation, she and Bheki refuse to acknowledge that Vercueil has a history and that, even as a drunkard, he can be useful, sending Elizabeth's message to her daughter. His weakness marks him in their eyes as unelect. To Elizabeth such cold and Calvinistic intolerance is foreign to the warm climate of Africa. It destroys the

traditional respect for age accorded in African societies. The violent children are chosen to free the country; they must have iron in their veins. All others are damned. Elizabeth tries to appeal against this Calvinism by speaking to her vision of an older Africa, one in which the elderly are respected. The spirit of Calvin is, however, too strong and her appeal fails. Calvin has made it into a society in which only strength is honoured. Elizabeth views Calvinism as the cancer which is destroying herself and her country.

Cancer causes normal body cells to mutate and then to grow in a destructive and uncontrollable manner. Childhood and cancer are linked because children are corrupted, growing in a destructive and uncontrolled manner. The growth processes of the society and its inhabitants have mutated. Calvinism is the first corrupter of childhood because it forces martial discipline into young children. Conversely its attempt to instil order creates anarchy as martial discipline destroys respect for humanity.

...a time has come when childhood is despised, when children school each other never to smile, never to cry, to raise fists in the air like hammers? Is it truly a time out of time, heaved up out of the earth, misbegotten, monstrous? What, after all gave birth to the age of iron but the age of granite? Did we not have Voortrekkers, generation after generation of Voortrekkers, grim-faced, tight-lipped Afrikaner children, marching, singing their patriotic hymns, saluting their flag, vowing to die for their fatherland? *Ons sal lewe, ons sal sterwe*. Are there not still white zealots teaching the old regime of discipline, work, obedience, self-sacrifice, a regime of death, to children some too young to tie their own shoelaces? (AOI 46-47).

Elizabeth realises that the current age is considerably older than it seems. It is an "Age of Iron" which has indoctrinated children into the worship of death for some time now. As a classicist, she is aware that the "Age of Iron" succeeds that of bronze as an age characterised by violence, greed and wickedness. According to Ovid, for example, under "the age of hard iron", husbands and wives plot each others' death "and sons [pry] into their fathers' horoscopes impatient for them to die" (Ovid 1955, 32-33).

For Curren, this age has continued, increasing in its violence and greed until it reaches its ultimate philosophical status in the form of 1980s South African Calvinism. She sees the worship of death as inherent in Calvinism and Calvin's *Institutes* are amenable to such a reading, stressing the corruption of humanity and the world. Suffering is the natural lot of humanity, and God's mercy is simply in providing an end to suffering at the end of a pain-filled, disease-ridden and generally unpleasant life (Calvin 1559:2:14-15). Calvin's elect are not marked by happiness and ease in their lives, rather they too can only expect pain and suffering:

Those whom the Lord has chosen and honoured with his intercourse must prepare for a hard, laborious and troubled life, a life full of many and various kinds of evils: it being the will of our heavenly Father to exercise his people in this way by putting them to the proof. Having begun this course with Christ, his first-born, he continues it towards all his children. ...far from being treated gently and indulgently, we may say, that not only was he subjected to a perpetual cross while he was on earth, but his whole life was nothing else but a kind of perpetual cross (Calvin 1559:2:16).

Suffering is a sign of election because it renders the elect more Christlike. Calvin's *Institutes* serves as a pretext for *Age of Iron*. Coetzee seems to take an element of Calvinistic ideology, the theory that suffering is proof of election, and causes it to resurface in a number of characters and actions in the novel.

The novel evaluates the cult of martyrdom prevalent particularly among young black South African activists in the late 1980s. Elizabeth Curren blames this cult on the then Calvinistic rulers of the country. African youth are simply following Afrikaans youth in proclaiming "*Ons sal lewe, ons sal sterwe*" "We shall live, we shall die", quoting *Die Stem van Suid Afrika*, the then national anthem, in proclaiming their adherence to their ideal, that they expect to suffer and die for their country. *Die Stem* shares Calvin's reliance on predestination. Choice is gone as the children sing, not '*Ons wil sterwe*' (we will, we wish to die) but '*Ons sal sterwe*' (we shall die). Both sets of children accept the fate their country has decreed for them. Elizabeth struggles against fate before she finally accepts it. Unlike the Calvinists she questions fate, viewing herself as more pagan than Christian. She is a retired classics teacher who views the world not in terms of suffering and redemption, but according to a far more complex set of myths. A harmonious world is, for Elizabeth, not one in which people bear their suffering bravely, secure in the knowledge that they are of the elect. It is one which entails respect for human life in its various forms. On the other hand, Vercueil warns Elizabeth that she herself is "like iron" when she refuses to call her daughter back from America to help her in her suffering (*AOI* 68). Later, helpless with pain, she waves away a car whose driver offers assistance (*AOI* 121). Elizabeth is herself a stoic and Calvin warns against stoicism, calling it an "iron philosophy". Suffering is a sign of human frailty and it is acceptable to humbly confess that frailty by showing emotion (Calvin 1559:2:22). Calvinism is a pretext for the Age of Iron, but is not solely to blame for it. Elizabeth's own philosophy, the stoicism that leaves her dying among strangers, exiled in the classical sense of the word, is also somehow implicated.

Elizabeth journeys into a fiery township, echoing the classical descent into hell:

... On the roof of one of the cars stood a young man in battledress, his gun at the ready, staring out at the darkness.

Now there was a smell of burning in the air, of wet ash, burning rubber. Slowly we drove down a broad street lined with matchbox-houses. 'Turn right here,' said Florence. 'turn right again. Stop here.'

With the baby on her arm and the little girl, only half awake, stumbling behind, she splashed up the path to number 219, knocked, was admitted. Hope and Beauty. It was like living in an allegory. Keep the engine running. I waited (AOI 84).

Elizabeth's own space, suburban Cape Town, is rapidly becoming unfamiliar, but the township is utterly alien territory. Her journey is thus the final crossing into the new world of iron. The township is guarded and fought over by youth, both black and white, who are separated from Elizabeth by an attitude to life as well as a generation gap. Florence, Elizabeth's house-maid, has a familiarity with the township which she shows by her directions, ordering Elizabeth to drive through streets that seem meaningless to the latter. The directions interrupt Elizabeth's meditation on this strange place, as Chris interrupts Christian's. 'Hope and Beauty' are ironic reminders that this is a landscape of burning rubber and matchbox houses which frame their fragility. Allegory works in this case to demonstrate the strange juxtapositions in contemporary South Africa.

The "Age of Iron" is represented not only as an age of human development but a geological age, successor to the age of granite. Elizabeth refuses to acknowledge her own stoicism as a symptom of this age. At times she admits her own weakness, she does not, for example, deny Vercueil's accusation that she is also made of iron. She is classically liberal in refusing to acknowledge that she has anything to do with the state of her country. She clings to her view of herself as a frail, hollow old liberal woman in a fascist age of iron and blood. With her demise, a certain kind of liberalism is also dying. Elizabeth views her own liberalism both as an anachronistic and alien belief system in a country at war and as a gentler, more human perspective. Elizabeth surrounds herself with signs which place her in an earlier age, making her an anachronism in the South African society of the late 1980s. She drives a Hillman and she quotes Shylock; she is misplaced amid Casspirs and political violence. Her liberalism is opposed by Mr Thabane, with whom she disputes the meaning of such things as comradeship and childhood. There is a kinship between Mr Thabane and Elizabeth Curren. Both are teachers. Mr Thabane recognises Elizabeth through her car, and their exchange tells us something about their relationship:

'It is a Hillman, your car, isn't it,' said Mr Thabane. 'There can't be too many left on the roads.'

I was surprised. After what had passed between us. But he seemed to bear no grudge.

'From the time when British was best,' I replied. 'I am sorry if I do not make sense.'

He ignored the apology, if that is what it was. 'Was British ever best?' he asked.

'No, of course not. It was just a slogan for a while after the War. You won't remember, you were too young.' (AOI 91-92).

Mr Thabane questions the assumptions behind a fairly thoughtless slogan. The slogan is deliberately ironic, everything is currently wrong with the car. Elizabeth refuses to replace the battery or to repair the car, in spite of advice from Vercueil and others (AOI 65). She identifies with this dysfunctional car. The exchange begins as small talk. Elizabeth is surprised that Mr Thabane is still communicating with her because she did not respond as he wanted to the sight of the bodies of Bheki and others killed in the violence in the township. She has been lost for words, refusing to use the slogans that others are using to describe the horrific sight before her. She has refused to indulge Thabane's attempt to play Socrates, putting words into her mouth (AOI 91). It is ironic that now she takes refuge in a slogan and Thabane's question draws attention to this irony. It is, however, a different kind of slogan. Mr Thabane wants her to express her horror at the murders in the form of a slogan or cliché. She refuses this slogan, lacking words for the horror she sees. Later, however, she will describe the bodies and their indestructibility. Her own slogan, "British was best" is ironic, referring as it does to a decrepit car. She has no actual illusions about the quality of anything British. It is her only reference to Britain in the novel and so it is clear that she does not identify with the country. Her daughter is in North America; she uses classical Greco-Roman examples in her attempts to understand her world. The slogan is an ironic reference to a fallen empire of which she was once a part. In some sense it is an attempt to take refuge in humour, in irony, particularly after the language required to express the present has failed her. Thabane, through his literal-mindedness, thwarts the irony and denies her that refuge.

Vercueil is Elizabeth's only escape. He is a stranger and is himself weak and decaying. He is a fairly ordinary Cape Town derelict in his language and behaviour. He has sex with another derelict in his tent, he swears in Afrikaans. He is doggedly common-sensical, refusing to accept Elizabeth's failure to contact her daughter and suggesting, when she threatens suicide in her indirect way, that she drive herself over the cliff (112). When she refuses he buys a bottle of brandy with her money and encourages her to drink and to talk. She talks about Bheki's body and her reaction to it. She is concerned that she is talking too much:

'I saw the body,' I went on, taking another sip, thinking: Shall I now grow loquacious? Lord preserve me! And as I grow loquacious will Vercueil grow loquacious too? He and I, under the influence, loquacious together in the little car? (113).

Vercueil, however, is silent as she pours out her story. He does not even respond to her questions, but just encourages her to drink and to talk. In this role, he resembles Friday, whose silence leads Susan Barton to expose herself. Because, however, Vercueil can talk, Elizabeth realises what he is doing. She eventually becomes angry and refuses to talk or to drink. She orders Vercueil out of the car and he throws the keys into the bushes and walks off. He shows her, by this gesture, that she cannot use him as a confessor and then reject him. She must rely upon him completely or not at all. He does not, however, reject her entirely; he returns in parentheses two pages later, finds the key and takes her home (118). She is placing herself in his hands, giving him her trust before she dies. This trust, this giving of herself is linked to a sexual surrender but it is not one; "When I was younger I might have given myself to him bodily. That is the sort of thing one does, one did, however mistakenly" (120). This is another kind of surrender, a far more intimate and trusting one. She is trusting that he will post her letter and give her soul repose. She depends on Vercueil for grace, for "a final resting place" (Gallagher 1991:196-7).

Conclusion

Vercueil represents that part of Elizabeth's psyche which will allow her to accept her death. Elizabeth must learn from his example, his tolerance in a country sick with judgmental Calvinism. She learns to accept herself, her environment and finally her death, free from the guilt and shame that would condemn her to eternal suffering. Coetzee identifies the disease of white Southern Africans as guilt and shame. It is shame that sickens Dick Turner in *The Grass is Singing*, when he realises that, in spite of his cut-out decorations, he has been living in poverty and he is unable to support his wife. Oswald Grant's intolerance in *The Edge o' Beyond* kills his wife, who is softer and more liberal. He forces her to live with the shame of an illegitimate marriage and her death comes as a relief. His inability to forgive mirrors an unforgiving African landscape and Joyce can only find her final years of happiness in a soft and gentle England. Coetzee challenges the old way of reading the landscape, undermining the old set of tropes by suggesting that it is we who create our setting, out of what we have inherited from our forbears. We make the landscape harsh; it does not make us harsh. But against the backdrop of this human landscape and the suffering it causes, innocence, tolerance and forgiveness are possible.

Chapter Six: A Resting Place for the Wanderer

In the eighteenth century, the novel replaces the epic as the dominant narrative form and reading becomes a private rather than a public act. Many epic characteristics make their way into the novel and novelists frequently turn to epics, particularly Homer's *Odyssey*, for inspiration. Both Dickens and Rushdie, for example, use the Homeric motif of the garden as a place of rest amid turbulent journey. In Dickens, the journey is an allegory for the struggle to survive amid the depredations of industrial urban life. For Rushdie the journey is the post-colonial movement between continents and identities. The epic paradise becomes the garden in the novel. Epic characters find their refuge ready for them. Novel characters must build theirs. The change begins with Milton, whose garden in *Paradise Lost* needs to be maintained in its perfection. Each subsequent generation redefines the concept of the garden. In the eighteenth century, Rousseau's Saint Preux and Voltaire's Candide find gardens at the end of their odysseys, but the gardens are artificial. By the eighteenth century, work is essential to the production of gardens; as Pangloss tells Candide, "...when man was placed in the garden of Eden, he was placed there *ut operaretur eum*—that he might work—which proves that man was not born to rest" (Voltaire 1759:99). Voltaire mocks Pangloss' position, since the philosopher talks about work without actually working but Jean-Jacques Rousseau takes the link between work and paradise more seriously. In *Émile* and *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, Rousseau uses paradise and gardening in ways which will help to define the colonial project. By the nineteenth century, nobody will simply stumble across paradise in their wanderings; characters must make gardens out of the scraps left by urban populations. In *Our Mutual Friend*, a squalid urban environment characterised by greed and corruption, allows only a moment of paradise. That paradise is pinched and restricted. The post-colonial condition of migrancy involves something of a return to the epic notion of paradise. Figures in Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* seek paradise, conditioned by the European literary tradition in which the trope is omnipresent. Their expectations are thwarted as the garden proves elusive.

The garden, as an artificial space, functions in opposition to paradise, a natural or divine space. Milton's Eden is a Protestant paradise because it contains no duplicity of meaning; everything is unambiguously what it seems to be. Sin results when meaning is complicated. In a fallen state, good and evil are intertwined into all knowledge as all words develop a good side and an evil side. The only possible return to paradise is a return to the simplicity of faith. The Romantics, especially following Rousseau, attempt to secularise Milton's vision. They too yearn for simplicity and purity. They desire knowledge of the sublime but they believe that humanity creates the necessary conditions for a pure, untranslated and instinctual awareness of the world. Rousseau in

particular believes that education systems muddle humanity's apprehension of the world and that it is possible to educate young men into a less confused way of seeing. The clarity of perception is thus no longer an act of divine grace but of a humble and hardy education with plenty of fresh air and sunshine. Rousseau thus begins to conflate garden and paradise. His end is a paradise in that it lacks complications in meaning. It is only what it seems to be or perhaps only *seems* to be what it seems to be, if, for example, we examine Julie's garden in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. Rousseau's gardens are allegorical, representing not only paradise but the act of their creation. The distinction between garden and paradise is dissolved as human work enters paradise and, in fact, makes paradise possible. In Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*, paradise is effaced. Rushdie's Saladin Chamcha/Salhuddin Chamchawala and Gibreel Farishta find gardens in name only. Their aeroplane, the Bostan, named for a garden of paradise, blows up at the beginning of the novel and they travel home in the sister ship, the Gulistan, at the end of the novel. Gibreel tries to create gardens and fails to do so. Chamcha never finds his garden. For Rushdie, as for Homer, the garden is elusive.

Epic Paradises: The Garden as Chimera

Odysseus begins the *Odyssey* trapped in paradise. The goddess Calypso keeps him on her island because she is in love with him. However, in spite of the beauty of the place, Odysseus is miserable, only wishing to return home. The gods send Hermes to set him free:

In the space within was the goddess herself, singing with a lovely voice, moving to and fro at her loom and weaving with a shuttle of gold. Around the entrance a wood rose up in abundant growth – alder and aspen and fragrant cypress. Birds with long wings roosted there, owls and falcons and long-tongued sea-crows that have a business upon the waters. Trailing over the cavern's arch was a garden vine that thrived and clustered; and here four springs ran near each other, then in due order ran four ways with their crystal waters. Grassy meadows on either side stood thick with violet and wild parsley. Even a Deathless One, if he came there, might gaze in wonder at the sight and might be the happier in heart. So the Keen Watcher, the Radiant One, stood there and gazed there too; and having gazed to his heart's content, he passed quickly into the ample cavern. When queenly Calypso saw him face to face, she was sure at once who he was, for the deathless gods are no strangers to one another, though one may live far apart from the rest. But bold Odysseus was not to be found within; as his custom was, he was sitting on the shore and weeping, breaking his heart with tears and sighs and sorrows (Homer 1980:56-7).

Calypso's paradise is deceptive in its appearance. In spite of its extreme beauty, Odysseus longs for the rocky shores of Ithaca. He would rather be a beggar in his own home than a kept man in a perfect garden. The garden recurs throughout the *Odyssey*

as a deceptive place of plenty. His crew are, time and again, lured into dangerous situations by the promise of plenty. Only Odysseus survives, because only he has the strength to reject paradise and continue to steer homewards.

The post-lapsarian gardens of Milton's *Paradise Regained* do not reflect the disciplined control of nature by obedient man. Instead, they serve as an instrument of temptation. Their beauty epitomises artifice and seduction, like make-up on a prostitute. These gardens represent the corrupted pagan world which Satan offers Christ. It is appealing and yet corrupt because artificial. John Dixon Hunt asserts that here, Milton's vision relies strongly upon the Italianate style of Garden, with its grottos, busts and other allegoric spaces.

Milton knew the modern Italian theatre well, having attended at least one opera in the Palazzo Barberini while he was in Rome; so it is inconceivable that he would not have been prepared, however submerged the idea in *Paradise Lost*, to acknowledge the connections between theatre and garden which we know to have been a vital part of the Englishman's appreciation of Italian gardens. And in *Paradise Regained*, where Milton specifically acknowledges gardens and groves among the various landscape of ancient Rome, their theatrical potential is again finely used: Christ enters a 'woody Scene', with alleys opening in perspective, and there the drama of temptation is played out (Hunt 1986:174).

Eden is not the same as the post-lapsarian gardens of *Paradise Regained*. While Eden is "the Garden" (Milton 1667:IV:209), planted by God, Satan offers Christ "gardens" which occur in the context of all of human society, represented by Rome. If the "idea" in *Paradise Lost* is "submerged", it is because paradise, as *the garden*, has none of the recognisable features of the artificial gardens of *Paradise Regained*. These gardens occur within the context of other historical and geographical features, unlike Eden which seems to be before history and to encompass all pre-lapsarian geography. Paradise is outside history and geography; gardens exist with human-defined time and space:

He brought our Saviour to the western side
 Of that high mountain, whence he might behold
 Another plain, long but in breadth not wide;
 Washed by the southern sea and on the north
 To equal length backed with a range of hills
 That screened the fruits of the earth and seats of men
 From cold Septentrion blasts; thence in the midst
 Divided by a river, of whose banks
 On each side an imperial city stood,
 With towers and temples proudly elevate
 On seven small hills, with palaces adorned,
 Porches and theatres, baths, aqueducts,
 Statues and trophies, and triumphal arcs,

Gardens and groves presented to his eyes,
 Above the height of mountains interposed:
 By what strange parallax or optic skill
 Of vision multiplied through air, or glass
 Of telescope, were curious to enquire (Milton 1671:IV:25-42).

These particular gardens are, for Milton, gardens, not paradise. Their context is a world in which human settlements must be protected from the fury of nature, "from cold Septentrion blasts". All the signs of pride and triumph in the gardens are thus hollow and impotent. They are only there through the grace of the protective mountains. The city, for all its proud show, is "divided by a river". Nature thus undermines humanity's attempts to recreate Eden. Due to deception, in this case an optical illusion, the human city appears to dwarf nature. The illusion is ironic because the garden owes both its existence and its division to nature. It exists in a space protected by mountains and divided by rivers, while its survival in any form is only due to the will of God. This set of gardens is a deceptive representation of the original garden which is Eden. Eden's barriers and its contents are natural and harmonious, as Satan sees during his approach:

So on he fares, and to the border comes
 Of Eden, where delicious Paradise,
 Now nearer, crowns her with enclosure green
 As with a rural mound the champaign head
 Of a steep wilderness, whose hairy sides
 With thicket overgrown, grotesque and wild,
 Access denied; and overhead up grew
 Insuperable heights of loftiest shade,
 Cedar, and pine, and fir, and branching palm,
 A sylvan scene, and yet as ranks ascend
 Shade upon shade, a woody theatre
 Of stateliest view (Milton 1667:IV:131-141).

Where gardens are characterised by division, paradise presents a unity. The alpine pine and the tropical palm grow together, protecting Eden. They form a living barrier, in contrast to the dead mountains of *Paradise Regained*. In *Paradise Lost*, the wilderness forms a crowned head, like the head of a man or of God. It is not just man who is made in the image of God, it is also man's domicile. Paradise is protected by a zone of unlimited fecundity, which forms a far more effective barrier than the artificial boundaries of the gardens.

Milton makes a connection between innocence and cultivation in Book Five of *Paradise Lost*. Adam and Eve work at directing Eden's uncontrolled fecundity and thus keep their own desires in check:

On to their morning's rural work they haste
 Among sweet dews and flow'rs, where any row

Of Fruit-trees over-woody reached too far
Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check
Fruitless embraces. Or they led the vine
To wed her elm; she spoused about him twines
Her marriageable arms, and with her brings
Her dow'r, th'adopted clusters, to adorn
His barren leaves. Them thus employed beheld
With pity heav'n's high King,... (Milton 1667:V:211-220).

The natural fecundity behaves according to social constraints. An ordered garden behaves like a good marriage, with spouses doing their duty to one another and reaching a perfect balance between fecundity and barrenness. For Milton, it is human intervention, with divine guidance, that completes nature and social and natural images are intertwined with the language as a trope for the perfect order of divine nature. This quotation, perhaps, illustrates Maureen Quilligan's point that Milton is not an allegorist. Allegory requires a multiple meaning; Milton recreates a pre-lapsarian language in which words only have a single level of meaning and that meaning is innocent. For example, the river Error is so-named simply because it wanders (Quilligan 1979:179-80). In this case marriage simply means an innocent, fecund yet controlled unity. It applies to trees as well as to people. Later, marriage will apply to the relationship between fallen human beings. It will no longer refer to the innocent relationship between trees and vines. By contrast, Finney points out that "the unfallen garden contains the seeds of its own degeneration" (Finney 1984:103). Adam and Eve must cut it to keep it from becoming wilderness, just as they must control their own appetite for the forbidden fruit. The garden thus has a double meaning because it represents its occupants' future state. Their state of innocence means that they are unaware of the link between themselves and the garden. As long as they keep their own nature in check, they will do the same with that of the garden.

The Garden in the Novel: Artificial Paradise

Rousseau initiates the romantic project by trying to move nature to a place of prominence in the garden. Gardening becomes a trope for education, in *Émile*, and has all of its old associations of love and the beautiful soul in *Julie*. The 'nature' which is simultaneously liberated and restrained in Rousseau's gardens, is also both human and 'natural'. It involves people's inner selves and the nature of trees and animals. Where medieval gardens, such as that in *Le Roman de la Rose*, involve an artificial garden in which the hand of the gardener is invisible, Rousseau offers us seemingly natural gardens in which the gardener stands by to boast of his handiwork. As de Man (1969:186) has observed, neither use of the trope is as directly opposed to the other as it seems. Rousseau's stance has implications for other romantic thinkers who write books of poetry and philosophy telling us that we should appreciate nature, rather than

reading books. It also paves the way for a Darwinist colonialist discourse whose avatars claim to be the end product of nature, its most evolved form, while boasting about the technology which enables them to subdue nature and 'lesser' beings.

We can begin to discover some of the ideals underlying Rousseau's gardening allegories in his *Confessions* (1781). He develops the parallel between gardening, eroticism and education in his own life. Mme de Warens, to whom he affectionately refers as his 'Mamma', seduces him into a love of gardening, working against his 'contempt'. In doing so, she uncovers his true nature.

I know of no study in the world so close to my natural tastes as that of plants, and the country life I have been leading for the last ten years has been nothing but one continual botanisation, though without purpose or progress. But having no idea of botany at that time I had conceived a sort of contempt, even a disgust for it. I looked upon it as no better than a study for apothecaries.... So botany, chemistry, and anatomy were confused in my mind under the name of medicine, and served only to furnish me with sarcastic jokes all day long, and to earn me an occasional box on the ears (175).

She makes the garden available to him; he goes there to read and to sleep and his interest slowly develops. He moves from mocking her medical studies (Mme de Warens is something of a herbalist) to becoming a fully fledged gardener. This is effective education, when judged against the standards of *Émile*, because it is education which allows one's pupil to find out for himself that he wants to do what you want him to do. His sexual education at her hands is less effective, because she promises her favours to him at the end of an eight-day period. He is both excited and anxious and finally disappointed because it feels like incest: 'I wet her bosom with my tears' (189-90). She feels nothing because she 'had not sought for gratification, she neither received sexual pleasure nor knew the remorse that follows' (190). Perhaps her lesson would have been more successful if she had been as subtle as in her introduction to gardening. In describing her botched attempt at his sexual education, Rousseau cites *Émile*, telling us that one should never tantalise a child with the promise of a future reward. Perhaps he is right; it was a problem of pedagogic technique, on the other hand, perhaps sex and gardening cannot be so easily conflated.

Gardening continues to serve in the confession as a surrogate intimacy, as a sign of devotion. At one point, Rousseau, believing that his health is failing, attempts to interest Mme de Warens in the garden as a surrogate Jean-Jacques. He believes he is dying:

One thing contributed towards making [my few remaining days] more pleasant; and that was my endeavour to foster her taste for the country by means of every amusement I could devise. By making her love her garden, her chicken-yard, her pigeons, and her cows, I came

to grow fond of them all myself; and these little occupations, which filled my day without disturbing my tranquillity, were more valuable to me than the milk and all the other remedies which were to preserve my poor frame and restore it, insofar as that was possible (220).

He tries to follow what he perceives as 'Mamma's' earlier seduction into gardening by seducing her. He does not tell us whether he succeeds in this aim, or even really establishes that she had very subtly made a gardener of him. Instead, he recounts his own seduction. He seduces himself into becoming a gardener, and as a result is made healthier. Fletcher discusses the mediæval *Hortus Conclusus* as an allegory for the healthy body; the enclosed garden keeps contagion out (Fletcher 1964:201n). For Rousseau, the act of gardening produces a healthy body.

When Jean-Jacques goes on an adventure, he returns to find that he has been replaced in almost every aspect of Mamma's life (including the sexual one) by the 'noisy' young Vintzenreid who is a paragon of control and efficiency:

He neglected nothing except the garden, for gardening was too peaceful a job for him and did not make enough noise. His great joy was to load and drive a waggon, to saw and split wood; and he was always to be seen with an axe or a mattock in his hand, always to be heard running about, and thumping and shouting at the top of his voice (249).

Large tools and 'thumping and shouting' have replaced the quiet dedication of the gardener. Perhaps the two opposed rôles serve as metaphors for sexual personae. Rousseau's characterisation of Vintzenreid is jealous speculation: by conflating his own sexual rôle with his identity as gardener, perhaps he hopes to convince his readers that his rival's personality can also be so conflated. This overview of Rousseau's autobiographical use of gardening can be applied to his fictional views. Rousseau confines each of these: rather than using the garden as an open-ended trope, he gives us the erotic garden in *Julie* and the educational one in *Émile*.

Julie's Garden: Elysium, Eden or Escape?

Rousseau's *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1761) is an epistolary novel about an unrequited love. Saint-Prieux, a private tutor near Geneva, falls in love with his student, Julie, and writes her an anguished letter, confessing his feelings. He is relieved to find that his love is reciprocated but, once Julie's parents find out about the love, he is fired and Julie is forbidden ever to see him again. Julie is torn between loyalty to her lover and to her father. She chooses the latter, marrying one Monsieur de Wolmar, an elderly friend of her father's, and becomes a good and chaste wife. Saint-Prieux, in the meantime, travels off to the colonies and returns to Switzerland, mature and sun-tanned. Monsieur de Wolmar invites him to stay at their estate at Clarens, where Saint-

Prieux is dazzled by de Wolmar's paternal ordering of the estate and by the beauty of Julie's apparently wild garden.

Saint Prieux recalls Voltaire's *Candide* who also travels out into the world. While Saint Prieux is a teacher, *Candide* leaves before he has a chance to be corrupted by too much education. On his travels, he seeks proof that "this is the best of all possible worlds" (Voltaire 1759:2) and encounters war, slavery and the inquisition. *Candide* is an eternal innocent, who is not caught up in the ideologies of others. He experiences the world, but does not allow it to affect him. *Candide* is, like Saint Prieux, expelled from the castle due to his love for his master's daughter. The expulsion also prompts a series of educational travels, which help to mature *Candide*. He finds much of the world crude and grasping, only discovering peace in the excessively wealthy El Dorado. With a surplus of mineral wealth, the inhabitants of this country do not need to pursue wealth and power. Instead they have become a nation of simple and honest gardeners. When *Candide* and his friends return to Germany, it is only to "cultivate our garden" (100). By doing so, they escape a corrupt world and re-create utopia.

Julie refers to her garden as her 'Elysium' (Pléiade 471:McDowell 304). Elysium is the opposite of Eden because it lies at the end, not the beginning, of life. While Rousseau's novel takes its name from the 12th century *Letters of Abelard and Héloïse*, and shares its preoccupation with chaste love, it is a rediscovery of a pagan trope of an erotic garden. Finney traces the development of this trope to Homer and before. Zeus and Hera consummate their love in a garden created for them by the earth (Finney 1984:16). Rousseau's garden deviates from the classical norm because it is not a place where love can be consummated. The consummation occurred long ago in Julie's father's bower. Julie's socially-unacceptable desire has been channelled into the creation of the garden which only seems to be the one place on the otherwise orderly estate where nature can run rampant. This appearance is deceptive. The desire that the garden replaces has been sublimated into a socially acceptable place and is, in a sense, dead. The garden is therefore the graveyard of desire. It mirrors the cloister in *The Letters of Abelard and Héloïse* because it is the site in which carnal love becomes something more sacred. In a letter to Abelard, Héloïse compares her convent to a 'plantation... sown with plants which are still very tender and need watering if they are to thrive' (Abelard and Héloïse 1616:111). The souls of the young nuns are the plants and the water is Abelard's knowledge of religion and of monastic life. The mediæval view of a garden is that it needs constant attention and watering.

Saint-Prieux thinks that Julie's wild garden is the spontaneous product of nature allowed to run its course. 'It cost you only neglect' he tells Julie (Pléiade 472:McDowell 305). He makes the romantic blunder of believing that nature left to its own devices will create a perfect garden in a confined space. Julie tells him that he is

wrong: 'It is true that nature has done everything... but under my direction.' She then shows him how she has created the illusion of a tropical paradise by making paths twist and planting indigenous Swiss plants. Under its wild surface, the garden is a rather staid orchard. Rather than functioning as an orchard, the garden has become a refuge for birds and animals. It is a place where Julie may escape the responsibilities of being lady of Clarens. In a note to the description of the garden, Rousseau contrasts it to the 'future' of gardening. This type of garden is also a fashionable one: a '*jardin anglais*' (de Man 1969:185), which will make way for other fashions. Rousseau sees the future of gardening as a lifeless one in which gardens will be filled with porcelain, china, sand and empty vases rather than plants (Pléiade 480:McDowell 312).

While this garden contains living plants and animals, it is a far cry from nature's exuberance. The empty and artificial decorations which Rousseau so disparages are metaphors for the living plants of a real garden. In the same way, the garden's wilderness serves as a metaphor for the erstwhile passion of Saint-Prioux and Julie. While we can be seduced by Rousseau's impassioned description, we must not forget that this is merely a garden in a book; barren, metaphorical and printed across the dried pulp of dead trees. It is a controlled garden which makes certain rhetorical points. It echoes Julie's paths which lead back on each other, creating an illusion of an infinite garden. Both are testaments to the desire to have a limitless space at one's command, to be free to exploit that space, or leave it fallow. Paul de Man shows the similarity between the gardens in *Julie* and in *Le Roman de la Rose*. They are both filled with features which are 'controlled not by nature but by the ingenuity of the inhabitants' (de Man 1969:186). It is thus not possible to read one garden as artificial and the other as natural. De Man thus deconstructs the opposition between the gardens, telling us that both follow 'the traditional topos of the erotic garden' (187). Both point to the creative ability of the writer, rather than the gardener.

Both gardens, as de Man also notes, are exclusive. The birds settle in Julie's garden because the servants (*valets*) are kept out (Pléiade 476:McDowell 308-309). Away from the disruptions associated with people, the birds live in familial bliss because Julie promotes 'paternal and maternal tenderness' (Pléiade 476:McDowell 309). Julie's garden is in this way a microcosm of her husband's orderly estate in which Monsieur de Wolmar encourages similarly harmonious relationships among his workers (*domestiques*). Both maintain their harmony by excluding dangerous outside influences. The *Hortus Conclusus* maintains the health of the garden's inhabitants. The sealed-off garden re-encloses and protects Julie's already-lost virginity.

Monsieur de Wolmar proves to be a correct husband for Julie through his careful stewardship of the family estate. He is a mature and balanced individual who welcomes Saint-Prioux hospitably, knowing that openness is a far more successful way of ending

the affair than secrecy. This ending, of course, mirrors Abelard's emasculation at the hands of Héloïse's uncle (Abelard and Héloïse 1616:75), which moves that relationship rather sharply from the physical to the metaphysical. De Wolmar treats Saint-Prieux as a long-lost son, inviting him into his tranquil family. Julie is the Wife and Mother in the centre of this happy tableau. If Saint-Prieux were to disrupt this happy family, he would show ingratitude and commit incest. He therefore accepts his place in the new order of things, and is emasculated just as effectively as Abelard. The latter, we must remember, did not view his emasculation as an entirely negative thing. He tells us 'God's grace [cured] my lechery by depriving me of those organs with which I practised it' (Abelard and Héloïse 1616:65). Abelard saw his castration as part of a divine plan. Saint-Prieux sees his as part of the wisdom of the atheist Monsieur de Wolmar.

Through his sensitivity and wisdom, Monsieur de Wolmar shows that he is a husband in both senses of the word. He not only protects the valuable resource that is his wife, in this case by bringing an old passion to an end through careful management; he also 'husbands' his land. The French verb '*ménager*' translates the English 'to husband' fairly directly because it has all of the same implications of careful stewardship of resources; the noun refers to the family unit (*Nouveau Petit Larousse Illustré*). De Wolmar's paternal treatment of both Saint-Prieux and Julie renders the order at Clarens a literal, though chaste, ménage à trois. Just as Monsieur de Wolmar uses openness and logic to protect his wife, he skilfully manages his estate. The parallel between land and wife is made more explicit when we realise that Clarens is Julie's family estate. Monsieur de Wolmar holds Julie's father's land, and his daughter, in trust.

The estate is a monument to utilitarian planning. 'Mournful Yews' have been replaced by 'fine fruit trees'; 'useless horse chestnuts by young black mulberry trees' (Pléiade 442:McDowell 302). Everything has become both functional and beautiful rather than useless and ugly. Indeed, one wonders why anyone would ever want to plant a 'mournful yew' when there are so many happy young fruit trees to be planted. Beautiful function extends to the office buildings and, most importantly, to the servants:

Ici c'est une affaire importante que le choix des Domestiques. On ne les regarde point seulement comme des mercenaires dont on n'exige qu'un service exact; mais comme des membres de la famille, dont le mauvais choix est capable de la désoler. La première chose qu'on leur demande est d'être honnêtes gens, la seconde d'aimer leur maître, la troisième de le servir à son gré, mais pour peu qu'un maître soit raisonnable et un domestique intelligent, la troisième suit toujours les deux autres. On ne les tire donc point de la ville mais de la campagne. C'est ici leur premier

service, et ce sera sûrement le dernier pour tous ceux qui vaudront quelque chose. On les prend dans quelque famille nombreuse et surchargée d'enfants, dont les pères et mères viennent les offrir eux-mêmes. On les choisit jeunes, bienfaits, de bonne santé et de physiognomie agréable (Pléiade 445).

[Here the most important business is the choice of servants. They are not at all regarded as mere mercenaries of whom one only exacts a specific service; but as members of the family, who, if poorly selected can devastate [their employers]. The first quality one demands is that they be honest people, the second that they love their master, the third that each serves at his whim, but if the master is reasonable and the servant intelligent, the third will always follow the two others. This is their first service, and it certainly shall be the last for those who so desire. One does not, therefore, draw them from the towns but from the countryside. One picks them out from some large family over-burdened with children, where the fathers and mothers come to offer their children themselves. One chooses young people, who are courteous, of good health and agreeable physiognomy (own translation)].

This passage is on one of 32 pages which McDowell cuts from her translation. She sums up the passage as 'A description of the conduct and economy of the Wolmar household' (416). This 'conduct and economy' refers almost exclusively to the training of the servants and of their obligation to the estate, issues which will become central to colonial writing. The servants serve at their master's whim (*à son gré*); they and their master chose each other, they want to serve and then they serve without question. '*Gré*' is defined in the *Nouveau Petit Larousse* (1939) as '*Volonté, caprice*'. '*Volonté*' means 'will'; '*caprice*' has much the same meaning as in English. It is a 'sudden decision, without reflection, a sudden and passing love, changes, irregularities'. By following his master '*à son gré*,' the servant must assume that even what appears to be capricious is actually wise and useful. The ambiguity of the statement calls for a total faith that a master will live up to the ideal presented in Monsieur de Wolmar. This is the danger of using specifics as examples for the general.

Rousseau seems to offer a way out of Hegel's well-known Lord/Bondsman dialectic, fifty years before the dialectic is articulated. Lord and Bondsman are metaphors for independent consciousness or being for itself and dependent consciousness or being for others (Hegel 1807:24). The Christian message works in terms of this dialectic, using metaphors of master and servant and reversing them. The ultimate mastery of self is utter self-sacrifice. The arrangement at Clarens is not feudal, because if it were it would involve a web of agreements and obligation between a lord and his vassals. The system is voluntary; servants need to spend their lifetimes at Clarens only if they so wish. The servants are like Julie's birds: they are free to settle on the estate in order to occupy themselves with amusing the owner. Like a benevolent

deity, de Wolmar freely gives the servants a place to live and work, and to care for one another. This is the 'paternal and maternal tenderness' which Julie encourages among her birds. Just as he has become a surrogate parent to Julie and to Saint-Prioux, replacing Julie's brutal and unreasonable father, de Wolmar becomes a parent to all his employees. The parents of his prospective employees willingly hand over their most precious offspring. De Wolmar plays gardener with his employees, pruning over-abundant families and transplanting the more promising shoots into a more nurturing environment. The *ménage* extends to more than three people because the estate is a happy voluntary family. They are there, not because the master needs labour and the servants need money, but because their reciprocated love for their master means that it is in their interests to be there.

Monsieur de Wolmar is the ideal for the literary and actual figure of the firm but liberal landlord. David Bunn discusses William Alfred Campbell's creation of the Mala Mala game reserve as an allegory for "the principle of *custodianship*, an archaic eighteenth-century ideal of benevolent proprietorship which mimics aristocratic attitudes towards the distribution of estate surpluses and the management, by picturesque labourers, of proscribed game" (Bunn 1993:57). Both Rousseau and Campbell posit a romantic, pre-industrial style of management as an alternative to depersonalised industrialism. According to each the worker should place loyalty to the master and the land over his or her own self-interest. Rousseau's advocacy of pastoral harmony between classes as a solution to the problems of industrialisation and class conflict in Europe becomes a means of imposing order on colonial subjects.

Educating the Coloniser: Gardening in *Émile*

Just as Monsieur de Wolmar's employees are convinced of their need to be servants, young *Émile* must come willingly to his education. The first priority is a voluntary teacher. Like Monsieur de Wolmar, *Émile*'s father does not trust hirelings. He is not prepared to 'confide' his son's education to 'mercenaries' (Rousseau 1762:50). It is not just a professional class of servants in *Émile* who must be prepared to perform a labour of love. *Émile*'s nurse must provide more than simply milk: 'she...owe[s] him a care that calls for zeal, patience, gentleness, cleanliness' (57). Just as de Wolmar very modestly demands love from each of his employees, *Émile*'s father demands only zeal and patience among the more concrete attributes required of a wet nurse. How does one achieve such devotion?

Émile is a manual of education without coercion. It tells a tutor how to teach a small boy in such a way that he becomes self-reliant and develops an appetite for learning for its own sake. Its lessons for educating small boys can be extended to the education of servants, or at least to encouraging the kind of value system where people are encouraged to give freely of themselves for other people's benefit.

Gardening has a more concrete function in *Émile* than in *Julie*. It is a calculated means of teaching one's young pupil the value of property. The tutor waits for his charge to express an interest in how things grow, and then together they plant beans. Rousseau claims that children have no innate sense of private property or of ownership, but that since it is a useful kind of knowledge (does it take one further from a state of nature?), it can be taught. Planting a seed creates in a child a sense of ownership; but Rousseau's choice of metaphor is noteworthy, telling us the specific way in which this sense occurs. Ownership is here presented as colonial:

I become his gardener's helper. Until he has arms I plough the earth for him. He takes possession of it by planting a bean in it. And surely this possession is more sacred and more respectable than that taken of South America when Nuñez Balboa in the name of the King of Spain planted his standard on the shore of the South Sea (1762:98).

Planting a bean is a more *sacred* form of colonisation than planting something symbolic like a flag. By planting something, one occupies a piece of ground more completely. Monsieur de Wolmar's fruit trees signify an entirely new order; that he has superseded the old impotent order of Julie's father. Rousseau's form of colonisation recognises the property rights of aboriginal inhabitants. *Émile's* act of appropriation is illegal: that spot had been reserved for Monsieur Robert, the gardener, and his melons. Monsieur Robert graciously agrees to cede part of his territory to the young *Émile* and his tutor, and to recognise their property rights, on the condition that they recognise his. Once again it is those who lack authority who give rights to those who are developing authority.

In the conventional sense of the word, a tutor is both servant and master. He is hired by a master as schoolmaster to a son. In *Émile*, a tutor is a surrogate father. Rousseau has already stated that a father is best equipped to attend to his son's education (49). If an outside tutor is to be accepted at all he must be prepared to put the child's well-being ahead of his own welfare. The tutor is both master and servant to *Émile*. In this particular instance he becomes the 'under-gardener' in order to teach the boy about gardening and about property. The tutor is a kind of regent, who will guide the child, in his father's absence, until he is mature enough to make his own decisions. His guidance takes the form of allowing the child to think that he is making decisions already.

Rousseau also advocates teaching children to read by planting the seed of interest and waiting for it to germinate. The only book fit for little boys is, of course, *Robinson Crusoe*:

Robinson Crusoe on his island, alone, deprived of the assistance of his kind and the instruments of all the arts, providing nevertheless for

his subsistence, for his preservation, and even procuring for himself a kind of well-being—this is an object interesting for every age and one which can be made agreeable to children in countless ways. This is how we realise the desert island which served me first as a comparison. This state, I agree, is not that of social man; very likely it is not going to be that of *Émile*. But it is on the basis of this very state that he ought to appraise all the others. The surest way of raising oneself above prejudices and ordering one's judgements about the true relations of things is to put oneself in the place of an isolated man and to judge everything as this man himself ought to judge of it with respect to his own utility (184-185).

Rousseau is engaging in utilitarian myth-making. While he acknowledges that *Émile*'s situation is not the same as that of *Crusoe*, he suggests that *Émile* is best educated by suspending the social conditions around him and putting him in the place of a hypothetical *Crusoe*. Adorno and Horkheimer (1944) identify *Crusoe* as 'Odysseus as bourgeois handyman'. Odysseus is the perpetual wanderer, using his travels to test his cunning as he journeys toward the ever elusive home. *Crusoe* is a settler. He makes the island his colony and eventually populates it with colonists, weapons and livestock (Defoe 1719:298). He has taken a vacant piece of land and made it his by planting seeds. J M Coetzee revises this image by presenting a *Crusoe* who does not plant seeds, but prepares the ground for the promise of seeds, serving perhaps as a more effective allegory of colonialism as usually practised. In his act of colonisation, *Crusoe* reforms a group of mutineers, teaching them independence, resourcefulness and a sense of justice (273). Defoe here anticipates the end towards which Rousseau will use his book. He will catch *Émile* while he is young, before he has a chance to rebel, and will allow him to convince himself of the sort of justice the book represents. Utilitarian allegory seems to be a contradiction in terms but Rousseau makes the link explicit where he says 'we shall thus make a reality of that desert island which formerly served as an illustration.'

Our Mutual Friend: A Shrunken Garden in an Urban Wasteland

Gail Finney views the garden in the English novel as a merger of two different views of gardening. The French view of "garden as erotic enclave" is merged with the German "garden as ethical construct" (Finney 1984:102). She has created a useful binary division of national types of novel, but it breaks down in places. My examination of Rousseau has focused on the ethical construct in French writing. The garden represents a sublimation of passions in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, as in *Paradise Lost*, and an ethical classroom in *Émile*. Despite our differences, I find Finney's genealogy of the garden extremely useful. She shows how these two uses of the garden merge in Victorian fiction, reflecting the social history of the era:

In many respects the English garden type occupies a middle position between the French and German variations. As in much mid-nineteenth-century German fiction, the garden as image of Eden incorporates a past-oriented, humanistic set of values converging in the traditional family structure and associated with rural life. Reflecting the reaction against England's more urbanised and industrialised economy, however, the garden sphere in nineteenth century English fiction functions, as in the contemporaneous French novel, as the last remnant of nature in an increasingly artificial and mechanised world. But this reaction is much more subdued than in French realist fiction, the intense feelings associated with the Eden realm tend to remain within the bounds of social convention rather than advancing as far as the illicit passions of the garden as erotic enclave. Similarly, Victorian nostalgia for the lost harmony and simplicity of rural England is counter-balanced by a sense of the inevitability of urban progress (Finney 1984:102).

The English garden thus exhibits traces of French and German models, without resorting to their extremes. By the nineteenth century, the garden has come to occupy an ironic position. For Finney, the juxtaposition of the garden against urban squalor is most pronounced in the later novels of Charles Dickens. "Dickens' last works depict a society increasingly pervaded by materialism, hypocrisy, criminal violence, urban grime and injustice of every kind. From this world there is no moving to the country in the manner of Wordsworth" (Finney 1984:132). The population in England has moved into crowded and filthy cities and the notion of a pastoral landscape occupied by healthy people is a distant memory, and one which cannot be re-created. Charles Dickens' novels explore this grimy urban environment and its impact upon its various citizens. While Finney discusses *Our Mutual Friend*, *Great Expectations* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, I will limit my discussion to *Our Mutual Friend*, since it is in this text that the contrast between garden and urban desert is most highly developed.

The London of *Our Mutual Friend* is another kind of wasteland; it is built on waste in the sense that discarded people and their rubbish form its foundations. It is a foul and gloomy place and many Londoners exist through sifting through others' waste. The elder Mr Harmon has thrived on his pickings, leaving a generous legacy around which the plot of the novel revolves. Mr Harmon lived amid his heaps of "dust", accumulating money and abusing his ancient servants. He stands at one end of the spectrum, at the other is the dredger, Jesse Hexam, who earns his living pulling bodies out of the Thames, robbing them, and handing them over to the police. Unlike Harmon, Hexam reaps few material benefits from his parasitism. He is eventually drowned while attempting to rob a body. At the opening of the novel Harmon has died, leaving his estate to his servants because his greed and miserliness have estranged him from his only surviving relative, the younger John Harmon.

The pinched and squalid people are reflected in their pinched and squalid landscape. London is poor and dirty, with little regard for the spiritual life of its inhabitants. The conflation of character and landscape is apparent from the first description of Jesse Hexam:

Allied to the bottom of the river rather than the surface, by reason of the slime and ooze with which it was covered, and its sodden state, this boat and the two figures in it obviously were doing something that they often did, and were seeking what they often sought. Half savage as the man showed, with no covering on his matted head, with his brown arms bare to between the elbow and the shoulder, with a loose knot of looser kerchief lying low on his bare breast in a wilderness of beard and whisker, with such dress as he wore seeming to be made out of the mud that begrimed his boat, still there was business-like usage in his steady gaze (Dickens 1864:2-3).

Hexam's appearance, character and environment form a whole. His boat and his clothing express the mud and slime at the river bottom. Like the river, he is dirty, unpredictable and filled perhaps with unpleasant secrets. The hair on his face and chest forms a "wilderness". His appearance is wild and uncontrolled. He exists in a shadowy world just outside the law, his former partner, Roger Riderhood, suggests that Hexam has "[a] skill in purwiding (sic) what he finds" (65); thus he insinuates that Hexam sometimes murders the people he discovers in the river. It is a malicious insinuation, and an unfounded one, but the marginal nature of Hexam's work leaves him open to such suspicions. Like the filthy river on which he operates, he cannot be policed or controlled.

The elder John Harmon hides secrets in the muck, unlike Gaffer Hexam who dredges up secrets. Harmon, like Hexam, has lived amid the waste in which he plies his trade. His house is "... set in an enclosed space where certain dark mounds rose high against the sky, and where the pathway to the Bower was indicated, as the moonlight showed, between two lines of broken crockery set in ashes" (Dickens 1864:55). The mounds are mounds of rubbish and Harmon has made his fortune by sifting through the grime. The broken crockery and the ash pointing to the house are a frank admission on his part that his house is part of the waste that surrounds it. The novel's main plot revolves around wills hidden in the mounds. The first will leaves everything to John Harmon, the younger, if he marries Bella Wilfer. Otherwise the estate passes into the hands of Mr and Mrs Boffin. The second, dug up by the scurrilous Silas Wegg, leaves everything to the Crown. The third, hidden until the novel's dénouement, leaves everything to Mr and Mrs Boffin. In order to discover the legacy, both Boffin and Wegg are forced to go digging through the rubbish. Because the mounds of processed waste hide Harmon's legacy, a relationship is created between the rubbish he recycles and the money it has generated. The mounds are

discards of discards, since everything of value has been extracted, and they are great heaps of useless leavings.

Harmon is honest because his wealth is located amid the garbage that generated it. The novel's other wealthy characters, the Veneerings, live in a new and shiny house. As their name suggests, this newness and shininess is simply a veneer which covers the corruption lurking beneath. As with Hexham and Harmon, the Veneerings are thoroughly integrated with their environment: "...what was observable in the furniture was observable in the Veneerings—the surface smelt a little too much of the workshop and was a trifle sticky" (Dickens 1864:6). Like Harmon's, their wealth bears obvious traces of the process that created it. Unlike the miser, however, they do their utmost to obscure those traces. The corruption behind the Veneerings' wealth is apparent from their friends who are, with a few exceptions, parasites. The fortune hunters Alfred and Sophronia Lammler marry from the Veneering household, each thinking that the other is wealthy. Having discovered that they have duped each other, they resolve to survive by duping other people. The affable and indigent Mr Twemlow, is granted a permanent seat at their dining table by virtue of his relationship to the aristocracy. Lady Tippins occupies a similar position and compensates with snide comments about her hosts' *nouvelle richesse*. Mr Podsnap is a bigot who refuses to recognise any existence, let alone merit, outside England. With the help of these friends, Mr Veneering is elected to Parliament and abuses his position to further the cause of the railway contractors (625). Veneering finally discovers "the clue to that great mystery of how people can contrive to live beyond their means" (815), becomes insolvent, leaves Parliament and goes abroad. Their fall means the beginning of a new dispensation in which the socially and environmentally conscious John and Bella Harmon move to centre stage and the marriage of Eugene Wrayburn and Lizzie Hexham suggests the replacement of an aristocracy of money with one of character. The mounds of refuse have been dismantled and London seems prepared to move into a cleaner and brighter future. The journey of the novel from dirt and darkness to cleanliness and light is complete, although later literature will continue to explore the concept of the city as a natural and moral wasteland.

The transformation Dickens promises in his novel is only made possible by those figures who serve as guardians of morality. The clearest example of such a guardian is Gaffer Hexham's daughter Lizzie who, even as she rows his boat, remains detached from the river and its corruption. Like the young John Harmon, Lizzie is a child who remains clear of the taint of the father. John Harmon, however, has broken from his father at an early age. He is educated in Brussels and then supports himself in "the country where they make the Cape Wine" (13). Like Gertrude Page's Dinah Webberly and Bessie Head's Gilbert Balfour, John Harmon renews himself morally and

spiritually in Southern Africa. He also has the upper-class background that makes a voyage to the colonies and a return voyage possible. Lizzie Hexham is tied to her father and his legacy, and her escape is a far more humble and restricted one. She and her friend Jenny Wren retreat to their friend Riah's rooftop garden. Like Lizzie, Jenny is also a moral guardian, literally acting as parent to her alcoholic father.

Riah is a Jew who is indentured to Fascination Fledgeby, a friend of the Veneerings and an unforgiving loan shark. Fledgeby uses Riah to run the business, exploiting the stereotype of cruel Jewish moneylenders as one way to ensure that his money is repaid. Riah is portrayed as a middle-eastern sage, exploiting a somewhat more positive stereotype against the negative one: "with his palm upon the stair-rail, and his long black skirt, a very gabardine, overhanging each successive step, he might have been the leader in some pilgrimage of devotional ascent to a prophet's tomb" (279). Finney notes Riah's unreality, saying: "Dickens' depiction of Riah is deliberately anachronistic, as if to emphasise that such goodness is out of date..." (Finney 1984:135). He is kind, courteous and humble in spite of the verbal abuse he endures from his employer and even from Eugene Wrayburn. Fledgeby is blind to Riah's holiness, only congratulating himself on "what a good 'un he was for the part" (Dickens 1864:279). Also following a middle-eastern tradition, Riah has made a rooftop garden, which he shares with his friends Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren:

... For whom, perhaps with some old instinct of his race, the gentle Jew had spread a carpet. Seated on it, against no more romantic object than a blackened chimney-stack over which some humble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book; both with attentive faces; Jenny with the sharper; Lizzie with the more perplexed. Another little book or two were lying near, and a common basket of common fruit, and another basket full of strings and beads and tinsel scraps. A few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens completed the garden; and the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke, rather as if they were bridling, and fanning themselves, and looking on in a state of airy surprise (279).

This humble attempt at an eastern roof-top garden surprises the very chimneys of London. Its scraggly greenery is an affront to the pollution they generate. It is also a place of learning, where Lizzie and Jenny do their reading. In this respect it resembles the ironically named Boffin's Bower and the educational gardens of Rousseau. While Rousseau uses the artificial nature of the Jardin Anglais, Dickens uses the rooftop oasis of the middle east. Riah's garden is transplanted from an actual, geographical desert into the spiritual and artificial desert of London. Both Dickens and Rousseau suggest that learning and morality lie outside their own immediate experience. Riah and his garden belong to another time and place. Fledgeby, as European philistine, is as

immune to the virtues of learning as he is to the somewhat pathetic charms of the garden. Riah as an exotic and moral figure serves as an educator. He and his garden bring an exotic kind of natural and spiritual oasis to an urban wasteland.

The crippled and stunted Jenny Wren sees the garden as a good and peaceful place because "...you feel as if you are dead" (280). For her, death is a happy state, high above the worries and torments of ordinary people. It is "an escape *from* the world *into* the self: the "death" of Riah's rooftop garden is the province of the imagination" (Finney 1984:133). Jenny's imagination is that of a "Wordsworthian child [who] has a 'visionary gleam'"(133). She maintains a fantastic world which shelters her from her premature adulthood in which she mothers her drunken father. Like the imagination of a child in a sordid world, however, the garden is a fragile place and its fragility mirrors that of the relationship between Jenny and Riah, both marginal people, which suffers a setback when she suspects that he really is a cruel Jewish usurer. She hears an exchange between Riah and Fledgeby, in which the latter appears to be asking for mercy for debtors, while he is actually telling him to give no mercy. Fledgeby manages to appear to be a charitable sort while Riah must act the part of a monster. Based upon this exchange, Riah ceases to be Jenny's "fairy godmother" and becomes "the wicked Wolf" (574). Like the garden, their friendship too is subject to the pollutions of a harsh world and it cannot survive without a change in the environment. The rooftop garden only offers temporary respite from the urban wasteland. It is a resting place where people can educate and strengthen themselves for the battle ahead.

Paradise as delusion: *The Satanic Verses*

Rather than locating allegories of heaven and hell in landscapes, Rushdie locates them in the characters of Salhuddin Chamchawalla and Gibreel Farishta. He reverses their rôles as Salhuddin becomes satanic and sympathetic while Gibreel becomes angelic and destructive. Like Coetzee, Rushdie explores and problematizes nineteenth-century novelistic conventions in order to weave a post-colonial narrative. According to Spivak, *The Satanic Verses* is based upon "a self-ironic yet self-based modernism" (1993:225) and there is support for her reading because the central male migrant figure is the focus of the text. Salman Chamcha changes to confront a changing reality. John Harmon serves almost as an author for other characters' development, using his wealth and almost omniscient wisdom as a catalyst. For example, he teaches his future wife Bella Wilfer and his one-time guardian Nobby Boffin about the pitfalls of wealth. Chamcha is acted upon as women help to undermine his utopian view of England. In spite of this crucial difference, Rushdie follows Dickens in his broad exploration of a squalid urban landscape which serves to awaken rural nostalgia, particularly in recent migrants from the non-industrial third world.

Rushdie's London looks very similar to that of *Our Mutual Friend* and, in fact, Rushdie's novel's climax occurs at a party launching the musical of *Our Mutual Friend*. Rushdie's London shares many characteristics with its nineteenth century forebear. It is still a polluted and intolerant place but the dynamics have altered with the influx of immigrants from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Latter-day Podsnaps abound in the guise of policemen and neo-fascist hooligans. Like *Candide*, *The Satanic Verses* is a picaresque novel, whose hero encounters various kinds of intolerance and persecution before he returns home to tend his garden. While it follows the pattern of a didactic journey, punctuated by paradises, it questions the dichotomy between paradise and hell, since the hero is a devilish figure who, with the innocence of a *Candide*, wonders what has happened to him.

The hero of the novel is Salhuddin Chamchawala, a voice artist who works in advertising, radio and animation. He is an utterly anglicised Indian, who has rejected all things Indian in his embrace of the British. He has even changed his name to Saladin Chamcha. He is set against Gibreel Farishta, an Indian film star who specialises in playing deities. When their plane, *The Bostan*, is blown up by Sikh extremists, they plunge to earth. In falling Gibreel takes the form of the angel Gibreel and Chamcha takes the form of Shaitan, the devil, complete with horns, hooves and a strong odour of goat. The characters are at war with one another; Gibreel, for all his angelic appearance, initially betrays Chamcha, allowing him to fall into the hands of a bigoted squad of policemen and immigration officials, who view his horns and hooves as proof that he is simply an illegal "Packy" (Rushdie 1989:157). Chamcha, a naturalised British subject, initially shares their view of illegal immigrants, protesting that he is "not one of your fishing-boat sneakers-in, not one of your ugando-kenyattas" (140). He has spent his life trying to distance himself from Indians and is horrified when he finds himself mistaken for one. Once in the police van he is subjected to various tortures and humiliations, things he finds hard to reconcile with his vision of England: "Why did Purgatory, or Hell, or whatever this place might be, look so much like that Sussex of rewards and fairies which every schoolboy knew?" (158). When he finally proves his citizenship, he is moved to a hospital full of other fabulous monsters and warned not to say anything about his experience at the hands of the police.

In the meantime, Gibreel is living out various fantasies, he initially takes Rosa Diamond, an old woman who finds them on the beach, back into her tempestuous youth in Argentina. Later he takes himself to Jahilia, the place of sand, where he inspires a prophet called Mahound to write a holy book. He inspires Ayesha, the butterfly girl in India, to lead a pilgrimage to the sea. While Chamcha is ashamed of his metamorphoses, Gibreel delights in his, displaying a certain megalomania. Neither has any control over what he has become. Gibreel does not know what to tell Mahound.

Chamcha grows bigger and more demonic, and, in spite of himself, becomes an allegorical expression for the anger of black people in London. Neither can see, initially, why they have changed. The novel leaves the question of what they represent open ended. They are realistic figures who have been allegorised, called upon to represent much larger forces than themselves. It seems at first that their signified is specifically Indian; perhaps Gibreel represents the conservatism, even the fundamentalism of post-colonial India while Chamcha represents the need to cast off an Indian identity, to obliterate one's heritage and become a part of the metropole. Each is punished for their position. Gibreel sows intolerance and discord wherever he goes. Chamcha is forcibly reminded that he is black, that he belongs to the margins, not to the centre. Later in the novel, the author speculates that their difference is more essential and manichean:

...Should we even say that these are two fundamentally different *types* of self? Might we not agree that Gibreel, for all his stage-name and performances; and in spite of born-again slogans, new beginnings, metamorphoses;— has wished to remain, to a large degree, *continuous* — that is, joined to and arising from his past; — that he chose neither near-fatal illness nor transmuting fall; that, in point of fact, he fears above all things the altered states in which his dreams leak into, and overwhelm, his waking self, making him that angelic Gibreel he has no desire to be; — so that his is still a self which, for our present purposes we may describe as 'true' ... whereas Saladin Chamcha is a creature of *selected* discontinuities, a *willing* re-invention; his *preferred* revolt against history being what makes him, in our chosen idiom, 'false'? And might we not go on to say that it is this falsity of self that makes possible in Chamcha a worse and deeper falsity — call this 'evil' — and that this is the truth, the door, that was opened in him by his fall? — While Gibreel, to follow the logic of our established terminology, is to be considered 'good' by virtue of *wishing to remain*, for all his vicissitudes, at bottom an untranslated man (Rushdie 1989:427).

With its interrogative style, its pauses and its stresses, the passage parodies academic discourse. For a moment, the author plays his own critic, speculating upon the allegorical value of his characters. The conditional tone of his assertions undermines any possible claim that this is truly the truth about either character. The characters are intertwined, as two possible states of existence who fall back into one another. Chamcha is conservative in dress and outward appearance while Gibreel is a man of many faces. On a deeper level, however, Chamcha speaks with many voices. Both figures express the contrast between inner and outer or between 'appearance' and 'truth'.

While Gibreel and Chamcha initially appear opposed, although the reason for the opposition is never clear, they are figures for the same allegory. Homi Bhabha develops this point:

... More specifically I have argued that appeals to the national past must also be seen as the anterior space of signification that 'singularises' the nation's cultural totality. It introduces a form of alterity in the double narrative figures of Gibreel Farishta/Saladin Chamcha, or Gibreel Farishta/Sir Henry Diamond, which suggests that the national narrative is the site of an ambivalent identification; a margin of the uncertainty of cultural meaning that may become the space for an agonistic minority position. In the midst of life's fullness, and through the representation of this fullness, the novel gives evidence of the profound perplexity of the living (Bhabha 1994:167).

The choice between Chamcha and Farishta is not either/or. Both characters realise many possibilities and, most significantly, they embody the idea that things are not what they seem. Farishta, even as he appears to represent a purer form of identity, takes on the character of Henry Diamond, an English settler in Argentina, after his fall from the sky. The shades of their allegorisation wander across all the varied locales of the novel, and it is impossible to trace the full development of each character or to identify all of the consequences of their identity without a book-length study which examines the novel in relation to such things as the English novel, the post-colonial identity, the Koranic tradition, Persian poetry, to name a few. Here I will examine each character in relation to the city as desert. A metaphorical figure only really becomes allegorical when it finds itself in an allegorical landscape. The landscapes here are Jahilia, the place of sand, a pure city which exists outside and before European colonisation, and post-colonial London which owes a good deal to the nineteenth-century vision of Charles Dickens.

Jahilia is a trading city on a caravan route through the desert. Nomads have settled here and fixed their identities. It is "a city of businessmen.... The name of the tribe is *Shark*" (Rushdie 1989:95). It is necessarily a conservative and intolerant place which attempts to make its shifting identities more concrete:

The city of Jahilia is built entirely of sand, its structures formed of the desert whence it rises. It is a site to wonder at: walled, four-gated, the whole of it a miracle worked by its citizens, who have learned the trick of transforming the fine white dune sand of those forsaken parts, – the very stuff of inconsistency, – the quintessence of unsettlement, shifting, treachery, lack of form, – and have turned it, by alchemy, into the fabric of their newly invented permanence. These people are a mere three or four years removed from their nomadic past, when they were rootless as the dunes, or rather rooted in the knowledge that the journey itself was home (93-94).

Jahilia represents the attempts of nomadic people to concretise a shifting identity. It becomes an allegory as questions of identity resurface throughout the text. Jahilia mirrors London, expressing the dilemma faced by Chamcha as well as by the entire immigrant population. It suggests that the problems of migrancy are neither new nor limited to formerly-colonised subjects in the late twentieth century. Jahilia responds to its status with a conservatism and greed reminiscent of Podsnap and the Veneerings in *Our Mutual Friend*. It refuses to tolerate difference and seeks to solidify further its position by gaining wealth through any means available. The chief target of the city's intolerance is another natural element, water:

...Water is the enemy in Jahilia. Carried in earthen pots, it must never be spilled (the penal code deals fiercely with offenders), for where it drops the city erodes alarmingly. Holes appear in roads, houses tilt and sway. The water carriers of Jahilia are loathed necessities, pariahs who cannot be ignored and therefore can never be forgiven. It never rains in Jahilia; there are no fountains in the silicon gardens. A few palms stand in enclosed courtyards, their roots travelling far and wide below the earth in search of moisture (94).

The city is a monument to the persistence of the desert and of those who dwell therein. While desert and garden are usually posited as opposites, here the gardens themselves are made of the desert. The city thus lacks the space even to tolerate an oasis. Like most new things it is terribly vulnerable, in this case to the slightest drop of water. Water is its opposite and those who carry water are excluded from the dealings of the city and are treated with contempt. The exclusion of the water carriers becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because they form the backbone of the new religion of Submission, a religion which will replace the fundamentalism of sand with that of water and similarly invert all the values of the city. The religion will occupy the city, force a new code upon it and this code will give rise to various abuses and hypocrisies. The religion of water resurfaces with the exiled Imam in London, who "drinks water constantly, one glass every five minutes, to keep himself clean" (Rushdie 1989:209). The Imam expects Gibreel to lead the revolution to cleanse his country of Desh from the culture of wine and the Empress. Jahilia is thus the place of singularity because it lies opposed to the multiple existences of London.

Chamcha initially embraces an Englishness which he sees as monolithic as Jahilia. He is determined "to become the thing his father was-not-could-never-be, that is a goodandproper Englishman" (Rushdie 1989:43). His father responds by attacking his lack of authenticity:

'A man untrue to himself becomes a two-legged lie, and such beasts are Shaitan's best work,' he wrote, and also, in more sentimental vein: 'I have your soul kept safe, my son, here in this walnut-tree.

The devil has only your body. When you are free of him, return and claim your immortal spirit. It flourishes in the garden.' (Rushdie 1989:48).

Changez locates "the garden" at their home in India, linking it to Chamcha's "immortal spirit". Chamcha is looking for an English garden, inspired by the great tradition of English literature. In order to force himself into England, he must force Englishness into himself and ignore certain glaring contradictions. He lives under the delusion that he can convert to this Englishness, that with the right clothes and the right voice, they will accept him as one of their own. He fails constantly and proudly ignores his failures. He arrives in a fairly consistent England in the 1950s, where he attends public school and an English university. Chamcha obtains "a British passport, because he had arrived in the country before the laws tightened up" (47). His Englishness also involves purging himself and his surroundings of anything Indian. He resembles the friend in Marechera's "Black Skin What Mask":

He tried to purge his tongue too, by improving his English and getting rid of any accent from the speaking of it. It was painful to listen to him, as it was painful to watch him trying to scrub the blackness out of his skin (HOH 93).

The friend also wears expensive clothes and attempts to blend in to England. Like Chamcha, however, the physical fact of his skin colour prevents his assimilation. Chamcha also finds himself betrayed by his accent. Zeenat Vakil tells him "You know what you are, I'll tell you. A deserter is what, more English than, your Angrez accent wrapped around you like a flag, and don't think it's so perfect, it slips, baba, like a false moustache" (Rushdie 1988:53). Like Marechera's friend, he is acting out the rôle of an Englishman but his costume keeps slipping, leaving him naked and exposed.

Chamcha is an early immigrant who beats the later waves of immigration from the commonwealth into Britain and builds his sense of his own superiority upon his early arrival. He is an ideological, rather than an economic migrant and is also a product of an upper-class, conservative environment which venerates things English, although he is an extreme example of this tendency. During the course of his stay in England, the monolith of Englishness begins to break up. London becomes a city of many identities, many cultures because the new arrivals, knowing that the English will not accept them, are not even prepared to waste their time attempting to assimilate. Faced with this challenge to their identity, the English, whose cruelty was manifested in their treatment of the young Chamcha at public school, become openly barbarous as they try to demonstrate that Englishness cannot be acquired.

Chamcha ignores a primary rule of colonial education and post-colonial migrancy, that "to be Anglicised is *emphatically* not to be English" (Bhabha 1994:87). Bhabha

identifies the missionary project in England as serving to produce a class of hybrid people, of “mimic men”(87) who will serve as a buffer between the English governors and the Indian governed. Chamcha deludes himself, unconsciously realising that he cannot become English, he accepts Anglicisation according to the terms of the colonisers. He is excluded from English secrets; they will not tell him how to eat kippers or why they laugh at him. His choice of profession reflects his status as mimic. In ‘doing voices’ for puppet shows, radio and animated advertisements, he promotes his illusion of Englishness while keeping his appearance securely in the shadows. As a single anglophilic individual, Chamcha moves into the niche that the colonisers have constructed for him. Not satisfied with such status, a later generation of arrivals refuse to accept conditional residence in the capital. They begin to re-form the place in their own terms.

Chamcha as Shaitan unwittingly becomes the champion of the reformation. He finds himself in a Bengali boarding house, protected by Sufyan and family. Sufyan asks him, rhetorically, by way of invitation: ‘Where else would you go to heal your disfigurements and recover your normal health? Where else but here, with us, among your own people, your own kind?’ (Rushdie 1989:253). Sufyan’s wife, Hind, is not so welcoming. She cannot believe that, in addition to all his other failings, her husband is prepared to let Shaitan stay in their house with their two young daughters. The daughters, Mishal and Anahita, view him as an interesting ‘freak’. They are new Londoners. They no longer have strong ties to Bangladesh but find that England treats them as outsiders. They join the children of immigrants from other parts of the commonwealth in trying to protect themselves and their homes from fascist attacks. Chamcha responds later to Sufyan’s question: ‘I’m not your kind... You’re not my people. I’ve spent half my life trying to get away from you” (253). The English, his rôle-models, have rejected him and he rejects London’s Indian community. His insularity places him in the position of Christian in Marechera’s *Black Sunlight*, who has spend years of travelling “In search of my true people” (*BS* 4). Christian finds a group of anarchists with whom he shares a common purpose. Chamcha is forced to become an allegory for the disenfranchisement of black people in London.

As Shaitan, Chamcha begins to occupy the dreams of blacks and whites alike:

...the image of the dream-devil started catching on, only amongst what Hal Valance had described as the *tinted persuasion*. While non-tint neo-Georgians dreamed of a sulphurous enemy crushing their perfectly restored residences beneath his smoking heel, nocturnal browns-and-blacks found themselves cheering, in their sleep, this what-else-after-all-but-black-man, maybe a little twisted up by fate class race history, all that, but getting off his behind, bad and mad, to kick a little ass (286).

He is an unwilling avatar of black resistance to various forms of racism and oppression who causes concern and uncertainty among English whites. Mishal and Anahita Sufyan's initial positive response is echoed among their peers and his dream self becomes an expression of their anger and aspirations. Even as he becomes the heroic 'Goatman,' Chamcha clings resolutely to the ideal of England as expressed in English literature. Like Eliot's Prufrock, he says 'This is not what I meant, at all' in response to his growing popularity, while Mishal tells him that like Lewis Carroll's Alice he is 'growing out of the attic' (287). Chamcha is changing London, even as he tries to escape into the safe and known world of literature.

Gibreel, on the other hand, actively tries to change London, to make it into his own tropical city, a latter day Jahilia. He wants to transform the city systematically, using "Geographer's London, all the way from A to Z" (Rushdie 1989:322). His first attempt to save a lost soul leads to a punch in the nose. He sees demons and goblins everywhere, but no hope of salvation as, through its very geography, the city as place joins with the city as citizens in resisting him:

But the city in its corruption refused to submit to the dominion of the cartographers, changing shape at will and without warning, making it impossible for Gibreel to approach his quest in the systematic manner he would have preferred. Some days he would turn a corner at the end of a grand colonnade built of human flesh and covered in skin that bled when scratched and find himself in an uncharted wasteland, at whose distant rim he could see tall familiar buildings, Wren's dome, the high metallic spark-plug of the Telecom Tower, crumbling in the wind like sandcastles. He would stumble across bewildering and anonymous parks and emerge into the crowded streets of the West End, upon which, to the consternation of the motorists, acid had begun to drip from the sky, burning great holes in the surfaces of the roads. In this pandemonium of mirages he often heard laughter: the city was mocking his impotence, awaiting his surrender, his recognition that what existed here was beyond his powers to comprehend, let alone to change. He shouted curses at his still-faceless adversary, pleaded with the Deity for a further sign, feared that his energies might, in truth, never be equal to the task (Rushdie 1989:327).

Gibreel, the at times unwilling and confused avatar of the single path, runs into the mutability of the city. It is a huge mass of people, buildings and vacant spaces which constantly transforms itself. Because it resists a single reading, it becomes to Gibreel, as to other fundamentalists, a place of chaos. Here the desert imagery takes over. The city is "an uncharted wasteland", full of "crumbling... sandcastles". Everything that would make it familiar or readable becomes a mirage. Nothing can grow in this city because acid drips from the sky. Gibreel's fantasy blends with the commuter's reality as this acid causes "consternation". The enemy is everywhere in the city and he realises

that, since such an amorphous and incomprehensible mass cannot be saved, he must destroy it. He first attempts a warning, growing to many times life-size and stepping out into traffic. A limousine, rented by the film producer Whisky Sisodia, drives into him. Gibreel then attempts to render the wasteland fertile by “the metamorphoses of London into a tropical city” (354). He reads the city and its functions as an allegory of its weather. He brings on “a tropical heatwave” (356) and then returns to Jahilia. Going back once more to London, he finds the heatwave growing, but that it only brings more chaos.

The clash between Chamcha and Gibreel comes in a setting from Chamcha’s beloved English Lit. It is a party held at the film set for the musical version of *Our Mutual Friend*, which has a miniature Dickensian London created as a set. The con-man Billy Battuta and his lover Mimi Mamoulian use the party to celebrate their release from prison in New York. The big budget movie production succeeds where Gibreel failed. It shrinks the chaos of the London wasteland into something more readable:

Chamcha enters the arena and is amazed. – Here London has been altered – no, *condensed*, – according to the imperatives of film. – Why here’s the Stucconia of the Veneerings, those bran-new, spick and span new people, lying shockingly adjacent to Portman Square, and the shady angle containing various Podsnaps. – And worse: behold the dustman’s mounds of Boffin’s Bower, supposedly in the near vicinity of Holloway, looming in this abridged metropolis over Fascination Fledgeby’s rooms in the Albany, the West End’s very heart! – But the guests are not disposed to grumble; the reborn city, even rearranged, still takes the breath away; most particularly in that part of the immense studio through which the river winds, the river with its fogs and Gaffer Hexham’s boat, the ebbing Thames flowing beneath its two bridges, one of iron, one of stone. – Upon its cobbled banks the guests’ gay footsteps fall; and there sound mournful, misty, footfalls of ominous note. A dry ice pea-souper lifts across the set (Rushdie 1989:422).

It is a more readable London, one which has been “condensed” and “abridged” for a mass market audience. While the set is technically dazzling, it has a flat, artificial property which gives it the sense of poor taste and of things not quite being in their proper place. The whole atmosphere of *Our Mutual Friend* has become as “bran-new” as the Veneerings. The musical adaptation has lost the Dickensian sense, echoed by Rushdie earlier in *The Satanic Verses*, of London as a vast urban desert. A significant absence from the set is Riah’s rooftop garden. It is, perhaps, too fine a detail for a musical, but it leaves the neo-Dickensian London, and thus Rushdie’s London, without an oasis.

Chamcha, unlike *Candide*, never finds a garden in which to rest. He makes a journey home on an Air India jet called the Gulistan, the sister ship to the Bostan. Both are named after gardens of paradise, or gardens in Persian poetry. The novel in this sense begins and ends with the name of a garden, but the garden is merely a mirage. The novel does not end with a garden; Spivak claims that “*The Satanic Verses* must end with Salhuddin Chamchawala’s reconciliation with *father* and nationality, even if the last sentence records sexual difference with the idiom of casual urban fucking...” (1993:223). Chamcha takes back his original name and reclaims his inheritance as he returns to India to care for his dying father. The garden will be destroyed as the family home at Scandal Point is bulldozed to make room for “One more high-rise, one less piece of old Bombay” (Rushdie 1989: 535). That property is left to Kasturbabai, a servant who became the surrogate for Changez Chamchawala’s first wife, and she opts to dispose of it. The passing of the father creates space for a woman to make her own decision. Salhuddin loses his emotional attachment for the place after witnessing Gibreel’s suicide. He is re-inserted into India but it is not the India of his father. Zeeny Vakil, his first Indian lover, brings him into contact with the politics of life and culture of India. His final break comes when Gibreel commits suicide in front of him in the office at Scandal Point. This violent memory replaces his childhood memories and he allows Zeeny Vakil to lead him out of a childhood paradise which was never one and into an involvement with India.

Conclusion

The single allegory of a garden points to many moments within the Rousseauian text. Julie’s garden mirrors de Wolmar’s estate. *Émile*’s gardening serves to reinforce many of the messages found in *Robinson Crusoe*. Both sets of tropes promote resourcefulness and imagination. Each is an outward and visible proof that the gardener has an organised soul. The beautiful soul is not just an expression of the beautiful garden that surrounds it. It proves its beauty and order, ironically, since order is often presented as a Neo-Classical concern, by the fruits of its labour. While Rousseau’s experiments in natural gardening and humane and industrious estate management are to be found in Switzerland, they are presented as anomalous because they function in an artificial European social milieu. Only in the colonies, where a man is alone with his resources and the barren land, can anyone truly prove his manhood and produce the kind of estates whose prototype is to be found in Clarens. These people will be in close proximity to vast tracts of unspoilt nature, allowing them to develop a truly Rousseauian education. The pre-colonial vision comes under fire from both colonial and post-colonial writers. Gertrude Page’s Oswald Grant and J M Coetzee’s Daniel Foe, in attempting to rebuild paradise, leave only a dry barrenness. Coetzee’s Magistrate can only find a barren paradise. Rushdie’s protagonists, as post-

colonials, are denied any paradise at all. By the twentieth century the romantic ideal of the man-made paradise has been severely problematised. Conversely, however, in Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* and Marechera's *Black Sunlight*, in societies torn by cataclysmic wars, safe and creative spaces occur. These spaces look surprisingly like gardens.

Chapter Seven:
Paradise as Refuge in *Black Sunlight* and *The Life and Times of Michael K*.

According to Angus Fletcher, battles and journeys are common features in allegory. Battles represent internal struggles as the subject tries to unify his or her psyche. The most obvious of such allegories is the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius, in which aspects of the psyche, like *Libido* and *Pudicia* battle for control (Lewis 1936:66-68). Fletcher uses the *Psychomachia* as a generic type for the allegorical battle. The allegorical journey becomes the progress, after Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Fletcher explains: "The *psychomachia* and the progress are narrative images of the struggle. They are battles for, and journeys toward, the final liberation of the hero. If a temporary liberation occurs along the way, it is but the precursor of one final victory" (Fletcher 1964:22). Both Marechera's *Black Sunlight* and Coetzee's *Life and Times of Michael K* project current conflicts on to an imaginary future of total war. Such projection is an allegorical technique, often used fairly crudely in science fiction. These conflicts also represent the internal contradictions of the colonial and post-colonial subject. Each text thus combines psychomachia with apocalyptic distopia. The hero in each embarks upon a journey, attempting to escape the conflict around him. Neither text, however, offers a final victory. Paradise and gardens are merely temporary sites of refuge from endless civil war and oppression.

Both novels tell of a state of violence which has escalated to the point where it is no longer possible to determine the combatants. Michael K hides from the soldiers of both sides. Christian is a fellow traveller with a group of anarchists, the BSO, in the midst of an all-consuming civil war. The protagonists grow up in the context of oppression and war, attempting to define themselves in spite of the inhumanity around them. The novels share many thematic relationships. Both describe a society after the breakdown of order and normality. Both resist racial classifications and an easy taking of sides in this post-totalitarian society. Both novels foreground disabled characters. Marechera's narrator Christian marries the blind Marie; Michael K, who himself is harelipped, attempts to move his invalid mother. Each novel rejects any sense of conventional morality, which gives Christian and Michael K a distorted view of the world, rendering them more perceptive than a more conventional narrator. In Coetzee's novel, Michael K's reading of the world is contrasted to that of the medical officer in the prison camp, whose liberalism renders him blind to the reality of Michael K's situation.

From Racial War to Total War

Marechera claims in an interview with Alle Lansu that both novels refuse to reduce the conflict to a racial one, compensating for what could be an over-emphasis on race in Southern African literature:

DM ...some people have got a problem with *Black Sunlight*. They can't decide whether Sally or Nicola or Katherine or Sordid Joe are white or black, because I don't specify the race of anyone in there. If you have developed emotionally and intellectually to the stage where for you it's not the colour of the person but the fire which makes them unique as an individual, then it can be very boring to read a book which categorises everyone in terms of race. That's one of the problems of South African literature.

AL ... But it is historically understandable.

DM Yes, but for me, because Zimbabwe is now independent, it means that Zimbabwean literature no longer has to do that. Already a South African writer, J.M. Coetzee, in his novel *The Life and Times of Michael K*, has shown the way (Veit-Wild 1992:29).

Marechera believes that literature should reflect the movement away from the racial dynamics of the colonial period. While both texts are thus non-racial, neither suggests that the end of racial conflict means the end of conflict in Southern Africa. Each instead shows that the racial conflicts of the nineteen seventies and eighties could have expanded into a cataclysm that was indiscriminate in its destruction. The conflict grows out of the primary lack of respect for human life and individual identity that characterises apartheid education and other aspects of the bureaucratic state. In each novel, the conflict has its most profound impact at the level of the individual psyche.

While the final conflict in *Black Sunlight* appears to be a non-racial one, the novel begins with two stereotypically racialised characters fighting over the narrator. The narrator, who later calls himself Christian, is a post-colonial, who identifies himself as a man in a "black skin", which is possibly "the wrong skin" (*BS* 4). He is initially the court jester to a "chief, as black as human beginnings" (*BS* 1). The chief is brutal, totalitarian and anti-intellectual. He is physically, as well as politically powerful, and is ruled by his passions: "The fantastic physiognomy of my great chief suggested sudden and barbaric impulses, crude and insatiable appetites, dark and grim events (*BS* 6). Blanche Goodfather is the chief's antithesis. She is a white woman, who represents an intellectual quest. She is "an intrepid seeker after the ideal human society" (*BS* 4) who saves the narrator from the chief's forces by allowing them to gang-rape her, surrendering to the chief's patriarchal authority, while maintaining control. As she tells the narrator, "...I convinced them that it would be even more pleasurable for them to use my cartons of Durex" (*BS* 6). Blanche brings Christian payments for his work as a

photographer and news of his “strange acquaintances” in another, anarchic place. The story of these acquaintances is told as a flashback. Christian is revealed as a refugee from a state of total war, one who has returned from exile, moving from the anarchy of another state to his chief’s total, traditional rule. The conflict between mind, stereotypically allegorised through the European figure of Blanche, and body, similarly presented through the African figure of the chief, frames the other conflicts in the novel. Each figure represents a possible set of values for the narrator, “Swinging. Swinging in a cocoon of chickenshit. Europe was in my head, crammed together with Africa, Asia and America” (*BS* 4-5).

David Pattison suggests that in *The Black Insider*, a precursor to *Black Sunlight*, the characters are different “versions of Marechera” which express various “alternative scenarios for the author’s life” (Pattison 1995:5). In Pattison’s reading, “the Devil’s End of *Black Sunlight* and the Arts Faculty of *The Black Insider* are representations of Marechera’s psyche” (Pattison 1995:4). The war thus becomes an expression of Marechera’s psychological struggles as aspects of his personality battle for control of the self. Pattison’s reading is instructive and it locates both texts within the tradition of psychomachia, even if Pattison does not use the term. The struggle is, however, also a struggle to choose between political, literary and philosophical identities and so the warring factions in the author’s psyche also represent political and philosophical traditions. A shell hits the Arts Faculty, destroying the other possibilities (Pattison 1995:9) and leaving the narrator armed with a submachine gun, waiting for the paratroopers to get into range (*BI* 115). *Black Sunlight* paradoxically begins with an alternative ending. The narrator has left the war and accepted the authority of the chief. He is rescued by Blanche Goodfather and the struggle begins afresh.

While Michael K exists in a South Africa in which racial labels no longer exist, the country and Michael K himself are products of the system of apartheid. Forced removals are now universal, as the entire population occupies spaces prescribed by violence or by military dictatorship. Michael K seems to live outside history, but the liberal medical officer in the internment camp confirms what any reader with a knowledge of South African history and politics already suspects by making specific links to the South Africa of 1983. We realise that this is the old SADF trying to bring an intransigent black population under control and failing to do so. One reference involves:

... a corporal raising the orange, white and blue on a flagpole on the middle of the track, a five-piece band playing ‘Uit die blou,’ the cornet out of key, and six hundred sullen men standing to attention, bare-foot, in their tenth hand khakis, having their thinking set right. A year ago we were still trying to make them sing; but we have given up on that (*MK* 132).

The “orange, white and blue” is the old South African flag; “Uit die blou” is the beginning of “Die Stem van Suid Afrika”, the then national anthem. Because the medical officer lives within the system, its rituals have significance for him. By contrast, Michael K’s time spent at Kenilworth is “an allegory ... of how scandalously, how outrageously, a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it” (MK 166). The medical officer belongs to the world of the camp, only realising when he patrols its perimeter after Michael K’s escape that it is a small and restricted world. He is “a little surprised at how small a camp can seem from the outside that is, to those who dwell within, an entire universe” (MK 156). The medical officer has played Pilate to Michael’s Christ. He tries to make him assert his innocence during an interrogation but is frustrated by his reticence (MK 137-138). Both Michael K and Christian point to the possibilities of a universe of meaning outside the concentration camps of Southern African politics and history. The universe is, however, still tainted with the oppressive legacies of colonialism and apartheid.

Life on the margin

Michael K and Christian are both sensitive and perceptive characters in a brutal world which fails to understand them. They exist in a violent, manichean history which does not allow for their existence:

If Benjamin said that history had hitherto been written from the standpoint of the victor, and needed to be written from that of the vanquished (Benjamin 1955:258-9), we might add that knowledge must indeed present the fatally rectilinear succession of victory and defeat, but should also address itself to those things which fell by the wayside – what might be called the waste products and blind spots that have escaped the dialectic (Adorno 1951:151).

Michael K and Christian are neither victors nor vanquished. They occupy other spaces and seem to escape the dialectic of colonialism and liberation. They are still presented, however, in terms of the colonial/anti-colonial discourse around drought and paradise. However, they transform the allegory, experiencing the battles as witnesses rather than as participants. Through flashbacks in each novel, we see their struggle to cope with the various oppressive institutions and figures in their societies. Each remembers brutal educational institutions which are reflected later in the naked authority of those in power. The soldiers in Coetzee’s novel restrict Michael K’s movements and steal his money. They are the final authority in the state of emergency. Christian begins *Black Sunlight* as court jester to a chief whose power is also absolute and who serves as an allegorical reflection of all those who seize political power.

Michael K spends his childhood at Huis Norenius in “the company of other various afflicted and unfortunate children learning the elements of reading, writing,

counting, sweeping, scrubbing, bedmaking, dishwashing, basketweaving, woodwork and digging" (MK 4). Later, when he takes refuge in a cave high in the Karoo, he remembers the hunger and the arbitrary brutality of the place:

As a child K had been hungry, like all the children of Huis Norenius. Hunger had turned them into animals who stole from one another's plates and climbed the kitchen enclosure to rifle the garbage cans for bones and peelings. Then he had grown older and stopped wanting. Whatever the nature of the beast that had howled inside him, it was starved into stillness. His last years at Huis Norenius were the best, when there were no big boys to torment him, when he could slip off to his place behind the shed and be left alone. One of the teachers used to make his class sit with their hands on their heads, their lips pressed tightly together and their eyes closed, while he patrolled the rows with his long ruler. In time, to K, the posture grew to lose its meaning as punishment and became an avenue of reverie; he remembered sitting, hands on head, through hot afternoons with doves cooing in the gum trees and the chant of the tables coming from the other classrooms, struggling with a delicious drowsiness (MK 68-69).

While Huis Norenius seems intended as a charitable institution, it embodies cruelty. The children are kept in a state of perpetual hunger and they brutalise one another and steal rubbish from the institution in order to find some relief. In time K comes to accept his hunger and he no longer fights for food. Later, in the internment camp at Kenilworth, he will hover on the brink of starvation, refusing to eat. While K is hardened to hunger, he is also hardened to other forms of brutality. The teacher forces his students into a regimented silence, making them sit quietly with their hands on their heads. The teacher is a Verwoerdian educator who forces children to be passive and obedient, preparing them for careers as servants. The curriculum stresses manual work. K grows to enjoy the punishment as "an avenue for reverie". The dullest of punishments thus becomes a chance to explore his inner self and to listen to the world around him. On the surface, K appears to accept the definitions that Huis Norenius has imposed upon him. He eventually learns that he is essentially a gardener: "...the truth is that I have been a gardener, first for the Council, later for myself" (MK 181). From outside it seems as if he has internalised his oppressive education, accepting hunger, punishment and a role the institution defines for him. Internally, however, he uses these traits as resources in resisting the system and the definitions it imposes. He becomes indestructible because there is nothing more the system, with its camps and its controls, can do to him.

Marechera's narrator, Christian, remembers a similarly brutalised schooling. He recalls being beaten in class and that "From all sides my head was jammed with facts" (BS 17). He observes prisoners outside the window under the supervision of "an armed

guard who also carried a rawhide whip". The police state begins in the school and extends very visibly into its surroundings. The narrator can see that the physical brutality to which he has just been subjected is a reality of the wider world. The time spent at school reads like a fast-paced and violent hallucination. Christian is not like Michael K, who in a tranquil state recalls the tranquillity he found in the midst of punishment. The heat and the pain close in on him and he fights to kick away the "faded picture from a faded planet on which I found myself" (17).

Michael K remembers the point at which older boys no longer bullied him. Bullying has become such a normal event that its end marks a pleasant change. Christian also recalls being tormented by another child:

...I stubbed my toe and fell. There was blood on my elbows, and this boy whose face was scarred all over with laughter. I looked hard at him, drew in my head, and rained on him with fury. There were all these hands and legs kicking and clawing us apart. It was a whirlwind. The bell rang just as his knuckles found my right eye. I was alone (*BS* 17-18).

He is playing his own game, that of kicking the world away when he stubs his toe. At that point the boy breaks into his field of vision, laughing at him. He attacks him but other "hands and legs" prevent him from avenging himself. The boy manages, however, to punch Christian, and the fight, along with the injustice of its outcome, reminds Christian of his isolation. When he is not amid the violence and brutality of school, he is at home with the orphans Marie and Stephen. At times, they read, sketch and think quietly but at other moments they find ways to deal a perceived evil around them:

There would suddenly come as if from some distant malignant world, hateful moods, awful silences, sudden outbursts. Aunt would suddenly begin to talk to herself in the kitchen. Stephen would silently stalk each room bursting the innards out of insects that crossed his path. Marie would simply, unaccountably, scream as though her throat were being cut. I – I would rain. This could go on for days. The dog would refuse to come anywhere near all of us; it would refuse its food; and at nightfall would cast into orbit a sorrowful howl soon echoed by other canine beings. The very house itself would look and feel and smell morose and miserable (*BS* 19).

In contrast to the open brutality of the school, the house is a place where each character retreats into his or her own world, much as Michael K goes to "his place behind the shed" (*MK* 68). These worlds can be placid and productive; they harmonise with one another. When the worlds become tormented, however, they clash. Stephen is a scientist. In his happier moments, he reads manuals on tractors. When he is unhappy, he vivisects insects. Marie is blind and she quietly thinks to herself when she is calm.

When she starts screaming, however, her screaming pierces everything, reminding herself and everybody else of her existence. Christian's response to all of this is, however, more puzzling. He says "I – I would rain". In the first passage, responding to the boy who mocks him, he says, he "rained on him with fury". In *The House of Hunger*, a storm allows the narrator to express years of pent-up emotion. Thus an external storm allows for the release of internal tension. Here, the external allegory for the narrator's feelings does not exist. He rains only inside himself.

The War

The oppression in the schools explodes in both novels into a cataclysmic civil war in which the military is everywhere present. Both novelists illustrate the lessons of Soweto in June 1976, in which an oppressive and dehumanising education system exploded into conflict. Christian and Michael K represent a future generation, growing up in a time of normalised civil conflict. One of Christian's childhood memories is of military vehicles outside their house:

...I could hear Marie singing and playing the ukulele. I could hear my aunt banging about in the kitchen. I could hear the build-up of trucks outside and the deep throaty rumble of the armoured cars as they picked their way through the congested streets. From his window Stephen pointed out all the different military uniforms and vehicles and as I listened to his running commentary I saw turning into our street derelict trucks that were full of corpses piled on top of each other. And Marie's song rang out thin and clear above the metallic muted notes of the ukulele (BS 21).

He remembers the contrast between the domestic sounds of an evening at home and the ominous sounds of military vehicles and the smell of corpses. Stephen and Marie are war orphans: "[t]hey had come to stay with us as their home and parents had been bombed" (18). Marie is blind; she will later marry Christian. Stephen is an expert in military uniforms, weapons and vehicles. The war is without beginning and seems without end. In *The Black Insider*, Marechera gives us a sense of the war's origins:

The fighting had been going on for a long time. In fact no one (I mean 'myself') could remember when the thing had begun, how it had begun, why it had begun at all, and finally who was supposed to be on whose side. All I know was at one stage it was us blacks against the whites. But somehow or other things had suddenly become complicated and it was no longer a black versus white chess game. It was more like a kaleidoscope in which every little chink of colour in the shaken picture was fighting every other little chink. News agencies could not keep track of the alliances and counter-alliances, the neutrals and the non-aligned, the ferocious and the hyperferal, etc. Meanwhile the cities were rotting, becoming mass graves in which there were little pockets of plague outbreaks (BI 24).

The war in *Black Sunlight* is a distilled version of that in *The Black Insider*. Marechera creates the sense of endless war through the use of childhood memory, rather than through the failure of adult memory. The chaos of many sides and of counter alliances is replaced by the anonymity of the combatants. The soldiers are never named and so we have no sense of who they are and why they are fighting. The vague detail of mass graves in the cities becomes the specific one of lorries filled with corpses parked in the street outside. As Christian matures, he becomes the photographer to an anarchist group. They fight the present conflict against authority. Devil's End, as their base, is thus also the ultimate site of resistance to the barren conflicts of history. He states, "The course of history. It was all a desert and Devil's End was the only Sordid Hope" (BS 74).

The opening few pages of *The Life and Times of Michael K* focus on Michael K's birth and early childhood. We know from the first moments of the book that he is born with a harelip and a twisted nose. He is delivered by a midwife, who assures his mother, "You should be happy, they bring luck to the household" (MK 3). Corrective surgery is not available and the midwife offers folklore as a compensation. The reason becomes clear when we learn that Michael K's mother is a domestic servant, and can therefore not afford such surgery. She brings him up alone: "Year after year Michael K sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people's floors, learning to be quiet" (MK 3-4) We learn that he is sent to Huis Norenius "at the expense of the state"(4); that he holds two jobs, is a victim of a mugging and that his mother has become ill. There are references to a curfew (7) and to restrictions on travel by rail (9). But such restrictions, particularly on the movement of black people, were a common feature of South Africa under apartheid. It is only after we know all Michael K's domestic details and of his struggle to move his mother, that we learn that there is a war on, and that Cape Town is in a state of anarchy. The news reaches us incidentally, as if the war is assumed:

Then late one afternoon in the last week of June a military jeep travelling down beach road at high speed struck a youth crossing the road, hurling him back among the vehicles parked at the curbside. The jeep itself swerved off and came to a halt on the overgrown lawns outside the Côte d'Azur, where its two occupants were confronted by the youth's angry companions. There was a fight, and a crowd soon gathered. Parked cars were smashed open and pushed broadside on into the street. Sirens announced the curfew and were ignored. An ambulance that arrived with a motorcycle escort turned about short of the barrier and raced off, chased by a hail of stones. Then from the balcony of a fourth floor flat a man began to fire revolver shots. Amid screams the crowd rushed for cover, spreading into the beachfront apartment blocks, racing along the corridors, pounding upon doors, breaking windows and lights (MK 11).

The incident described is a flash point that triggers off the violence in Cape Town, but we realise that the condition has been growing steadily worse. Military vehicles are moving through expensive white suburbs with impunity. Hotel lawns are overgrown, suggesting that tourism has dwindled. The curfew applies to all areas, not only to the black areas outside town. The violence, which Elizabeth Curren is shocked to encounter on the Cape Flats in *Age of Iron*, has become an ordinary fact of life for all Capetonians. Michael K and his mother, we now learn, have been expecting this escalation of the war. They hide in their room, listening to the riot and the riot police: “the conviction grew in them that the real war had come to Sea Point and found them out” (13).

We see soldiers in *Black Sunlight* during a demonstration at the university. While this demonstration is loosely based on demonstrations at the University of Rhodesia during August 1973 (see Veit-Wild 1992:122-136), there are many significant differences. The demonstrations at UR involved armed police (Veit-Wild 1992:130) but no shots were fired. Students retaliated by throwing stones. Another riot occurs in *The House of Hunger*, where Christian and his white girlfriend, Patricia, are beaten up by right-wing demonstrators “demanding the racial segregation of the halls of residence” (HOH 71). Like Marie in *Black Sunlight*, Patricia is disabled. She is unable to “run much because of her club foot” (72). This demonstration also has roots in history. While the University of Rhodesia was set up as a multi-racial institution (Veit-Wild 1992:95), by the early 1970s, the government and conservative students called for separate residences and even for a separate African university (122-3). The University demonstration in *Black Sunlight*, however, occurs for no specific reason and is larger and more violent than its historical antecedents. There are five hundred demonstrators, surrounding the administration building. The demonstrators are themselves surrounded by soldiers and “behind the soldiers were spectators who before the day was over would regret ever having come out to watch” (BS 31). As in the demonstration in *The House of Hunger*, bystanders become legitimate targets. Christian photographs the developments from the relative safety of “Professor Webb’s office”. Webb is a sympathetic liberal lecturer, possibly modelled on Albert Knottenbelt, who disarmed the student demonstrators at UR, believing that their home-made weapons would provoke police fire (Veit-Wild 1992:130). Unlike Knottenbelt, Webb negotiates not with the demonstrators, but with the soldiers. The officer-in-charge knocks him down, and they begin to fight physically. A student throws a stone through a window and the shooting starts.

In the *Black Sunlight* demonstration, the shooting is in earnest. These are soldiers, not policemen:

I saw a student break out of the livid mess and run towards the now fleeing spectators. A soldier jumped from behind a parked armoured car and aimed an ugly looking gun at her. An arrow of flame shot into the student's back. In an instant she was a walking living torch. There were running figures everywhere. Isolated fights. Here and there a bunch of students hacking down a trapped soldier. And the rapid starbursts of gunfire (BS 32).

These soldiers have flame-throwers at their disposal. They adhere to none of the standard rules of crowd control. They are accountable to no-one, not to a government, to the media or to public opinion. They escalate the level of violence, treating it as another aspect of the ongoing war. The soldiers are faceless and nameless. There is no sense of the government they support or of its ideology. While Stephen is an expert on their vehicles and uniforms, the novel at no times describes those uniforms or vehicles. They are simply soldiers and the novel does not identify them with a particular army or cause. The only specific reference occurs when Christian is captured by the army and rescued by the BSO in the early hours of the morning. When the attack comes "the commandant" shouts "FUCKING TERRS!" (BS 89). The word "terr" is specifically Rhodesian slang for "terrorist". However, "commandant" was not a Rhodesian army rank, and so the use of a historical term is offset by the use of a rank which does not fit into that moment of history. The rank has fascist and totalitarian overtones, suggesting that, in the constant struggle, the state has hardened into something even more repressive than post-UDI Rhodesia. Like *The Life and Times of Michael K*, *Black Sunlight* uses history as a point of departure in creating a fictitious world.

The soldiers in *The Life and Times of Michael K* are also generic. There is nothing to identify them with South Africa. Their vehicles are jeeps, armoured cars and lorries; not ratels and casspirs. The specific vehicles produced for the SADF by ARMSCOR had, by 1983, become metaphors for the South African military machine. It is possible that because Michael K views the world with lenses free from the tint of ideology, he sees these vehicles as generic categories. However, the lorry here is olive green, SADF lorries in the 1980s were painted mud brown. One of the soldiers Michael K meets is wearing a "camouflage uniform" (MK 36), South African soldiers in the 1980s wore "browns", a uniform of plain mud-brown khaki. The soldiers invariably speak English. In *Age of Iron*, set in the Cape Town of the late 1980s, soldiers and policemen speak first in Afrikaans. For instance, a young soldier says to Elizabeth "*Wag in die motor, ek sal die polisie skakel*" ("Wait in the car, I will call the police") (AOI 97). He proceeds to conduct the conversation with his superior in Afrikaans. When the police raid her house to arrest Bheki's friend John, one policeman says to the others "*Neem haar binne*," (Take her inside) (AOI 139). The only traces of Afrikaans in *Michael K* are signs, for example, "HERVESTIGING—RELOCATION" (MK 19). But these could

be traces of a former regime. All the signs in the Jakkalsdrif Relocation Camp are in English (75). The police in *Age of Iron* drive the characteristically South African “yellow police van” (AOI 48). The regular police wear blue uniforms (138); their colleagues in the riot police wear camouflage (140). In *Age of Iron*, Coetzee is very specific in his use of details in terms of the language, uniforms and equipment of the police and military. In *The Life and Times of Michael K*, the police and military wear generic uniforms and speak a generic strain of military English. The camp commander, Major Noël van Rensburgh, at one stage uses an Afrikaans expression, “’n boer maak ’n plan” (160). But this expression is part of an English sentence, beginning with “Remember...”. The use of the odd Afrikaans phrase in an English sentence is characteristic of South African English. The medical officer and his superior identify themselves as part of a system, which bears some resemblance to South Africa under the National Party. They use a common set of cultural references and their behaviour follows certain codes. Both use the cynical language of English speaking South Africans during the apartheid era. They are critical of the government, but feel that it is all that stands between them and chaos.

Fragments, Signs and Ruins of History

The medical officer and his commandant represent the last stand of a once-proud military machine. Their attempts to instil discipline into their shabby charges meet with failure. They are at the end of apartheid but nobody understands the concept or believes in it. Their only link to the actual history of white South Africa is a nostalgia for cricket and the wistful use of the odd Afrikaans expression. In both *Black Sunlight* and *The Life and Times of Michael K*, history appears, as Benjamin suggests in his discussion of allegory, “in the form of script” (Benjamin 1963:177). In this case the script appears as traces of language from extinct regimes. The Afrikaans-English signs in *The Life and Times of Michael K* are a trace of a bilingual South Africa under apartheid. Nobody, even in the Boland, speaks Afrikaans in Coetzee’s novel. The signs are a reminder of the past that produced this apocalyptic present. Likewise the Rhodesian slang term, “terr” in *Black Sunlight* serves to remind us of the 1965-1980 *Chimurenga* war which begot this war. Both authors produce a narrative present which has no consciousness of a linear history which progresses towards humanistic goals. History is written as signs in the text.

The sign as such receives harsh treatment in *Black Sunlight*. While on their car journey, Christian and Susan encounter an actual sign:

...Her eyes lit upon a traffic sign that was speeding towards us.
 ‘STOP.’
 I did.

'Have you got a hammer. Or something metal and heavy.' She gestured meaningfully at the sign. It said 'Winston 15 Miles'. 'Those things bug me,' she added.

I took out the heavy hammer and the equally heavy jack. She took the hammer. She let out a bloodcurdling war shriek and hammered at the sign.

'Destroy! DESTROY THE SIGN.'

I had attacked it from the other side. Crunch. CRUNCH VVBRAAKK. It fell. She leapt upon it. CRUNCH VBRRRKKK GA. When it looked like it would never get up again except as scrap, she spat into her palms, rubbed them together and grabbed the heavy hammer for the last mighty stroke. I turned my face away. This was more than any game.

'GVRK!!!' (BS 49).

Susan selects an arbitrary sign upon which to vent her destructive impulses. The sign is personified as an innocent, its message is inserted into their conversation after "It said". She smashes it until "it would never get up except as scrap", thus demonstrating her utter aversion to it. Susan is something of a sign herself, commencing the exchange with the command "STOP". On the written page, the distinction between human communication and signs blurs. The sign's helpful information stands in contrast to the comic-book all-capitals noises which herald its destruction. Susan's aversion to signs is part of her general opposition to the written word. She tells Christian, "Poems should not be written but brought into being, brought right out into living reality" (BS 50). Her particular poems involve spontaneous acts of violence. The attack on the sign allegorises her stance as the producer of living meaning at the expense of dead script. In destroying the sign, she destroys geography and history and asserts her own unique, unprecedented existence.

While Susan epitomises *Black Sunlight's* drive to create a living, if destructive and transient, meaning, Michael K is simply oblivious to signs. He discovers and invents his world as he moves through it. He is blind to the language and the symbols of the system, speaking a language without coded references, without symbols. Words mean exactly what he thinks they mean. Gordimer observes that the K: "has no reference, nor need it have, to Kafka" (Gordimer 1984:3). Michael K shares his surname with the heroes of *The Castle* and of *The Trial*, suggesting he is in some way related to them. Like one of Kafka's characters, he occupies a position outside a system of meaning and, consequently, many of its rituals make no sense to him. The language of soldiers, police and other officials is, from K's perspective, not specific to South Africa. It is, however, fairly Kafkaesque, linking events in the novel to a wider set of problems. Unlike Kafka, however, Coetzee gives us a section of the novel in which the insiders talk among themselves, making references to a set of historical South African events. However, the order and meaning of this world are also on the point of collapse and,

thanks to Michael K's presence, the medical officer begins to question his own meanings and understandings.

Rather than a specific local conflict, the war in both novels seems part of an endless pattern of oppression and conflict. Marechera's narrator cannot remember life without war, an impression reinforced by the use of childhood memories. Michael K only notices practical details. He is utterly unaware of politics and the root causes of his condition. He sees the concrete realities of his day to day existence, and from there, allows the reader to infer that there is a war on. War and race, the two great South African obsessions of the 1980s, are thus relegated to the background. Michael K is other, in that he refuses to occupy the system in any recognisable way. There are attempts to label and classify him, to force him into the system. His charge sheet, when he is arrested, reads "Michael Visagie—CM—40—NFA—Unemployed" (MK 70). His charges include "not being in possession of an identification document, infringing the curfew and being drunk and disorderly" (70). Several of the details on the charge sheet are inaccurate. He is not forty years old but "in the thirty-first year of his life" (4). The medical officer later identifies him as "a little old man" (129), saying later that "he claims to be only thirty-two" (130). The medical observes him for long enough to realise that he is not what he seems to be. Most of the state functionaries along the way do not have time for complicated observations, they fit K into categories that make him easier to process. None of the categories is trustworthy and so Gordimer's use of the "C" in the quotation to assign an ethnic identity is to be regarded with some suspicion.

The Journey

Central to each novel is a journey away from repression and towards something better. *Black Sunlight's* journey is literally central. It is a thematically arbitrary shopping trip but it occupies the middle pages of the novel and provides a moment of hallucinatory erotic freedom. Michael K's journey takes him and his mother away from Cape Town, ostensibly so that she can return to the pastoral utopia of her childhood. While its main aim is thwarted because Mrs K dies, the journey takes Michael K to a point where, both physically and spiritually, he can begin to define himself.

Michael K tries to move his mother out of a Cape Town under military occupation. The imaginary world of the novel uses specific Capetonian geographic details: Michael K and his mother stay in a bombed-out flat in Sea Point; only the military have use of the major roads, like the Black River Parkway, in and around Cape Town; Michael K is later interned at the Kenilworth racetrack. He is travelling from Sea Point to Prince Albert, a town in the Karoo, a distance of some four hundred kilometres. He has no idea of where Prince Albert is, of its distance from Cape Town

or of the effort required to get there. His mother dies in Stellenbosch and so he loses the primary reason for his journey. Only his mother's ashes make it to Prince Albert.

The initial journey is exhausting, requiring many false starts. Michael K trundles his home-made cart with his mother aboard towards Prince Albert. He suffers mechanical failure and the army forces him to return to Cape Town. Their rate of progress is painfully slow, especially because they must cover the same ground repeatedly. By contrast, the vehicles which pass them travel effortlessly towards their destination:

Two days later they set off again, leaving Sea Point a full hour before dawn. The zest of the first adventure was gone. K knew now that they might have to spend many nights on the road. Furthermore, his mother had lost all appetite for travel to far places. She complained of pains in her chest and sat stiff and sullen in the box under the plastic apron K pinned across her to keep off the worst of the rain. At a steady trot, with the tyres hissing on the wet tarmac, he followed a new route through the centre of the city, along Sir Lowry Road and the suburban Main Road, over the Mowbray railway bridge, and past the one-time Children's Hospital on to the old Klipfontein Road. Here, with only a trampled fence between them and the cardboard-and-iron shanties clustered on the fairways of the golf course, they made their first stop. After they had eaten, K stood at the roadside with his mother clasped to his side, trying to flag down passing vehicles. There was little traffic. Three light trucks sped past nose to tail, wire mesh over their lights and windows. Later came a neat horsecart, the bay horses wearing clusters of bells on their harness, a troop of children in the back jeering and making signs at the pair of them. Then after a long interval a lorry stopped, the driver offering a lift as far as the cement works, even helping K to lift the barrow aboard. Sitting safe and dry in the cab, counting off the kilometres out of the corner of an eye, K nudged his mother and met her prim answering smile (*MK* 23-24).

The details of this journey reflect the slow rate at which they pass the various landmarks. A trip which would take a more privileged Capetonian a few minutes by car, takes them hours. Because their initial attempts to get going have failed, they lack even the motivation to make their task succeed. As Michael K and his mother pass familiar Cape Town landmarks, their author slowly reveals the process of social destruction; Red Cross Children's Hospital has closed and a suburban golf course is now a squatter camp. Once they are on the Klipfontein road, other vehicles pass them rapidly, again underscoring their slowness. It becomes miraculous that a lorry stops and that its driver is helpful. The lorry helps to increase the gap between origin and destination and it thus, after the drudgery of their earlier movement, brings a feeling of relief and freedom. This feeling is short-lived, however, as they return to their earlier drudgery after the cement factory.

Black Sunlight includes a very different journey which passes like a rapid hallucination rather than a slow nightmare. Christian and Susan make a shopping trip by car, and digress into a marsh full of flame-lilies. While, unlike Michael K and his mother, they do not toil towards their destination, this journey also brings its sense of relief:

We were out in the countryside by now. The hard sunlight was beginning to sweat like gelignite. It was rolling country. When the fields petered out there was, on either side of the road, grassland dotted with acacias whose yellowish leaves seemed ethereal as they slightly vibrated against the stark blue backdrop of the late morning sky. The women, the girl beside me, the car and its almost inaudible drone, the sweltering asphalt and its unending ribbon unfolding almost in front of us, they were like a magical arrangement, a fugue at once mystical and concrete, and I gradually unfolded inside myself and once again caught the serious carefree joy of it. I accelerated, slamming my foot down right to the floor. The car lurched forward. The view on either side sped past, backwards. Straight ahead the bright blue dome of the sky seemed impervious, unutterable, glacial, indifferent. I did not care. Susan flung her head back and laughed long and loud. When she stopped I could still hear laughter, a laughter resonant and clear and free. I realised it was me laughing and I laughed even more. We had money. We could just drive on right through the heart of our country and speed towards its outermost limit and there hang, as it were, over the jagged precipice of our history (BS 45-46).

The impending and potential violence of the narrative is expressed through the sunlight, "beginning to sweat like gelignite". Christian and Susan come out of an emotionally, as well as literally, explosive situation and the journey serves to break the tension. This trip brings a heightened state of awareness. The travellers become more conscious of the hallucinatory details of the world around them. At the same time they merge into one another as Christian becomes aware that he is still laughing Susan's laugh. The journey helps to focus Marechera's reading of the history of humanity in *Black Sunlight*. History is a series of explosions, potential and actual, leaving scars across a physical and psychic landscape. The narrator is at the edge of history, hence the imagery of a "jagged precipice". This journey is freedom after a childhood of brutal corporal punishment and of hiding in houses, counting armoured vehicles, afraid that if one leaves the house, one will be numbered among the bodies on the streets.

Castles, Convoys and Cathedrals

While the soldiers have access to lorries, armoured cars and motorcycles, the poor in Michael K's Cape Town must improvise their own transport. The Ks set off for Mrs K's childhood home of Prince Albert, and, because they cannot get a permit to use the

train, Michael K pushes his mother in a home-made hand-cart. His is not the only odd vehicle on the road:

...few of the people they passed at this early hour spared them a glance. Stranger and stranger conveyances were emerging on the streets: shopping trolleys fitted with steering bars; tricycles with boxes over the rear axle; baskets mounted on pushcart undercarriages; crates on castors; barrows of all sizes. A donkey fetched eighty rands in new currency, a cart with tyres over a hundred (*MK 21*).

These details explain a good deal about the poverty and the shortages in Michael K's Cape Town. The absence of petrol-driven vehicles suggests a shortage of fuel. Poor people rely upon trains and more ersatz forms of transport, suggesting that the buses are no longer running. There is no public transport for those who cannot afford private vehicles, and so they must improvise. The economy has collapsed and money has been revalued, hence the mention of "new currency".

In contrast to the "stranger and stranger conveyances" the wealthy have plenty of fuel and transport. They shelter in their vehicles, anonymous to poorer observers. Here, for example, is Michael K's first glimpse of a military convoy:

He was roused by a rumbling in the air. At first he thought it was faroff thunder. The noise grew louder, however, beating in waves off the base of the bridge behind them. From their right, from the direction of the city, at deliberate speed, came two pairs of uniformed motorcyclists, rifles strapped across their backs, and behind them an armoured car with a gunner standing in the turret. Then followed a long and miscellaneous procession of heavy vehicles, most of them trucks empty of cargo. K crept up the verge to his mother; side by side they sat and watched in a roar of noise that seemed to turn the air solid. The convoy took minutes to pass. The rear was brought up by scores of automobiles, vans and light trucks, followed by an olive-green army truck with a canvas hood under which they glimpsed two rows of helmeted soldiers, and then another pair of motorcyclists (*MK 21-22*).

The convoy is conspicuous in its power and its consumption of fuel. The empty trucks are an ironic counterpoint to Michael K's overloaded and flimsy hand-cart, and to the forms of transport seen in the novel up to this point. One of the soldiers underlines the irony of the contrast by pointing to the hand-cart and asking, in generic military jargon, "Is this your vehicle?" His use of the word 'vehicle' suggests that there is some relationship between the humble, home-made hand-cart and the convoy which has just past. The sound of so many motorised vehicles travelling together is obviously unfamiliar to K, as he first thinks of it as thunder. The convoy represents an alien world, of which he knows nothing. The position of privileged people and the soldiers who protect them is a profoundly bizarre one. He finds the society and its war utterly

baffling. The soldiers and those who command them live in a far-off protected world and K cannot guess at the reality of their existence. As Marechera says of the whites in Zimbabwe, in the interview with Alle Lansu:

It's like something from Franz Kafka — *The Castle*. The castle is inaccessible and so the ones beneath it think that there are no problems in the castle, everything will be solved. It was so easy to make us kids feel that we were shit, that we were a product of an inferior race, because for God's sake, even when we had to go into town with our parents to buy school uniforms, we would see all these things in the shops, things which we knew we could never get, and of course we would blame our parents for not having the money (Veit-Wild 1992:10).

The privileged in *The Life and Times of Michael K*, like the white minorities in historical Rhodesia and South Africa, form a class of their own. In Michael K's dystopia, race is no longer a guarantee of such privilege. The wealthy Buhrmanns, the only people in the novel who belong to a clearly identifiable ethnic group, in this case probably German immigrants, fall outside the protection of the government and must flee the country. Those who travel in military convoys represent a class of people who are more protected than the Buhrmanns. Even the farmers, who once enjoyed the protection of the National Party government, must make their own convoys. On the Stellenbosch road, Michael K sees "a farmer's convoy, train of light trucks and cars preceded by a lorry armoured in heavy mesh in whose open back stood two men with automatic rifles scanning the ground ahead" (MK 26). In this case, the men are simply men, not specifically soldiers. The armour on their vehicle is home-made. Their convoy is not scheduled, some children have told K that convoys do not run on Sundays. It is possible that they represent another force, the farmers, who are responsible for their own defence.

The occupants of the cars and other light vehicles who follow the main convoy live the charmed life of Castellans. They possess the wealth and the privilege to protect themselves from the collapse of order in the society. K does not catch a glimpse of the people themselves, he only sees their vehicles. Those privileged people who ride in convoys are literally and metaphorically bounded off from ordinary people like K. Their convoy serves as a mobile castle, travelling in the same direction as K at great speed. K, standing under the bridge, looks up at their vehicles and marvels. He echoes Franz Kafka's K. the Land Surveyor in *The Castle* in this respect:

... The Castle hill was hidden, veiled in mist and darkness, nor was there even a glimmer of light to show that a castle was there. On the wooden bridge leading from the main road to the village K. stood for a long time gazing into the illusory emptiness above him (Kafka 1926:9).

Like K. the Land Surveyor, Michael K at first doubts the existence of this miraculous presence above him. He initially hears "faroff thunder", K. sees "mist and darkness". In the first case, the phenomenon seems to be a force of nature, in the second it is obscured by natural phenomena. The position of each outsider is also significant. K. stands on a bridge, looking up at the castle. Michael K is initially under a bridge when he hears the convoy. His position is below that of Kafka's K. The convoy contains an "illusory emptiness" in that Michael K sees only the vehicles, not the people inside them. The convoy is so alien to Michael K that at first, he does not realise that its soldiers perceive him as a threat. He stands and watches until the final motorcyclists come to harass him. Like K., he is initially unaware of the correct procedures. K. goes to sleep in an inn and is awoken by a "son of the Castellan" (Kafka 1926:9), who demands a permit:

'One must have a permit,' was the reply, and there was an ironical contempt for K. in the young man's gesture as he stretched out his arm and appealed to the others, 'Or must one not have a permit?' (10).

The young man, whose credentials are later revealed to be quite dubious, treats the Land Surveyor as an imbecile because he does not understand the rituals of the Castle. Michael K meets the same emphasis on permits:

The motorcyclist whistled, rocked the barrow lightly, called down to his companion. He turned back to K. 'Along the road, just around the bend, there is a checkpoint. You stop at the checkpoint and show them your permit. You got a permit to leave the Peninsula?'

'Yes.'

'You can't travel outside the peninsula without a permit. Go to the checkpoint and show them your permit and your papers. And listen to me: you want to stop on the expressway, you pull fifty metres off the roadside. That's the regulation: fifty metres either side. Anything nearer, you can get shot, no warning, no questions asked. Understand?'

K nodded. ...

He could have turned back at once; but at the risk of a second humiliation he helped his mother into the barrow and pushed her as far as the old hangers, where, indeed, there was a jeep parked by the roadside and three soldiers brewing tea over a camp stove. His pleas were in vain. 'Have you got a permit, yes or no?' demanded the corporal in command. 'I don't care who you are, who your mother is, if you haven't got a permit you can't leave the area, finished.' K turned to his mother. From under the black canopy she gazed out expressionlessly at the young soldier. The soldier threw up his hands. 'Don't give me a hard time!' he shouted. 'Just get the permit, then I'll let you through!' (MK 23).

Michael K finds the same reiteration of the word “permit”; to the soldiers permits are an ordinary, even natural, requirement for travel in the peninsula. Anyone who does not realise their importance must be an imbecile. As the motorcyclist tells him, even travelling too close to the road is grounds for an arbitrary violent death. In this he echoes Kafka’s *The Trial*, where one can be suddenly executed without even the knowledge of one’s crime. Michael K’s innocence is underscored as he approaches the hangers “where, indeed, there was a jeep parked by the roadside and three soldiers brewing tea over a camp stove.” The “indeed” expresses his surprise at finding that the motorcyclist had told him the truth. He is so baffled by this world that he does not expect anything to be real. The irony of his permit, is that, unlike K. the Land Surveyor, he has applied for one but has been unable to obtain it in time to help his mother get away from the Peninsula (9). Kafka’s K. is an educated person who suffers through his ignorance of unwritten laws. Michael K, as member of the working class, is constrained by laws which seem to allow the privileged to travel with impunity. The drivers of the “scores of automobiles, vans and light trucks” which follow the convoy seem immune from the problems of permits and papers.

Marechera’s narrator in *Black Sunlight* also occupies a marginal position in which many of the rituals of the society around him are alien. Even at school, the details of everyday life reflect a state of oppression:

...The armed guard was flexing his whip and striking terrifying attitudes. His dark glasses gleamed like the sinister emblems of a powerful world. What did it mean that this was my hometown, my county, my continent, my planet, my universe? It could mean everything. It could mean nothing. I was in it. I was it. This irrepressible heat of a living thing growing just as the weeds grew. A truckload of soldiers roared past. All their intentions were left hanging like dust over the asphalt long after they had gone. They were there in the classroom with us, marshalling facts, categorising, reciting, and absorbing the knowledge handed down through the ages. All these meanings that had a hard and unyielding face! How did one escape? In a rain of bullets? Or seeing red everywhere until the straitjacket came? (BS 21).

Christian finds that his surroundings have been suddenly made unfamiliar. Everything seems choreographed, from the armed guard “striking terrifying attitudes” to the parade of facts. The armed guard is watching prisoners weeding the school lawn; his sunglasses suggest a world of cruelty and terror that Christian can only guess at. Christian has just been caned. The teacher is never described and so his or her presence blurs with that of the armed guard. The students are like prisoners and their lessons have become military. Facts are placed in a rigid, marshalled order and Christian is desperately looking for an escape. The school, the prison and knowledge itself are part

of a Southern African landscape of townships and mine compounds which underscore “the importance of space and surveillance to any understanding of capitalist production” (Bunn 1993:51). Christian seeks the status of a Michael K, who can claim “I am not in the war” (*MK* 138). Like Michael K, he seeks a route that will remove him from the society and its battles. Because he is not as literal-minded, he looks for metaphysical, as well as physical paths. Unlike Michael K, he finds all exits barred. Religion and philosophy offer no sanctuary:

‘What exile leaves itself behind?’ Horace asked. The Soul is a fault which never escapes itself; we bring it back and withdraw into itself. ‘In solitude be to thyself a throng,’ urged Tibullus, Virtue, says Antisthenes, is content with itself, without rules, without words, without deeds. Nowadays we have a thousand gurus to teach us to stand on our heads ... to meditate transcendently, to blast our minds with mescaline, to take up the Tibetan Book of the Dead, to chant namiongorengetio ... to escape the horrible boredom that makes us bite our hands and neither fear the final day nor wish for it (*BS* 116).

A system of belief is an anaesthetic to deaden the pain of existence, particularly that of ethical or virtuous existence. Since *Black Sunlight* advocates an existence without limits, a life of pure sensation, religion becomes escapist. At times, however, Christian needs a spiritual refuge. He assumes the Bunyanesque name of Christian in an ironic gesture but he also hopes to find some form of salvation in a cathedral. The place unsettles him profoundly and his desire for refuge embarrasses him:

I closed the huge doors behind me and walked softly towards the altar. I was in the opium of the people. The huge cross dangled from chains fixed to the roof. I stood looking at the crucified Christ. He looked like He needed a stiff drink. He looked as if He had just had a woman from behind. He looked like He had not been to the toilet for two thousand years. He looked like I felt. That was the connection. That was what made Him big, this mirroring quality that made your right hand a left hand and your sins a path out of themselves. He hung there like one in dire need of a cigarette. Not just passive, but alive so, like a picture out of a men’s magazine, explicitly showing all his wounds and orifices with an air of spirited invitation. In these terms Nick had described Him to me, described Him as one describes a thorn in one’s flesh, or the spreading disease between one’s thighs.

It was so quiet in there I could hear my thoughts arranging themselves all over His body. Why had I come? I always came to watch Him whenever the soullessness was too much for me. It always ended with the same humiliated ridiculousness of staring at a man-made statue expecting a miracle to take place (*BS* 28-29).

His attempts to escape into a religious state are a failure because he sees himself reflected in the crucified Christ. “The opium of the people” fails to bring relief from the pain of his existence. The cathedral produces an even more negative response in Marie;

Christian remembers that once he brought her here “but she had taken only a few steps towards the altar when she shivered violently and vomited” (29). She has been entirely sheltered from religion and she later asks “what kind of place it was”. Her reaction is instinctual whereas that of Christian is analytical. Ironically, Christian understands his relationship with Marie in terms of the icon of the crucified Christ:

I held her in my arms and let her cry, she who could not see me, could not see the pictures and drawings I made, she who felt me, touched me, tasted me, wrung me in her sleep without ever, ever seeing me. And I feared he or rather feared, sometimes, that her blindness was the only thing I loved about her. There were days when I knew that all my feeling for her was bound up in that fragile shell of blindness, that fragile, unseeing self-contained dome. And I knew that were I to wake up and find myself in that dark rotunda, crucified, dangling from chains and chords fixed to the sightlessness of her, then – I would be free (*BS* 36).

The passage demonstrates the most basic form of allegory, extended metaphor. The Christ icon reflects all who see ‘him’ and Christian visualises the space between himself and his wife in terms of his reflection in the icon. Marie cannot use the icon because she cannot see it. Her blindness in this respect represents the basic difference between the couple. Christian exists through the generation of visual images in the form of paintings and photographs. He understands the cathedral and its icon in terms of their visual effect. Marie cannot experience Christian’s vision and so he grows to believe that if he could suspend himself in her sightlessness, he could achieve freedom. The paradox of their relationship finally develops in the image of a freedom which can only emerge from a figure crucified and in chains. The paradox is the lack that draws Christian into the cathedral. It is so profound that the Christ figure, unable to offer solace, crashes at his feet (30). Because of the failure of the cathedral, Christian photographs the explosions as the BSO blows it up.

Hell and Caves

Michael K’s religious sense blurs the metaphysical and the actual. He recalls “a fiery furnace”, a phrase which perhaps lingers from some perfunctory religious instruction at Huis Norenus. Its context, like Christian’s encounter with the crucified Christ, is produced from his own experience. He uses it to understand his mother’s cremation:

So there is a place for burning, K thought. He imagined the old women from the ward fed one after another, eyes pinched against the heat, lips pinched, hands at their sides, into the fiery furnace. First the hair, in a halo of flame, then after a while everything else, to the last things, burning and crumbling. And it was happening all the time (*MK* 32).

This final burning occurs literally, with the hospital staff, who see themselves as givers of charity, feeding the flames. It is not a hell after life; it is the hell at the end of life. "The fiery furnace" is an allusion to the book of Daniel. The halo is perhaps remembered from some religious picture he saw as a child. The concept of eternal damnation has been replaced with the literal destruction of living bodies. Michael K seems as unaware of the meaning of the words "passed away" as he is of the phrase "Do you want to make a phone call" (30). He later tells the medical officer, "They burned her. ... Her hair was burning around her head like a halo" (130). The medical officer reads this statement as proof that Michael K "is not wholly of our world" (130). In this case, he has taken an actual event and described it as if it were a metaphysical. His blurring of the actual and the metaphysical perplexes the medical officer.

Christian also enters a physical hell in *Black Sunlight*. He meets the anarchists of the BSO in the caves at Devil's End, where he is given a name. He also accepts a job as photographer to the BSO, photographing 'hostages':

'Please sign here.'

He turned the book towards me. I signed. There were all these signatures and each had flush against it the same strange mark.

'So that is your name. We don't use our own names here... What would you like us to call you?'

I didn't even think, I said,
'Christian.'

And Christian you shall be. Now come with me, I want to show you something.'

I followed him into the tunnel. We passed through huge rooms in which vague human figures were poised in very excruciating positions. Some dangled from chairs fixed to the roof (One hung upside down and dangled by his testicles). Some were transfixed upside down by huge nails driven into the rock passing through their ankles or knees. Others —

'Don't dawdle, man. We haven't got all day,' Chris said.
'Besides you'll have your chance with them.' (BS 53).

Christian's 'real' name is never given and he is hardly ever even referred to as Christian. The name is ironic, since he chooses it in hell. The scene contains several allusions to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Like Bunyan's Christian, Marechera's has made a long journey through various obstacles to arrive at this place. It is not heaven, but hell, and it is a hell which resembles that in Dante's *Inferno*. The caves are in a place called "Devil's End" and in *The Inferno*, the devil occupies the lowest level, thus the "end" of hell (Dante 1321:XXXIV:28-36). Here he constantly consumes the traitors, Cassius, Brutus and Judas Iscariot. On his journey to the end of hell, Dante witnesses many such examples of living death.

The references to Bunyan and Dante are, however, ironic. Marechera takes Christian allegory and transforms it into an allegory which reflects a different world order. The Christian mythology of sin and redemption meets the Bader-Meinhof gang. Christian participates in unchristian activities like terrorism and group sex, and is thus far from Bunyan's Christian, who is Christian "in word and deed". Like Dante, Marechera's Christian descends into hell, where he encounters the vague human figures who endure tortures far beyond what any living being could survive. Christian is not in hell to save his soul, however, or to assist others in saving theirs. He is there to assist the BSO in collecting ransoms for their tortured hostages by photographing them. In this role, he is a participant in hell, even though he is not an actual torturer. His guide's name, Chris, who is a sadist, creates another relationship between observer and torturer. 'Your chance' means that Christian will be allowed to photograph the hostages, to examine them more closely. While this scene appropriates elements of allegory: the descent into hell, the fantastic imagery and the use of names, it is not strictly allegorical. Name and function are at odds with one another.

The caves at Devil's End have enjoyed a varied history, always in the hands of those who oppose those in power. Christian meets his double, who explains that the caves have always served as a place of refuge:

'You don't know the history of these caves I suppose? Nobody really does. But they are prehuman. All kinds of monstrous beings used to roam in and round here, beings long since extinct: Mastodons, dinosaurs, pterodactyls, sabre-toothed tigers, mammoths. Though perhaps that is laying it on a bit thick. Anthropoids hung around shivering, begetting, dying. There is a lovely collection of remains and artefacts to attest to the fact. Bones, teeth, stone artefacts. Even a bit of pottery. But the caves are first mentioned in the letters and documents of the twelfth century. There had been an epidemic of some sort, a plague. Thousands found refuge here. But Devil's end was used as a collection point by the slave drivers. The sea is conveniently close by and the caves are easily defended against attack. You can imagine the grisly goings-on. Floggings, impalings, body inspections, tortures of all kinds. Most of the grim instruments you've seen date from that period. All kinds of men found refuge here: robbers, heretics, pirates, criminals, hermits, lepers, swindlers, pariahs of all types. Now it's us. We are as it were the living memory of all those centuries of nightmare. But then everybody must have roots. A sense of identity, continuity. Disease, war, persecution, rapine, these are our ancestors, you know (BS 71).

The double has replaced Chris as the narrator's guide through the caves, just as Beatrice replaces Virgil in Dante. Instead of taking the narrator through paradise, however, the double takes him deeper into the hell of human history and resistance. He knows something of the history of the place and delivers this history proudly, as an

affable lecture, sprinkled with “as it weres” and “you knows”. The caves are the darker side of humanity’s story. They have seen the initial struggle between “anthropoids” and prehistoric monsters develop into the more complex battles between people as the ages progressed. The reference to the plague and to documents dating from the twelfth century would locate the caves somewhere in Europe. The discussion of slavery links them to the history of Africa. Pattison identifies them as “lost history and an eloquent lament for a lost culture” (Pattison 1995:6). They are also the location of all the alternative histories suppressed by a dominant, linear historical narrative. The caves then are not an actual set of caves, but the subterranean location of humanity’s darker side. Like Rushdie’s Shaitan, the figure of hell becomes the site of resistance to oppression. It does so by appropriating and exploiting those moments in human history that the mainstream would rather forget.

When Michael K flees the farm and the Visagie grandson he takes refuge in a cave. Unlike the social community of anarchists and hostages at Devil’s End, K’s cave is a solitary one. It resembles the seaside cave in which Beckett’s Molloy takes refuge (Beckett 1955:70). The first cave is not isolated enough, so Michael K finds a second one, further out of the reach of human society:

...he climbed higher, zigzagging up the slope until the road through the pass disappeared from sight and he was looking over the vast plain of the Karoo, with Prince Albert itself miles below. He found a new cave and cut bushes for the floor. He thought: Now surely I have come as far as a man can come; surely no one will be mad enough to cross these plains, climb these mountains, search these rocks to find me; surely now that in all the world only I know where I am, I can think of myself as lost (MK 66).

His first cave was one “that had evidently been used by campers” (65). It is a cave that carries traces of human history, like the caves at Devil’s End, and he leaves it to be free of even the traces of humanity. His journey to the cave is a rejection of history and even of time. In the second cave, he sits and does nothing. He resembles Christ in *Paradise Regained*, fasting in the desert and looking down upon the world. Time passes, only measured in terms of sunrises and sunsets. He remembers his own history: the decaying leaves in Wynberg Park and the cruelty and hunger of Huis Norenius. K remains in the cave until “it [comes] home to him that he might die” (69). Like Christ, Michael K is tempted, only he faces oblivion. He then descends from the mountain to be overwhelmed by gardens:

... the last light was fading by the time he entered the town. The smell of peach blossom enveloped him. There was a voice too, coming from all sides, the calm even voice he had heard the first day he saw Prince Albert. He stood at the head of the High Street among the verdant gardens, unable to make out a word, though he listened hard,

of the distant monotone that after a while blended with the twitter of the trees and then gave way to music (*MK* 69).

After his sensory deprivation in the mountains, the strong smells of the town and of its cultivation seem almost overwhelming. Like a Milton's Christ in *Paradise Regained*, he has spent his time fasting in the mountain. Now, as he returns to the town, the gardens overwhelm him. He hears for the second time a voice which perplexes him. He initially thinks, on his first encounter with the voice, that it is "the voice of Prince Albert" (*MK* 49). In both cases, as he progresses further into the town he finds the voice "giving way" to music. It is a deceptive voice which tantalises him, drawing him further into the town and its gardens. For Coetzee, as for Milton, the gardens are an anti-paradise. Paradise is to be found on an overgrown farm, where nature takes its course and Michael K must plant his pumpkins amid the undergrowth so he, like the farm, can become free from human interference.

In both novels, caves serve as the ultimate refuge from society. They also serve as a return to a more primal state. For Marechera, the caves at Devil's End are a return to humanity's essential history of conflict and disease. They are therefore a more truthful reflection of society. Unfortunately, the caves are a society in microcosm. They have conflicts and oppositions and because they are an eternal centre of resistance to the established order they are a target. At the beginning of the novel Christian learns that the BSO has broken up but he expects that resistance will develop again: "The crudely organised opposition, driven underground would perhaps emerge sometime out of their basements, ratholes, caves. The capture of Devil's End probably scattered them far and wide" (*BS* 13). One large cave has been too easy a target and so, like Michael K, they have retreated into smaller caves. The revolution could resurface anywhere, from any cave entrance; it has a rhizome, with its roots spreading out below the surface of the earth (Deleuze and Guattari 1975:3). Michael K experiences complete freedom from societal pressure in his cave. He reaches the point that at which it no longer matters whether he lives or dies. He decides to return to society because, if he dies, "his story might end with his bones growing white in this far off place" (*MK* 69). Christian makes a photographic record of Devil's End, Michael K decides to survive in order to preserve a story. In his case, however, it is his own story, not the story of the group, and he suffers great difficulty in finding an appropriate hearer. Caves then serve as the site of a collective and/or personal history but each novel seeks ways to escape that history. The escape brings the characters briefly into contact with paradise. For Michael K, this contact comes with travelling further up the mountain and deeper into the cave. Christian finds his paradise before he makes the journey to Devil's End. Once in the cave he is back into the world of the dead and dying and paradise is impossible.

Moments of Paradise

Marechera's figures escape from a universe of dust, chaos and violence into occasional transcendental moments. They then return to the chaos. As in Chifamba's 'Vana Vakarasirirwa Mugore Renzara', Paradise, for Marechera in the *House of Hunger*, lies between hardships. It is a fleeting moment in a painful and dry universe. Paradise is opposed to a garden in that it is a natural state of security and fecundity. A garden is an artificially created one. Chifamba's narrative suggests that even amid times of extreme drought and deprivation, it is possible to stumble across havens of water and nourishment. Her viewpoint is opposed to a colonial one, parodied in Page's figure of Oswald Grant, that Africa is uniformly barren and infertile and that fecundity can only be created by the hard work and the sophisticated management skills of the colonisers. Just as Coetzee questions and problematises the colonial dichotomy, Marechera questions the concept of paradise. Marechera's paradise is neither a common origin, as it is for the Christians, or a common goal, as it is for the more utopian socialists. It is a location in space and time only open to a few select individuals. Paradise is not always a pleasant place to be. In 'A Writer's Grain', a small boy is tormented by an anthropomorphic warthog in a little forest clearing that is a combination of Eden, complete with dinosaurs, and the witch's house in Hansel and Gretel (*HOH* 116-117). At other moments in *The House of Hunger*, Marechera problematises paradise, exploring the lies behind romantic, Christian, African-Nationalist, liberal and consumer paradises.

In *Black Sunlight*, Christian and Susan find paradise in the middle of their car journey:

Out of that bright blue sky seemed to flash a dazzling bolt of lightning. It shot through my very soul and left a quivering there. I slowed down, flung one hand across Susan's shoulder and stopped. I locked the doors and we jumped the little wooden fence and ran across the short tufts of green grass and picked our way through a marshy patch, crossed that, and with a vengeance tore off our clothes. A shrill harmonica seemed to blast a prolonged note through my brain. But I could see that she could hear it too. At last we lay back exhausted, I mean on our backs, looking up at the sky. All the immense tract of the universe was our private paradise. And this green, this quickening land, it was there for us to roam. It shrilled again and again through my ears, through all my senses, through all my unrefusing flesh. We wrestled and fell apart, spent and panting, and raced each other all through that unending noon. We picked up our clothes and without putting them on raced back to the car and drove a few miles further on, to the river, where we swam in the green stream. Afterwards we walked slowly back to the car, apart. She was kicking at the flame lilies and I picked a bunch of them and threw them in the back among the cameras (*BS* 46).

As in *The House of Hunger*, the moment of enlightenment seems to be preceded by a flash of lightning. The enlightenment is also something to be shared with another character; it is a moment in which the narrator discovers the other. This lightning emerges out of the clear blue sky of an hallucinatory noon. The other, in this case, is a woman and the two make love and go on to race and to swim. It is unlike the fight in the storm with Harry (*HOH* 33-34, see Chapter 2 above), in that the embraces are literal, not metaphorical. Christian finds paradise in his post-coital rapture: "All the immense tract of the universe was our private paradise. And this green, this quickening land, it was there for us to roam". Heaven is found in the bright pure colours of sky and landscape. It is not simply a sexual awakening; the sex in itself is not described. It is as if some immeasurable force expresses itself through these two people and their moment of coition. Christian experiences this force as a sound, in his head, which Susan can also hear; "It shrilled again and again through my ears, through all my senses, through all my unrefusing flesh". He has been penetrated entirely by the sound.

Black Sunlight expresses several paradisaical moments through sexual encounters. In one of these Christian merges with Marie and her blindness as he enters a darkened room and she hides from him (*BS* 36-37). Their roles are reversed. She can find her way around the room, he cannot: "It struck me that whereas I was bumping into things and blundering through, searching for her, she had not once knocked into anything or upset any of the furniture" (37). She takes control of the situation and becomes invisible to him. As a sighted person plunged into darkness, he is disturbed but Marie is in her element. She only has vision in darkness, or as Marechera expresses the paradox, "She was in her own black sunlight" (37). This particular exchange makes them equal and paves the way for a profound sexual encounter, expressed not visually, but through the neutral medium of sound: "We rode the crest of that sound again and again and I shall not know such another till the waves recoil" (37). Through this particular consummation, they break free of the religious bias that privileges vision.

There is another orgasm that arrives with the destruction of the cathedral and brings the end of waiting and the event, recorded by Christian's cameras (94-95). The anarchists celebrate the moment of destruction with a party and the party develops into group sex, with characters pairing off. Christian performs mutual oral sex with Patricia, Stephen's lover, aware that Marie is gazing at him before she and Stephen become entangled. The intensity of the encounter leads to a blackout, which echoes the destruction brought about by their bombs. Everybody recovers from the blackout at the same time, and the effect is somewhat sheepish and ludicrous:

When Patricia and I came to and peered cautiously round, it was to discover all the other heads – arranged in pairs – also coming to and peering cautiously round. The record had long since stuck and its repeated fragment – strident, squeaky, yet as ironical as a fart –

gradually, relentlessly pulled at the mouth of the house until lips, at first stretched into sheepish smile, burst into laughter.

REAL HEALTHY WHOLEFOOD FUCKIN' LAUGHTER.
Christ (95-96).

Far from a moment of rhapsody, the BSO's sexual encounter becomes a moment of comic relief for the group. All the tension of the group's activities, particularly the careful co-ordination between destroying the cathedrals and recording their destruction for posterity, degenerates into an orgy and from there into the ironic laughter. The particular tensions of the relationship between Marie and Christian seem to dissolve for a moment. But the whole effect is an illusion, as evidenced by the narrator's cynical interjection of "Christ", which closes the chapter. The stuck record is an important reminder that nothing has changed. Their act of resistance to the meanings created by society will only lead to government crackdowns. The group will disintegrate, members will only see each other in passing in the street, and will be too caught up in their own lives and in the fear of arrest to show any sign of recognition. Christian, trapped in ever-growing mazes of philosophical speculation, will become increasingly more isolated. Sexual unity is a transient illusion, like all other forms of unity in the novel.

Michael K is not even taken in by the illusion of sex and community. Towards the end of the novel, after his miraculous escape from the camp at Kenilworth, he encounters three derelicts, a man and two women, on the beach at Sea Point. One of the women has a baby and seems to be involved with the man. These people, in their disregard for authority and the pointlessness of their existence, resemble the BSO. They give Michael wine, which he vomits up immediately, and they feed him. Unlike the BSO, they do not destroy the structures of the old order, instead they turn them to their own use. They occupy the abandoned houses and businesses of post-apocalypse Sea-Point (*MK* 175). Also like the BSO, they are sexually uninhibited. The single woman casually fondles Michael K's penis and takes "his penis into her mouth" (178). He is a sexual innocent and is not interested in her advances. He remembers her with dismay:

He could not sleep. Against his will the memory returned of the casque of silver hair bent over his sex, and the grunting of the girl as she laboured on him. I have become an object of charity, he thought. Everywhere I go there are people waiting to exercise their forms of charity on me. All these years and I still carry the look of an orphan. They treat me like the children of Jakkalsdrif, whom they were prepared to feed because they were still too young to be guilty of anything (*MK* 181)

The woman's sexual charity reminds him of the religious charity of the "Vrouevereniging ladies" at Jakkalsdrif, who allow him to scrape the soup bucket (*MK* 84). Both acts of charity emerge because the women see him as an innocent, one who needs their care. They make the same mistake as the medical officer at Kenilworth, who believes he can do something for the man he calls "Michaels". Michael K does not want to be the object of other people's charity because charity finds its ultimate expression in Huis Norenius. He shares an aversion to social workers with Molloy, who says, "against the charitable gesture there is no defence that I know of" (Beckett 1955:23-4). He does not want to return to childhood because he associates childhood with the absence of freedom. He hopes for the isolation of his pumpkin patches, spread out across the bush. He has a vision of minimal survival, escaping back to the farm and simply living, free from camps and charity (183-184). Christian also imagines "Beginning to live over again, having more provisions for the road than I have road left" (*BS* 117). Where Michael K sees the minimal existence as the freedom from charity, Christian imagines a freedom from words, saying "I am learning to speak just when I need to learn to be silent forever" (117). Each novel ends, not with paradise, but with isolation and the acceptance of isolation. Paradise was a fleeting moment in the lives of the protagonists. Michael K envisages a return to a paradise which meets only his most essential need, the need for water, but the novel leaves him on the beach at Sea Point.

Christian and Susan find their moment of freedom in a reversion to childhood but it is a childhood which lacks the supervision of adults. Like the siblings in Chifamba's *rungano*, they find refuge near the water, away from adult authority. Their playing and racing in the sun indicate a return to childhood. Water serves as such a refuge throughout the novel. Christian meets Blanche Goodfather for coffee and cigarettes near blunt rock falls (*BS* 10-11). Christian and Susan are fleeing the war, and their military and marital responsibilities. Their moment of ecstasy, even though it seems infinite, passes. Susan would like to continue their journey, saying, "Shit! Let's not go back. Let's drive on to the next town... We'll make believe just for a few days... Besides what I still have to learn about those explosives wouldn't hurt a fly" (*BS* 46). She brings reality back after the ecstasy. She reminds herself and Christian that there is a war on and that they are accountable to a chain of command. They are no ordinary pair of adulterers throwing off their clothes and taking an unofficial afternoon off work to frolic in the sunshine. Their holiday involves a movement away from the death and destruction of their war back towards a state of innocence. Susan's destructive urges surface when she kicks the flame lilies. The flame lily grows in marshy areas and is the official flower of Zimbabwe, as it was the official flower of Rhodesia. She attacks the

flower as symbol whereas Christian tries to preserve it, romantically collecting a bunch of flame lilies. His act is also destructive because the picked flowers will certainly die.

Michael K's escape, unlike Christian's, is a solitary one. His communion is with nature and his memories of nature rather than with another human being. He recalls Wynberg Park and becomes aware that he has changed:

When he thought of Wynberg Park he thought of an earth more vegetal than mineral, composed of last year's rotted leaves and the year before's and so on back till the beginning of time, an earth so soft that one could dig and never come to the end of the softness; one could dig to the centre of the earth from Wynberg Park, and all the way to the centre it would be cool and dark and damp and soft. I have lost my love for that kind of earth, he thought. I no longer care for that kind of earth between my fingers. It is no longer the green and the brown that I want but the yellow and the red; not the wet but the dry; not the dark but the light; not the soft but the hard. I am becoming a different kind of man, he thought, if there are two kinds of man. If I were cut, he thought, holding his wrists out, looking at his wrists, the blood would no longer gush from me but seep, and after a little seeping dry and heal. I am becoming smaller and harder and dryer every day. If I were to die here, sitting in the mouth of my cave looking out over the plain with my knees under my chin, I would be dried out by the wind in a day, I would be preserved whole, like someone in the desert drowned in sand (MK 67-68).

Michael K's development recalls the Shona tradition in which people get dryer as they become older (Lan 1985:93). His dry state suggests that he is close to death. He has developed into a new kind of being, a dryer one who can thrive in the anti-paradise of the desert. Unlike Rushdie's *Jahilia*, the sand does not signify absence but surplus. Michael K has survived for so long on so little that he could drown in sand and thus be made immortal. While he recalls the damp, fertile soil of Wynberg fondly, he has now become at one with the dryness of the Karoo. Marechera's Christian finds his escape in a return to water and to the games of childhood; Michael K moves towards the acceptance of old age and of death. There is, as in *Black Sunlight*, a thread that holds him to the world he left behind him: "There seemed nothing to do but live" (MK 66). While he shuts himself down to an almost deathlike state, shunning food and movement, he retains the merest flicker of life. It is this core of life which finally causes him to return to the world of the living. Susan and Christian move from a deadly landscape to a living one. Their destructive urges carry them back to a world of potential death. While the two novels work in diametrically opposite ways, both involve encounters with paradise. Marechera's paradise is the conventional Eden, with flowers, innocence and streams. Coetzee inverts the paradise tradition, bringing his character into paradise in drought.

Conclusion: Quenching Thirst

Each protagonist reaches a point in the landscape at which he breaks free from dependence upon, or persecution by, other people. Christian ends *Black Sunlight* contemplating his suicide:

Beginning to live all over again, having more provisions for the road than I have road left. Like Cato the Censor, learning Greek in his old age, I am learning to speak just when I need to be silent forever. Words are an empty bag, a rowing round seven miles of it all. Their bells at Easter follow her mountains ringing on a donkey and fire sits hardy when winter loves an old hag. I am burnt on the breakteeth words. Their timeless fear to all. Meaning leaks in through holes in the roof and drums softly here and there collecting in puddles that soon extend their tentacles all over the floor where I watch the gashes in my wrists leak faster and faster with meaning to flood beyond recognition my embittered days with Blanche Goodfather. Amazon. And we grew to know less and less of each other. Yet the memory would not set into the setting sun, that green and frozen glance where broken hearts are wrecked out of their wounds. A blind sky bleached white the intellect of human bone, skinning the emotions from the fracture to reveal the grief underneath. And the mirror reveals me, a naked and vulnerable fact (BS 117).

While the narrator of *The Black Insider* waits for the enemy, cradling his submachine-gun, Christian has only himself and his language to confront. The intellect, represented by Blanche Goodfather and her civilisation, has nothing to offer. He is alone with his grief, stripping himself to the bone but left without an audience to witness his act and without an ending. Memory remains as a stain, refusing to join in the sunset of conventional closure. Meaning behaves like rain in *The House of Hunger*, suggesting that the drought in both novels is indeed an allegory for meaninglessness, in particular the meaninglessness of language. The blood from Christian's wrists blends into the puddles of meaning making him a part of the meaninglessness.

Michael K also ends with a solution to the drought. He imagines a return to the Visagie farm, accompanied by "a little old man with a stoop and a bottle in his side pocket who muttered all the time into his beard" (MK 183). The farm infrastructure is destroyed and when the old man asks how they will obtain water, Michael K responds with an action:

...he, Michael K would produce a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string. He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie the string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live (MK 183-184).

Marechera concludes with a storm of meaning which cannot be articulated. Coetzee suggests that the drought can be conquered through a simple, symbiotic relationship between Michael K and the landscape. Using the imaginary teaspoon, he takes enough to meet his needs and no more. Christian notes that he has "more provisions for the road than I have road left". His surplus is a curse and he links the surplus of provisions to a language surplus. Michael K proposes a minimalist existence, ending with the simple phrase "one can live". He need only do enough to sustain life. The effort to sustain the garden has made way for an effort to sustain himself. At the final moment in *The Life and Times of Michael K*, garden and gardener merge. In *Black Sunlight*, the only union is between the rain that ends the drought and the blood of the suicide. Christian's existence is fixed and alone. He is "a naked and vulnerable fact" who cannot achieve either extinction or unity.

Conclusion

Black Sunlight's protagonist, like Eugene Dawn, returns to introspection after the moment of action. The destruction of the cathedrals is perhaps a more legitimated act than Dawn's stabbing his son. Martin Dawn is innocent. From an anarchistic perspective, particularly that of an African anarchist, the church has been complicit in the destruction of African tradition and in the mental colonisation of the continent. The crux of the problem is the relationship between action, no matter how moral or immoral that action, and the words which express the action. Those words themselves are all that can justify the action. We can only understand Christian's participation in the bombing through his relationship with the Christ icon. But that relationship has nothing to do with the icon itself. The icon merely mediates Christian's relationship with Marie. The BSO's target is not the cathedral in itself. It is the cathedral as sign. *Black Sunlight* explores the possibility of an unmediated existence. The character of Susan is the purest allegorical expression of that existence. She destroys signs. Christian is more ambivalent. By photographing the cathedral bombing he documents the destruction of the sign, thus creating a new one. He builds another image through which people mediate their existence and Susan is justified in telling him, after the destruction of the road sign, "Your heart wasn't in it" (*BS* 49). Christian is the authorial voice, and authors are implicated in the creation of meaning. His final isolation is an attempted escape from his own authority.

Michael K is another kind of author. He represents the authorship of one's own destiny. Where Christian becomes a participant in an increasingly insane world, recording its insanity, Michael K looks for an exit. By fitting into the ecology of the landscape, surviving on the minimum, he will break out of the network of human relations. He will take enough from nature to meet his needs, fertilising his little plots as he does so. He is also creating a mythos, an understanding of himself as gardener. Like *Candide*, he will define himself by the action of gardening while those around him try to achieve self-definition through language. Michael K chooses to leave his cave in the mountains and to return to the Visagie farm. He risks encountering the grandson and being re-inserted into society. When he fantasises his return to the farm, he imagines an old man who will accompany him, and respond to his resourcefulness. He is as implicated in a social world as Christian is in the world of signs. In both cases, the protagonists hope to meet society on their own terms. Michael K wants to be seen as a resourceful being, not an object of charity.

The subjective and allegorical approach of both Coetzee and Marechera is, similarly, not an attempt to write themselves out of the reality of contemporary Southern Africa. Coetzee makes the point very clearly in a comment on the complicity of white South Africans in the apartheid system:

The whites of South Africa participated, in various degrees, actively or passively, in an audacious and well-planned crime against Africa. Afrikaners as a self-defining group distinguished themselves in the commission of that crime. Thereby they lent their name to it. It will be a long time before they have the moral authority to withdraw that landmark.... Is it in my power to withdraw from the gang? I think not.... More important, is it my heart's desire to be counted apart? Not really. Furthermore—and this is an afterthought—I would regard it as morally questionable to write something like the second part of *Dusklands*—a *fiction*, note—from a position that is not historically complicit (DP 343).

Coetzee asserts that he is not an Afrikaner, since he would not be accepted as such by the group. On the other hand, as a white South African, he accepts his complicity in the apartheid system, even as he opposes that system. Complicity is empowering when it enables a subject to understand a situation from within. Aside from the moral issue, the character of Jacobus Coetzee would run the risk of degenerating into caricature if drawn by someone not intimate with the mythos of Afrikanerdom. Jacobus Coetzee, as Coetzee asserts in the *Speak* interview, is not an eighteenth century frontiersman. He represents the desire to achieve self-realisation at all costs. By placing him in the anarchic borderland of the 18th century Cape Colony, Coetzee explores the limits of that desire. What if man is free to realise himself with no bounds on his authority? What if the people in his environment exist purely as objects upon which he can vent his desires? Jacobus Coetzee is the projection of calls for Afrikaner self-determination into a historical setting in which self-determination is completely possible. The narrative emerges out of the tension between Afrikaner pasts, presents and futures. The Eugene Dawn narrative works as a contrast. What becomes of the drive for self in the context of a contemporary America which represses it?

Marechera and Coetzee use allegory to demonstrate the complicity of the writer, and of the act and style of writing, not only in past abuses, but in the shaping of a future reality. Allegory allows for the projection of current subjective realities into a potential state of being. While, certainly in the case of *Michael K*, this state of being can seem to be a prophetic one, it is more importantly a fictive one. It lies clearly outside the dynamics of current experience. Marechera says of *Black Sunlight* that:

...I tried to show that what is in the mind as some banal slogan can, when actually acted out, end in destruction and death. No one censors your dreams, no matter how horrible or macabre they are. But if you start translating your thoughts and your dreams into real life, that's when society moves against you in terms of the police, the army and the secret service. So here is a group of people who are actually acting out their thoughts and of course sooner or later maybe will have to face the consequences. But Devil's End and the house Susan, Katherine and the others keep in town show that freedom is

itself a type of prison, and that ultimately there's no way out (Veit-Wild 1992:31).

Black Sunlight begins with slogans that express the expectations of Marechera's fellow squatters in London and uses these slogans as the basis for a new fictive universe. The movement from a statement to an imaginative setting which actualises that statement is allegory. Both writers take other forms of expression, slogans as well as novels, and project them into scenarios. As with *Dusklands*, the emphasis of *Black Sunlight* is upon taking responsibility for one's utterances. The squatters seek absolute freedom in the face of overwhelming state hegemony. The writer sympathises with their aims, just as Christian sympathises with the aims of the BSO, but he creates a universe in which the slogan could be the basis of a future world order.

Allegory for both writers thus revolves around the question of ethics. *Dusklands* and sections of *Black Sunlight* examine the possibility of freedom without ethics. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Age of Iron* and *The House of Hunger* place the ethical self in extreme situations, testing the limits of ethics. One understands both writers best by placing them within the context of story-telling, specifically within Southern Africa, but also within the world at large. Humanity mediates its relationship towards history through its stories. Allegorical writing explores the ethics of that mediation by imagining the same stories, but within an alternative historical framework. Marechera rejects the official versions of African narrative, claiming that it has been hijacked by missionaries and propagandists. At the same time, he uses the figures and techniques of traditional narrative in his own writing. The rejection is not of tradition, but of its abuse. Coetzee's writing makes use of the stories of colonialism, especially those which locate themselves in Southern Africa. Both writers make active use of the narratives of local history but they do not limit themselves to these narratives. They relocate the modernist project in a setting recognisable to the Southern African reader and they redefine it in terms of theme, form and function. In doing so, they break free of the restrictions of Southern African historiography and of European literature. They reject what Hayden White identifies as nineteenth century discourses around nation and narrative and instead offer allegorical universes in which individuals make their own identity and their own history, even if those individuals have to accept the consequences of what they have created.

Appendix I:
The Children who were abandoned in the Year of Starvation

Jane Chifamba¹

- 1 A long, long time ago there was a man and his wife who were very poor. They had two children, a boy and a girl. In one year of starvation they failed to obtain food. They were unable to give any to the children. The children began to cry and to trouble their parents, demanding food. The parents were so troubled that they finally plotted to abandon their children to end the suffering caused by seeing their children's continuous crying.
- 2 One day they woke the children up early in the morning, saying that they were going to grandfather's place to seek food. The children were happy at the prospect of becoming satisfied. The family formed a file, father and mother in front, the children following behind. After much walking they arrived at a river which had a very large black pool in which lived a very fearsome crocodile which seemed ready to catch and eat any people and animals which fell in. Father and mother told the children to rest while they went in search of a few mouthfuls of maroro (a wild fruit) to help them to arrive at grandfather's.
- 3 The children waited and fell drowsy. Father and mother went straight home, hoping that the children would miss the path and die in the bush. Perhaps they would become confused and fall into the pool with the crocodile.
- 4 When the children awoke, they began to search for their parents, thinking that they had gone just a little way to look for this maroro. They looked near the pool but they could not see them so they began to search in earnest. They followed the river but could not see them and they collapsed again of hunger. They tried to cross the river to search on the other side but the boy fell in. The crocodile saw him but it took pity on him and carried him across. The sister crossed by the same path, on the back of the crocodile.
- 5 Having been helped to cross, these two siblings continued to seek (1)² their parents further and further into the countryside. As they wandered thus into the countryside, they saw a well-trodden, beaten path and persisted in following it. The boy had a small bag that he had been given by his father. Now they walked

1. From Chifamba, Jane. 1964. *Ngano Dzepasi Chigare*. Salisbury: Oxford University Press, in Association with the Southern Rhodesia Literature Bureau. pp. 1-7. Translated into English by Grant Lilford. Thanks are due to Anna Poshai and Greenwell Matsika for correcting the translation. I, of course, remain responsible for any errors.

2. Numbers in brackets refer to page numbers in the original.

for a very long time. The sister asked, "When are we going to return home to be with mother?"

6 "It does not matter when, the point is we will get there." answered the boy.

7 They continued to walk and began to see a heap of finger millet (zviyo). The boy said "Look, this grain was left by mother."

8 "Take some and put it in your bag to give to mother," the girl answered.

9 After finding those grains, they only walked a few paces. They saw a pile of grains of maize by the side of the road. The little girl said to her brother, "Could it be that father was carrying a torn sack?"

10 "I don't know. her brother answered. "Put the maize in your bag." The girl put the maize in her bag and they found their path again.

11 They continued to see little heaps of maize, millet, rice, chiiko, all spread out. The bags eventually became very full of the grain that was left everywhere.

12 As afternoon arrived and they were growing very hungry, these two children arrived at a huge house that was just near the path they were following. They hoped to find food and directions as to the way home. Because they did not know the people here, they risked themselves to arrive at this place. The two children were not aware that the house had once belonged to some ogres (magandanga) who used to kill people and seize their possessions. These ogres were caught and condemned to die. Therefore the house no longer had an owner.

13 The children entered the enclosure expecting occupants who would return soon. They saw the house was decorated with those same stolen things I mentioned but no sign (2) of the people of the place. They found a water pot and another cooking pot but there was no water in the water pot. Although they had found plenty of grain on the path, they had been unable to eat it, and they looked forward to putting something in their mouths for the first time in ages. They decided to cook sadza. The girl took the water pot and went to draw water. As she left, so did the boy to find fire-wood for cooking.

14 As he was leaving the house he saw four little puppies which were sleeping close by. He whistled and they immediately came to him. As they came, he gave them the following names: Machena (White-one), Tongoona (Nót-at-all-seen), Muroindishe (He-who-is-sent) and Chitsvuku (Red-one). He took them in search of wood and returned soon to make the fire. After this the girl arrived, she was astonished to see that her brother had found these dogs but she was also very happy because the dogs would protect them and drive away wild animals.

- 15 These children brought each other up at this place and covered themselves with blankets and wore clothes that they found in the house. As they grew up, the boy found castor oil seeds (mhadzi yepfuta) (3) and he spoke to his sister of watering them. The girl agreed. Hence she always agreed to water the castor oil seeds of her brother and to enable them to grow.
- 16 The next day, the girl went early to the spring where she saw at the well another very beautiful girl. She said, "Good morning aunt," because it was her custom to greet all the people she met. When the girl at the well saw that she had been seen, she jumped and fell into the well where she then sank into the water and did not become visible again. The girl who had come to draw the water was dry-mouthed with astonishment. She set off for the house without water. On arrival she told her brother of all she had seen.
- 17 "Why did you call out to her; you should have just caught her and brought her here so I could marry her so that you would be able to stay with her here whenever I go off to hunt." This is how the brother answered.
- 18 "To catch a person from who knows where when I was not even able to talk to her?"
- 19 Since the brother did not quite believe the story, he said, "Let us go together to the well, we should see if the girl you saw has returned." They both went to the well, but not a person did they see.
- 20 Early the next morning, they returned again but did not see a thing. As soon as the girl went alone she saw five girls who resembled each other. The girls were quick to spot her and they jumped into the well just as the others had done. The sister returned to the house, she said to her brother on arrival that if she went to the well in the morning, he should follow her by the side. The boy said, "If I should see them going into the well, I will also follow them so that I can see where they live."
- 21 "If you enter the water you will die, and I will be left behind. Who will look after me?" At that point, the sister began to cry.
- 22 "I want to find a girl who I can marry so that you will be able to stay with her."
- 23 Early the next morning, the girl went to the well with her brother following at the side. Before they got there, the boy said to his sister that if he should enter the water, (4) following girls, she should stay and watch the castor oil plant near the well (the one she had watered). He said, "If you should see that plant growing well with strong leaves, it is then that you know that I am alive and moreover that I am happy. But, if you should see that the plant has withered it is then that I am suffering. If you should see that the plant has dried up, then you know that I have died."

- 24 "Good. I hear you my brother. Go well. Let the ancestral spirits (midzimu) look after you." The girl now began to weep copiously.
- 25 Then the girl arrived at the well, the boy hidden at the side, she saw those girls running towards the well. The boy emerged from where he was hidden, ran like the wind and entered the well at once. His dogs, seeing that their master had entered the well, followed also. Under the well there was a hole which could only accept one person at a time. Those girls were caught by the boy since they were not able to escape through this narrow path without running into each other.
- 26 The girl who was left behind said to the boy that for men to go there was forbidden because it was a large village for women only. Although the boy heard this, he persisted in following since he wanted to see for himself (lit.: so that he could see for himself in his nose like snuff - *kuti anozvionera pamhuno sefodya*).³ They finally arrived at a large village, which was for women only with just one huge man. This man had four heads. He would not allow other men to stay there because he feared losing his kingship.
- 27 When the girls arrived in the large village they at once started telling the senior wife that they were followed by a good yet poor boy. The senior wife hurried to hide him in an enclosure in their camp. There they told him to keep quiet and to stop his dogs from wandering about.
- 28 While the five girls were hiding the boy, the big man of four heads was asleep. Soon he woke up, smelling a man. When the senior wives saw him starting to revive, they asked him if he wanted the meat of a chicken. This man refused because he first wanted to hunt a man who had entered his enclosure, since he could smell his scent. He sniffed towards the camp where the boy was hidden, so he could find him (5) and seize him there. Our boy's dogs, hearing this man coming, emerged so that they could bite him. The boy restrained them and was asked by the man how he had come to this village of women only. As somebody in danger, but he answered in a soft voice, saying, "I am lost, I don't know myself where I am, sir."
- 29 This huge man thought of a plan to catch this boy so he could punish him and eat him without fear of his dogs. He would in time suggest a plan to go into the bush to hunt in the early morning. But since he usually hunted with arrows, they should obviously not take the dogs. They should leave them locked in the house so that they would not get out.
- 30 The next morning, this huge man came wandering towards the house to put his plan into action. He went to wake up the boy so that they could go. He said to

³. See Pongweni 1989:141.

that young man that he must shut his dogs up in the house. The boy shut up his dogs well, but he left one place open, so that if he should call them, they could get out.

- 31 They went far from the house, the huge man thinking that today the boy would be finished. I will carefully eat him without his dogs here. They walked a little way into the bush, the huge man said, "Climb this tree and break off firewood for us to take home". His plan was that when the boy climbed the tree, he would shake it until the boy crashed to the ground; then he could begin to eat him. While he was climbing the tree, the boy began to call his dogs. The dogs in that place went "gu" (ideophone of knocking something down) hearing their owner's whistle; they began to break the house so they could get out. They ran out of that place going in the direction of the whistle. They found their master in mortal danger. One by one, in their anger, they jumped and each seized a head of the huge man at the neck. They severed all the heads and the huge man died. When he saw that the huge man was dead, the boy came down from the tree and lead his dogs back to the village. All the young and old women had begun to cry together, thinking that he had been killed. Then, the mothers and the girls were very happy to see that he was alive. They made a ritual feast (bira) to give thanks to him (6) because up until now all the boy children they had borne were in danger of being eaten.
- 32 Since this boy had left his sister at the other place, he said to these mothers that it was time he started preparing to go back. All the old and young women thought of going with him because they would live better in a country without men with four heads. These arranged themselves in a file so that they could go with him; the place seemed not to have anyone left behind. They made a file led by this boy.
- 33 The sister of the boy sat watching the castor-oil-bean tree to see what it could tell her of her brother. At the time that her brother was almost eaten by the huge man with four heads, when he was shaken out of the tree, the plant withered greatly. She was very unhappy, thinking that her brother had died. When she saw the plant start to develop strong leaves she began to be very happy.
- 34 As soon as the women finished packing, they were led by the boy and the five girls to the new world. They entered that place out of the well. It was the boy who was the last to come out.
- 35 As he arrived home he joined his sister and was received with very great happiness. He told his sister of all he had seen and done in his journey of

coming into great wealth. He was also happy to show her the wife he had brought with him.

36 The boy eventually became very rich because the men of the surrounding district came to get married at his house since it was a district of men only. All the bride prices (pfuma) were his. It is he who ate them. Finally he became a very great king feared by many.

37 It is here that the storyteller finishes.

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