

MARGUERITE POLAND'S LANDSCAPES AS SITES FOR
IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

BY

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the
degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in the Department of English

UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL

DURBAN

2008

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father, Mr Manuel Job Jacob and my mother, Mrs Catherine Jacob who instilled in me the value of good education and whose sacrifices, love and support I will cherish throughout my life.

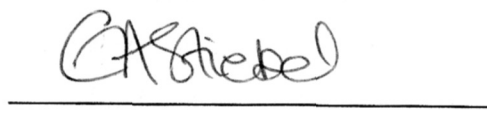


DECLARATION

I, Mark Christopher Jacob, (student number: 200202011), hereby declare that this thesis, apart from the quotations acknowledged within it, is the product of my own research and has not been submitted in part, or in full, for any other degree and /or institution, for assessment and evaluation.


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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I focus on the life and works of Marguerite Poland and argue that landscapes in her fiction act as sites for identity construction. In my analysis I examine the central characters' engagement with the land, taking cognisance of Poland's historical context and that of her fiction as represented in her four adult novels and eleven children's books. I also focus on her doctoral thesis and non-fiction work, *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People* (2003). Poland's latest work *The Boy In You* (2008) appeared as this thesis was being completed, thus I only briefly refer to this work in the Conclusion. My primary aim puts into perspective personal, social and cultural identities that are constructed through an analysis of the landscapes evident in her work. Post-colonial theories of space and place provide the theoretical framework. In summary, this thesis argues that landscape is central to Poland's *oeuvre*, that her construction of landscape takes particular forms depending on the type of writing she undertakes; and that her characters' construction of identity is closely linked to the landscapes in which they are placed by their author, herself a product of her physical and cultural environment.

"Landscape is dynamic; it serves to create and naturalise the histories and identities inscribed upon it, and so simultaneously hides and makes evident social and historical formations" (Carter et al 1993: xii). The implication of this statement is that the landscape is continuously constructed and deconstructed; that there is a constant evolution of meaning between individuals and the landscape; and that socio-historical conditions are largely responsible for forming ideology and consciousness. This, I argue, is also true for Poland's fiction. Poland's own position, as a writer who draws inspiration from the land and its inhabitants, is also discussed.

In this thesis I examine the different phases of Poland's work looking at different kinds of identity construction through different kinds of landscape portrayal. As a prolific South African female contemporary writer, Poland has made inroads into the world of fiction writing once dominated by men.

Consequently, feminist issues abound in her writings and I deconstruct characters' engagement with the land in order to uncover their gendered identities. Primarily, I explore the themes of belonging, identity formation, displacement and dispossession in a particular space and place.

My thesis opens with an introduction outlining reasons for my choice of writer, her works to be discussed and the theoretical approaches to landscape and identity construction pertinent to the thesis. I focus on what Poland's writing yields in terms of gendered identities, racial attitudes and cultural practices in her fictional landscape construction. These sections are grounded in the theories proposed by writers such as, inter alia, Paul Carter, Edward Relph, Chris Fitter and Dennis Cosgrove. In Chapter 2 my discussion focuses on the life and works of Poland placing her in a historical and cultural context. In Chapter 3, I explore how Poland constructs what I call a 'mythological landscape'. My aim here, as in the following chapters, is to analyse place as a text upon which histories and cultures are inscribed and interpreted and which, in turn, inscribes them too. I also show the extent to which Poland relies on oral folklore to create space and place in her fiction. The literary focus is on her children's literature and her writings on cattle description and folklore.

Chapter 4 focuses on a literary analysis of *Train To Doringbult* (1987), *Shades* (1993), and *Iron Love* (1999) respectively. These novels demonstrate how Poland shows identity shaped within a 'colonial landscape'. I examine how these novels reiterate that socio-historical conditions are responsible for forming ideology and consciousness. I also analyse how this particular genre puts into perspective personal, social and cultural identities that emerge from particular periods in South African history. Chapter 5 focuses on what I call the 'indigenous landscape', on how the South African landscape and the indigenous cattle of the region become characters in their own right. A literary analysis of *Recessional for Grace* (2003), *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People* (2003) and Poland's thesis, *Uchibidolo: The Abundant Herds: A descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour-pattern terminology and naming practice* (1996), form the basis of my discussion in this chapter.

I conclude my thesis by further confirming the significance of landscape in Poland's work as a site for the construction of identity. I focus on Poland's impact on South African literature to date. I also focus on Poland's preoccupation with identity in a transforming landscape, showing that there is a constant evolution of meaning between individuals and the landscape within which they find themselves. In this regard I show that identity linked to place has to be seen in terms of context. I mention Poland's most recent commissioned project – a historical biography of the St. Andrew's College in Grahamstown, an institution that is now a hundred and fifty years old. Poland's association with this college, its social and historical context and other discursive issues pertaining to landscape, transformation and construction of identities are fore-grounded, to lend impetus to my thesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

During the writing of this thesis many people assisted me with advice, information and encouragement. In particular I would like to thank:

- Dr Marguerite Poland for her encouragement and inspiration and for taking the time to shed light on salient issues in her novels.
- My supervisor and mentor, Professor Lindy Stiebel, for her time, insights and motivation.
- My parents, wife and children for their patience, understanding and encouragement.
- Michael Jacob and Laura Ghirao for their assistance with printing.
- My friends and colleagues for all their support and encouragement.
- The National Research Foundation for financial assistance towards this research. Opinions expressed in this thesis and conclusions reached are those of the author and not necessarily of the National Research Foundation.

CONTENTS

Declaration	i
Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	v
Contents	vi
Introduction	1
 <u>CHAPTER ONE: DECONSTRUCTING LANDSCAPE</u>	 14
1.1. Defining Landscape	16
1.2. Writing the Landscape	20
1.3. Landscape and Identity	24
1.4. The Landscape of Marguerite Poland	27
 <u>CHAPTER TWO: POLAND IN CONTEXT</u>	 36
2. Poland In Context	36
 <u>CHAPTER THREE: MYTHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE</u>	 51
3.1. Myth, Mythology and the Oral Tradition	53
3.2. Folktales	55
3.3. Folklore Motifs	58
 <u>CHAPTER FOUR: COLONIAL LANDSCAPE</u>	 76
4.1. <i>Train to Doringbult</i> (1987)	78
4.2. <i>Shades</i> (1993)	102
4.3. <i>Iron Love</i> (1999)	142

CHAPTER FIVE: INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE	161
5.1. <i>Uchibidolo</i> (1996) and <i>The Abundant Herds</i> (2003)	
5.1.1. Cattle in Zulu Life	164
5.1.2. The Poetry of Naming	170
5.1.3. Cattle and the Oral Tradition	178
5.2. <i>Recessional For Grace</i> (1996)	
5.2.1. Preamble to <i>Recessional For Grace</i>	182
5.2.2. Gendered Identity	188
5.2.3. Environmental Symbiosis	192
5.2.4. Photography, Landscape & Identity	199
5.2.5. Women in Society	205
5.2.6. Animals in the Landscape	213
CONCLUSION	217
BIBLIOGRAPHY	222

INTRODUCTION

Landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction,
a composition of that world. Landscape is a way of seeing the
world. (Cosgrove 1984: 13)

This introductory chapter deals with an exploratory discussion of selected discourses that I offer in order to position myself in this research study. I have employed theories of space and place, and their inter-relationship with identity to give me the tools for constructing and deconstructing Marguerite Poland's portrayal of landscape in her works as sites for identity construction. Whilst my focus is on what I call Poland's colonial, indigenous and mythological landscapes, my discussion and analysis is sensitive to the complex transformation of landscape and identity in the new South Africa. Discursive issues around place, space and their relationship to identity will be problematised, developed and deepened to provide a framework within which to understand the lives of indigenous and colonial people and their engagement with the land, as portrayed in Poland's work. In this regard I will refer to the works of Paul Carter, J.M. Coetzee, Edward Relph, Chris Fitter, Mike Robinson, Bill Ashcroft, Dennis Cosgrove and Sara Mills, whom I regard as foundational theorists within the field of landscape and identity study, particularly for my purposes. In my research I have noted that Poland has not been studied as widely as she deserves to be by the academy and that as yet no full-scale work has been devoted to her writing. In my thesis I will draw from critics who have looked at sections of her *oeuvre*, for example, Elwyn Jenkins (1986, 1988, 1993), but in most instances I will have to rely on my own readings of her works.

"When people are 'at home in' or 'at harmony with' a particular landscape, that landscape speaks to them and is understood by them" (Coetzee 1988: 10). Poland's engagement with the South African land is overwhelming and her

deep affinity for nature is evident in all of her works. There is a depth of understanding and a love of the land and its people in her writing, which is deeply impressive. Fine details of flora and fauna, as well as locality, in the sense of particular places, mountains, plains and rivers are described to the letter. One of Poland's concerns in writing, particularly when writing for children, "is to give them a sense of belonging, to try to relay to them a sense of wonder in and understanding of the environment and the people of this country" (Poland 2000: 13). Although setting by some may be taken as only 'background', it should also be looked at through the refracted light of human consciousness; and identities in terms of place should be determined by *where* one is in a topographical sense, by *whom* one is with, and in what social and historical context. So although existence is social, it is also dependent on one's engagement with the land. In this chapter, I intend to provide a brief overview of the works of Poland with particular reference to her portrayal of the colonial landscape, cultural landscape, mythological landscape and the indigenous African landscape. Furthermore, I will explore her engagement with the physical aspect of the landscape, and then look more specifically at theories containing place, space and identity construction.

Firstly, let me define some of the terms to be used in this thesis. The word 'colonial' is "usually associated with imperial rule, orientalism and Third World exploitation" (Assmann 1999: 57), whilst 'landscape' is usually associated with topography, scenery, and even backdrop. For the purposes of this thesis 'colonial landscape' will refer to the late nineteenth century socio-political environment of South Africa, its physical milieu and the culture and ideologies bound within it. I will look at how Poland interweaves past and present, fiction and history, testimony and memory as she presents accounts of historical happenings, drawing from personal experiences, and transposing these into the lives of her fictional characters. 'Mythological landscape' will refer to the world of fantasy, to relationships with animals, objects, gods and the South African land upon which the story takes place, along with the culture and customs developed in society. 'Indigenous landscape' will refer not only to the physical

shape of the land of South Africa, but also to the relationship between people and land they occupy. It also constitutes the indigenous inhabitants' thought patterns, as well as expression, that embrace symbolism and imagery in both the written and spoken word.

The settings in Poland's work and her descriptions of the environment and its inhabitants are the descriptions of an enthusiast of landscape. Baker posits that the term 'landscape' refers essentially "to the form, to the structure, to the appearance, to the visible manifestation of the relationship between people of the space/land they occupy, their milieu (both human and physical)" (2003: 78). The word 'landscape' as used today refers to both a specific terrain and the general character of that environment. It is both topographical and aesthetic in its reference. Poland's originality in dealing with landscape involves not only an acute sense of place but also a sensitive manner of relating landscape and the animal life upon it to her characters. Each of her novels and short stories seems to focus upon some form of organic life in terms of which the characters themselves are described in a particular space and place. On commenting on the symbiotic role of people and place in the South African landscape in general, Poland's response is:

The people who inhabit it or who once inhabited it, like the San, are also a source of inspiration. I believe – and fiercely – that the old beliefs and traditions of which I speak, are a valuable and precious commodity in the desolation of our contemporary world. In these old beliefs there is much to instruct, much at which to wonder and much to feed dreams. These old beliefs, rooted in the land and reverend to nature, give another richer dimension to our way of seeing things.

(2000: 13)

SPACE VERSUS PLACE

Much of what we see around us bears marks of ongoing processes of change. People live in a world that is spatial and although places are socially constructed, and hence dynamic, the meaning of places is temporarily stabilised through processes of scaling (a linear transformation that enlarges or diminishes objects) and the drawing of borders. According to Ashcroft et al:

Space and place are more or less synonymous with one another, but once relations with absent others were made possible by the invention of the clock, the calendar and the map, things changed radically. Locales became shaped by social influences quite distant from them, such as spatial technologies, colonising languages, or, indeed, the very conception of place that these languages came to transmit. (1998: 178)

All cultures, of course, have possessed modes of determining time in one form or another, as well as ways of situating themselves spatially. In every society individuals possess a sense of future, present and past, and every culture has some form of standardised spatial markers, which determine a special awareness of place. In the book by Ashcroft et al, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (1998), Ashcroft outlines how, in pre-modern settings, time and space are connected *through* the situatedness of place. Place and space have long been central constructs within geography, archaeology and landscape architecture. The construction of place and space within these disciplines has reinforced and emphasised the traditional notions of spatial thinking, visualisation and the use of non-linear and conceptual modes of representation (mapping, drawing and model building).

According to Harley, more formal methods for the calculation of time and the ordering of space such as calendars and maps were developed by larger pre-modern cultures such as the ancient Chinese, the Mogul emperors in India and

the Sultans in the Ottoman Empire (see Cosgrove and Daniels 1989: 281). Indeed, these were the prerequisites for the 'distancing' across time and place. But in the pre-modern eras, for most of the ordinary activities of day-to-day life, time and space remained essentially linked through place. Timing devices facilitated changes in the activities of everyday life. A world that has a universal dating system and globally standardised time zones, as ours does today, is socially and experientially different from all pre-modern eras. The global map is not just a mode of portraying 'what has always been there' – the geography of the earth – but is constitutive of quite basic transformations in social relations in terms of urbanisation, race relations, and patriarchy and gender stereotypes.

Cartography, which refers to the drawing or constructions of maps, established space as something that could be measured; an abstract concept which did not depend on any particular place. Maps not only embody both knowledge and possession, but also a sense of tenuousness of such possession. McClintock contends, "The map is a liminal thing, associated with thresholds and marginal zones, burdened with dangerous powers" (1995: 27). Until relatively recently, academics did not debate the terms of space and place beyond the disciplines of geography, archaeology and landscape architecture. Now the paradigm shift is towards spatial patterns, the meanings that groups and individuals attach to landscape and built environment, and spatial modes of problem solving. The concepts of place and displacement reveal the very complex interaction of power, language, history and environment in human experience and the importance of space and location in the process of identity formation.

According to Carter, in his influential book *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), the process of naming identifies places. He eloquently shows just how important the process of naming has been in the case of Australia. He contends that the naming of places can indicate both a point of conquest and of habitation. People live in places within spaces and are lodged within the landscape. These places, besides being named, are also categorised locations. Whilst naming makes places unique, categorisation is a way in which places are rendered

similar. In other words, a mountain here is like a mountain there, or a reservoir here is like a reservoir somewhere else. Places are also defined and recognised through the metonymic process of symbolism: Table Mountain is symbolic of Cape Town; whilst the pyramids are symbolic of Egypt. These symbols may be natural or artificial, permanent or temporary. What is important, however, is that they bring to mind the place they symbolise. According to Robertson and Richards, "As nature is transformed, it is the dominant element in society who will seek to write their own landscape in their own image, in accordance with their own view of the way in which the world should be organized" (2003: 4). Landscape, as a geographical setting and as an aesthetic concept, directs and communicates that view to 'the other' in society, who accepts that view as natural. Symbols written in the landscape, for example, a country church or a cemetery, are responsible for naturalising the concepts of symbolism and imposition. Whatever it is, the effect is the same: landscape becomes one of the principal criteria by which the powerful in society are able to exert authority and dominance – through a process of imposition and naturalisation. Landscape construction then, is inadvertently responsible for revealing, representing and symbolising the relationships of power and control. Robertson and Richards contend that landscapes are therefore, "cultural images" and they are of the opinion that landscapes "often hide the process that have made them – social, political, economic, spiritual" (ibid).

The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not come from locations, nor from trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from the superficial and mundane experiences – though these are all common and perhaps necessary aspects of place. The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centers of human existence. (Relph 1976: 43)

People construct places by establishing habits, customs and practices. In other words, people construct and inhabit places just by doing certain things in certain

ways. The power of spatial configurations in our everyday social practices and ideological constructions of place and identity is quite evident in post-colonial times. When it comes to issues of power and socio-physical space, the South African black population did not enjoy the same status as the colonisers. Power relations in colonial societies entail dominance of the place and, significantly, in the construction of the 'other' in colonised territories through codes of representation. This positioning has grave implications for the struggle for place in the social construction of spatiality and identity construction. Place is a complex interaction of our bodies, the natural world, physical objects, social relations, and cultural and religious systems of meaning. Place is expressive space, meaningful space. Humanistic geography defines place as a center of meaning constructed by experience. Tuan proposes the following definition of place:

Place is a center of meaning constructed by experience. Place is known not only through the eyes and mind but also through the more passive and direct modes of experience which resist objectification. To know a place fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another. At a high theoretical level, places are points in a spatial system. At the opposite extreme, they are strong visceral feelings. Places are seldom known at either extreme: the one is too remote from sensory experience to be real, and the other presupposes rootedness in a locality and an emotional commitment to it that are increasingly rare. To most people in the modern world, places lie somewhere in the middle range of experience. (1975: 15)

To see clearly the reality and life of the land is to see clearly the very context and pretext of every event that takes place there, whether the event is taken to be as pluralistic as the life of a culture or as individualistic as the life of a single human being. Active participation in the development of space is important as it is representative of individuals' ability to make spatial decisions and find place in

their community, and it has implications for their political positioning in social relations of power. Spatial awareness is crucial especially within capitalist urban contexts where there is an unequal representation and construction of space. When the development of capitalism creates conditions of existence that are lived and experienced along class structures, then the fundamental basis for the growth of a class culture exists. Dominant capitalist groups often restrict and define the 'others'' access to space. This is important when one comes to think about how one ought to make sense of who one is and the social relations that structure one's life in terms of identity construction. According to C. Taylor, "In order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become, and of where we are going" (1989: 54). The quest for identity in place and space permeates into everyday life, as well as philosophical consciousness, and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary social world. Changes in intimate aspects of personal life are directly tied to the establishment of social connections. Identities are produced as people interact, and identity is actively constructed. The dynamics of interpersonal social interactive contexts influence the construction and reconstruction of roles.

CULTURAL IDENTITIES

What a 'person' is understood to be certainly varies across cultures, although there are elements of such a notion that are common to all cultures. The capacity to use 'I' in shifting contexts, characteristic of every known culture, is the most elemental feature of reflexive conceptions of personhood. The implication herein is that cultural identity is not exclusive and people may identify with more than one culture. 'Culture' itself refers to customs, practices, languages, values and worldviews that define social groups such as those based on ethnicity, common landscape or common interests. Ngugi wa Thiong'o posits, "Culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world" (in Olaniyan and Quayson 2007: 293). Cultural traditions, like individual identities, are articulations of the experience of coming to terms with the life of that culture's

landscape: both arise out of, and may be understood as articulations in differing voices of the same pre-verbal reality. Cultural identity is important for people's sense of self and how they relate to others. Excessively strong cultural identity can create barriers between groups. Conversely, members of minority cultures can feel excluded from society if the majority of those in authority obstruct or are intolerant of their cultural practices. This implies that some identity formations are hegemonic – they dominate because they are constructed in such a way that their dominance seems like the natural order of things. This has wider ramifications and affects the relationships between landscape and the construction of identity in terms of race, gender and culture. Philips argues that "Hegemonic masculinities are naturalised or taken for granted" and that "different landscapes stereotype male-female relationships and identities" (2006: 9). Similarly, the landscapes in Poland's works are absolutely crucial to the articulation of these ideologies. The characters do not set out with their identities, but acquire them en route through different places and spaces – physical locales and metaphoric spaces of social norms and codes. The colonial landscapes in Poland's works make the power of men seem like the natural order of things. In patriarchal landscape, for example, the white middle class male is constructed as superior not only to other races but also to all women as well.

In applying the above theoretical arguments to Poland's work, particularly her landscapes, some preliminary observations can be made. In her narratives, *Train to Doringbult* (1987), *Shades* (1993), and *Iron Love* (1999) Poland looks at various aspects of colonial life, observing especially the tendencies of the age to repress individual identity and to stifle female independence. The colonial and indigenous landscapes of Poland's work are a series of perspectives within whose order each character must find his or her identity, in relation to other members of the group and in relation to the physical environment in which s/he finds herself/himself. Poland's work explores various frontiers and transgresses many boundaries in order to resolve their identity crises. For example, in *Shades*, Frances explores and exposes the mean hypocrisy of the 'Victorian' ideal of

womanhood and the training of women merely for their place in the home. Frances attempts, in some telling and dramatic actions, to make a statement on the enfranchisement of women and on all artificial forms of social subjugation.

Poland's novels are clearly South African in their preoccupation with land appropriation, dispossession and identity in a transforming landscape. Colonial intervention, like the Glen Grey's Act of 1894, physically alienated large populations of colonised people and the landscapes mimic the cultural ignorance and material greed of colonial society. The black indigenous people were forced to move to different regions and to build new identities with the land and their culture. The implications and consequences of the exploitation that destroys the fabric of a traditional way of life are played out through the microcosm of life in the settings conjured up by Poland. Traditional culture is severely affected and Poland depicts the black man's struggle to come to terms with the fact that his space has been invaded and that his dispossession is a means of sacrifice for progress and development. They no longer have a land that they can call their own, and which can give them the identity they require. Poland interestingly sets her narratives not only in an African geographic and temporal situation, but in some works also within a colonial, historical space, even postcolonial, in a work such as *Recessional for Grace*. The landscapes of Poland's novels, then, are not only the simplified allegorical landscapes of the narrative, but also a political landscape which places the author and her works in specific relations to her country at a particular time.

Molyneux posits "the bourgeoisie has an interest in changing, indeed is continually compelled to change the natural world in order to accumulate capital" (1983: 8). Viewed like this, South Africa is exposed then in the late nineteenth century as an exploitative landscape, not only in terms of commodities but also in terms of its people. Poland clearly depicts this capitalist expansionist movement in *Shades* (1993). Historically, the inexorable dispossession of the Black people in South Africa, of land, of social, cultural and personal identity and of freedom was a result of the migrant labour system. This system,

with all its unethical exploitation and destruction of the individual and society is graphically depicted in *Shades* through Victor, whose character, Poland confirms, is based on a distant relative of hers. This character, "the architect of the migrant labour system" (Poland 1993b: 5), is portrayed in the South African landscape as vividly as possible because she (Poland) wished to lay the ghost of the past and bring into perspective, for herself, the history of her own family in a place she holds most dear. She acknowledges, "It is a place of great contrasts: one of light and one of darkness. A place of decay and a place of hope" (2).

Poland's love for the South African landscape and its diverse cultures, encouraged her to become deeply involved with the indigenous people and their language. Her interaction with the Xhosa people, together with academic study, helped her learn their language, habits and stories. The acts of using language and symbols and telling stories are themselves habits and customs, ones that come to pass in particular places during a specific time period. Story and tradition are, in essence, didactic and help the reader/ listener to form clearer perspectives of life on the land. Poland's use of the oral tradition in her children's literature nurtures a sense of belonging and it mediates between personal experiences and shared social norms. The oral tradition derives its final authority not from its analogy to previous oral texts but rather from its structural geography, its grounding in particular time and space. Orality and tradition are inevitably related closely to one another. As Ong claims in his study of speaking and writing, oral cultures

have a heavy investment in the past, which registers in their highly conservative institutions and in their verbal performances and poetic processes, which are formulaic, relatively invariable, calculated to preserve the hard won knowledge garnered out of past experience which, since there is no writing to record it, would otherwise slip away. (1977: 23-24).

The oral tradition is both embedded in, and a product of, the dynamic process of interaction with changing landscapes. Furthermore, the meanings attached

to the landscape and the encoding thereof, through the medium of the oral tradition, reinforce the concepts of belonging and identity. Mythological landscapes not only deconstruct space and place but also pass on cultural identity from one generation to the next.

Concepts related to oral tradition and mythology will be discussed in Chapter Three, entitled Mythological Landscape. There will, however, be an overlap with Chapter Five entitled Indigenous Landscape, in which I will discuss Poland's thesis, *Uchibidolo: The Abundant Herds: A descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour-pattern terminology and naming practice* (1996), plus her books, *Recessional for Grace* (2003), and *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Cattle of the Zulu People* (2003). Paintings by Leigh Voigt in *The Abundant Herds* confirm that Poland has an affinity for visual representation, either in paint or photographs, and I will explore this dominant motif permeating most of Poland's work in terms of landscape depiction. In Chapter Five we will see how Poland finds inspiration for her novel, *Recessional for Grace* in a photograph, which in the foreground bears the shadow of the photographer around whom Poland structures her narrative. She employs the flashback technique into the imagined lives of Grace and Godfrey, and unfolds a love story set in a remote valley in the Eastern Cape. The novel also revolves around Poland's love affair with the names of Nguni cattle, which she likens to poetry because of their spiritual connotations and metaphorical descriptions. Her doctoral thesis, *Uchibidolo*, also revolves around Nguni cattle and is the genesis of her reference book, *The Abundant Herds*. The environment and the habits and attachments they engender are presented in such a way as to make apparent the sense of value of the lifestyle of the indigenous inhabitants of South Africa and the value they place on the landscape, both physical and cultural.

In summary, this thesis will argue that landscape is central to Poland's oeuvre, that she constructs her landscape in such a way that the form it takes depends on the types of writing she undertakes; and that her construction of her characters' identities is closely linked to the landscapes in which Poland situates them. In Chapter One I aim to examine issues concerning place and space; changing definitions of landscape and

how these affect identity construction. Chapter Two revolves around Poland's world, how landscape has influenced her, which is evident through a biographical analysis of her life. Chapter Three explores Poland's mythological landscape, Chapter Four her colonial landscape and Chapter Five her indigenous landscape, all as evidenced in her writing. Chapter Six concludes the thesis, summarising the cultural and spatial relations in the different fictional landscapes of Poland's work; and looking forward to her current work.

CHAPTER ONE

DECONSTRUCTING LANDSCAPE

It was the names themselves that brought history into being, that invented the spatial and conceptual co-ordinates within which history could occur. For how, without place names, without agreed points of reference, could directions be given, information be exchanged, 'here' and 'there' defined?

(Carter 1987: 46)

Paul Carter stresses the importance of mapping in order to define landscape. Maps colonise space. The configurations and elements of maps indicate operations in terms of histories, geographies and politics of a particular space. Following on from Carter's radical new appreciation of space, climate and topography, the South Africa's academic world has also developed a keen interest in spatial discourse. The upsurge in critical attention paid to 'landscape writing' takes cognisance of the fact that humanity cannot exist independently of the landscape; that humanity and the landscape form an interactive space. Spatial discourse, however, needs to be developed around debates on identity construction as these are regularly linked. Identity is not fixed, immutable or stable, but rather something that is continuously constructed, created and recreated in landscape that is, to a large degree, also constructed by the viewer and, more particularly for my purposes, the writer.

At the outset, I aim to define terms to be used in this thesis: firstly, changing definitions of the term 'landscape', both historical and contemporary; and secondly, a discussion of the terms 'place' and 'space' in order to put into perspective the significance of engagement with the environment in the construction of human identities. There have been many interesting studies in this field (see Cosgrove [1984] and Carter [1987] as early examples) and these will provide valuable insights for my study. My main focus is broadly the portrayal of landscape in literature where it serves to produce constructed spaces and linked identities. My concerns will then be with the specific spaces in Marguerite Poland's writing and what these yield in terms of gendered attitudes, race and cultural practices. Although I will not be

focussing on the question of time directly, historical data that I use will show that the question of historical context impacts constantly on constructions of space. The concept of landscape has many meanings as will be shown, and although initially a term associated with art; contemporary analysis of the term reveals its associations with geographical writing, environmental design and literature. My exploration of Poland's portrayal of landscape in her fiction as site for the construction of identity will be grounded in the theories postulated by Cosgrove (1984), Carter (1987) and J.M.Coetzee (1988), Hillis Miller (1995), Fitter (1995) and Robinson (2002).

1.1 Defining landscape

The term 'landscape' according to the dictionary may be defined as, "A large area of countryside, especially in relation to its appearance" (Procter 1995: 795). The concept 'landscape', however, may be interpreted both literally as well as figuratively. Initially the term was associated with art and painting and it referred to natural scenes portrayed in paintings or photographs; or scenery that is seen as worth painting or photographing. Painting, or artistic composition of scenes from nature, has its roots in European history where landscape painting emerged as a recognisable genre in fifteenth century Europe. Donatello (1386 – 1466), for example, was one of the outstanding artists of his time and he defined and refined the whole terrain of naturalistic and humanistic art. With skill he was able to capture the essence of real landscapes, as one would see them physically, and, on a higher plane, convey a metaphysical message. Donatello, who concentrated on the study of man and nature, transformed the idealism evident in the study of classical forms into a new realism (see de la Croix and Tansey 1975: 428).

Konrad Fiedler quoted in *Gardner's Art Through the Ages* states:

The artist is called upon to create another world beside and above the real one, a world freed from earthly conditions, a

world in keeping with his own discretion. This realm of art opposes the realm of nature... Artistic activity begins when man finds himself face to face with the visible world as with something immensely enigmatic... What art creates is the world, made by and for the artistic consciousness... It is not the artist who has need of nature; nature much more has need of the artist... By comprehending and manifesting nature in a certain sense, the artist does not comprehend and manifest anything, which could exist apart from his activity... Only through artistic activity does man comprehend the visible world.

(de la Croix and Tansey 1980: 789)

The artist, thus, similar to an author, becomes not an imitator of nature, but an arbitrary interpreter of it. We learn of beauty as encapsulated and interpreted by and through these mediators, who hold a pivotal role in taking inspiration from particular landscapes and circulating the ideas of landscape itself. As illustration of this point, in Chapter Five I aim to explore the manner in which Poland, the author, and her cousin, Leigh Voigt, the artist, interpret nature, more especially the colour-patterns of the hides of Nguni cattle.

Some date landscape paintings back to *The Odyssey Landscapes* of the first century B.C. These particular works of art are wall paintings in a house in Rome and they represent scenes from the Homeric epic. Much later, painters like Paul Cézanne (1839 – 1906), who is often called the founder of modern art, produced distortions and irregularities in painted objects that resembled those of this ancient still life. Cézanne contended that the landscape could not afford the artist the same perception as still life objects. He believed that still life was the perfect means of expression for his experiments, as the selected objects could be arranged to offer him a closely controlled starting point. The still life was the ideal vehicle for Cézanne's experiments, as a limited number of selected objects could be arranged by the artist to provide him with a well-ordered point of departure. "The landscape does not afford the artist this advantage, the problems of representation being complicated by

the need to select from the multiplicity of disorganised natural forms those that seem most significant and to order them into pictorial structure that will have cohesive unity" (de la Croix and Tansey 1980: 789). To apply his methods to painting landscapes was one of Cézanne's greatest challenges. Thus, just as landscape had been the principal mode of Impressionist Theory and experiment, so it became the subject for Cézanne's most complete transformation of Impressionism (784).

Landscape painting developed through the centuries and was particularly promoted by the Romantic painter, Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775 – 1851) and also by impressionist painters like Monet (1840 – 1926) and Cézanne, as mentioned above, in the nineteenth century. Romanticism lifted landscape painting to the level of first importance – the level once occupied exclusively by figure painting. It encouraged the expression of moods and feelings animated by experiences of nature undominated by man. The attitude to many of the landscapes assimilated in the art of Monet and Cézanne was highly coloured by the past. These landscapes gave these artists a sense of identity as artists, as well as a working framework within which to operate, and against which to measure their evolving responses to nature. Whilst Monet did not make each painting a "composite, complete thing, but rather an instantaneous fragmentary moment of perception" (Wadley 1989: 33), Cézanne's painting was a matter of a great series of perceptions organised as a whole. Individual paintings by these artists did challenge the social, moral and aesthetic conventions of their time, but such works were conspicuously few and far between.

It is important to observe from the brief history quoted above, that landscape in painting is by no means inertly material but that it is socially and discursively produced. Visual artists compose landscape according to a definite picturesque schema. The procedures of pictorial painting (and viewing) are highly technical and are based on pictorial principles: tone, colour, light, form, planes of foreground, middle-ground proportion, perspective, texture, space etc. Space, in our common sense experience, is the bounded or boundless 'container' of masses or objects. For the analysis of works of art we

regard it as bounded and susceptible to aesthetic and expressive organisation. Architecture provides our commonest experience of the actual manipulation of space, while the art of painting frequently has had the purpose of projecting upon a two-dimensional surface an image (or illusion) of the three-dimensional spatial world we move in. "Picturesque landscape is, in effect, landscape reconstituted in the eye of the imagination according to acquired principles of composition" (Coetzee 1988: 40). Aesthetic observations of picturesque art become a locus of meaning when the elements of the painting's composition are decoded. In this process of decoding, many layers of meanings have to be identified and interpreted since itemisation of features is seemingly contrived and is not explicitly vivid to the untrained eye. "The study of landscape then involves identification of the modes through which it communicates behavioural clues, sets guidelines for observed behaviour and defines the daily ecology of human life" (Ward 1972: 8).

We expect painting to be, so to speak, the last word about itself. Ultimately, after interpreting it from all angles, we return to the picture to see what it has to say for itself. We need to be on guard, however, against too much comment, of seeing or being taught to see what is not there. Although this may be the case, landscape art is designed for the viewer who may or may not respond positively to it. In other words, the individual may respond in a particular way and may be emotionally affected by it. He or she may decide to remain before the scene or turn away. Cosgrove posits "the same is true for the relationship we have towards the real world once we perceive it as reality" (1984: 18). The implications herein are that there is an element of personal control over the external world. According to one's desires, one may either stand before the landscape or one may ignore it. There remains thus, an active human engagement with the material object. Cosgrove reiterates this concept in claiming that "landscape is not merely the world we see, it is a construction, a composition of that world" (13). In contrast to Cosgrove, the determinist views environment as "the active agency in man-environment interactions, relegating man to the position of a powerless, if adaptable organism caught in the grip of powerful forces" (Ward 1972: 4). These views as

applied to Poland's interaction with landscape will be expounded later in this thesis.

1.2 Writing the Landscape

Like landscape painting, the art of landscape writing is a solitary and complex activity. These artists (painters/writers) are alone with the enormity and shifting complexity of nature as their motif, supported only by what familiarity they have with the tools of their medium and by their skill as artists. Like landscape painters, writers – for whom landscape is central – view landscape as both “topographical and aesthetic in its reference” (Coetzee 1988: 166). Topography is a word that combines the Greek word *topos* (place) with the Greek word *graphien* (to write). Subsequently, topography refers to the writing of a place, either by words or by graphic signs. Place, hence, is configured in the most efficacious manner: “We are all artists and architects, creating order and organising space, time and causality in accordance with our own perceptions and predilections” (English and Mayfield 1972: 243). Topographical changes are a result of changing spatial relationships determined by environmental, cultural and economic stimuli (see my discussion on *Shades* in Chapter 3).

History shows that colonial settlers as a result of farming, mining, deforestation, industrialisation etc dramatically transformed parts of the landscape of South Africa. In changing the physical milieu, settlers took cognisance of the natural features of the landscape and utilised them according to their needs. The main objective in changing the habitat and manipulating the physical milieu is to gain, either financially or aesthetically or, in some cases, both. However, man in a particular place, acquires activity patterns conforming to that specific habitat and he finds himself subjected to definite environmental forces and restrictions. These concepts are clearly articulated by Poland in her novel *Train to Doringbult*, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. The landscape as perceived and described then, is a reflection of both the inner and the outer self. Hillis-Miller postulates, “The landscape is not a pre-existing thing in itself. It is made into a landscape, that is, into a humanly meaningful

space, by the living that takes place within it. This transforms it both materially as by names, or spiritually, as by the ascription of some collective value to this or that spot" (1995: 21).

This spot (place), as a singular term, has a variety of meanings. *Webster's Dictionary of the English Language* (Webster, M. 1989: 1099) gives fifty-two different definitions for the entry. Besides the meanings that the concept has in the field of geography, these include different kinds of meanings related to one's position in a society or other kinds of circumstances. Some examples given are: 'if I were in your place', 'it is not your place to offer criticism', or 'in the first place'. Principally, the word is used as a noun to denote location, positioning. It is a description of what makes that place different to others. Some regard place as any portion of space measured off or distinct from all other spaces – appropriated to some definite object, site or position. Much has been written about the 'sense of place', a well-known phenomenon in human society in which people strongly identify with a particular geographical area or location. Thus it seems that 'place' is not used only to refer to spatial locations, but also to locate people inside society. Being an abstract interpretation of 'place', this meaning may be far less acceptable than the primary meaning of 'position in society'. According to de Certeau, "A place is an instantaneous configuration of positions" (1984: 117). But, although elements may lie in juxtaposition, they cannot exist in the same location (place) at the same time. One object has to be displaced for another to take its place. The various elements have a defining role in the landscape as they co-exist. In other words, these elements define a particular place and are profound centres of human existence. Hence, a place is not merely an objective location or collection of geographical attributes. It becomes an emotional abstraction that consists of landscape, people and experiences anchored in time. Elements that turn space into a place are memories, feelings, connections, cultural rules and conventions (see Bender 1993: 3).

We live in a three-dimensional world in which objects and events occur and in which they have relative position and direction. Since our world is spatial and

three-dimensional, notions of space permeate our daily encounters. The structure of the space surrounding us moulds and guides our actions and interactions. As we grow older and wiser, we become skilled at structuring and interpreting space for our personal and interactive purposes. Our world is filled not only with artefacts, tools and representations of our work, but also with other people and with signs of their activity. The sense of other people's presence and the ongoing awareness of activity allow us to structure our own activity, seamlessly integrating communication, collaborating and constructing identities. We attempt appropriate behavioural framing, which we observe and encounter in the real world. This behavioural framing comes not from a sense of space but from a sense of place.

A place does not develop an identity solely because of the function it serves, nor from the society that populates it, nor from events and experiences. Although these aspects are necessary, the essence of place lies in "the unselfconscious intentionality that defines places" (Relph 1976: 43). Physically, a place is a space which is invested with understanding of behavioural appropriateness, cultural expectations, and meanings. Every image and idea about place is compounded by personal experience, events and the consciousness. Place is shaped for each society by refraction through cultural and personal lenses of custom and stimuli. Ashcroft et al posit, "Place can be a continual reminder of colonial ambivalence, of the separation yet continual mixing of the coloniser and colonised (1998: 179). Thus, a place is generally a space with something added – social meaning, principles, cultural understandings. An important part of the concept of place is the sociological implication. Since the fundamental ontology of place is connected to human situatedness, making places means that one is making something in respect to which one can situate oneself. There is an equivalence relation between humans and places: no places exist without humans and vice versa, no humans exist without places. Place is a precondition of human existence, and making places is thus to reinforce their 'placeness'. In contradistinction to place, space is non-defining and does not have the stability of place. Space is fluid and is made up of intersections of many elements. According to de Certeau, "Space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of

direction, velocities and time" (1984: 117). Tuan posits, 'Space can be variously experienced as the relative location of objects or places, as the distances and expanses that separate or link places, and – more abstractly – as the area defined by a network of places" (1977: 11). Landscape, a picture of the land in paint or words, may be seen as something moulded by the individuals in order to derive their own sense of belonging and identity. People make places. By modifying one's environment, one creates a place – a significant part of space.

According to Carter, "Space itself was a text that had to be written before it could be interpreted" (1987: 41). Settlers or colonists, as they were also commonly called, in South Africa in the nineteenth century, provided such texts as places new to them came into being. In describing place, the settler attempts to differentiate the landscape in such a way that s/he is able to write about it. Rivers, lakes, hills, mountains and valleys are essential in bringing space into the realm of communication. These conceivable places can, in a sense, be read and they transform spatial extension into a spatial text. These places inscribe the landscape with direction and their value in place is that they give space direction. Thus, in *Road to Botany Bay* (1987), Carter emphasises the importance of these physical places as explorers' aids in 19th century Australia, as well as an aid to mapping for the surveyor. He posits that they not only provide the surveyor with worthwhile objects to plot; they also supply him with indispensable points of view. Carter's analogy compares the explorer's movement to that of a ship at sea, whilst the surveyor has to tack between definite points of reference (See Carter 1987: 102). Nineteenth century British settler perspectives on land and landscape will be shown to be significant in Poland's works, as will become evident in Chapter Two.

If one had to approach the concept of place in a purely scientific manner, the concept would be reduced to a mere spatial concept: it would thus mean 'a location in space'. However, as has been argued, the landscape and human life are inseparable and both rely on each other for their definition. But these definitions are always in a state of flux as people are continuously rethinking and changing connections to place. People deal with

places daily. Human spatiality is the map that describes how places determine human behaviour. We, humans, are shaped throughout our lives by our interaction with places and the meanings we assign to these places. Other people in these places also mould us and as such, landscape takes into account the impact nature and places have on a culture. Thus, a sense of place is much more than simply the spatial organisation of our surroundings, and more than the three-dimensional arrangements of artefacts. Places also call up cultural understandings, which help us to frame our behaviour.

Erica Carter et al posit, "Landscape is dynamic, it seems to create and naturalise the histories and identities inscribed upon it, and so simultaneously hides and makes evident social and historical formations" (1993: xii). Man's engagement with the land becomes encoded over time as the characteristic cultural tradition and history of the people. The landscape too, functions to animate the cultural tradition and affirms the life of the land. Descriptions of the environment in fictional writing are extremely varied and insist on the inclusion of the human community within the natural world. In other words, landscape is embedded in a social discourse and is obviously affected by the human communities, which develop and sustain it. It reflects an interrelationship, ideally an equilibrium, between natural conditions and social structures. The harmony is not necessarily human, but one of the requirements for harmony is the accommodation to the landscape. The landscape, whether a material spatiality or its representation is, as Paul Carter has put it, "one of the principle spatial forms and fantasies through which a culture declares its presence" (1987: xxii).

1.3 Landscape and Identity

To understand landscape as a representation does not imply stasis. The constitution of power of the cultural processes involved in the making and meaning of the landscape is only maintained through constant remodelling and reworking. In other words, landscape and identity formation are a dialogue constantly in process. They are not passive but operate as part of the intricacies of social relations. All landscapes, whether painted, real or

imagined, are representational - they all form part of the medium through which we make sense of things and through which meaning is produced and exchanged. This is significant when one reflects on who one is and how social relations determine one's character and life. Some theoretical postulations, for example, post-structuralism, claim that identities are neither fixed, nor stable and immutable. Identity is something that is constructed and reconstructed on an ongoing basis further reiterating the belief that identities are made through different social processes and are constantly being changed. In considering some of the discursive issues around 'self' and 'identity', with particular reference to the landscape, I will offer a general discussion of self, identity and identity formation: this discussion will be linked to social constructions of place for the purpose of this thesis.

According to Epstein (1978) the process of identity construction is one upon which the contradictions and dispositions of the surrounding socio-cultural environment have a powerful impact. We tend to define ourselves, and appropriate behaviour, by reference to the norms of the groups that we belong to. We identify with groups that we perceive ourselves to belong to. Thus, identity construction is a complex human process, which combines personal and environmental factors that are often poorly understood. Burke and Reitzes (1981: 91) claim, "Identity is like a compass, helping us steer a course of interaction in a sea of social meaning". While Identity Theory discusses the process of labelling or naming oneself as a member of a social category, Social Identity Theory explains in greater detail how *social identities* are internalised, how contextual factors make different identities salient and how identities produce identity-consistent behaviour. The making of identity is, thus, a dynamic process. For post-structuralists, the principles we live by and our ways of acting are more than just our individual essential nature. They have emerged historically and are specific to a given time moment or place. These existing forms of being and acting have become constitutive of people and their actions in a particular landscape. Subsequently, as Darian-Smith et al postulate, "Landscape circulates as a medium of exchange, as a site of visual appropriation, a focus for the formation of identity" (1996: 3). The implication herein is that belonging and identity depend on landscape, as

well as society's cultural definition of the concept of self. The landscape in Poland's texts also raises the question of what it means to 'belong' to the land, and how far a sense of belonging relates to a sense of being 'owned' by the land.

Although most of Poland's works have a rural setting, some of her landscapes also embrace urban life. Modern urban landscapes permit the development of a public cosmopolitan life in ways that were not available in more traditional communities. Modern urban settings provide a diversity of opportunities for individuals to search out others of like interests and develop associations with them, as well as offering more chances for the cultivation of a diversity of interests or pursuits in general. There is a profound connection between landscape, identity and practice. Developing a practice requires the formation of a community where members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants in a particular space. Although many cultures may be fractured, many do possess a sense of homogeneity and a sense of attachment to a particular environment. According to Schama, landscapes are "culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock" (1995: 61).

Society inculcates a sense of belonging and a special awareness to spatial situatedness. Identity, then, is an attribute of the individual, of the landscape and of the event that takes place in the creation of the relationship between individuals and context. Those wishing to sustain a healthy state of existence, then, must enter into some working identity not only with a cultural tradition but also with a particular landscape. Virtually all landscapes nowadays have cultural associations, because virtually all landscapes have been affected in some way by human action or perception. In other words, most landscapes are, in practice, cultural landscapes because they have been impacted in differing degrees by human processes. Cultural factors in large measure control the rate at which the landscape is being altered and the economic and cultural differences of a multicultural society are largely responsible for both the dynamics and statics of the process. The landscape, thus, is an

interactive space: a geographic space with cultural and natural resources associated with historical activities and events exhibiting cultural values. Understood in this way, landscapes are not neutral, objective sectors of the physical earthly reality, but sites of concrete human interaction.

Tuan proposes that landscape and more especially place, is known “not only through the eyes and mind, but also through the more passive and direct modes of experience which resist objectification” (1975: 151). Viewed thus, landscape becomes a qualitative phenomenon grounded in the act of mapping and born out of a living context. Poland reiterates the fact that landscape is an experiential phenomenon, something to her which she holds dear to her heart and that which is a vital part of her existence. Repeated engagement and interaction with the landscape brings one to an understanding of the environment, learning and judging and ultimately defining environments and environmental characteristics important for living. The “landscape is not only a passive embodiment of values and beliefs, but an active ‘medium of communication’, a source of stimuli that influence human behaviour in context” (English and Mayfield 1972: 8). Engaging with, or immersing in, the landscape becomes an interactive two-way process. To know the land fully means both to understand it in an abstract way and to know it as one person knows another. In Poland’s works, one can distinctly see the intimate relationship she shares with the land and which she translates into her fictional landscapes.

1.4 The landscapes of Marguerite Poland

I will argue in this thesis that Poland’s fictional landscapes can be divided into the following ‘types’: ‘mythological landscape’, ‘indigenous landscape’, and ‘colonial landscape’. The reason I have divided Poland’s fictional landscape as such, despite their obvious overlaps, is because it facilitates categorisation of Poland’s move from ‘children’s stories’ to her more adult novels. This also shows how Poland was progressively and acutely influenced by San mythology, the indigenous culture, and the historical influence her family had in shaping present day South Africa. As much as her writing is rooted in a

familial 'settler' identity, she also constructs a gendered identity, as well as an African identity. Poland recognises the landscape as a context for engaging in and interpreting action and, through the process of assimilation and socialisation, she proceeds from a colonial landscape to an indigenous one and vice versa. In her journey between these landscapes she dwells quite frequently on mythological landscape. Her fiction is suffused with a sense of the personal and intimate and this compels the reader to move away from the position of uninvolved spectator to that of active participant, because s/he too is part of the ongoing process of self-actualisation and identity construction.

Poland's fictional landscape is firmly rooted in an African context and deals closely with the flora and fauna of South Africa, especially of the Eastern Cape. The written word cannot escape oral antecedents and Poland tends to reflect the antecedents of the oral tradition of black South Africans. According to Killens and Ward, "Literature began with the oral tradition, evolved from the blending of oral and written traditions and continues to grow as self conscious artists adapt or modify their literary heritage to serve contemporary needs" (1992: 7). In the oral tradition, African myths are stories passed along from generation to generation by word of mouth. They are inexorably linked to religious traditions, tribal customs and idiomatic expressions dealing with their belief systems. The mythological landscape, or landscape imbued with mythological import, has existed in every conceivable society. It is evident that in their general characteristics and in their details, various nations' myths reflect, express and explore the inhabitants' self-image and beliefs within a particular landscape. What we might call 'mythological' landscape is thus important as we explore individual societies and human culture.

British classicist, Geoffrey Kirk, in *Myth: Its meaning and functions in ancient and other cultures* (1970) uses the term 'myth' to denote stories with an underlying purpose beyond that of simple story-telling; and the term 'folktales' to denote stories that reflect simple social situations that play on common fears and desires. Stories in the oral tradition can be divided into a few basic

categories. The general groups are folktales, which tend to answer questions; whilst the moral tales provide instruction. Folktales often include stories in which animals talk and have other human characteristics whilst moral tales frequently pass under the guise of fairy tales. In both these groups, however, the landscape is significant as something to respect and as something to be learned from. Poland uses traditional African folktales and moral tales in her fictional landscape construction – in Chapter Three I will explore Poland's children's tales focusing on the effect oral tradition has on her stories and on how she constructs, by extension, a fictional mythological landscape.

Poland's works, as I will argue, have interlocked themselves around notions of space and place, identity theories and around cultural and mythological landscapes. Her characters, human or otherwise, are able to integrate and identify with the landscape in which they find themselves, thereby configuring place. In recognising and constructing these places, the characters are, by extension, identifying and confirming their own existence. The concepts of space and place inadvertently depend on each other for meaning. Lipsanen contends, "Space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value" (2001:1). He posits that when space is transformed into place, historical events that took place in previous times in a particular place play a big role in creating an intimate connection with people. For example, Poland's colonial history (which will be discussed in Chapter 2) can be traced back to St. Matthews (the St Matthias mission station in *Shades*). She is thus able to form an intimate connection with her main characters, basing them on her family members. Furthermore, in *Shades*, the Reverend Walter Brownley, a missionary from England, finds himself in the alien landscape of the Eastern Cape and he is overcome by a "strange sense of foreboding" (Poland 1993: 8). His disposition, as well as Benedict Matiwane's, the orphaned black boy brought up in a white mission school, forces him to make an existential connection between life and the land:

There was no poetry in any of his books to describe such a landscape – no poetry, no words. He had decided, long ago that his God, his most dependable, predictable Creator- had retreated in defeat before the God who had invented this. One day those same dark-sapped bushes would march in and reclaim the mission and its cultivated lands. He was sure of it. There was nothing of the rules of settlements to underscore the impotence of man against a place like this. (ibid)

To reiterate this concept, Poland's landscape, in the majority of her works, functions from the outset not only as setting but also as character. Some of Poland's characters are clearly cast in the familiar existential condition – alone and burdened with the sole responsibility of discovering or creating some identity or bond between his/her own identity and the world. The socio-historical conditions in *Shades* bear testimony to the fact that identity is shaped by the intimate relationship of people in that particular place at that particular time. Moreover, because landscapes have a temporal dimension, which alters with time, they can be read as palimpsests, documents in which nature's own powerful dynamic, plus the changing intentions of human beings over the years, inscribes a historical record. These concepts will be fully explored in Chapter 4, which will concentrate on the 'colonial landscape' evident in Poland's 'adult' novels *Train to Doringbult* (1987), *Shades* (1993), and *Iron Love* (1999); and further illustrated in Chapter Five with the indigenous landscape evident in *The Abundant Herds* (2003). The history of South Africa from the time gold was discovered in 1883 through to the passing of The Natives' Land Act of 1913 and to the present day democratic transformation will be crucial to this discussion. Furthermore, I aim to explore the social forces that were contesting the formation and construction of a society that was passing through a transitional period, from merchant capitalism to industrial capitalism. Included in these concepts will be Poland's role in researching and publishing important facts on Zulu culture with respect to cattle, their role in the indigenous landscape and their influence on Zulu oral tradition.

Poland's fictional landscapes bring to life the voices of the ordinary people who build and inhabit the landscapes. She explicitly and implicitly examines space and landscape in terms of geographical spaces as well as abstract mental and cultural spaces. In each of her books there lies some sort of struggle for existence -- for cultural empowerment, for liberation from patriarchy, for freedom from marginalisation. Her articulation of the highly complex notion of borderlands, as sites of marginality and ambiguity, shows, to varying degrees, how people are either constrained or liberated by them. Poland's works dwell significantly on the concepts of borders and boundaries, which are central to the process of defining, articulating and maintaining place. In *Shades* and *Train to Doringbult* she is able to identify the reflexive relationship between people who live in a particular place and the construction of that space by economic and political forces. The history of the place is brought to the surface and incorporated within the map she draws of the landscape. The history and the geography of the places are reflected by and within the people who live there. In Poland's quest to engage with the full meaning of the landscape, she draws on personal observation, local and national history, geography and their intersections. She opens up spaces for her characters, allowing them to modify and challenge prevailing gender constructions, for example, in *Train to Doringbult*, Poland observes the lay of the land, its geography and the spaces it provides.

In Chapter 3, I will be analysing *Train to Doringbult* and the experiences of the main characters as they journey through the imagined landscape of 'Doringbult', facing their fears and challenges head on in an attempt to determine their space in alien places. Jan de Villiers' mission at the dam site in which he finds himself brings to mind Heidegger's example of the bridge to clarify how spaces receive their bearing from places (see Lipsanen 2001: 1). Heidegger uses the example of a bridge to clarify this concept: a bridge constructed over a stream gathers the earth and landscape around it. Therefore, it constitutes a place. On the other hand, place is connected to other places through space and it is through these places that space comes into existence. This is what Anne Stenros calls the topological character of

places and spaces. Place is topographical and like a bridge it always connects the elements around it. Space is topological too, since it is a system of places. Space connects places (Stenros 1997: 17-18). In this chapter these concepts investigated by Stenros and Heidegger will be explored further. In *Train to Doringbult*, Elsa, a white colonial woman, is shocked at the police brutality against her loyal farm-labourer, Petrus, and in a life-changing moment she experiences emotionally and spiritually a powerful fusion with the indigenous land and its inhabitants. Like Frances in *Shades*, she undergoes a sense of illuminated inner space, which was previously obstructed by the fact that she was a female in a colonial society. Both women expose the social malaise of the time – female subjugation in a patriarchal society. And so it is, within the sphere of male domination and the cosmology of the indigenous people, that these women have to fight to create an identity and a sense of worth; to transcend the limitations imposed on them by circumstances and gender. These themes, integrated with the landscape, enable the plot to develop out of the setting.

Poland frequently makes use of short descriptions of a panoramic vista of land to reveal life within the landscape. The places in which the characters find themselves are full of spiritual life, history and personal significance. The descriptions of the land are not separate, but are described as an integral part of the daily life and experiences of the people who live within it:

A hamerkop lumbered up. Jan watched its wing shadow jigsaw on fragments of stone, ready small and swift across a krantz. It turned ponderously, sank down among the trees. He felt a slight unease as he followed the pattern of its flight. He knew Thekwane, the gaunt-winged hamerkop, relic of a pterodactyl, an ancient bird that wades in vleis and sees the destinies of men reflected from the sky. There -- a star streams: someone's heart has fallen over. Thekwane, seeing it, dedicates another of its feathers to the dead. Jan looked away irritated. He was absorbing Elsa's own strange

cosmology, full of birds and stars, creatures and beliefs taken from her father Southey and from old Nontinti.

(Poland 1987:15)

Poland's affinity with nature, and her sense of the almost sacred significance of certain landscapes, is a feature that enriches her novels. The landscape, as she constructs it, has a life of its own as it contextualises the other, secondary forms of life, including human lives that have learned to co-exist with the nature of these places. Poland foreshadows the dilemma of many South Africans who are possessed by a love of place and people, yet are deeply uneasy and resentful about the types of identities they possess. As one reads the landscape, one becomes fully conscious of the integral role that specific features of the landscape play in African tradition. The landscape is not stable since it is transformed by the seasons, by the weather, and by the activities of the inhabitants. The landscape is also a landscape of social boundaries. The South African landscape reflects a complex, even conflicting matrix of colonial, pre-colonial and post-colonial history and contemporary political and social relationships. "I had always harboured the assumption that this was my place as the family myths had led me to believe. I had overlooked the possibility that this might be someone else's place as well and much more so than mine" (Poland 2000: 8).

In her works, Poland articulates a framework for the exploration of culture and her emphasis is on cultural, gendered and political boundaries as constantly shifting not fixed. Poland uses the text as a site on which to build attitudes and perspectives, using nature and visual elements of the landscape to enhance the effect of her text. One may thus conclude that landscape is a complex dialogic spatiality where elements meet, interact, entangle, disperse and shape. Landscape becomes an ongoing process, never static but always evolving, adapting and embracing differences as they emerge. According to Relph, "Landscapes change their identity according to the way in which we experience them" (1976: 133). Bender too, contends that, "Landscapes are created by people - through their experience and their engagement with the world around them" (1993: 1). The implication is that sense of place is

dependent on much more than simply the spatial organisation of our surroundings and three-dimensional arrangement of artefacts – places call up cultural understandings which help us to frame our behaviour as argued earlier. In Poland's *Iron Love*, for example, the all-boys' boarding house provides the setting. The environment of the school demands a communally-held sense of appropriate behaviour, and provides a context for engaging in and interpreting action. New pupils at the boarding home learn the cultural norms and mores of the school space environment as part of their enculturation. Understandings develop within cultures, and learning them is the normal and general process of assimilation and socialisation. A colonial school in an African landscape in which boundaries and borders are transgressed provides fruitful grounds for analysis: these concepts and their association with place and space will be developed in Chapter 4.

In what I will call Poland's 'anthropomorphic writing', for which she is noted, the integration of animals with the landscape is clearly discernible:

It was a quiet valley between a scoop of hills and dunes. A valley where the tracks of duiker traced back and forth across the ash-grey sand and bushbuck kept to the thickets. Tortoises plied from gaukum patch to gaukum patch and drongos and hoopoes and dusky bushbirds lived there. Only in spring the bright electric flash and sweet, piercing note of bee-eaters livened the bush when they came to nest in the limestone banks. It was a place where cicadas shrilled among the blombos when the summer bergwind blew; where mist drifted in winter, salty with sea-spray. And it was called KwaFubesi by those who lived there – the home of the giant eagle owl. (Poland [1981] 2001: 2)

This passage extracted from *Once at KwaFubesi*, together with many of her other descriptions, suggests the intimacy with which the animals share with the landscape. The birds and animals are part of the landscape, mingling with one another and being an integral part of each other. The indigenous

landscapes of Africa are full of plants, birds, animal life, geographical forms and other physical features, which are named in indigenous languages with corresponding names not always given in English. Poland's academic studies in indigenous languages hold her in good stead when she describes the indigenous landscape. With consummate ease she is able to capture the indigenous vocabulary's richness of detail for the terrain, vegetation and animal life. Her descriptions confirm her affinities and sense of identity with the land. A journey through the indigenous landscape, recreated by Poland, is a profound experience. She continually suspends the actions of her characters to study the shape and contours of the landscape on which they move. She shows an extra-ordinary fondness for the vegetable world, as well as for the birds and animals. She is very reverent and exact when speaking of cows especially. In fact, she has such an intense passion for cows, that she made them the topic of her doctoral thesis: '*Uchibidolo: The Abundant Herds*'. This is a thought-provoking descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour pattern terminology and naming practice. In her research she uncovered 350 different names of cattle and in the majority of her works cattle play a role, significantly or otherwise. Stemming from her doctoral thesis are two major works: *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the cattle of the Zulu People* (Poland et al 2003) and *Recessional for Grace* (Poland 2003). These works explore the way cattle fit into the landscape and their importance to place and its inhabitants. These issues will be elaborated on in Chapter Five.

I turn now to a consideration of Poland within her context – historical, sociological and geographical – to understand better how she comes to create the fictional landscapes of her works to be discussed in this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

POLAND IN CONTEXT



“Landscape provides grounding for novels” (Hillis-Miller 1995: 8)

In this chapter, I propose to supply a brief introduction to Marguerite Poland and her *oeuvre*. My aim is to situate Poland in an historical and cultural context and also to determine how land and place have affected her writings.

In an interview with Zoe Molver (2005), Poland proclaims that her children’s book *Nqalu, the Mouse without Whiskers* (1980), is, to an extent, her own autobiography. In summary, this allegorical short story is about a mouse troubled by his lack of whiskers and his inability to carry out certain everyday tasks properly. Poland contends that behind this book were her “first explorations into the world view of stars, birds, trees, everything that is now *The Abundant Herds, Recessional for Grace*, and those images which come out of an African worldview because of learning languages and because of the metaphor, because of the idiom, because of the imagery in Xhosa and Zulu” (Molver 2005 : 8).

Credit, however, for Poland’s acute perception of the landscape and her successes in translating this into fictional landscape construction must be given to her mother and Poland’s upbringing. Poland affectionately affirms that it was her mother “who pointed out the magic of the veld, who made me aware of the little things in life. She instilled in me a love of nature, showing me the beauty of the tortoises, hares and duikers we would see en route to school, and the porcupines, meerkats and puffadders that abounded in the surrounding bush” (Gidish 1986: 5). Poland confirms that her mother was the daughter of a land surveyor, who was educated at St. Andrews College in the Eastern Cape. St. Andrews has played a significant role in the lives of Poland’s ancestors and she has recently documented the history of this institution. Poland’s mother was brought up in Pilgrim’s Rest because of her father’s work commitments at the Chamber of Mines. She remembers with fondness that her mother was a

“wonderful artist”, to whom the landscape was very important: “no one has seen the landscape in quite the same way that she did, and she and I saw it in the same way” (Poland 2005). As painter and writer respectively, mother and daughter complemented each other. Poland contends that she has, in a sense, simply refined the landscape she and her mother saw “because of Xhosa and the anthropology to understanding the undercurrents and mythologies behind it” (ibid).

Poland’s grandmother, who was a Scot, lived with the family from when Poland was three years old and she was also instrumental in developing Poland’s aesthetic appreciation. She always had time for her grandchildren and read to them “wonderful, sophisticated books” (ibid), thus developing in them a love for the arts and literature. Another influential family member was Poland’s great uncle, Wilfred Leigh Brereton, affectionately known as Uncle Bussy. He was reportedly a brilliant Xhosa linguist who worked in the mines as an official (ibid). When Poland visited him on the South Coast, he used to relate to her stories about his childhood. He was also fond of writing letters to her. Many of his stories and letters form the backbone of Poland’s novel *Shades*. Poland corroborates that Brereton’s character also feeds into the character of Godfrey in *Recessional for Grace* (Poland 2008).

Poland’s early years were spent in the Eastern Cape and she reverently posits that she is in “another level of being” (ibid) when she is in that landscape. Poland, though, was born in Gauteng on 3 April 1950 and when she was two years old the Poland family relocated to the Eastern Cape, where she spent most of her formative years. Growing up on her parents’ smallholding in Lovemore Park, between Sardinia Bay and Skoenmakerskop just outside of Port Elizabeth, she became acutely sensitive to the surrounding indigenous plant life, birds and small animals that lived there. The landscape of the Eastern Cape left an indelible mark on her and in an article entitled, “Making Stars Sing” (Poland 1993c), her fond description of the Eastern Cape reads as follows:

It is a beautiful place, surrounded by hills and forested ravines. Ancient Yellowwoods grow along the banks of the river and gracious buildings are clustered among pasture and cultivated lands. It is Frontier Country and the stories in the family about the happenings during the Xhosa Frontier Wars are legion; heroes and heathens; skirmishes and scourges, locusts and rinderpest; love and romance. The church gardens were prosperous, the church large and Victorian and the oaks that her great-grandmother had planted – in memory to England – were huge and spreading. It was always a matter of pride that her great-grandfather built the church with his own hands, making the bricks and setting the windows. (14)

This extract not only highlights the importance of landscape in Poland's life, but also helps to situate her historically. According to Cosgrove, "It is the origins of landscape as a way of seeing the world that we discover its links to broader historical structures and processes and are able to locate landscape study within a progressive debate about society and culture" (1984: 15). Key concepts in the above passage like "Frontier Country", "Xhosa Frontier Wars" and the "Victorian" buildings, give us an idea of Poland's background, her cultural heritage/identity and her way of seeing the world. Although her books may be fictional, many of her stories are based on family experiences. *Shades* (1993), for example, is based on Poland's great-great grandfather's (Charles Taberer's) experiences and those of other family members. This can be seen as Poland's search for her own 'shades', or ancestors, and her identity in an historical context. According to Poland, her great-great grandparents, who were stationed in Keiskammahoek on the banks of the Mtwaku River in the Eastern Cape, had been missionaries there from 1862 to 1913. In her research, Poland discovered four letter-books of Charles Taberer's assistant priest, Reverend Cyril Wyche, in which he documented the minutiae of everyday living in Keiskammahoek. Together with her great-grandmother's memoirs, Poland was able to determine the socio-historical forces that contributed to the most important themes of South African

history: the debilitating effect of colonialism on black indigenous inhabitants, the iniquitous migrant labour system, the tragedies of the rinderpest and the destruction of traditional Xhosa culture (Jacob 2003: 4). Poland's recapitulation of the past, using her ancestors' letter-books and other family memoirs, in no way makes her an historian. Whilst an historian ideally uses expository language, objective and verifiable and structured into a logical, linear and chronological sequence, Poland uses figurative language, subjective and verisimilar. She explores events in a particular place and context, recreating the past metaphorically so as to present the reader with the opportunity to grapple with it.

Ironically, the themes of family history, the effects of war and the importance of cattle to South Africa, which are evident in Poland's adult novels *Shades*, *Iron Love*, *Recessional for Grace* and in her doctoral thesis, all have their roots in one of her unpublished stories, 'Granny'. This story was written by Poland when she was ten years old and it forms the core and foundation from which her tales emanate. Being young and immature at that age, she naively wrote about her granny, who returned home, fictitiously, from her honeymoon with four children. These male offspring were patriotically sent by the young narrator to the tragic and violent war. This concept feeds into the novel, *Iron Love*, which revolves around World War 1. This novel will be discussed later and we shall see how Poland graphically highlights the plight of young boys in a colonial landscape. In *Iron Love*, as well as in *Shades*, historical events come alive and the reader acquires a sense of the past and some perspective of its relation to the present. So too with Poland's subsequent work and she too, in retrospect, acknowledges, "All things that inspire a little girl have all come to fruition one after another" (Poland 2005). Poland's fiction, then, grows out of many repeated events and periods (especially colonialism and its aftermath), but she responds to these events from different points of view.

Poland schooled at eleven different schools as the nature of her father's occupation warranted that he move around to different places. She did,

however, spend four years at a private Catholic Convent, Saint Dominic's Priory in Port Elizabeth, where she completed her schooling career. Here she gained insight into the ways in which identities are constructed and represented. Though Anglican, her engagement within an all-white, academic Catholic landscape revealed to her how gender and human identities are shaped. There are interesting affinities in Poland, I suggest, between her feelings for rural landscape, and an urban tendency towards social interrogation and reflexivity in the spheres of religion, race and gender identity. She is the first to admit that, although the missionaries' intentions may have been noble in their zealous propagation of Christianity, they often failed to recognise the cultural richness of the indigenous people. The evangelists who came to South Africa during the Victorian era were frequently British settlers who came to South Africa as pioneers, either in search of a better life for themselves or to change the 'heathens' and give them a 'civilised' identity. The British, who believed that their responsibility was to God and their duty was to show the 'heathens' the light, slowly eradicated the beliefs, religion and cultures of the indigenous people. The introduction of Christianity to the people of colour resulted in cultural and religious conflict. Now living in a contemporary post-apartheid era and being a writer, Poland remarks that she has become "cynical about missionaries" (von Klemperer 1993: 6).

Poland deals with historical facts, with social forces and energies which interest her, as they have bearing upon her individual spirit. Her love for the South African landscape and its diverse cultures encouraged her to become deeply involved with the indigenous people and their languages. Her familial homestead in the Eastern Cape may be seen as a spatial construct of a tightly-knit and spatially integrated ethnic community that created its own distinctive cultural landscape. Just like her great-grandparents who integrated with the indigenous people and became proficient in their languages, she too is well versed in Xhosa and isiZulu. In 1970 Poland graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree at Rhodes University, majoring in Social Anthropology and Xhosa. Her profound knowledge of the African culture and perceptive observations of the natural environment are evident in her descriptions of the landscape and the flora and fauna that

constitute it. Many of Poland's so-called 'children's stories' can be linked to her academic studies and the oral tradition. In "Tusi and the Dry Wind" in the collection *Once at KwaFubesi* ([1981] 2001: 110) the animals embody San beliefs:

The eland move out of the dune country, birds flock from the empty water-courses and the herds of springbok travel east, leaving behind the old or the very young and weak. That is the law of the desert – nor do the old ones fear it, for close behind the last migration of the herds a small dry wind comes, gently spiralling the sand. 'There tracks the dry wind,' they say. 'It has come to take us to the sky-plains where the Gauun flowers grow'.

In 1971, Poland completed her Bachelor of Arts Honours degree in Comparative African languages at Stellenbosch University, further reinforcing her alliance to Charles Taberer and allegiance to the African culture. Poland married Martin Oosthuizen, an attorney living and practising in KwaZulu-Natal. This event in her life prompted her move to Kloof in KwaZulu-Natal. While living here, she pursued her academic career at the University of Natal, where she attained her Masters degree in Zulu literature for her dissertation entitled "A study of the Zulu folktales with special reference to the Stuart collection" (1978).

Poland explains her attraction to African languages:

I have drawn inspiration from the oral tradition of the various indigenous people, particularly the San. I am very aware that there are difficulties and failures in trying to 'fix' the oral in the written word, but 'oral literature' and 'written literature', though they may exhibit striking differences, are not born in separate worlds. They feed each other in subtle ways and my own work has drawn on both traditions from the start.
(Poland 1993c: 17)

This understanding of the oral tradition and Poland's integration of it in her works

will be developed in the next chapter.

In 1977 Poland gave birth to her first child, Susan. It was during this period of motherhood that Poland decided to start writing full-time. In 1979 her second daughter, Verlie, was born. Many were of the opinion that she was writing children's stories because of her own children. Poland posits that it was her love for literature and the landscape that prompted her writing. At the time of writing her third collection of children's stories (*Once at KwaFubes!*) Poland recalls that her daughter, Verlie, had taken ill. Typical motherly pains plucked at her heartstrings and she recalls how she poured all her "motherhood anxieties into the character of the little bush-pig with problems" (Gidish 1986: 6).

Whilst a 'new' writer she initially tried her hand at poetry writing; then moved to longer works of literature. Thus, in attempting different genres, Poland's writings range from poetry, to children's stories, to adult novels and to critical essays. Her first published poem, written when she was eight years old, is about the Victoria Falls. Her inspiration came to light when she saw the majestic falls and the surrounding grandeur of the landscape. For this poem she received ten shillings from the local newspaper. Another poetry composition entitled "The Hawk" was published in 1967 in *Personality* magazine. Following the lines of Alfred Tennyson's succinctly written poem "The Eagle", Poland's poem has just two stanzas. Later, at a poetry reading and analysis forum, she was thoroughly amused and amazed at a critic's Marxist interpretation of her poem. Later she wrote a poem called "The Herd Boy" even though she knew nothing then about cattle. Ironically, she went on to write her doctoral thesis and a book on Nguni cattle and their colour patterns.

Controversy surrounds the issue of whether Poland really wrote books for children to be classified as children's literature. According to Sell, children's books convey "a sense of the Arcadian innocence and harmony, which applies throughout the entire story, on the more or less explicit assumption that childhood is, as it were, a safe and delightful place, both for the child characters in the book and for the

child listener or reader" (2002: 13). In actual fact, Poland's market is for different kinds of readers: for children, who enjoy the adventure element, and for adults, who probably know the allegorical content of these tales. *Nqalu, the Mouse with no Whiskers* (1980) was Poland's first published children's book. Allegorically, this story is Poland's rigorous struggle to create, affirm and sustain a personal identity. The story was later translated into Afrikaans as well as into Japanese. In 1979 Poland also wrote and published *The Mantis and the Moon* (1979), a collection of stories that draws on San mythology. This book was awarded the prestigious Percy Fitzpatrick prize for South African children's literature. In 1983 another collection of children's stories, *The Woodash Stars* (1983), was nominated for – and subsequently awarded – the Percy Fitzpatrick prize. Poland wrote numerous other books for children: one in particular, *Once at Kwafubesi* (1981), also received honourable mention at the Percy Fitzpatrick awards function in 1980 and 1981. Many of her stories were translated into Afrikaans and published: *Die Muis Sonder Snorbaard* (1979), *Die Bidsprinkaan en die Maan* (1981), *As die Boerboonblomme Val* (1983), and *Die Vuurkoolsterre* (1983). In 1989, *The Mantis and the Moon* received the Sankei Honourable Award for translation into Japanese. Many of Poland's children's stories are allegories that tap into the varied and rich tradition of the San and other indigenous groups of South Africa. Poland is, however, quick to point out that "folk tradition is not the only source of influence" (Poland 1989a: i). Wilderness conservation and other contemporary issues also form the basis of her stories.

Other children's books written by Poland are *The Bush Shrike* (1982), *Marcus and the Boxing Gloves* (1984), *Shadow of the Wild Hare* (1986), and *Marcus and the Go-Kart* (1988). With the exception of the 'Marcus series', which features characters based on her two daughters and illustrator Cora Coetzee's sons, all other books are deeply imbedded in an African landscape and / or its inhabitants (flora and fauna included). Poland's first three books were all animal stories having being inspired by the bush pigs, meerkats and porcupines that frequented her homestead just outside Port Elizabeth. With consummate ease, Poland combines an imaginative storyline with her anthropological knowledge

of African cultures. Sometimes her magical animal stories “broadly follow traditional lines, such as when they turnout to be ‘pour quoi’ stories (for example, why the mantis holds up his legs in prayer – *The Mantis and the Moon* (1979:1) at other times they are highly inventive stories of adventure, pathos and knock-about comedy” (Jenkins 1986: 122). Keeley posits, albeit subjectively, that Poland is “one of the first children’s writers in South Africa to take a look around her and write about what she saw”, thus becoming a “ pioneer of indigenous children’s fiction” (1985: 8).

The Woodash Stars is Poland’s first book about black children and the first to be published in seven black languages, as well as in English and Afrikaans. This book is a compilation of four short stories based on black folklore and is illustrated in colour by Shanne Altshuler, an East London illustrator. Later this book was adapted into a ballet by a dance company and it proved very successful. Similarly, in March 1997, the Playhouse Puppet Company staged *The Mouse with no Whiskers* as a professional production. Puppeteer, Andrew Godbold, with assistance from fellow puppeteer, Pillai Ngwenya, who worked on the Zulu translations for segments of the play, adapted the tale into a lively script. The tale could easily be staged as it has many characteristics of the African folktale genre: the mouse, born without whiskers, is a social misfit. He is ostracised because he is different and is forced to journey to the mountains to seek out the Spirit of the Great Elephant who will give him his whiskers, and thereby heal his spirit. In 1984 this book received honourable mention at the Percy Fitzpatrick Award’s function.

Poland also had a stint as a social worker in Port Elizabeth and in Durban; she confirms that her experiences as a social worker influenced the psychology in some of the stories she has written. In 1997 Poland contributed to a weekly column in the local newspaper, *The Mercury*. Poland also worked as an ethnologist at the South African museum in Cape Town. Here she could access indigenous and historical artefacts and documents easily and this gave her the advantage to research fully the landscape in which she set her stories, as well as

research every minute detail of all the flora, fauna and indigenous culture within her fiction. In this regard she says that she is a “bit of a frustrated scientist, very careful to get the names of animals and plants right” (Suter 1997: 6). Whilst in the Cape Province, Poland wrote regularly for the local newspaper *Weekly Mail* and in 1993 her short story ‘The Hare that Charmed the Wild’ was published in *The Mail and Guardian Supplement*.

After publishing eleven children’s books Poland turned her attention to adult fiction. Her quasi-religious devotion to landscape, to nature, comes through strongly in these narratives. Her first adult novel, *Train to Doringbult* (1987), is a moving story of love and prejudice played out in the uncompromising landscape of South Africa. Elsa, the female protagonist, feels threatened by the imaginary landscape of Doringbult. The sense of isolation on her lonely journey to restore man’s faith in humanity is overwhelming and Doringbult comes to imply much more than a place in an imaginary landscape. It comes to symbolise one’s attempts at overcoming one’s fears. Elsa’s husband, Jan, also faces his own ‘Doringbult’, when, working away from home to improve the family’s income, he experiences a sense of displacement, loneliness and helplessness against the backdrop of nature’s incensed landscape, where he experiences the fury of the wind and rain. In 1998 *Train to Doringbult* was short-listed for the CNA Award.

It was to be six years later before Poland’s second novel appeared in 1993. This hiatus, nevertheless, yielded a novel of great literary importance for Poland. *Shades*, a novel based on the lives of Poland’s ancestors, is a love saga played out against the landscape of the Eastern Cape. Ironically, the setting for this novel was predetermined when Poland was 16 years old. This was the year she first visited Saint Matthews Mission (the Saint Matthias Mission of her story) in the Eastern Cape. This physical landscape is an important one in her life, a bastion of possibility that becomes the centrepiece of her narratives. She had a sense of predestination that that particular locale was going to play an important role in her life (Poland 2005). It provided her with an important setting and, as is the case with all her work, without place there would be no story. Poland is

described as follows: "The sources of inspiration and the things that make [her] want to write either for children or for adults are exactly the same – it's always a place that makes the story come" (Schwartz 1993: 8).

In *Shades*, Poland creates a work of historical fiction replete with the authenticity of historical detail. The rinderpest disease of 1899, the discovery of gold in South Africa, World War 1, and the migrant labour systems are some of the historical moments evident in this intriguing novel. This book was short-listed for the M-Net Award. In 1998 *Shades* was serialised for radio. The variety of themes in this book and its relevance to contemporary South Africa influenced the Eastern Cape Department of Education in 1997, and The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education in 1999, to incorporate this book in their matric school syllabus. In 2001 *Shades* was adapted for theatre under the title 'Shades of Marguerite Poland'. Working closely with Poland, this production was written and directed by Patrick Collyer and Caroline Swart. Its first performance was by the Kwasuka Theatre Company in Durban and in 2002 the production toured high schools in KwaZulu-Natal. *Shades* embodies the cultural values of the colonial and Victorian era, and, as it is written by a female writer, it becomes a powerful means for questioning and redefining the construction of female identity against a changing landscape. Poland highlights the plight of white women in colonial South Africa and the impact of colonialism on the physical land and on South African society, including the patriarchal nature of traditional South African society.

This highly acclaimed novel was followed by *Iron Love* (1999), which, like Poland's previous adult novel, is set mostly in the Eastern Cape. Poland endorses in the introduction to *Iron Love* that "the story has been constructed from fragments of boy-history, family legend, a passing anecdote from an old boy, and the experience of a present pupil" (1999: ix). Since the plot is set in an all-boys' boarding school, Poland ensured that she painstakingly researched every school magazine produced by St. Andrews College in the Eastern Cape. To familiarise herself with the mechanics of the college and its history, Poland even

went to the extent of offering her teaching services here. Besides rugby, *Iron Love* also deals with life in an all-male boarding school, military training, conscription, homosexuality and the search for one's identity. Although the title refers to the tough love meted out to the boys by their masters, it also refers to their mothers' love. Ironically, mothers are not present but they are conspicuous by their absence. Their absence and silence addresses the issues of female subjugation and oppression in a patriarchal landscape.

Whilst writing her novels, Poland was also deeply involved in academic research. In 1997 the University of Natal awarded her a doctorate for her dissertation 'Uchibidolo: The Abundant Herds'. This dissertation is a stimulating descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour pattern terminology and naming practice. In her research she uncovered 350 different names of cattle. A corollary of her doctoral thesis is a book entitled *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the cattle of the Zulu People* (Poland et al 2003). According to Poland the aim of writing a book of this nature is twofold. Firstly, it is to preserve an aspect of the Zulu heritage for posterity; and secondly, it is "to contribute to an appreciation of the creative imagination and linguistic versatility of the Zulu" (Poland et al 2003: i). Poland's efforts for writing a book of this nature were recognised by the Department of Arts and Culture and on 28th May 2005 she was awarded the Lifetime Literary Award for English Literature. Briefly, the book captures the classification and definitions of the Nguni cattle through terminology that incorporates vivid metaphor. The metaphorical language depicts the grace and beauty of the cattle in their landscape and is a celebration of the Zulu aesthetic. Poland also presents a synopsis of Zulu traditional life, the role of cattle in their lives, their oral tradition and cattle-lore. In terms of landscape, Poland maps the geographic world the traditional Zulu inhabits and describes their cultural landscape, expounding Zulu rituals and customs. Features of the landscape are not contrived and she describes graphically the landscape of particular regions with their hills, rivers and forests and their particular forms of cultivation, pastoralism and cattle-naming practices.

In her latest novel, *Recessional for Grace*, a work which stems from her doctoral thesis and her coffee table book, *The Abundant Herds*, Poland skilfully interweaves a poignant love affair between a professor of African languages and a student writing her doctoral thesis against the mythology surrounding the naming practices for indigenous cattle in Zulu and Xhosa. She uses the context of love affairs to examine the validity of social ideals and traditional indigenous practices. The narrator becomes immersed in the existence of Professor Godfrey, who, like the author, displays a strong appreciation and devotion to indigenous cattle culture. The narrator's research unearths some of Professor Godfrey's original lexicon cards, which are annotated with little messages to a mysterious person referred to only as "G". The young researcher discovers that the "G" was in fact a reference to Grace Wilmot, a primary school teacher in the village. Like the professor, she too shows a strong passion for indigenous cattle culture. Thus, in the narrator's research, a parallel is drawn between the lives of Grace and Godfrey and their secret love affair is exposed. *Recessional for Grace* was long-listed for the IMPAC Literary Award 2005.

Poland's latest project traces the 150 years history of St. Andrews College, the all-boys' institution in Grahamstown, in the Eastern Cape. Significantly, this college forms the setting of Poland's novel *Iron Love* and is also the place where her husband as well as her father-in-law was educated. Furthermore, part of the land on which this college is built belonged to Poland's great-great grandfather. The character Walter in the novel *Shades* is actually a depiction of Poland's great grandfather and in reality this great grandfather was an educator at St. Andrews. On the other hand, her great grandmother (depicted as Frances in *Shades*) was responsible for laying the foundation stone for the library at the girls' section next door. The other major characters in *Shades* – Victor, Crispin and Charlie Fraser – were also based on people in reality related to Poland and were all part of St Andrews. As historian of St. Andrews, Poland feels as if she is again dealing with a "mythological landscape" when she considers the way she has "reconstructed her family in their actual history" (Poland 2005).

A holistic look at Poland's world reveals that she is politically sensitive, and consummately skilled in engaging with the colonial, mythological and indigenous landscape of South Africa. Her literary works are multi-layered and resist unequivocal interpretation – they convey different meanings, feelings and messages at once. In fact, it is Poland's engagement and description of the landscape, which gives her novel their power. Her vivid imagination reveals a faculty of seeing and describing the landscape that can spring only from a true love of nature. The human worlds of her characters are encompassed by a greater natural environment: from the birds, trees and animals to the cultural and indigenous landscapes.

CHAPTER THREE

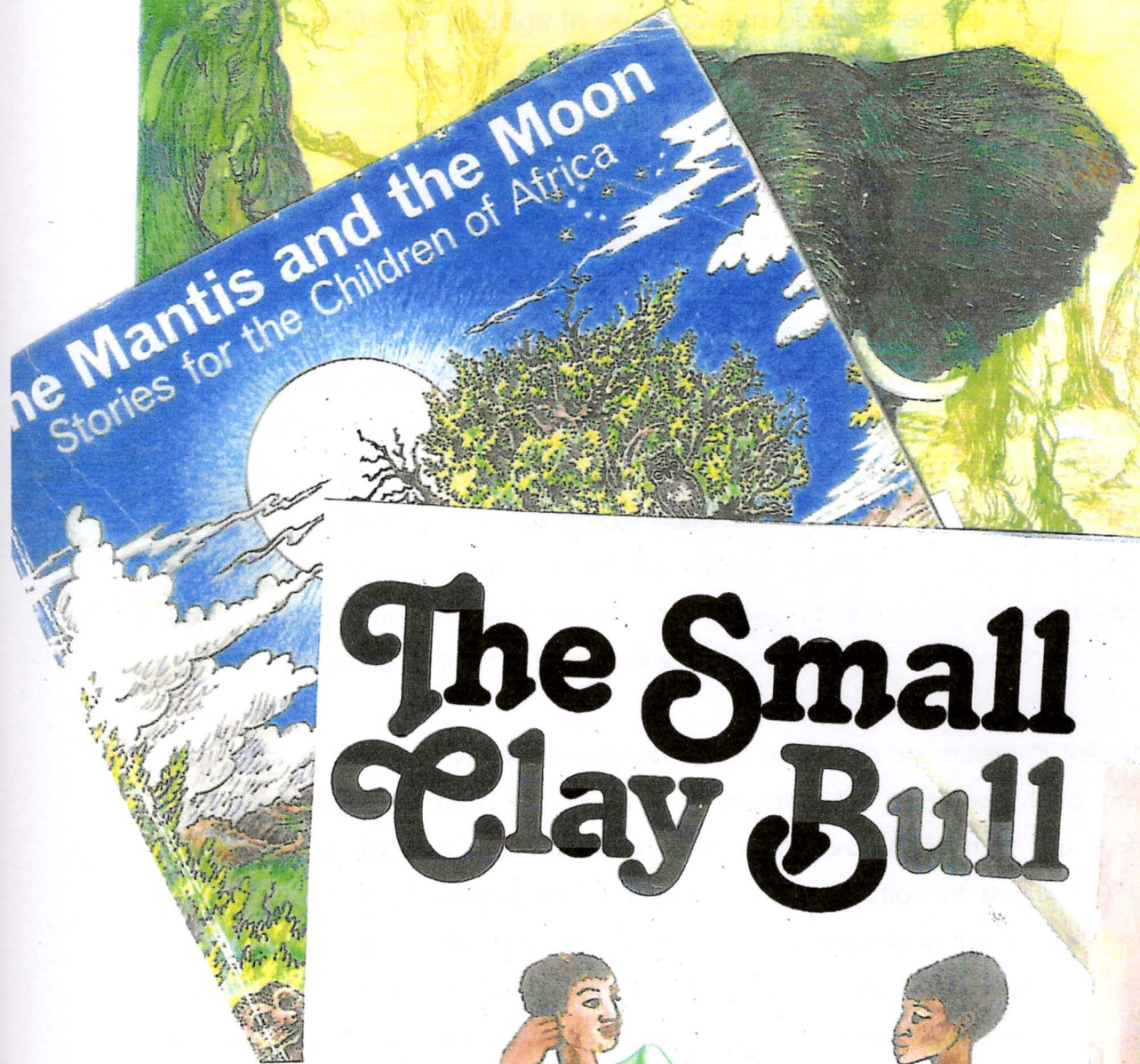
MYTHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

- *NQALU, THE MOUSE WITH NO WHISKERS* (1979)
- *THE WOODASH STARS* (1983)
- *SHADOW OF THE WILD HARE* (1986)
- *SAMBANE'S DREAM AND OTHER STORIES* (1989)
- *THE SMALL CLAY BULL* (1989)

Marguerite Poland

NQALU

the mouse with no whiskers



The Small Clay Bull



Literature began with the oral tradition, evolved from the blending of oral and written traditions and continues to grow as self-conscious artists adapt or modify their literary heritage to serve contemporary needs.

(Killens and Ward 1992: 7)

Traditionally, Africans have revered good stories and storytellers, as have most peoples around the world who are rooted in oral cultures and traditions. Storytelling is an ancient art, which is used to heighten awareness of wonder and mystery. The main purposes of storytelling are to entertain, to teach and to transmit cultural beliefs and values. Originally, stories were mainly used to explain the world, to teach people about the earth and about the community they lived in. For the purposes of this study, I will define the oral tradition as used by Poland in her writing as imaginary adventure narratives with a didactic vocation. The fictional landscape, characterised by cultural realities, social values and mythological figures drawn from Zulu and Xhosa beliefs, which emerges from such tales, can be defined as a 'mythological landscape'.

Marguerite Poland's mythological landscape is evident in her children's tales in which the intricate detail she employs to describe the indigenous flora and fauna in her stories is similar to that used in the oral tradition of the early inhabitants of South Africa; for example, in her collection of stories in *The Woodash Stars* (1983) the story 'The Woodash Stars' has links to the San people; 'The Tale of Nombulelo' to the Xhosa; 'Tobane and the Watermelon' to the Tsonga and 'Child of the Dove' to the Zulu. The word 'landscape', as discussed in Chapter 1, can be used to refer to 'views and vistas', but for most people, even in the contemporary modern world, this is not the way they relate to their surroundings on an everyday basis. This is merely a minute constituent of it. To take a different aspect of this relationship, the landscape of any country is imbued with memories, history, folklore and atmosphere. For the San each

aspect of the cosmic landscape has a personal identity and human beings are seen to be a part of the natural order rather than separate from it. It is also quite common to hear someone refer to a place as having a particular 'atmosphere' to it, and this is a way of relating to place. We can also view the landscape as a reference to the way that people see, understand and relate to the land around them. There is a whole corpus of modern day tales embedded within the African landscape but before an analysis of Poland's works in this vein can be undertaken, the following concepts need to be defined and discussed: myth and mythology, the oral tradition, folktales and folklore motifs.

3.1 MYTH, MYTHOLOGY AND THE ORAL TRADITION

The oral tradition, according to the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, is defined as "a way of preserving a group's beliefs, customs and history by parents telling their children about them, and their children telling their children and so on" (Procter 1995: 992). According to Brunvand (1986), the oral tradition and other types of folklore are those materials in culture that circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions, whether in oral form or by means of customary example, or by the process of traditional performance and communication. In the oral tradition two distinct categories of genre can be identified: legends and myths. Legends are narratives that describe human personae acting in the real world, and also include stories that seem unreal and often supernatural.

Myths are the least factually dependable type of oral tradition. Animals with human qualities, superhuman heroes and the fantastical element are characteristic of mythologies. Definitions based along the lines that myths are stories are not wholly correct as the mythology of some societies includes assigning different functions or areas of interest to the various gods and goddesses. A deity may reign over agriculture, another over love, another over war, another over the landscape, and so on. Thus, a rough definition of myth is 'a

story about the gods'. Another, broader one is 'a sacred story'. Neither of these definitions is adequate, but "many myths are narratives about the exploits of gods and supernatural beings" (Cavendish 1993: 8). These exploits may or may not have really happened, but they may contain truth of a different and deeper kind, which may explain the history and rationale of a community, institution, custom or social development. According to the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, a myth is "an ancient story or set of stories, explaining in a literary way the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts. A myth is also a commonly believed but false idea" (Procter 1995: 935). A myth addresses the inexplicable, attempting to resolve such metaphysical questions as where we came from, how things came to be, why our ways are different from those of others and why the human condition is the way it is. Myths also have moral dimensions explaining in moral terms why things happened and how people should behave. In addition to this, myths play a critical role in how a culture constructs its sense of place, although they are generally stories that take place in an imagined, remote, timeless past.

With the changing times, stories often change depending on historical context. Harold Scheub's *Dictionary of African Mythology* (2000) explores a full range of archetypal figures and shows how mythic scenarios can vary from region to region. In his book, he shows African traditions as every bit as colourful and transformative as the myths of other world cultures. Scheub shows how an expert storyteller uses structural elements – image, rhythm and narrative – to shape a story's fundamental emotional content. He also shows how a skilled writer can stir up emotions despite the obstacles of space, time and culture.

African mythologies, given their great number, do not present a consistent set of characters, although many of the tribes tell similar stories. It is from landscape, and the culture that sprang from it, that many African myths throughout Africa evolved. Because of the land's primal but unpredictable nature, the San developed an intense reverence for all living things, including the land. The reverence they have for the land is imbedded in their myths and stories, which

serves a more profound purpose than merely entertainment. As in most cultures, San mythology focuses on nature and the “tales usually feature talking animals” (Jenkins 1986: 133). An example of this is the praying mantis, which is also a well-known god of the Bushmen of South Africa (see Cavendish 1993: 211). The myth, which attributes the origin of death to a mistake, is as a result of the praying mantis’ inability to deliver a message to earth by herself. Regarded as a divine messenger, the slow praying mantis asked the hare to deliver the message. This message was unfortunately relayed incorrectly. Many countries in Africa have strikingly similar myths, which may differ from group to group in local detail, but not so much in the basic themes of their myths. Poland draws on these myths in her books entitled *The Mantis and The Moon* and in *The Woodash Stars*. These books will be discussed later in this chapter.

3.3 FOLKTALES

A prominent component of the oral tradition is folktales. There is much disagreement among scholars as how to define the folktale; consequently there is disagreement about the relation between folktale and myth. One view of the problem is that of the American folklorist, Stith Thompson (1995), who regarded myths as one type of folktale. According to this approach, the discrete characteristic of myth is that its narrative deals with sacred events that happened ‘in the beginning’. Other scholars either consider folktale a subdivision of myth or regard the two categories as distinct but overlapping. Myths and other oral traditions are parts of a community’s complex body of folklore, and cannot be understood properly without reference to the other parts of that folklore. For example, we cannot determine how the processes of omission and fusion may have affected these myths.

Another important aspect of the problem of defining a folktale relates to the historical origin of the concept. Despite universal features, the particular narrative meanings, themes, genres and styles of storytelling around the world differ from culture to culture. In South Africa, by ‘oral tradition’ we generally

mean *black* oral tradition. An overview of a 'typical' folktale drawn from the African oral tradition can be obtained from a reading of Canonici (1985, 1987), Finnegan (1970) and Scheub (1971). South African writers have produced literature grounded in history and in culture and although writers have responded to the African landscape in different ways, history and collective experiences have their traces in one's own culture. Generally folktales are tales of popular or traditional origin of style narrated by an adept storyteller or performer to children usually in the evening after the daily chores have been completed. In a sense folktales are human audio-visuals: they are governed by a set of rules, which determine, inter alia, time, place of delivery and the manner of performance. Time of delivery is a significant cultural factor as the darkness of the night creates a specific atmosphere. The darkness symbolises a time of mystery and magic and an association with the spiritual world. Canonici (1987) affirms, "Some taboos on the use of particular words were lifted only at night, to give the tale sacred connotations" (133). With the passage of time, tales took on new interpretations and meanings and they became important agencies of imparting knowledge and wisdom. Thus, a common feature of the oral folktale is its didactic purpose. In order to achieve this intention oral tales make use of human character-types rather than unique individuals. This concept will be explored as we analyse Poland's works later in this chapter.

For hundreds of years folktales took the place of the unwritten textbook of African education. Folktales were thus, not only a means of entertainment, but also the means to pass on traditions, beliefs values and morals. Furthermore, folktales not only served as an effective means of educating the children in terms of subject matter, but also in terms of effective and expressive oral communication – gestures, voice modulation, expression, articulation etc. Children absorb the experience by observing the storytellers' interpretation of the plot and characterisation as they watch and listen. Their participation may be seen as an essential ingredient of traditional indigenous communal life and as basic training in a particular culture's oral arts and skills. Bartlett confirms this, stating, "These stories are often the 'carriers' of our universal affinity to know who

we are and where we have come from" (1998: 8).

Every human culture in the world seems to create stories (narratives) as a means of interpreting and making sense of the world. The narrative keeps the past close at hand – transferring indirectly traditional culture and consequently keeping cultural identity firmly intact. Many features of the folktales, although universal, may differ in terms of genres and styles depending on a particular culture. A parameter affecting the reliability of oral traditions is the dynamics of storytelling. Oral literature is fluid, in continuous change and adaptation. Stories are always told for a purpose, which may alter from time to time depending on the intent of the storyteller or the event. Bearing in mind the oral nature of folklore, one has to question the authenticity of the passing down of tradition from one generation to the next. When traditional stories are transmitted orally from one individual to the next, content matter is inevitably reshaped as a result of a number of contextual and psychological factors. In addition, storytellers do not simply memorise and repeat the same story the same way each time. In other words, there is a clear line separating what purports to be 'authentic' oral testimony and what is clearly a fictional and conventional use of the oral narrative mode. Furthermore, the oral tradition may also be losing its impetus because of the influx of the written word, television and the other literary genres. Since tradition refers to the passing down of information, customary behaviour and social patterns from one generation to the next, a temporal dimension is also added to the transmission process. The implication herein is that information may be overlooked and deleted and events and characters reshaped resulting in meaning being distorted. Even the references to myths will be affected as a result of the processes of omission and fusion. Canonici, in his research, notes that he perceived "a decline in the external manifestations of the folktale tradition as a consequence of westernisation of life and education" (1987: 151). Oratures, like the cultures that generate them, continuously evolve and change across time, culture, place and regional style for a variety of reasons. If a story loses its significance because of changing values and social circumstances, it is discarded or modified, and new stories are born. Gunner too, posits that, "In an

era of globalisation, orality has often adapted itself in its many different forms to become a vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of a new generation of Africans" (in Olaniyan and Quayson 2007: 70).

Folktales have a predilection for strong and compelling story lines: the choice of words and the ability to maintain listeners' attention are key factors in this regard. Whilst the written short story can afford to be more impressionistic, lyrical and even poetic; folktales must be drawn on bold and memorable lines. Tales related are events. They occupy temporal and spatial dimensions and must be of certain duration. A critical balance needs to be maintained between conciseness of the story and extravagant, flamboyant detail. The trick is to lure the listener into a state of suspense in order to make the climax more effective. The determining factor here is how the narrator unfolds the story entertaining the learner with a host of seemingly irrelevant details and yet adhering to the framework of the plot. As can be seen, the nature of early-oral style has progressively given way to a greater emphasis on fictionality, on artful inventiveness and Poland has adapted her children's tales epitomising African oral folktales in terms of fundamental art form, philosophical symbolism and didactic values.

3.4 FOLKLORE MOTIFS

In Africa, tribal folk-life gave birth to stories that contained African motifs: praise songs, proverbs, myths and legends. Like folktales from any other culture, the African folktale of the south reflects an interest in animals, the way they behave and the reasons for such behaviour. Usually the smaller animals of Africa, for example, the tortoise, the hare, the spider etc. were the main characters but later these folktales began to include larger animals like lions, elephants and foxes. Animal tales fulfilled a dual function: they conveyed expressly a moral lesson as well as made learning fun-filled and entertaining. Folktales taught children how to respond to the environment with its physical, intellectual and spiritual challenges. Although children were generally receptors, adults too

participated and storytelling became a community affair.

The sacredness of the storytelling was enhanced by song, dance, choral participation and the use of drums. "The drum is seen as a call to nature (the drum resounds on the earth, its beat is echoed by the ground, the mountains, the forests etc.), to the spirits below and to those above, to join in prayer, in rejoicing, in thanksgiving and in celebration" (Canonici 1987: 133). Whilst the oral literature is fluid, continuously changing and open to adaptation, written literature is fixed (although interpretation of such is not) and may be considered more of an individual act since the writer writes alone and is able to manipulate the written word to produce the desired actions and expressions. It is for this reason that written folktales may not have the desired effect – folktales' audience participation is negated and the creative artistry of the live storyteller is nullified. Nevertheless, writers like Poland, have used their talents in re-creating the atmosphere of the African setting where there is a deep sense of mystery invested in the environment.

In order to appreciate Poland's works, one has to look at the particular cultures and oratures from which she draws – for their themes and values, for their narrative structures and plots, for their rhythms and styles, for their images and metaphors and for their artistic and ethical principles. It must be stressed again though, that Poland's children's stories are not transcriptions of San folktales. They are original pieces of work that may be related in structure, theme and message to the stories told by the San peoples. This is confirmed by Jenkins who comments: "The characters in Poland's stories, like her settings, are usually much fuller than those in traditional tales" (1986: 128). Bearing in mind that oral texts are always in a state of flux, the classification of San literature is obviously difficult. San stories were expressed according to the occasion. Categorising San texts using Western forms of poetry, narrative and drama as a norm seems impossible, but Ruth Finnegan (1970) posits that elements in written literature are also evident in oral forms. These include, *inter alia*, style, subject matter, structure and manner. Chapman reiterates that in San expression chant-like utterances in songs

“reinforce invocation, lament and dramatic performances” (2003: 24). Since the San were hunter-gatherers the evenings were generally a time for stories. The narratives included stories of hunting exploits, news, anecdotes, encounters between animals and humans, animal parables and stories of supernatural beings.

Many of Poland's stories follow the traditional style of indigenous folktales and many of her children's stories revolve around animals, birds and insects that are endowed with human qualities, especially the ability to talk and understand the human language. Some debate, however, has arisen questioning whether Poland's 'children's stories' are really for children. The uncertainty has arisen because of Poland's acute use of scientific details when describing plants and animals and because of her subtle social comment when using the microcosm of the animal world to comment on the macrocosm of real life. To this end, where animals are central, Poland creates a mythological landscape, which fits with the literary genre of folktales. The rest of this chapter will explore how through constructing a mythological landscape within which humans and animals interact, Poland simultaneously is constructing an identity for herself as 'South African', 'female' and 'didactic' within an indigenous African context.

The following works of Poland will be analysed in this chapter: *Nqalu, the Mouse with no Whiskers* (1980), *The Woodash Stars* (1983), *Shadow of the Wild Hare* (1986), *Sambane's Dream* (1989) which is a revised combined edition of *The Mantis and The Moon* (1979) and *Once at KwaFubesi* (1981), and *The Small Clay Bull* (1989). According to Poland “it was safe writing about animals – if you wrote about animals that had a society, you were writing about people, but at a distance” (Schwartz 1988: 8). In other words, the animals' behaviour in her fiction is similar to that of humans in the non-fictional world. The animals, with their distinguishing character traits, represent a wide spectrum of human character types, for example, the helpful badger, the cunning jackal, the loving dove, the roguish fox and so on. Thus, Poland's landscape consists of a world partly real and partly fantastic. Poland's first published children's story, *Nqalu, the Mouse*

with no Whiskers, succinctly sums this up:

Nqalu knew that he was different, but there was nothing he could do to change the way things were. All the mice in the bush had whiskers – and all the other creatures too – but he, Nqalu, had none. No, not even the beginnings of them. All he wanted, all he thought of, all he ever dreamed about was to have long, shining whiskers like every other mouse.

(Poland 1987: 7)

As mentioned earlier, Poland maintains that like Nqalu, she too felt that she lacked something. In fact, she proclaims that this book, *Nqalu, the Mouse with no Whiskers*, is to a certain degree, a reflection of her own life. The protagonist, disturbed by his lack of whiskers and his inability to carry out his duties competently, is similar to Poland and her first steps into the world of fiction writing. Her explorations into the Xhosa and Zulu literary worlds, are to an extent, her search for an identity in an indigenous landscape.

Briefly, *Nqalu, the Mouse with no Whiskers* is about Nqalu, a small striped fieldmouse who lived alone in a thicket. He was afraid to venture out because the other mice used to mock his lack of whiskers. One day he encountered an otter who advised him to seek help from the Spirit of the Elephant. However, both of them did not know where the Spirit of the Elephant lived. Nqalu was advised to find out from Thekwane, the hamerkop bird. Plucking up courage, Nqalu sought out Thekwane who lived high up in a krantz. The bird pointed to the highest peak in a far off mountain range and told him that that was where the Spirit of the Elephant lived. Nqalu knew that to get there was a formidable task but he was desperate. So, summoning up courage, Nqalu set out on his adventure. After many obstacles Nqalu reached the Spirit of the Elephant and much to his amazement found that he had grown whiskers. The Spirit of the Elephant proclaimed that that must be attributed to Nqalu's determination.

Nqalu "lived alone in the thicket, never venturing far from his hole" (1987: 7). His

desire to be alone reflects his uneasiness and anxieties. It further reiterates his lack of confidence and his inability to identify with others. This is symbolic, not only of Poland, but also of many other settler female writers who venture into the world of African languages, seeking thereby to construct an African identity. These writers knew that they were different, just like "Nqalu knew that he was different" (7). Many women writers, for example, Olive Schreiner (1855 – 1920), had to work secretly and used pseudonyms (hers being Ralph Iron) in order to get their works published. Secretively, "just as the moon was rising" (7), Nqalu crept out from his refuge, venturing into the landscape, searching for his whiskers and, indirectly, his identity. His nocturnal movements ensured that he would not be seen clearly and be open to criticism and mocked for his inadequacies. This is generally a human characteristic where people try to hide their shortcomings and are afraid to reveal their physical, emotional or cognitive weaknesses. Poland's use of personification in "the sighing of a little lost wind in the reeds" (9) conjures up a sorrowful atmosphere that envelops the landscape, contributing to the despondent psychological make up of the protagonist. The doom and gloom is further reiterated when Nqalu realises that "the owls would soon be out hunting" (ibid). Owls are generally regarded as the wise ones (though dangerous for a mouse out in the open) and symbolically Poland can be referring to those people who already know the language and the landscape that she is trying to come to terms with. As hunters, they may be seen as authoritative, dominating figures. Put into perspective of a white female settler writer in a male-dominated arena, Nqalu is the representative of all the Polands who are trying to establish themselves in a society, which favours the male in terms of prestige and social potency.

This short story provides Poland with the space and scope she needs to create an artistic vision of her reality, of trying to 'fit in' as a female settler descendant. She is thus expressing an emergent feminist ideology. In a more fundamental and feminist way, the story examines the situation of women in relation to abilities and potential. Poland emphasises the role of women who transcend the limitations imposed on them by circumstances and gender. She brings to the fore societal

stereotypes, and outlines to the reader everyday problems, giving insights to current attitudes concerning women and, in her work set in the past, the tensions implicit in women's engagement with Empire and masculine narrative conventions. This indicates then, that she not only encounters external denials and prohibitions, but that the picture of womanhood given her by her society prevents her from finding within herself ways of recognising what it is she wants in her life journey through the colonial landscape.

Jill May postulates that one of the basic elements of children's literature, "are concerned with heroic journeys" (1995: 90). This journey contains landscape that provides the boundaries for the hero. The milieu in which the protagonist finds himself or herself shapes his/her journey. "In turn, the hero expands the world's horizons by venturing outside his [her] everyday scene" (ibid) in search of a utopia. Nqalu's search for his 'whiskers' in a hostile environment surprisingly reveals compassion and support from certain quarters. The encouraging advice from Otter is:

"You'll never get what you want in life if you're not prepared to fight for it. Why complain about your whiskers if you won't go out and look for them?" (Poland 1987:14)

Like the tenacious Nqalu, Poland was determined to open up cultural and literary spaces for herself. In a patriarchal society, such as South Africa of the 1970s, obstacles were abundant and there was danger in the form of criticisms everywhere. Nqalu too had to encounter many dangers in the quest for identity: 'Thekwane had been in the shadows nearby, but so quiet was she, and so well did her feathers blend with the rocks, that he had not seen her' (26 – 27). In the African landscape the enemy could easily camouflage itself and the first creature that Nqalu encountered on his journey to the Spirit of the Elephant was Thekwane. Though female, similar to dominating male figures in colonial society, Thekwane is overbearing and condescending to the creatures on the lower rung of the social ladder. Thekwane is mocking and teasing in her attitude as if she is all-knowing.

To reiterate her knowledge of the landscape,

The bird went to the end of the ledge and stood looking out across the river. "The Spirit of the Elephant," she said, "can be found on that mountain... it's a full day's flying."

"I can't fly," said Nqalu.

"Indeed!" Thekwane raised her crest feathers delicately. "It is most unfortunate to be a mouse!" (18)

As in many of Poland's stories the mythological landscape is also a character in the story. It makes up part of the fabric of the story and plays an integral role in the story. Sarah Bartlett posits, "Myths are a reflection of the whole, of the place from which we have arrived and the place to which we may return" (1998: 8). Through the symbols of myth we can perhaps obtain an insight that will help us in our understanding of that place.

All day Nqalu trudged along. There was no water. There was no shade; just scrub and thorn bush and sandy red dongas. His mouth and the end of his nose were dry and his fur was stiff and dusty. The bush and grass were so high above his head that he could not see the mountains. (Poland 1987: 24)

Water and shade are the sustenance and comforts given by the landscape but the fact that the above extract shows a lack thereof, indicates symbolically that the road in one's quest for identity is very difficult. Similarly, Poland's hopes and aspirations were like "scrub" of the landscape – stunted, and the "thorn bush" is symbolic of dangers and critics of the time. Even the bush became an obstacle, as it was "so high" that the "mountains", which represented the goal could not be visualised clearly. The extract above shows how the aspiration towards the ideal is constantly frustrated by the landscape. The landscape becomes a reflection of the desperate inner reality Poland was experiencing at that time.

Like Nqalu, she fights against the social malaise, which lies behind an essentialist conceptualising of the self.

I have discussed Poland's later work first because *Nqalu, The Mouse with no Whiskers* is, in some ways, a reflection of her life and it lends coherency to the previous chapter, 'Poland in Context'. Although Poland considers *Nqalu the Mouse with no Whiskers* (1987) a book symbolic of her life, her 'heart book' is *Shadow of the Wild Hare* (1986). This book moves away from the traditional elements of San folklore. The most conspicuous element is the characters. Whereas the San would generally not mix humans with animal characters in their folklore, Poland introduces human children and a San trapper. Set in an Eastern Cape farm, it articulates the integration of human and animal life with the landscape.

Tantyi Mayekiso, a trapper who is paid by farmers to eliminate the threat of jackals to the farmers' livestock, intrigues Rosie, the main character. She accidentally stumbles into his lair and discovers a wild rabbit tethered to a food-trough. Doubtful whether he intends eating the rabbit himself or making it a sacrifice for jackals, Rosie decides to rescue it. She keeps it with her other rabbits in the hope of taming it, but it refuses to eat. In desperation she summons up courage and visits Tantyi Mayekiso, seeking advice on what to feed him. The trapper gives her a lecture on San mythology and the role of the hare that he calls Dhau. He says, "It will not want to live if the *isithunzi* that it has is gone" (1986: 38). The Xhosa word, *isithunzi*, confuses her and the trapper explains that it means shadow, and this is how Poland derives the title for this book. Metaphorically, the shadow refers to the rabbit's spirit, and in order to restore its spirit, Rosie had to release the hare into the wilds "when the moon is small and Dhau can grow with it in brightness" (40). Paralleled to the hare is Jacoba Pandoer, a member of the community whom people incarcerate thinking she has a mental illness because she came from a welfare home and because she used to talk to anyone walking on the road. Jacoba advises Rosie to set the hare free: "Even if it dies. It is better than a cage. This thing I know" (33).

Rosie, her brother, Skip, and his friend, Willie, learn that the rare rabbit that Rosie had rescued from the trapper, Tanti Mayekiso, could not be tamed and that interference in controlling nature is against the laws of the universe. Poland portrays the riverine rabbit, *Bunolagus monticularis*, as a half-mythical figure: "The old *Boesman* said it was once a child that the moon made into a hare. Now things die because of it. It's strong *muti* for the old *Boesmans*" (24). According to Jacoba, the hare was used by the *Boesman* for *muti* to call jackals and caracal so that they could put these animals that troubled the farmers, to death.

In her research, which she carried out on animals, insects and birds mentioned in her book, Poland uncovered that the riverine rabbit "is one of the least known and most endangered mammals in South Africa" (86). Other names, by which the riverine rabbit is known, are 'pondhaas', 'vleihaas', 'doekvoetjie' and 'Bushman Hare'. In her story Poland calls the hare Dhau. Poland associates the *Bunolagus monticularis* in her story, with the hare in the San legend whose lip was split by the moon when it pestered the moon about the death of its mother:

"I do not want to hurt him! I only want to make him tame. Why should he be angry?"

"Dhau is the child of the old people," replied Tanti Mayekiso.

"It was Dhau that was there when the world began and the moon was very new." He raised his hand and drew the moon sickle-thin. "It is Dhau that drinks the water of the moon and brings the words of life and death. This is his work. It is Dhau that was once a child that the moon has made into a hare. That is why Dhau is slow-footed like a man, timid as a child. It is still the man in Dhau the jackal smells and that is why he comes to find him – for is not a man a hunter? And is not a jackal that which follows where a hunter goes?" (37 – 38)

The moon is an important leitmotif in Poland's creation of a mythological landscape together with other leitmotifs like the mantis, the hare, and the rain.

Among the now extinct Cape San, prayers were most often addressed to the new moon. This leitmotif will be further developed in my discussion of "The Apprentice", a story that appeared in *The Mantis and the Moon* (1979).

Poland's first published book, a collection of animal stories was *The Mantis and The Moon: Stories for the Children of Africa* (1979). This is a compilation of eight short stories:

- The Mantis and The Moon
- The Adventures of Ntini, the Small Otter
- If the Boerboon Flowers Fall
- The Apprentice
- Mpungutye – The Story of a Jackal
- The Season of the Stubby Caterpillar
- Fudo and the Prickly Pear Thieves
- The Rain Bulls

One story, which can be read as an early parallel to *Shadow of The Wild Hare* (1986), is "The Apprentice". This tale is about the Old Hare who, about to die, wants to pass on his expertise to his successor, the apprentice, Mvundla. The Old Hare was an artist "and around the rock-faces of his home he had painted, in white and ochre, all the animals, birds and insects of the high country in which he lived " (1979:62). The Old Hare believes that his expertise in painting was passed on to him from his ancestors and that it is his duty now to pass it on to Mvundla who must, in turn, pass it on to future generations. According to the Old Hare, it was the San people who taught his ancestors to paint and since the San have moved from the mountains and his own ancestors are dead, he believes that it is his duty to decorate the rocks.

Poland has deliberately created a setting which links to San art. The San have left on cave walls a vivid visual history of their lives and stories, using natural colours and dyes. According to Chapman, "They have bequeathed a visual art the significance and complexity of which is only now attracting detailed attention"

(2003: 23). Colonisation was responsible for the San's migration from the Cape to the northern parts of South Africa and beyond her borders. In the Huns Mountains of the south-western Namibia (excavated by Eric Wendt in 1968 to 1972), rock art estimated to be about 25 000 years old has been discovered. Researchers have questioned the connection the !Kung of the Tsodilo Hills could have had with the /Xam Bushmen of the Cape, or those of the Drakensberg. Irrespective of the verifiability of the link, van der Post and Taylor conclude that, "their paintings, like their stories, are in similar mode and are filled with the same spirit" (1984:31).

Mvundla questions the Old Hare why it is the hare among all the animals who is the artist and the Old Hare relates the following anecdote:

"Once there was a San child," began the Old Hare, settling himself more comfortably and looking out over the crowns of the trees towards the hills. "This child cried in distress to the moon because his mother was dead and he could not find her. The moon told the child his mother would return – just as the moon does – for it is born, it grows, it dies and is born again. The child did not understand. He said that he did not believe the moon. The moon became angry at these words and struck the child on the mouth, turning him into a hare. That is why our kind has a split lip. Our ancestor himself was once that San child."

"I believe that it is right that hares should know the lore of painting now that the San themselves have gone from these mountains."

(Poland 1989a: 64)

In the mythological landscape of the San, the moon (as mentioned earlier) plays a vital role, as giver of light and life. Many San myths and legends have a solar and celestial bias. The Bushmen as a whole are traditional tribal religionists and they believe that the celestial bodies (sun, moon, morning star and southern cross) are symbols of divinity. Each of their tales of the divine is an ancestor's perception of the supernatural. Each brings with it its own truth shedding light on

some aspect of the divine. The new and full moons were important times for rainmaking rites and dancing, and it seems that the moon was viewed as the physical manifestation of a supreme being associated with heaven, earth and especially rain (of key significance to people in drier regions, whose existence was so dependent upon rainfall).

Poland's reference to the mystical function of the moon highlights the San's perceptions of the mysteries of the universe. The moon, say the San, is really an old shoe belonging to Mantis, who threw it up in the air to guide himself. As it rises, it is red with the red dust of Bushmanland, and cold like old leather. According to the San, God created all of Southern Africa for them. He created the firmament above with the sun, moon and the stars; the earth below with its mountains, rivers and seas; the hills and valleys and the grass and flowers. Thereafter, He created the San, and then the animals. They believe God left them to guard it all. This, obviously, considerably predates colonialism. Research by Chapman reveals that the San belief is that, "It is part of the tradition that all the animals were once people" (2003: 29).

Since the lifestyle of the San is complex and always in a state of flux, "it is difficult to determine whether the San believe in a single god or in many gods" (Tobias 1978: 162). Many Bushmen groups, of which the San is one, however, believe in a higher spiritual being as well as a lesser god. They also believe, like many other cultures, in other supernatural beings, as well as the spirits of the dead. In "The Apprentice", the Old Hare confirms this when he says to Mvundla:

"The San believed that the dead ride on the rain clouds, but we animals know that when we die, we go to high pastures where the rain-cows graze and where we will be young once more". (Poland 1989a: 63)

The leitmotif of the cows is conspicuous in most of Poland's writings and this will be discussed later in the chapter. The 'high pastures' the Old Hare refers to is similar to the Christian belief of the Garden of Eden and of Heaven. This mythological landscape represents a way in which certain classes of people

have signified themselves and their world through their imagined relationship with nature, and through which they have underlined and communicated their own social role and that of others with respect to the world around them. The San did not live comfortable lives, as at times they had to endure a hostile landscape with its storms, droughts and heavy winds. This precarious and uncertain relationship with nature ensured that the San developed a keen respect for all living things and the land itself. The mythology in which this respect and homage is entrenched contains key elements to understanding their culture and its customs and beliefs. The idea that the 'dead ride on rain clouds' evolves from the San's belief in the supernatural spiritual world, that the dead have an impact on weather and rain patterns. This myth is a symbolic way of presenting the way human beings cope with the world they live in.

"The Apprentice" is Poland's best-known San-style narrative. The hares who paint on the walls of the Drakensberg caves can, to a large extent, be identified with the San. Both propagate the same religious beliefs, and affirm that their ancestors were taught to paint by the now almost extinct San, whose traditions they still maintain. The statement, "Our ancestor himself was once a Bushman child" (64) confirms the hare's association with the San and their identification with the landscape becomes complete. "The Apprentice", thus, is an intriguing fantasy world set in an identifiable landscape featuring characters that are neither human nor animal. In other words, Poland juxtaposes the real and the fantastic to create a mythological landscape that is both intriguing and mesmerising.

In "The Rain Bulls" (Poland 1979) Poland adheres to the imagery, setting, characterisations and thematic concerns associated with the San and sustains an original San myth of the existence of rain animals:

Storms are brought by the rain-bulls. The rain cows comes with the misty showers of summer. They are a great herd of eland that live in the sky pastures ... That is where their herder, the

wind, keeps them until winter has gone... only a little water will have fallen, and the desert, thinking it is spring, will put forth its green leaves and shoots. (1979: 117)

At Sani Pass in the Drakensberg Mountains, a remarkable rock painting was discovered which has echoes in this tale. Expert interpreters have identified rain animals, imaginary creatures, in the form of eland, which the medicine men of rain, while in a trance, would lead across the area where the rain was desired. The eland is the most commonly painted animal in San rock art and is considered by the San as the Great God's favourite creature (van der Post and Taylor 1984: 36). The extended metaphor of the eland bulls is beautifully sustained throughout Poland's story and she skilfully negotiates the disparity between the oral, the painted and the written mode of story telling.

At this juncture I would like to reiterate once again that Poland's works are not transcriptions of San stories and though they may be mimetic, they are her original creations. Similarities abound because Poland is an expert at African languages, having studied Zulu and Xhosa and having researched African traditions and customs for her doctoral thesis and for her children's stories and adult novels. In terms of imitating San stories, "we might have expected her animal characters to have a distinct way of speaking, and in other respects to be indistinguishable from animals" (Jenkins 1986: 134). But her animals are easily identifiable creatures although they have been given the ability to converse in conventional human speech. Each of her animals has an arbitrary personality and she has, to a large extent, refrained from stereotyping them as is done in many European and African fables. "This arbitrary association of character traits and animal species make her stories much closer to San tales" (135). Poland, thus skilfully harnesses the power of the oral tale without foregoing the benefits that the fictional written story can bring. The illusion that the reader is hearing the oral tale is carefully sustained. Poland has succeeded in reconstructing an African worldview sustained within her fictional mythological landscape.

According to Jenkins, "Mpungutye—The Story of the Jackal" is one of the small

numbers of Poland's stories, which are told in the San, rather than African style:

Although this particular story is of a kind one does not find in San folklore, for it is of a straightforward, non-magical nature which only twentieth-century Western culture with its concern for animal welfare and conservation could produce, it has elements of the style of San storytelling: the use of the present tense resembles the diction of San stories when directly translated into English, and there are references to San mythology --'Indeed it is the star-jackal who has led Mpungutye home; calling to them as he hunts the star-herds through the sky'. (132)

"Mpungutye – The story of the Jackal" is about a black-backed jackal, which, in the throes of a drought, becomes desperate for food and so decides to rob a farmer's hen house. During the raid a bullet fired by the angry farmer wounds Mpungutye's pregnant wife. Although she survives, she is unfortunately separated from her husband. The story then revolves around Mpungutye's adventures in his search for his wife. As Jenkins posits above, this is one of Poland's straightforward stories with, however, the use of the present tense giving resemblance to the style of San storytelling.

Poland's other stories found in *The Woodash Stars* (1983) and *The Small Clay Bull* (1989b), however, are more steeped into the mode of African storytelling. In *The Wood-ash Stars* the following stories may be found: "The Wood-ash Stars"; "Nombulelo"; "Tobane and the Watermelon" and "Child of the Doves". Three stories constitute *The Small Clay Bull*: "The Small Clay Bull"; "The Broken String"; and "Thuleleni's Horns". These stories are more in accordance with African traditional stories as they employ similar narrative techniques, include the fantastical, and provide fascinating myths that capture their cultural context. Although "The Woodash Stars" is an original story by Poland, she does draw on the rich tradition of the San. The story is about Gau and Xama and how Gau tries

to get Xama, with whom he is in love, a new kaross by killing a gemsbok. Young and inexperienced, Gau gets lost in the desert after killing and skinning the gemsbok. Filled with worry and desperation, Xama tries to light up the way for him by flinging into the night sky embers from the coal fire:

“And so it is – the old ones say – that the thousands of little stars that form the Milky Way are really a handful of wood-ash glowing in the dark. For once a young San girl named Xama threw the embers of her fire into the sky to light the way for Gau the hunter, lost out in the desert wastes in the darkness of the night”. (Poland 1983: 15)

Poland masterfully slips in and out of white confining spaces and into the wide world of African space, skilfully articulating and merging the two to provide the reader with valuable insights into present day cultural landscapes. This serves as a reminder that landscape is a social product (see Cosgrove 1984: 14). Indeed, Poland uses the mythological landscape to depict what man is, and how he is situated with reference to the nature that surrounds him, and of which, in a sense, he is a part. The mythology of black indigenous South Africans extends the reader's own limited experience by means of imagination – they sharpen our sense of the physical landscape and deepen our sense of the emotional, intellectual and moral implications of human situations and actions. Furthermore, since the oral tradition is deeply characterised by cultural realities and social values, it plays an important role in the transmission of knowledge, traditional attitudes and values to a changing world.

In “The Small Clay Bull”, for example, Sipho informs Thabo that he (Thabo) has made a grave mistake in killing a wagtail bird. The wagtail is also referred to as “*mvemve*, the bird of the cattle” (Poland 1989b: 5). The *umvemve* is also known as “*umcelumvemve*, the Cape Wagtail or *Motacilla capensis*” (Poland et al 2003: 101). This small white and grey bird “is regarded with great affection and, among the Xhosa, is seen as the bringer of good fortune” and its praise name is “*intake yenkomo*” (ibid) – more will be made of this in Chapter Five. According

to Sipho, anyone guilty of killing an *mvemve* “will have no cattle and those he has will disappear” (Poland 1989b: 5). As prophesied by Sipho, cattle thieves steal two of Thabo’s three cows. Prior to this, though, Thabo’s uncle had taken Thabo’s bad-tempered cow to see if mating her with his red bull would help her temperament. To ease his guilt and to try and get his cows back, Thabo takes Sipho’s advice: bury the charred remains of the bird he had roasted with two white beads whilst chanting the words “*Camangu, mandingafikelwa ngamashwa*” (8). When spring comes around again, Sipho and Thabo play on the riverbank modelling cattle out of clay. Thabo makes one similar to the piebald speckled cow that was sent away and one similar to his uncle’s red bull. Everyday he plays with these clay models, pretending they were real – “He talked to the small red bull, longing to put blood in its heart so the cattle-kraal would be full again” (12). Finally when his uncle does send the piebald speckled cow back home, it gives birth to a red bull calf. Subsequently Thabo’s clay models disappear mysteriously.

Hence, the story revolves around this myth in a landscape covered by *mpepho* flowers (*Helichrysum miconiaefolium*) – flowers of the ancestors – and by the *mpepho* winds, which reminds the characters that the ancestors are always nearby (see also *The Abundant Herds*, 2003: 102 – 104). Using elements from the Zulu oral tradition, myth and fantasy, as well as from non-fiction Poland portrays the natural, traditional and mythological elements as mutually entangled categories. Furthermore, her mythological landscape in “The Red Clay Bull” has referents in her indigenous landscape in *The Abundant Herds*. Similarly, in *Train to Doringbult*, we are introduced to “other local myths which add to the novel’s Eastern Cape context” (Eve 2003: 284). An example of this is the *hamerkop* bird, which according to Xhosa tradition, is a bringer of ill omens if it flies over one’s hut or is deliberately killed. Traditional African children’s literature has an immediacy of appeal to the African child as it depicts objects, animals and milieux, which are familiar to the child’s experiences. Poland, in harmony with the landscape, is able to capture this immediacy of appeal, its mythologies and at the same time articulate the meaning of the landscape, not only to the African

child, but to the wider reading public as well

On the whole, Poland's stories not only entertain, but also provide information about African belief systems – see, for example, her depiction of the mantis and the concept of *isithunzi* in *Shadow of the Wild Hare*. According to Chapman, the mantis is “the great, incorrigible disturber of peace and social order: the trickster, devilish by nature, who is at war with all human inertia” (2003: 29). Poland's stories capture myths in their cultural contexts. These myths, however, may be rooted in a belief system and lifestyle that many African people no longer follow. Thus, whilst Poland may be writing stories in the typical oral traditional style in terms of the co-existence of the fantastical and the real, she has actually modified this genre in order for it to engage meaningfully with the growing complexities of the twentieth-century South African life. Her allegories about broader issues reach out to the entire South African population and indeed, the world beyond – even, for example, Japan, where her book *Nqalu, the Mouse with no Whiskers*, was translated. It is clear then, that the idea that Poland's children's stories are for children only is invalid.

In the next chapter I aim to link Poland's 'children's stories' with its references to cattle, *isithunzi*, shades and spirits of the ancestors, to her 'adult' novels which are underpinned by a consciousness of place, in particular, the colonial landscape.

CHAPTER FOUR

COLONIAL LANDSCAPE

➤ *TRAIN TO DORINGBULT* (1987)

➤ *SHADES* (1993)

➤ *IRON LOVE* (1999)

Identity is a fiction, a negotiable construction subject to change.

(Robinson, F.G. 1995: 40)

According to Wicomb, postcolonial theory addresses the question of place, of how the postcolonial writer revises the empty space of colonialism and through writing and naming turns it into place; its concern is with the related concept of identity formation (2005: 145). The concepts of space, place and identity formation expounded by Wicomb find expression in Poland's work discussed in this chapter. As a postcolonial writer, Poland depicts socio-historical events and conditions of the colonial period, showing how they form ideology and consciousness. She delves into aspects of colonial life, observing the tendencies to suppress individual identity, especially over women in a colonial landscape.

For the purposes of this thesis, the 'colonial landscape' will refer to the socio-political environment of South Africa in the late nineteenth-century, its physical milieu and the cultural identities within it. Thus, a colonial landscape I will define as, a landscape informed and constructed according to the colonial ideology of its inhabitants. In this chapter I will show how Poland puts into perspective personal, social and cultural identities emerging from the colonial period in South Africa, excavating, metaphorically, landscapes below our conventional sight level to reveal attitudes and ideology that lie beneath the surface.

Poland's novels *Train to Doringbult*, *Shades* and *Iron Love* are all set in a colonial landscape as defined above.

Train to Doringbult



MARGUERITE POLAND

4.1 *Train to Doringbult* (1987)

The extract below reveals the stark landscape of the Eastern Cape in which the colonialists find themselves:

When they were boys Jan and Adrian had explored the lands together, fished the dam, shot birds in the orchard. But now Adrian only saw what kleinboet had failed to do. Always 'kleinboet', and so it seemed when he sat at table imprisoned in his jacket and tie, his straight dark hair obedient, wetted flat against his skull. But out there in the lands Adrian trailed behind him, sweating and irritable and Jan would go ahead with a quiet satisfaction. (Poland 1987:10-11)

A family farm, Blackheath, is the main setting for *Train to Doringbult*. When the de Villiers brothers, Jan and Adrian, get married, Jan and his wife, Elsa, remain on Blackheath taking control of the land and its affairs, whilst Adrian and Elizabeth move away and settle in Grahamstown, where Adrian becomes a successful advocate. Adrian's lifestyle changes and from a simple boy living on a farm he develops into a sophisticated individual adapting to the urban landscape of the city. He rarely visits the farm, the landscape to which he originally belonged. In fact, he only visits the farm when he feels like hunting. On one such expedition, led by the labourer, Abedingo, Adrian accidentally shoots and kills Sipho, Abedingo's younger brother. The traumatised Abedingo runs away, stealing one of Jan's guns in the process. This incident is the turning point in the lives of everyone at Blackheath – this I will discuss later in the chapter.

The farm, Blackheath, is a microcosm of life in South Africa during the colonial period – white farmers controlled farms on which black subordinates worked. Their lives were separate but also very closely interlinked. In a sense we can refer to this as a paradoxical unity – a unity of disunity. Although blacks and whites

shared a common space, they practised different cultures, had conflicting attitudes, but at the same time could be mutually supportive. Thus life on the farm is a reflection of the more general social conditions evident in South Africa during that era. Petrus and Elizabeth are Jan's subordinates although they were the same age as Jan, grew up with Jan and had their roots in Blackheath. According to Middleton, "One of the necessary conditions for meaningful human existence is an attachment to a specific place" (1981: 101) and in this narrative we find that all the main characters display the need to be associated with Blackheath. Attachment to this particular spot gives the characters security by allowing them to appreciate some of the sources from which their lives spring. A sense of security emanates from, and is rooted in, a kinship system, religious beliefs and in the continuity of tradition and although the people on the farm came from different ethnic backgrounds, they were able to mix with relative ease. Roots in a particular place at a particular time influence a person's life by encouraging his or her growth and development while providing a firm emotional, social and intellectual foundation on which to build. Jan's life on the farm is full of hardships and although he is forced to work elsewhere, he retains ownership of Blackheath, expecting his wife to control it in his absence. Even Abedingo, the fugitive, returns to the place he knows as home.

The name 'Blackheath' has echoes of English origin, enough to suggest a past linked to settlers from a colonial background. This place is a concrete, tangible and, most importantly, social manifestation of the notion of local identity. Ironically, if we break up the name Blackheath into its two syllables, black and heath, the connotations become clear. 'Black' encapsulates not only the African people of the place, but also the gloom that the place descends into, whilst 'heath' refers to moorland and has associations with the British landscapes noted for its meadows, moors and heaths – generally used as settings by English writers like William Wordsworth and Emily Brontë. Ironically, the main characters on the farm, Jan, Elsa and Adrian de Villiers have Afrikaner names. This complexity and ambivalence of Blackheath must be seen against the backdrop

of tensions inherent in the novel and it is through this backdrop that I intend to construct the more complex identities.

Although the different ethnic families grew up together, there is in this novel, rooted in each individual, the fear of the 'Other' which is at the heart of racism and xenophobia. This, inevitably, has implications for both individual and collective identities and for the meaning and coherence of the community at Blackheath. *Train to Doringbult* can be compared, in certain aspects, to Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). According to J.M. Coetzee, the farm of Schreiner's narrative, like the farm of the pastoral, lies outside society but it mimics the ignorance and greed of colonial society (1988: 4). He contends that in terms of the pastoral, white labour must be vividly portrayed and the occlusion of Black labour is imperative to show the supposed sloth, idleness and laziness of the natives. To define and inscribe the property of its occupants, work on the land must take the form of digging, ploughing, planting and building. From a white man's perspective then, the work of the subordinates should be hidden and writers are required to portray servants as simple shadowy presence in their narratives. Pauline Smith's *The Beadle* (1926) and Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm* satisfy these conditions and although Marguerite Poland's *Train to Doringbult* has close associations with these writers' narratives, the blacks in her works are more visible, yet still 'part of the landscape': "Workers were part of a farm like the earth and the shed and the best pepper tree by the kraal" (Poland 1987: 39-40). This is indicative of Poland's affinity with the indigenous people of the Eastern Cape, and their belonging to the landscape she also loves.

In *Train to Doringbult*, Petrus Ngubane, a black farm worker, was born at Blackheath farm in the same year as Jan. Now adults, they work the farm together. "They cared for the goats, they repaired the machinery, they watched the level of the reservoir. They spoke with the stockmen, and with each other" (39). On the surface it seems like an ideal relationship, complementing each

other, working side by side like brothers. Poland perpetuates her belief that the relationship between people and the environment should aim to be harmonious; thus the intensity of the bonds between these human beings and their surroundings is appropriate. Each individual however, is at a different level of identity construction, affective and moral growth: Adrian and his uncle Cedric are enmeshed in the throes of capitalism, extending their empire and determined to make a profit irrespective of the consequences. Jan becomes embroiled in an extra-marital affair and suffers emotional pain in his growth. Elsa, unaware of her husband's illicit affair, finds herself in her own search for identity, fighting patriarchal attitudes and the corruption within legal structures. Petrus too, quietly goes through the assimilation process in a colonial setting and strives to buy his own property mimicking the exploits and aspirations of colonial mentality and capitalism.

"The historical origins of capitalism lie in the dissolution of existing relations between human beings and the material conditions of their lives, relations often termed 'natural' " (Cosgrove 1984: 61). As much as this may be true, Petrus harbours aspirations to live like the colonisers, the perpetrators of capitalism. Poland's setting is a pre-industrial one, just beginning to feel the influence of an intrusive acquisitiveness. The tranquillity of the farm begins to alter as the first eddies of capitalism and social changes make themselves felt. At Blackheath, specific tensions arise which find expression in different individuals. In Jan's relationship with Abedingo Ngubane, for example, it had not occurred to Jan that he had always dictated the terms of the relationship:

And yet, in all the time, on his deference, his acquiescence, it was Petrus who had known how to keep their friendship just beyond the test. It was Petrus who had always held the links-only he seemed to realise how fragile they might be. He preserved them with a kind of prudence, aware of what was best, aware that Jan, unconsciously, could play the 'White' man when he wanted to. (Poland 1987: 40)

Petrus is enmeshed in a system of relations that extends both within and between social classes, and he is geographically tied to a specific landscape. As an agrarian worker he is engaged in a series of duties, obligations and traditions towards the land. There is a tension built into his relationship with the de Villiers, in his desires and inspirations as an individual. After Petrus is awarded damages for the injuries inflicted upon him by the police, he confides in Jan, telling him that he is in the process of buying his own farm and is intent on leaving Blackheath. Jan tries to persuade Petrus to stay on at Blackheath:

"It's your home too, Petrus. You know that."

"It is your land, *Nkosan*."

Jan heard the word, the subservience that it implied.

He understood Petrus' purpose in using it. (202)

Jan had believed that Petrus would be his servant forever; that he would be obligated to the de Villiers' family for everything that they had done for him. Unfortunately for Jan, Petrus is aware of the racial oppression evident in his life and in the lives of his family members. This ultimately gives rise to tensions and conflicts, which cannot be resolved although the de Villiers had tried to make the environment in which they lived, as harmonious and comfortable for the blacks as possible. However, as Loflin asserts, "The landscape is not, cannot be, an apolitical space" (1998: 3). Pratt earlier had observed that instead of viewing the imperial relation as a simple imposition of power upon another nation, it is more accurate to see it as a complex collision of cultures in what she calls the contact zone, described as "social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination" (1992: 4). Blackheath, in this sense, is a 'contact zone' and Jan, "by his generosity" (Poland 1987: 39) and his intimate relationship with his worker, inevitably "held Petrus in bondage" (ibid). Jan may thus be seen as a representative of the many colonisers who consciously or unconsciously continue to express in daily life the prejudices, bias and racial suppression of a

hegemonic and hierarchical system where the values of the colonisers of European descent dominated. Petrus, on the other hand, is also a representative of those who seek personal fulfilment, a racial identity and empowerment of the self at the cost of an alienation, not just from place, but also from a community and from those whom he may regard as family.

In earlier times, however, Petrus was regarded as a member of the family, taking care of Jan's belongings when Jan was away at boarding school: "Petrus had made them his own for the time, had returned them uncomplainingly when the holidays came" (ibid). Later, when the farm was suffering with an acute period of drought and Jan had to leave home to be the foreman on a dam-site on the Orange River, he had to leave Petrus in charge – "not with a lamb, or a crow but with a farm, hundreds of head of stock and his family" (40). The stakes were different from their childhood days and the politically sensitised and maturing Petrus "accepted the responsibility without emotion" (ibid). Jan, too, suffered ambivalent feelings. He handed over Blackheath reluctantly, "feeling the process of abdication" (ibid).

In terms of the farming competence of Petrus, Jan had nothing to fear. He had introduced and adequately schooled Petrus in modern methods of farming. Also, Petrus had absorbed European cultural practices and from Jan's point of view, could be relied on. According to de Kock, one may, in retrospect, look at a composite of representational practices which European cultural agents helped prepare the ground for what they considered a re-making of the African Order (1996: 48). Culture is (often) understood as the basic organising principle of social life and is defined as the integrated set of shared categories, meanings and predispositions which mark each society as unique. According to Moore, "In such formulations, social structures are at the same time systems of social meaning and classification as well as being categorisations of the social and natural world" (1986: 4). The process of assimilation and acculturation ensures that Petrus becomes indoctrinated to such an extent that he believes, like the

coloniser, that individual ownership of property is a necessity. In the buying of land in Mpumalanga, Petrus, like the other modernised blacks, consolidates his own sense of self in the African landscape. In this regard, it must be noted that, the early nineteenth century Nguni had lived “under a system of migratory agro-pastoralism in which land was held communally and generally regarded as pasturage rather than agricultural property” (Peires 1981: 161). To paraphrase de Kock, ‘New Africans’ did not simply emerge. They developed over decades of intensive representational realignment in which colonisers aimed to inculcate modified cultural practices. In fact, almost every daily cultural practice – worship, dressing, housing, labour etc. – was transmitted in the establishment of new forms of identity (see de Kock 1996: 47 – 50).

One may argue that in terms of appropriate planting, harvesting and housing, the indigenous people were more in tune with the African environment than their European counterparts. According to Mills “this can be patronizing and assumes a more ‘natural’ role for indigenous peoples, which relegates them to a more ‘primitive’ level of existence and civilization (2005: 73). In *Train to Doringbult* we see that the indigenous people are able to assess the potential of the environment, to understand the resources and adapt their demands and lifestyles accordingly. Mills posits that, “it is necessary to see spatial relations as constructed by the process of interaction, as they are predicated upon ways of knowing and seeing” (170). It would be a misnomer to consider spatial relations as simply a reflection of social relations although there is a very close relation between the social and the spatial. In Petrus a particular type of sensibility and perspective is constructed and he becomes conscious of the need to construct his own identity in the South African landscape. “And Petrus had preserved, in silence, and often in retreat, an autonomy for which he’d always fought: he went often to Mpumalanga where the small homestead was growing from the earth, and ironstone lay on ironstone around the goat kraal, and a patch of ground was hoed for mealies” (Poland 1987: 41). As this quotation indicates, Petrus’ homestead, seen from the secure vantage point of Blackheath, is

conceptualised as a place, a visible object, even before he shows longing and love for it. From an abstract sense of self, Petrus creates a sense of identity rooted in the particularity of place. In his desire to reclaim his paternal, even patriarchal, inheritance of the land, Petrus may be seen to assert an identity at odds with his loyalty to the Visagie family and Blackheath.

In contrast to Petrus is Abedingo Ngubane. Abedingo represents, to a large extent, the rootlessness and placelessness of people found outside their immediate cultural context. Abedingo's lack of a strong sense of rootedness and belonging is circumstantial. His younger brother, Sipho had gone to check the snares whilst Abedingo had shrewdly led Adrian and the other White hunters "away from the snare set in the game path where the contours of the gorge converged" (15). Unfortunately Adrian's attention was drawn to the thrashing in the undergrowth and he fired two shots in that direction although he was told not to. On investigation they found the body of Sipho crumpled across the body of a bushbuck caught in a snare. Abedingo slipped away unnoticed, taking with him Jan's rifle and a bag of ammunition. Once he passed the "old stone gates of the farm called Blackheath" he became a fugitive.

Adrian was prepared to use Abedingo as a scapegoat for the death of Sipho. As an advocate he was influential and had approached Captain Oliver who was more than willing to sweep the matter under the carpet, after all, it was only a "coon" (18) who had died. During this apartheid era it was conspicuous that the law could easily be negotiated and rejected according to the perceived needs and interests of specific social groups. This concept will be discussed later when I review Petrus Ngubane's case against police brutality. Sipho's case, however, reveals the troubled and ambiguous experience of the local black people, needed for their labour but uncompromisingly excluded and othered in a wider social context .

This novel, however, is neither a discourse on dominance nor struggle for freedom, nor revenge as much as it is an account of an attempt to stay alive, to survive. By engaging with the land, Abedingo transcends the historical and political narrative, which incidentally, is evident in Benedict's life in *Shades* (1999). Circumstances force Abedingo to scour the land in search of food and his relationship with the land becomes one of symbiosis – an occupation of personal space within a symbiotic framework. When times were tough, he ate rats and mice sitting “hour after hour, enticing them” (125) into his primitive traps. Then he “cooked, ate and hunted again” (ibid). The landscape was unfamiliar and hostile, but he persevered, walking in the direction he knew would take him to Port Elizabeth. His guardian, Nontini, had told him that his mother could be found there. His mother had abandoned her sons, Siphon and Abedingo, with their grandmother at Blackheath when they were new-borns. Abedingo walked from Cookhouse, to Alicedale, to Uitenhage, to Port Elizabeth. More often than not “the doors of households were closed against him” (ibid). He experiences the things of which many are afraid – loneliness and desolation; and the sense of being overwhelmed by the African landscape, swallowed up by the land and the natural vegetation. Abedingo displays a strong sense of bitterness at having to lose his dignity and self-respect, and by resorting to stealing he does not live in accordance with the values instilled in him by Nontini.

“Nontini Ngubane, matriarch of vagabonds” (124) goes in search of her grandson, Abedingo. Her travels take her through many stations: Coega, Addo, Paterson, Groenheuwels. Nontini displays many anxieties of the maternal experience, whilst, it must be noted, her daughter, Abedingo's mother, does not. This scenario can be paralleled to the mother-child relationships in *Shades* and *Iron Love*. Through the process of acculturation, the black indigenous mothers of South Africa, who worked in close proximity with colonialists, assimilated Victorian attitudes towards children. From an African perspective, Nfah-Abbenyi posits that motherhood can be rewarding, but most of all it can also be enslaving (1997: 51). Nontini and her daughter represent a versatile, fluid, unsettled

condition of maternity and femaleness and resist any fixing of the mother or motherhood as a complete human identity. The relation between (birth) mothers and adoptive mothers is rooted in personal and social histories of great complexity. One needs only to look at Emily in *Shades* and Charlie Fraser's mother in *Iron Love* to understand the complexity involved in the mothering process. "By telling the mother's story as a tale of the inability to mother, these novels express and sustain the ambivalence about mothering that historically has been expressed in many myths and narratives, and that late-twentieth-century feminists have reiterated in their movement from rejecting to celebrating (and then rejecting again) the maternal" (Daly and Reddy 1991: 35).

This ambivalence may be attributable not only to the colonial landscape, but more especially to the material conditions that have arisen because of the colonialists. Abedingo's mother's behaviour is a result of the context in which she finds herself: socially, politically and culturally. Her desire to leave the rural area to find employment in Port Elizabeth may be viewed as a rejection of her oppression and as an avenue to empowerment. It realistically apprehends the complexities and compromises of trying to take care of children. Furthermore, she does have her own mother to turn to, who, mired in the historical specificity of her oppression as a female member of an ethnic and patriarchal society, is required to play the role of mother again.

Nontini's drive to protect those she loves is a quality that empowers her journey and after a brief stay in Port Elizabeth she receives a letter that Abedingo was sighted near Blackheath. Blackheath is an integral part of his psychological being as it offers him a sense of belonging. Abedingo, however, had not returned to Blackheath per se. He sheltered on the outskirts of the farm seeking refuge with another nomadic family. The man had taken Abedingo's gun and together "they pilfered from houses and gardens" (Poland 1987: 130), always moving "just ahead of retribution" (ibid). In the African landscape much can be learnt from its wildlife and Abedingo learns "with an instinct as sure as a rook's,

to double back, to circle, from bush to bush within its territory, always beyond the hunter's reach" (131).

At this juncture I would like to point out that in Abedingo's ramblings through the land, he had come across some caves "with strange dark drawings of figures and animals" (126). These San drawings give Poland's landscape an authenticity and historical context. Even Elsa, the protagonist, corroborates this authenticity when she examines one of her prized possessions, a San arrow, "beautifully crafted of reed and bone and sinew" (64). Elsa and her father, Norman Southey, had "visited the old rock shelters of the extinct Southern San, searching always for evidence that they had lived there once" (65). In fact, as a researcher, Norman Southey had a collection of books on Rock Art, Anthropology, Archaeology and the San, and in his files he had "annotated notes marking sites of rock paintings on Kleinfontein, Blackheath and the surrounding hills" (64). More details on rock art, paintings and San mythology and their relevance to Poland's work may be found in this thesis in my introduction and in Chapter 3.

Just as Norman Southey crossed the boundaries of Blackheath and Kleinfontein, Abedingo, too, strayed from one farm to the next. It must be noted that Poland's affinity for the Eastern Cape has far more significance than mere setting. Historically, this part of Africa was the first frontier between black and white and the landscape provides a dramatic backdrop for the moral and political struggles around colonialism, expansionism, race and freedom. Boundaries, as mentioned in Chapter One, are the means of articulating presence. It enables places to be seen as tangible and be named; and it enables people to establish who and where they are. Boundaries are not simply physical necessities as much as they are symbolically needed in the crossing over of culture. Donnell posits that the history of co-existence, of overlapping and shared struggles that resist ethnic boundaries and absolutes continues to be a powerful and enabling paradigm for national construction based on transversality (2006: 88).

"Only fences were evidence of ownership" (1987: 55) Poland stresses in her novel. This does not mean that fences symbolise exclusion. To the contrary, it only distinguishes a person's position; and sets up "dialogue with the outside environment they create" (Carter 1987: 168). Although the fences defined the difference between the settlers and the indigenous people, communication and relationships were forged and differences negotiated. Culture, as a result, crossed boundaries and replicated itself; changing the face of the South African landscape. As far as Elsa and Jan are concerned, the process of identification with place allows them to identify with Xhosa tribal traditions, through a respect for the landscape.

This is evident when Jan goes away to work at the dam-site. He spends a lot of time away from Blackheath and Elsa. In the external environment full of anxiety and changes, Jan is obsessively preoccupied with his farm and the possible risks to his existence. Elsa, in her aloneness and introspection realised that Jan, like his father, "had been displaced in the midst of a secure and loving world" (Poland 1987: 75). All the people and places that represented some semblance of emotional attachment, stability and meaning were now cut off from him. The psychological and cumulative impact of his situation drove Jan into an affair with Yvonne, a woman who "needed to belong – to be first" (158). Like Jan, she was also working far away from her husband-to-be, Fanie. Being together, a prerequisite for love and identity, is painfully missing from both their lives, and so they find solace in each other. Their ability to relate to the people around them is dependent on their ability to work out a meaningful relationship between their own existence and the life of this place. Their decision to find comfort in each other seems to be related, at least in part, to the way in which they perceive the space around them and to the different values they place upon it.

The rural innocence of the farm is transformed in the city as Jan tries to hide the deceit the affair entails within him. Wicomb posits, "Human characters are shaped by the places they occupy; setting becomes absorbed into character"

(2005: 145). This goes to show that an individual's construction of 'self' is situational and constantly in a state of flux and assumes different identities at different times. Identities incorporate the conscious and unconscious pleasures, processes and desires of individuals. The 'town' relationship between Jan and Yvonne testifies to the fact that belonging somewhere specific – in this case the town along the Orange River – does not mean that you cannot belong to other places as well, whether spiritually or emotionally. To a considerable extent we can see *Train to Doringbult* as an exploration of the idea that emotional rootedness and love between individuals can be a substitute for physical and familial rootedness, although the actions of the protagonist may be seen, by some, as immorally correct.

In Jan and Yvonne's case we see that their illicit affair is an offshoot of the environment in which they find themselves. In other words, the environment neighbouring the dam-site provides the refuge that these characters require in order to soothe their feelings of alienation and displacement. The dam-site, is a male space, as a construction site, and it overflows with the potential for adventure and self-discovery. It is a rugged world that tests one's masculinity; a world that separates strong from weak men; and a world from which women are excluded.

Elsa, however, indomitably, faces her fate by adopting an aggressive stance against the circumstances that contribute to the grimness of her colonial background. Blackheath is the farm around which her life revolves. It is not just a place where things happen, it is the reason for the human life that exists there and that depends on it. When Jan leaves her alone with Petrus to run the farm, she experiences the land in its physical, spiritual and moral dimensions. Her relationship with the oppressed people deepens and there are attempts to connect, to rectify, and to compensate for the separation and gross brutality of white, colonial policemen against blacks. Uncle Cedric had jumped to

conclusions when he saw Petrus on Jaap Koen's farm advising the squatters to vacate the place:

'Listen, my girlie,' he said. 'I caught your bloody bossboy red-handed! I always knew he was a liar. Red-handed I tell you! Found him with my sheep in the bush on Jaap Koen's place. Him and some others.' (Poland 1987: 97)

Elsa had been adamant that Petrus was innocent and she even transgressed the norms of patriarchy by not only siding with a black man, but also taking on his case against police brutality personally. She refused to treat workers as "commodities to be bartered" (152) and, like Frances in *Shades*, she adopts a strong feminist stance: "They would not harness her again: Not Cedric. Not Adrian. Blackheath belonged to Jan. It belonged to her" (153).

Poland's choice of words, especially "harness" is bold and strong. It encapsulates patriarchal domination in its extreme. Like farm animals, colonial women – white and black – were subjugated and dispossessed of an identity, regarded only as providers of sexual and domestic gratification. A plethora of contradictory issues accumulate and compound Elsa's very existence as a woman. Elsa finds security at Blackheath and it is from this place that she is able to develop her stance against oppression. She is aware that liberal concerns about the environment are worthless unless they spring from a concern for the welfare of the humans living in that environment. She is also aware that the attitudes against women and against blacks are the result of ingrained group prejudice. She can no longer consume or be consumed by the history of colonisation – a history that endorses the silencing and subjugation of race and sex. She is forced into a situation where she has to break through these barriers and challenge perceptions of what is socially acceptable.

Elsa's frustrations are evident in the extract below, which are thoughts that flood her mind when Jan, who is away at the dam-site, advises her to spend more time with their friends' wives:

Elsa kept down her irritation. She did not say – I do not want to sit and discuss macramé. I do not want to go to meetings of the Women's Institute any more. I do not want to make salads for the Club. (74)

These lines reinforce Pocock's view that "it is the social dimension which gives life to a place" (1981: 16). In other words, social interaction gives meaning to individuals – a sense of belonging – not only to a community but also to a sense of place. But the individual must fit into the social interaction for the normal social fabric to continue to hold. The quotation above also expresses explicitly Elsa's anger. She is not only angry about her role in life, but also with her social friends, Annatjie and Joy, "for existing at all" (Poland 1987: 75). They were too complacent and had accepted their lot in life. Elsa had developed emotional, social, moral and intellectual roots in this colonial space, but now she feels a "sense of displacement" (ibid). She experiences a confused matrix of feelings and beyond the more readily identifiable familiarity of routine, place and people; she experiences a degree of existential detachment. Her aloneness frightened her and with Jan's absence she feels that "Blackheath, as she had always known it, was slipping away" (55). Subsequently, Elsa buries herself in her duties:

Elsa became the farmer. Each day she carried out the tasks that Jan had left for her to do. She paid the workers, handed out rations, listened to the weather reports, collected food from town. She recorded everything for Jan as he would want it. (54)

Elsa harbours the need to be autonomous, yet co-existing. Jan's absence liberates her from the confines of patriarchal dictates, giving her the freedom to do things generally done by males. In a sense, Elsa is able to possess the land personally. She is able to interact and integrate with the landscape. Ownership

of the land is now confirmed by her labour. She affirms a woman's strength, validates a woman's life in a way that the world at large does not. Poland captures the picture of a woman who uses her creative energies in a useful way, living a productive, self-fulfilling life despite the possibilities of loneliness that exist around her. Elsa proves to be practical, efficient, resourceful and resilient and she transcends the limitations of the self as imposed by a patriarchal society. Elsa knew that Jan "might not like the new initiative" (54), but she was prepared to "take the chance" (ibid).

Elsa's concern with protecting the farm is so great that she relentlessly subordinates herself to this. Her dedication to the farm does, however, result in her not spending enough time with her daughter, Nella. The task of care giving and mothering becomes the responsibility of the maid, Chrissie, who already has five children of her own. According to Daly and Reddy, "Although giving birth is indeed a part of mothering, it is care-giving that *defines* the act of mothering, and care-giving is a choice open both to those who give birth and those who do not" (1991: 3-4). This chapter in Elsa's life can be paralleled to Nontini and Nontini's daughter's life, which has already been discussed. Although the absence of Nella effectively emancipated Elsa from the cares and constraints of mothering, Elsa always harboured dreams of having another baby: "She had kept all Nella's baby clothes, in hope, neatly packed away in a drawer" (Poland 1987: 31).

Although Elsa takes a strong feminist stance, living in a patriarchal society, she knew the importance of having a son. Her father-in-law had stated quite categorically that a male should control Blackheath. Elsa reflected on her predicament: "One little daughter, no sons and the Blackheath farmlands, willed by Dick de Villiers to the male line. One day it might all belong to Adrian's boy (ibid). The thought that the farm may one day go to her brother-in-law's son irked her. She transgresses her feminist stance in her desire to hold on to a place. She demonstrates that gender discrimination in a patriarchal landscape can

profoundly and painfully infect a woman's psyche and her sense of identity, and can contribute substantially to her conventional fate. Without a son, Blackheath would, in the future, be lost. The issue was discussed many times with Jan but he had always been defensive. Typically, Jan integrates animal and landscape imagery in his speech contending that, "sheep are just the same as people" (ibid). As much as equating sheep to people is inappropriate in its context, Jan's response is a clue to the affinity he has with the land. His choice of words conveys a picture of the harmonious integration of nature and may be seen as a constituent part of the colonialists' ideal relationship with the surroundings. Not only are they physically involved with the landscape but also psychologically. In other words, when we talk of either the animals' or the people's intimate relationship with the landscape, they are not only in the environment, but they also make up the environment. For Cosgrove, the landscape is a "dimension of existence, collectively produced, lived and maintained" (Cosgrove 1984: 19). For Jan, farming is not merely an activity; it is an orientation to the world – recognition of, and responsibility to, Blackheath.

Blackheath, with all its undulating forms, curves, natural topography and animals, has a profound effect on Jan. He is subjectively engaged with his milieu and develops an affinity with his world. Elsa too, comes from a pastoral setting. Her family farm, on which she spent her formative years, is Kleinfontein. A direct translation of this Afrikaans name is 'small fountain' or spring. After her father's death, Elsa experienced an overwhelming loneliness and emptiness at Kleinfontein. What is important here is that the emptiness does not imply the absence of human inhabitants but rather a lack of human quality. "She did not know how to cope with her mother's stoicism at his death" (Poland 1987: 47) nor was she able to share her mother's grief or memories. "Excluded from the right to mourn, Elsa retreated to Blackheath and to Jan" (ibid) whom, by this time, she had married. This, however, does not imply that Kleinfontein is an expression of existential homelessness and alienation. To the contrary, it is a land of austere

beauty rich in historical artefacts and untold tales of the past. When her father died, she had climbed the hills of Kleinfontein to pay her tributes:

She had gone to her favourite San shelter, down a small, blind valley, obscured by boulders and scrub. She had walked through the *veld*, the tufts of grass so dry that the stems pierced the canvas of her shoes. She had climbed to where the *kannabos* grew and the *gwarri*, up to the crests where the helichrysums bloomed in the wind. They budded, opened and remained, petals whorled in layers, evidence of men and women who had gone before, reaffirming life. Immutable. (75)

This passage reiterates Poland's landscape as a place of refuge, an escape from the pressures and prohibitions of society. It portrays the typical Poland canvas of the South African landscape – finely covered with local details of setting and indulging in local colour with a haunting intensity. The landscape reflects appearance and reality, serenity and internal turmoil. In fact, it reflects and governs the social and spiritual condition of Elsa. Her consolation in the landscape is temporary, conditional and it is, paradoxically, a self-indulgent alienation that affects her. In all probability this stoicism and estrangement were products of Elsa's times. From this we can see that Poland reinforces the inexplicable links between nature's aesthetics and human matters. She does not contemplate the beauties and elegancies of the landscape in a vacuum. The fact that Elsa is surrounded by nature's plenitude, in her time of grief, is an open invitation for her to be soothed by the landscape's botanical riches.

Poland's descriptions of the landscapes of Kleinfontein, Blackheath, Brakkloof and the dam-site on the Orange River are acute and absorbing. The topography, its vegetation, its insect and animal life, and the physical attributes of its human inhabitants are the raw materials of her fiction. The power of the landscape delivers the inhabitants – however momentarily – from the terrors of purpose and choice. Elsa's choice to move from Kleinfontein to Blackheath,

although circumstantial, was a welcomed change for her. She was aware of the variations of the landscape and knew she would find liberation through change of place. It is, however, with trepidation that she listens to her brother-in law's plans to buy the neighbouring farm, Brakkloof.

Brakkloof belonged to Oom Jaap Koen and his son Freek. The farm itself was not prime property – it was too small and there were not enough water resources. The drought that was responsible for sending Jan to work elsewhere, also affected Brakkloof. Although Freek also went to work at the dam-site on the Orange River, Oom Jaap Koen was growing desperate and was on the verge of selling his property. Elsa did not like the idea of Uncle Cedric and Adrian buying Brakkloof in partnership with Jan because she knew that the burden of the farm would fall on Jan's shoulders. Furthermore, she did not see the farm as aesthetically pleasing terrain:

“The homestead and things? They are kind of sad. You know, creepy. It's all those cypress trees”. (33)

From this description it becomes evident that the landscape of Brakkloof surrounds and reflects the characters who own it. In other words, human traits combine with territorial features to give a combined individuality to the landscape. It seems as if the land has a life of its own, conscious and aware of the inhabitants and their values and needs. Poland's creation of a haunting setting gives the landscape a particular atmosphere and poignancy. The destructive consequences of the drought and skeletal cypress trees represent the extremity of the land's deprivation. Elsa responds to the landscape emotionally rather than observes it: she feels it, almost, rather than sees it. In using Elsa as the catalyst in the comprehension of the landscapes, Poland brings her readers face to face with something one might call the sacred as an element of her landscapes. As will be discussed later in *Shades*, this element is also true in Crispin's relationship with the land. Transcendence is achieved in solitary connection with nature. When Jan leaves Elsa in charge of the farm, she

experiences nature in a way that uplifts her individuality. According to Branch et al, "Farming may be an activity of spiritual utility" (1998: 156). Elsa's close proximity to a natural realm enables her to enjoy a spiritual benefit from her communion with nature. This has elements in common with the Romantic poets' invocation of the sublime. It strengthens her resolve and she is able to take a firmer stance against patriarchal oppression. As much as Elsa's value is determined by her feminist stance, it is also determined by how she relates to, and takes care of, those around her, especially her black workers.

Of particular significance is her relationship with Petrus Ngubane. Uncle Cedric had beaten Petrus believing that he was responsible for the theft of his sheep. Later, at the police-station, Petrus was again assaulted; this time by the arrogant white policeman on duty. Elsa took on the challenge against both Uncle Cedric and the law knowing full well that in a patriarchal society, in which she was enmeshed, she had a very slim chance of winning. Whilst Petrus suffered untold humiliation and degradation at the hands of the police, Elsa too experienced feelings of incapacity and powerlessness, in realisation that the dominant and totalising forces inherent in the social and political structures were always controlling the actions of the individuals and limiting the possibilities for resistance to the existing social reality.

In a restrictive landscape such as this, Elsa tries to liberate herself and others through her thoughts and actions much to the chagrin of Jan: "Don't play the big brave mouse Elsie. You can't start pushing the police around" (Poland 1987: 161). Elsa rebels against her condition and is prepared to take her struggle forward. Her success in her fight is reverberated in Uncle Cedric's fragmentation and in Petrus' success in his court-case. Unfortunately, their victory does not liberate everyone from the fact that police brutality and corruption is a reality in the narrative. Elsa's actions reaffirm her commitment to freedom and justice in the face of society's entrapments. Although she exposes the hypocrisy of the prevailing culture of law and order, she is unable to plumb the corruption to its

depths. Her battle merely touches on the brutality and condescension that characterised white racial responses to black people and their identity in that era.

Although Poland foregrounds the injustices meted out to Petrus, and his role as supervisor on the farm, the real depth and value of his African identity are not fully explored. In other words, his indigenous knowledge of the environment, and environmental changes to the landscape are substantially under-utilised. Adams postulates that "Africans have lived with the unpredictability of African rainfall for millennia and have developed a series of neat and more or less effective ways of insuring themselves against the vagaries of climate, while exploiting the natural resources available to them" (1992: 61). Petrus' prowess had not been utilised to the maximum earlier by Jan, but Jan is forced to leave him in charge of Blackheath when he leaves to supplement his income by accepting a job at the dam-site. At the dam-site Jan finds himself in an uncomfortable situation with Freek Koen. Forced to work together their animosity is apparent to all and sundry. Freek identifies Jan with his capitalist brother, Adrian, and their uncle, Cedric. He sees in Jan an enemy who is about to dispossess him of his home, of the land he loves. But fate and nature play a cruel twist in their lives. The drought breaks. The rain comes torrentially. Nature and earth work in tandem: "The earth that had been built up into banks by great machines dissolved in sticky quagmires of red and ochre ooze, trapping the bulldozers, steamrollers and trucks that had made them" (Poland 1987: 178). A crisis arises at the project on the Orange River and Jan and Freek are forced to work side by side in the mud, wind and rain on the scaffolding. The conditions prove too much for Freek and he falls a hundred feet to his death, merging with the rocks, mud and water. Poland succinctly in this passage captures the relationship and sacrifices of the colonialists with the landscape: "Each feat of engineering, each bridge, tunnel, railway and dam had claimed its victims – sacrifices to the spirits of the mountain or the river or the sea. And so it was with Freek – a small figure, frozen an instant to the straight strong girder, falling, falling, into the chasm of the gorge" (180). As a South

African colonialist Freek does not possess, but is rather possessed by, and dissolved into, the landscape.

It is expected that as pioneers, colonialists may have to sacrifice their lives in a harsh and unpredictable landscape, in their quests to alter it. As Adams contends, "The environment of Africa is complex, unpredictable and often harsh" (1992: 67). The pioneering colonialists of South Africa brought many skills with them and in addition to tapping the natural resources to meet their needs, they were also responsible for the development of infrastructure. Hooper claims that colonists have dramatically remodelled the landscape, "not just because it needs to be contained, yield a profit or support the community who live there, but because it is also regarded as a very visible marker of ownership and authority" (2005: 2). In their quest to conquer and transform nature, they physically exploited the land changing the landscape environmentally. Branch et al reiterate this attitude: "Nature on one hand is seen as something complete and great, vaster than our powers to know, but it also is a ground that we shrewdly exploit, often to its detriment" (1998: 6). In this exploitation, colonists also, directly or indirectly, effected changes in the lifestyles of the indigenous people. The dam site and the events that transpired there define philosophically the main characters' relationships with the land. They become an expression of a larger amorphous nature, which may be both the reflection of the colonialist and the medium through which they may know and understand the ultimate sacredness of the landscape. These concepts will also be discussed later in this chapter in *Shades* at St. Matthias, Mbokothwe and even at the Pirie bush at the *isivivane* cairn.

In terms of the sacredness associated with the landscape, the fictional siding of Doringbult, which features in the novel's title, is like the concept *mshologu* in *Shades*. "We all have an mshologu we're afraid of. We just give it different names. Satan. Fear. Death. Lots of different things" (Poland 1993: 150). These concepts encapsulate and reinforce the sacredness of the land. The name

'Doringbult' is a name made up by Poland and she has taken two Afrikaans words and put them together. Translated to English 'doring' means thorny whilst 'bult' refers to a ridge. The metaphorical and contextual implications of the name revolve around the fact that the place 'Doringbult' itself is out of bounds because of the hurt and injury it causes. The name seems to work in a complex and complicated way suggesting referentiality to its South Africanness. Colonists, especially their young, found it difficult to adapt and come to terms with the unknown. They had to internalise the landscape, recognise and make integral the austere environment. Adults had conjured up a fear, that "Doringbult is a terrible place" (1987: 36), and according to Eve, "The Doringbult of the title is a mythical railway siding used as a threat against naughty children" (2003: 283). Parents had threatened to send their impressionable children by train to Doringbult if they misbehaved. Subsequently, when Elsa was young, she questioned Jan:

'Where's Doringbult, Jannie?' Elsa had asked.

'Don' no !'

She had thought of it often, wondering. Doringbult a siding somewhere between *koppies*. Grey. A side track with no turning. An iron building and a gum tree, its bark strips rattling in the wind. No water in the pump. Abandoned carriages. No stationmaster. Nothing. Perhaps there were rats in the grain shed. Maybe a grave. (1987: 36)

This extract paints a very bleak, uncompromising picture of an imaginary place, a place to be feared. It stifles the children in their limited understanding of what life's multifarious meanings represent. In Elsa's growth towards womanhood, Doringbult becomes more than a place in an imagined landscape. It becomes a challenge – both physical and emotional. In a patriarchal society in which she finds herself, she is forced to do a 'man's' work and at the same time fight the norms and dictates of an oppressive regime in her battle towards female

emancipation. Jan too, has to come to terms with his own 'Doringbult' – attempting to cope in his own way with the displacement he experiences when he goes to the dam site. Thus, the landscapes in *Train to Doringbult* are seen in terms of a colonial backdrop against which self-identity has to be forged.

The concepts of self-identity, land appropriation and Victorian attitudes in a colonial landscape will be further explored in the novel *Shades*, to which I now turn.



MARGUERITE
POLAND

Shades



Were the barbarians in need of civilising, or were the civilisers the true barbarians?

(de Kock 1996: 4)

4.2 *Shades* (1993)

Shades (1993) is a prototypical South African colonial novel, which explores the themes of land appropriation, patriarchy, and search for identity. The implications and consequences of the search for cultural identity, of oppression in its various guises, and the exploitation that destroys the fabric of traditional life are played out through the microcosm of life at the mission stations and at the mines. Main characters undergo at times radical changes – physical and psychological – and they are juxtaposed against a seemingly hostile and permanent landscape. Most of Marguerite Poland's characters' lives, set amidst in a colonial landscape, appear to give symbolic expression and existential statement to the uniqueness of individual responses to situational conflicts and adversity.

Set in the late nineteenth century, *Shades* is constructed around the landscapes of St. Matthias, Mbokothwe, Grahamstown and the mines in Johannesburg. Crispin, a compassionate, self-sacrificing seventeen- year old youth finds himself in the epicenter of a crisis, trying to protect his dispossessed 'heathen' friends in a land of which they are supposedly part. At the mercy of colonial and imperial greed, Crispin's Xhosa friends, Tom, Reuben and Sonwabo Pumani sacrificed their lives by working in an alien landscape far away from home as a result of the Glen Grey Act. Crispin takes it upon himself to bring his friends' 'shades' home. He believed in the concept of 'shades' and was fully aware that "a child is conceived in conjunction with the shades. The shades worked in the blood of the parents shaping the spirit. These were the child's people. It was they who were vigilant at its conception. It was they who guided it" (Poland 1993: 102). He was also fully aware of the Xhosa belief that when a person dies away from home, his/her spirit turns to 'shades', and

is left wandering the land. He was also aware that the 'shades' could be led home to find peace by another individual by touching the body of the dead with a branchlet of an *Mphafa* tree, which carries the spirit. Poland thus portrays via Crispin and his Xhosa friends the need to belong to tradition, our past, our families, and the landscape in which we live. Thus, displacement and dispossession are seen to be major issues in this novel, and more broadly in the South African context.

Walter, the protagonist, is also, in a sense, displaced. He hails from England, and as a missionary, he is committed to serving God, no matter how harsh the African landscape and milieu. He feels dispossessed and "an odd sense of predestination" (8) assails him at the St. Matthias Mission Station and at the barren Mbokothwe Mission. Secretly in love with the young Frances Farborough, he finds solace and comfort in her, but because he is her teacher and because of the age difference he is unable to express explicitly his feelings for her. To complicate matters, Frances is in love with her cousin, Victor Drake. The respective parents concerned had groomed the two for each other and it was an unspoken pact. Frances feels the pressures of patriarchy; Victor feels the need to sow his wild oats; and Walter, feeling abandoned and isolated, feels the need to bury himself in God's work in a land which he confesses "God could not live in" (71).

Ad anum extremum mundi. Arse end of the world. That is what Walter had said – oh, so drily and dismissively – when Klaus Otto, the transport rider, gesturing at the surrounding countryside with his driver's whip, turned to him and asked, "What do you think of it?" (10)

Initially, Walter sees a hostile and alien space; a space associated with anxiety and expectation. Poland's opening chapter can be compared to European descriptions of landscape painting. The omniscient narrator obtains a bird's eye view of the landscape and provides a description organised along the lines of landscape art: first we see the "dark ridge of a bush-clad hill" (10), then "silent slopes" and finally the features that fill in (a mission

garden, a church, a house and a bungalow). In the distance is a river and the final touch to this landscape is the presence of people – Victor, Crispin, Frances and Benedict. The balance in the landscape is achieved through the human accommodation in the landscape of water, rocks, trees and sky. It is to these that the members of the mission station accommodate themselves, and from these that they satisfy their physical needs and also derive spiritual comfort. Despite Walter's profound ambivalence towards the landscape, he does demonstrate a willingness to accept the South African landscape on its own terms.

The novel starts in 1899 and Walter's arrival in South Africa reiterates the brave migration of whites to Africa and the resulting influence of colonialism on the indigenous people. In the early 1900's most of South Africa was undeveloped in terms of industrialisation and housing. The majority of the people, indigenous as well as colonists, lived off the land. The role of the land was to provide, amongst other things, nourishment for the multitudes of the people. Colonial intervention radically disrupted the cultural composition of indigenous communities and identity constructions of individuals. In fact, the colonists were responsible for physically alienating large populations of colonised people. Like the San, other native groups were forced to move northwards from the Cape to escape the overwhelming presence of colonists who sought land and cattle, as well as cheap labour. The Glen Grey Act of 1894 and the Natives' Land Act of 1913 bear testimony to this. According to the Glen Grey Act only the eldest son in a black family could inherit his father's land, in the event of the father's death. The remaining members of the family, who were subjected to hut taxes and poll taxes had to seek employment in order to pay their taxes. This "ensured the final destruction of the Black people by integrating them into the industrial society as a severely dependent labour force" (Jacob 2003:12). Crispin's black friends, Tom, Reuben and Sonwabo are trapped in a cruel system and by the demands of a capitalistic government. This system, procured through domination and subjugation, reiterates the vulnerability of the indigenous people in a landscape that is thus changing and new to them. When looking at colonial expansion Sara Mills contends , "Colonialism is predicated on the use of force

to appropriate land and resources" (2005: 5). Poland illustrates in *Shades* forceful colonial expansion and exposes the iniquitous migrant labour system. Subsequently, these actions created ethnic labels and promoted ethnic identities. Spatial relations, however, were not simply imposed on individuals, but rather were periodically affirmed and modified though at some times even transgressed.

Benedict Matiwane, Father Charles' black protégé, finds himself in a dilemma, an identity crisis. Being an orphaned black child, raised by a white missionary, he is unable to come to terms with his identity. He searches for the meaning of life, his history and for the truth, but he feels overwhelmed in a colonial environment. As with the other 'natives', Benedict's cultural fabric and sense of belonging in his own land is wrenched away from him by his sponsor, Miss Prudieaux-Brune, and by the missionaries who came to South Africa in the hope of converting the 'heathens'. "*Iranuga*: stranger, wanderer. That was the word to describe him. Here were no ancestral lands of his. No relatives, no shades" (Poland 1993:101). Benedict was indoctrinated by colonial beliefs, mannerisms and the English language and was raised within a strict Victorian code of conduct. He could not stray and if he did, he was emotionally and financially blackmailed by Emily Farborough, whose demeanour was always rigid and Victorian. She always threatened that if Benedict failed to conform then she would inform his sponsor in England accordingly, and she would ensure that his sponsorship be discontinued. If his colonial education and other colonial privileges were truncated prematurely, then he would be no better than the 'heathens'.

Benedict exemplifies the need of all human beings for an identity, even a sense of acceptance and belonging. Benedict is aware that as a baby his mother had abandoned him on the church steps. Raised in a Christian environment, Benedict constantly questioned his real identity, his culture and his affiliation to the land. Even his name, Benedict Matiwane, was a mixture of English and Xhosa and this was a contradiction and source of conflict in his life. Furthermore, the fact that he could not trace his parents meant that he did not know or have any 'shades'. This disturbed and haunted him

immensely. "Perhaps, at the moment Father Charles had touched his infant head with baptismal water, the shades of his forebears had abandoned him and he had emerged, empty of a past" (102). As Benedict struggles to come to terms with his true identity, his introspection and experiences in the colonial landscape bring him closer to the domain of truth – the truth that his land has been invaded and defiled. He realises that he has no land he can call his own and which can give him the identity that he requires:

There are some corners of the heart that cannot be probed too closely, some hidden griefs that cannot be expunged: Benedict did not think often of who his parents might have been, for then the magnitude of his aloneness would assail him. He had been raised in an institution. There was security in its rules and routines. Like Mzantsi, like Miss Smythe, like the nuns and the orphans and the children who had nowhere to go in the holidays, like the old men who followed Kobus about the yard: they remained in a strange state of bondage and dependence, born not of love but of need. Like long-serving prisoners who had grown old in captivity, they were afraid of freedom. Each guarded his place jealously, was greedy of possessions itinerantly earned. (ibid)

Benedict feels the frailty not only of his own culture and belonging but the collective frailty of the other Blacks at the mission station – especially Mzantzi, the catechist, Nowasha the cook, and the other apprentices. Mzantzi strongly upholds the rules and customs of the Christian faith. In fact, he is so indoctrinated that he shuns all forms of 'heathen' activity.

At the 'Umngeni', an event, which took place before young boys went for initiation, Mzantsi spurns the display of stick-fighting and the sight of bare-breasted heathen girls. In fact, not only does he try to stop the ceremony, but he also sensationalises the incident to Father Charles in the hope that he may take drastic action. His greatest fear is that part of the 'umngeni' requires the boys and girls to indulge in 'umetsho', a sort of mock intercourse where the

girls' virginity remains intact and which requires an enormous amount of self-discipline and restraint. Sometimes the boys and girls give in to temptation and hence they are faced with unwanted pregnancies. Mzantsi questions the morality of the heathens but the liberal and tolerant Father Charles recognizes that all communities are prey to sensuality and vice. From this we see that, like Benedict, Mzantsi "remained in a strange state of bondage and dependence" (ibid). The colonial landscape has made them what they are, and in some peculiar and ironical sense, they feel a strange sense of belonging, an authentic sense of place and an existential meaningfulness that only St. Matthias could provide. According to Hooper, "There is a profound and corresponding (homologous) connection between the creation of the landscape and the social space" (2005: 67). Not only were the colonialists colonising the land, but also the minds of Benedict and Mzantsi. Thus, growing up in an area like the Eastern Cape colonises one through the process of assimilation. The mission station provides spiritual and physical comforts for Benedict and Mzantsi.

St. Matthias may thus be seen as a space, a text upon which histories and cultures are inscribed and interpreted. It is an enclaved space in which particular values and allegiances are dramatised so as to reinforce class, race, gender and other identity asymmetries. From the outset the reader distinguishes that St. Matthias, although a mission station, is not an idyllic setting. It is filled with the complexities and insights introduced by a changing landscape. Baker contends, "The geography of any place is continually changing, it is never static, which means that a historical perspective is necessary to capture its dynamic character" (2003: 25). Mzantsi, Benedict, Nowasha, Dorcas and the other indigenous characters associated with the mission have to accept the lack of permanence that dominates the way of life that is imposed upon them by a colonial society. Their search for belonging and identity depends on their willingness and ability to merge with the landscape, the place where events of their lives are taking place. Hooper posits that,

Space and place are not simply inert facts of nature,
waiting 'out there', somehow to be filled by human ideas,

activities and history. Rather, space is constructed, in an interaction between the natural world and human actions.

(2005: 210)

People like Emily Farborough who lived on mission stations discouraged black pupils and servants if they had any desire to interact with the natural world or with traditional customs. A typical example in *Shades* is Benedict, who was not allowed to participate in the 'umngeni'. The 'umngeni' and stick-fighting incidents are, however, life-changing events in the life of Benedict. Raised at a mission station, Benedict is prohibited from attending initiation instruction and as a result has little idea how his own people behave or think. He wants the security of the 'shades' to take care of him, but this is denied to him by his acceptance of the mission teachings. He does take cognisance of the fact that he is not one of the Farboroughs, nor ever will be. His life is unfulfilled in both traditions. If he is given the opportunity to socialise with the Xhosa people and is exposed to Xhosa traditions, it is possible that he may be in a position to decide to which culture he wants to belong. Furthermore, he may be the ideal candidate who is in the best possible position to integrate the two traditions. While watching the stick fight from the safety of the trees, he is challenged by the intrepid and arrogant Victor. Spurred on by Dorcas, to whom he is attracted, Benedict is compelled to accept the challenge. Although he is victorious in the duel, Victor embarrasses him by knocking him down with a cowardly attack. His anger for the white, Christian, ruling class was evident for all to see:

Benedict had turned his back on all of them. Without a word. There was nothing he could say and nothing could expiate the small, bitter sense of betrayal. That he knew. He had gone, just in his trousers, barefooted. He had walked with care. His feet, accustomed always to boots, were unfamiliar with grass and stones and the heat of the sand between the thorn bushes.

(Poland 1993: 101)

"Benedict had turned his back on all of them" is a symbolic gesture of not only turning his back on his own culture, but also the gradual estrangement from, and resentment of, colonial authority. It is this extreme form of alienation and separation that Relph calls existential outsidership, "a situation in which the person feels alienated from an environment devoid of meaning" (Relph 1976: 55). Victor's craven victory is also symbolic of the colonist's victory over Black tradition. Caught between the two cultures, Benedict harbours a deep sense of dispossession and loss – loss of culture and of identity. Furthermore, he cannot even associate with the landscape. His bare feet are "unfamiliar with grass and stone" because he was too accustomed to colonial, mission attire whilst being trained as a catechist in the hope of one day taking Holy Orders.

Benedict's stick-fighting and presence at the 'umngeni' was against mission rules. His desire to re-engage with traditional life puts him into direct conflict with the psychological distancing strategy he has been using to protect himself from the pain associated with his personal 'story'. He is forced to choose consciously between his dislocated and alienated way of life by claiming, and being claimed by this place. At this juncture it must be noted that although the mission stations were white-ruled and blacks were subjected to their dictates, they did provide educational and journalistic opportunities in the Eastern Cape that would later foster the rise of African nationalism and thereby the liberation of the indigenous people in the South African landscape. Many great Black leaders like Oliver Tambo and the first Black president of South Africa, Nelson Mandela, were products of mission education (see Mandela 1995: 55).

Benedict, like Mandela, "taught Bible classes" (ibid) and Benedict's ardent interest in the printing press and his ability to communicate in both English and Xhosa placed him in an enviable position. As an insider in the mission station, he was able to send valuable political and religious developments to the outside world. He wrote to the editor of *Izwi Labantu* and some of his articles were also published in *Imvo Zabantsundu*: "Benedict gave opinion on the vote, [and] the place of the black man in the impending war" (Poland 1993: 301). Politically awakened, but entrapped in the dilemma of 'belonging',

Benedict uses the printing press to express his thoughts and emotions and the response he receives from the black readers encourages him in his quest for liberation. Through the narrative movement from external detail to inner retrospection, we see Benedict's spiritual and political consciousness grow. The political landscape cannot be separated from his life and is an integral part of his psychological make-up. Living in a mission station made him aware of the hypocrisies and injustices meted out to him and to the other black indigenous people.

The magnitude of his dispossession and loneliness always assailed him when he reflected on his shades, the socio-political landscape and the treatment meted out to him by the colonists. In an attempt to escape from this reality, Benedict buried himself in his work and, just like the catechist, Mzantsi, he "remained in a strange state of bondage and dependence (102). Although Mzantsi and Benedict were both products of colonial indoctrination, Mzantsi, the elder of the two, was more steadfast in his newly acquired culture and he could not conceive of Benedict having an identity crisis. Mzantsi adheres to all the demands placed on him by the mission life and he even condemns and criticizes his traditional, native way of life. He is inflexible and follows rigidly the mission teachings though he does not fully understand them. He abides by the rules of the mission without exception. According to Father Charles, "There is no one more willing than Mzantsi, none more dedicated to the service of the Church, and no one whom the spectres of the past more haunt" (105). Mzantsi is a typically displaced Xhosa from whom the "spirit had been extracted and replaced with the trappings" (104). He was provided with food, shelter and colonial attire. In other words he was offered material benefits by the missionaries that made him look European and in return he lured the indigenous people to the mission station. This is a well worn theme such as Chinua Achebe introduced in *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and since followed by many writers, including in this case, Poland. Many found this new life attractive; the cause anchored itself and then gained momentum. A new identity was born for the heathens. In comparison to Benedict, Mzantsi lacks the inquisitive spirit, the need to come to terms with his own cultural identity and past. He doesn't believe that if one severs one's self from one's family

and one's environment, one cannot function holistically and effectively. It is in this context that the quest for identity and the tragedy of displacement, dispossession and alienation unfold in the novel.

Mzantsi and Benedict's identity and alienation is further affirmed in the cattle-dip incident. South Africa was plagued with rinderpest, a disease that affected cattle, in the late 1800's. Although *Shades* is an historical novel, it is certainly not a dry recording of history. Poland interprets history, transforming specific historical events such as the rinderpest into an absorbing fictional tale. Because the rinderpest virus was highly contagious, any cattle being moved from one place to another had to pass strategic points in the land where cattle-dips were set up. Benedict, Mzantsi, Victor and Crispin and their mules had to pass one of these dips while coming from Grahamstown, where they had been to buy supplies. The dip "had been constructed hastily beside the road, made of concrete and stones and stinking carbolic" (1993: 180). The man on duty was drunk and was overwhelmingly racist. He had insisted that Benedict and Mzantsi go through the dip with the animals. It is this incident, which makes Benedict and Mzantsi feel that they are no better than mules; they are treated like animals, not human beings. Although Crispin and Victor protested, the man was obdurate. He took out a piece of paper and showed them his orders: "All animals and Kaffirs" (181). Even though they explained that Mzantsi was a catechist and Benedict a student and that they did not work with cattle, the man was insistent, as well as sarcastic: "Kaffir is kaffir however smart the waistcoat" (ibid). Saakana's comment, "When the urge to retaliate against one's condition is constantly thwarted by the other, one's internalisation of the other produces a state of repressed anxiety" (1996: 66) is particularly apt here. This cattle-dip episode succinctly captures the social tensions and social conflicts that were characteristic of this formative moment of South African history.

Benedict Matiwane had been reborn at the rinderpest dip.
Baptised – not by fire – but by water and carbolic. He had
watched Mzantsi, naked, crouching and shamed beyond
his understanding, waiting for the pain of the boot in his
back, the bullet in his side, the lash about his neck. Abject,

they had stood together before a felon whose only power
was the gun in his belt and the unwashed pallor of his skin.

(Poland 1993: 183)

This extract echoes the marginalisation of the indigenous people – the historically skewed nature of cultural politics that have dominated South Africa up to the fairly recent present. The drunken white sentry is a representative of the colonial government. Benedict and Mzantsi were treated like animals and Benedict now realises his political insignificance in his own land. He feels totally humiliated and his bitterness grows. The gross indignity of shedding his clothes before going into the dip is too much to bear. The laughter of the white man exacerbates the pain felt by the two blacks. “Benedict Matiwane had been reborn”. The irony is blatant. Normally, when one speaks of being ‘reborn’, one interprets this as being converted to Christianity. Father Charles had taken Benedict in, and had baptised him in the Christian faith: “We bring this child into the light” (102). Benedict seems to have been baptised again – this time by carbolic. It characterises a turning point in his life. He has been degraded and his humiliation makes him realise that although he has been socialised at a white mission station, he is Black and can never be fully accepted by whites. The early genesis and foundation of his culture and his behaviour is a result of his interaction with the members on the mission station. His sense of belonging is uprooted at the cattle-dip and once again he questions his birth, his shades and his faith. He contemplates his being in the world, his place within his own culture and his place in the Christian world.

Where had he been born? In what ditch? What hovel?
Perhaps he had arrived under the aloof and dispassionate
eye of one of the nuns, his mother turned out before she
could hold him to her breast. A child of God. Which God?
Whose God? God was a white Man. That he knew. (ibid)

The belief that the Christian God regarded Blacks as being no better than mules instils bitterness in Benedict. He becomes blasphemous – “we are only

God's mules" (183) – and begins to break mission rules, for example, he meets Dorcas at night outside the mission grounds. Benedict becomes "inaccessible, defiant even" (259) and in terms of attendance at matins and evensong he loses his enthusiasm and eagerness. In fact, his defiance reaches such a level that he does not attend voluntarily but has "to be summoned" (ibid). Even at Crispin's funeral, Walter had to go looking for Benedict who did not want to remain with the family while they were mourning:

'I am always told that I am a member of the family.' He did not parody the words or mimic but spoke them quietly. His eyes held Walter's. 'But that is one of the great delusions. One is given a hat and a pair of breeches, a name and a present at Christmas and a sponsor to pay the fees and one is suddenly a member of the family? Where is that family? Where were they in all those other times? Who cared?' (6)

Benedict feels that his being a part of the family is a mistaken notion and in his delusional world the printing press becomes his refuge as it affords him the pleasure of freedom of expression and enhances his skill as a writer and journalist. His secret contributions to the press empower his people by conscientising them of the manner in which they were being oppressed. He seeks emancipation from the shackles of colonialism using the very same colonial education that he was given. Through colonial education, cultural frontiers and boundaries are crossed increasing the assimilation of culture and identity. Thus, the ambiguity of colonialism is made apparent by Poland's portrayal of Benedict, who uses the mission station and the opportunities it provided, to fight for the liberation of the colonised people.

According to Article 11, posted in the hall of the boarding-house, "Boys are strictly FORBIDDEN to join girls in their walks" (257). Furthermore, Article 3 clearly stated that, "No boy shall go beyond the Boundaries of the Mission Lands at any time or be outside the walls of the Institution after the last bell rings" (ibid). These restrictions are clearly symbolic depictions of the control experienced over the indigenous people. The symbolic controls also relate to

Poland's desire to create an authentic atmosphere of the South African political landscape at the turn of the century. Benedict knows the rules very well because he sees them everyday on the wall. He feels as if he is in prison, shackled from experiencing and enjoying the very land that belonged to his people. The sense of obligation to the oppressors was a taunt that never failed to gnaw at his inner being. During his rebellious phase he breaks the rules and meets Dorcas outside the church's boundaries. Mzantsi discovers them and reports them to Emily whose admonishment and chastisement of Benedict is nothing less than disastrous: 'You will be forbidden to take Holy Communion until I am satisfied that you have purged yourself of the wickedness of the last few weeks' (269). The irony in Emily's punishment is twofold. Firstly, when it was discovered that Victor was meeting Truter's daughter on his nightly trysts, his punishment was a lecture from Father Charles, some tea, and a calm and reassuring reading of a passage from the Bible. Secondly, forbidding Benedict to take Holy Communion, although he had not committed a sin, is a means of further deepening the rift between Benedict and the Church.

Benedict could find no evidence that Victor had been punished for his own excursions in the dark. The departure of the wheelwright and his daughter had brought the incident to a discreet close. There had been no public explanations, no penances exacted for the satisfaction of a Miss Prudieaux-Brune. Clearly, interest in traditional practice, the need to know the customs of his people – the need to be kin with his companions – amounted to depravity. Lust did not.

(101)

Just as Emily had forbidden Benedict to participate in the religious rituals, she had also made her son, Crispin, feel inadequate in terms of pursuing his dreams of taking Holy Orders. His sense of dispossession within the South African landscape, in which he was born, stems from the fact that he feels enclosed and shut in by the restricted life imposed on him by a Victorian culture. Crispin's love for and understanding of the land in which he was born,

together with his understanding of the native people, is the unwavering passion that guides him. When Victor had embarrassed Benedict in the stick-fight incident it was Crispin who "felt some vague, some uneasy sense that Benedict had been betrayed " (100). His suicide is also ultimately a result of his inability to exorcise remembrance of his childhood friends Tom, Reuben and Sonwabo. He feels that colonialism and capitalism had betrayed them. He is the only one to empathise with Benedict and the Pumani brothers and this is expressed in terms of nature's divinity:

It was only a Crispin, who had lived here all his life – a strange mixture of heathen, Christian and pantheist – who could understand the underlying rhythms. The capriciousness of seasons, the inconsistencies of men, the mythologies which lay in the heart of these hills would not shake a faith which sprang, not from the sermons of other men, not from the intellectual exercise of study and debate, but from some primal and instinctive harmony with God. (219)

Poland's novel begins with a prologue where the main characters and settings are determined. The main event in this chapter is the recovery of Crispin Farborough's body, which was located in the glades of the Pirie Bush. His death seems to have affected not only his family and friends but also the landscape and the elements:

The night wind was hot – the restless, wild hotness of a wind that had blown in from Xhosaland. It came in fierce sudden gusts across the beaten yard, like spirits disembodied. (1)

The fierce gusts of wind are symbolic of the anger of the elements on the passing away of someone who was one with nature. It is also symbolic of the restless spirits moving about, the shades of Crispin's ancestors. The wind could have blown in from any direction, but the fact that it came in from "Xhosaland" is an indication of Crispin's affinity with the Xhosas. In keeping with the title of the novel, Poland conjures up an interesting image when she compares the wind to "spirits disembodied". This image is further reinforced when one takes into account that Crispin is a Christian and according to his

religion, one should not take one's life. But we have already determined that Crispin is not a pure Christian – "he is a strange mixture of heathen, Christian and pantheist" (219).

His mother, Emily, attempts to bring him up according to Victorian standards and methods of discipline. Her rigid intolerance of Xhosa language, customs and traditions is misguided and as a result she is unable truly to accommodate being in a harsh African landscape. To understand fully her psychological make-up and her attitude towards Crispin, one has to first analyse her early years at Saint Matthias. "She had to keep the vision of her own vocation clear, against the tumults of her doubts and the exhaustion that her dedications caused her" (274). She had 'bargained' with God and had "pledged to dedicate" her child to the services of God on condition that He guaranteed her a safe delivery. But she had had a difficult labour lasting thirty-six hours and culminating in her baby being stillborn. Her second pregnancy went the same way but in true Victorian spirit she "held her grief with dignity" (275). When Frances was born, she had not made any pacts with God. Later she was blessed with a son, Crispin, but "he was too late to match her early aspirations, too placid to rekindle ardent hopes" (ibid). Emily's detachment from her children was so complete that she had Crispin breastfed by Nowasha the maid. During his formative years, Emily, whose heart had been set on a family member succeeding Father Charles at St. Matthias, ironically does not perceive Crispin's desire and suitability to be a priest. Crispin's dyslexia and his mother's hero-worship of Victor, ensures that Crispin becomes a victim of an unfulfilled vision. Sadly, although he realises that people need to know about their roots in order to identify with a culture and society, he is unable to fulfil his own ambitions and sense of identity.

Crispin displays a genuine feel for the land and respect for his Xhosa brethren. "He was so much part of the land, even though he was an English boy educated at a good English school" (Taylor, G.B. 1993: 21). He learns their language and participates in 'heathen activity' against his mother's wishes. Ironically, when Walter, Benedict and Crispin go in search of the missing Hubert Brompton, it is Crispin, and not Benedict, who is able to converse with

the locals in faultless Xhosa. Whilst the local herders make obvious their warm appraisal of Crispin, they also did not hide their contempt for Benedict, who was dressed in English attire. In their search for Brompton, the three men come across an "*isivivane* cairn and a confessional" (Poland 1993: 139) and Crispin explains to Walter that this is where "people come to tell their secrets to the shades".

It was a sanctuary, there in the green cathedral gloom, a place where men might go and so confess the burdens of their hearts, relieve the learnings of the spirits on their shoulders which made them bent and which disturbed their dreams. (ibid)

In true pantheistic fashion, Crispin pays homage to the mossy depression in the ground. He takes up a stone, and after a soft incantation, lays his offering on the mound. "There was that cosmology, the plants, the animals and the theology of the shades was something that he absorbed from the people around him" (Taylor, G.B. 1993: 21). Although Benedict also carries out this ritual, a few pages later, Benedict denies his belief in the *mshologu*:

"Why must I believe it? I'm a Christian"... He did not look at them but continued to stare out over the valley where the smoke from the homesteads was rising now, lifting up into the morning sky. (Poland 1993: 150)

Crispin, however, admits softly that he believes, explaining to Walter and Benedict that "we all have our *mshologu* we're afraid of. We just give it different names. Satan. Fear. Death" (ibid). According to Crispin, Brompton's *mshologu* is that he could not get away from his past. Hubert Brompton's vocation had brought him to the dry and barren Mbokothwe where he was unable to adapt and adjust. He experiences a feeling of homelessness and not belonging, which is similar to existential outsidership – the most extreme experience of separation from place (see Pocock 1981: 86). He is dispossessed, in the sense that he has been thrust by the Bishop far away from home. Brompton, like Emily, attempts to create a little England in the desolate

outpost of Mbokothwe. On the walls of his room were "black framed etchings of Hubert Brompton's College at Oxford, his school, a country church in England and among them, the rest clustered about it, a mezzotint of the Queen" (Poland 1993: 69). He is unable to adapt to this adopted land and the fact that he surrounds himself with things English is an indication of the fact that he is desperate to hang on to his past. In addition to this, it seems as if he has made no attempt to come to terms with the landscape and culture of Africa. What contributes to his loneliness and isolation is the fact that he condemns with an intense passion the heathen practices in and around his mission station. A typical example of his discrimination and longing for his past is his treatment of his servant, Pusey. Pusey is the name given to Mandlankosi Jingiso and Brompton not only dispossesses him of his traditional name but also extricates him from his culture, dressing him up in a tailcoat (with short-pants) and denying him the freedom to follow his beliefs. The incongruous Pusey is "created by poor Brompton to shield his heart from his own prying eyes, a panacea for some intolerable darkness" (365). Brompton's mission station becomes spiritually empty and literally barren. Hillis-Miller surmises, "The landscape exists as landscape only when it has been made human in an activity of inhabitation" (1995: 21). Relph had earlier expressed much the same thought positing that landscapes are in fact "cultural images" (1976: 43) since landscape only becomes landscape once people inhabit it and it becomes a centre of activity (see also Tuan 1975: 15). In Hubert Brompton's case, he fails the landscape by his inactivity, by his narrow fanaticism and by his self-alienation. This results in his nervous breakdown and Crispin is quite right in concluding that Brompton was affected by his *mshologu*.

Brompton's lunacy drives him into a nearby valley and the landscape turns into dense foliage, a forest in which "the light was locked away by crowding branches" (Poland 1993: 139). The darkness of the undergrowth is symbolic of Brompton's mind and thoughts. Unlike Walter, he had closed his mind and had refused to be enlightened about Xhosa customs and the landscape in which he found himself. The concept of darkness is even encapsulated in Brompton's favourite hymn which his musical box plays over and over again: "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide; the darkness deepens, Lord, with me

abide" (141). According to C. Taylor, social relations structure one's identity construction (see 1989: 54). One needs to have a sense of who one is, where one is going and most important how one has become. Brompton had no clear sense as to where he was going in life. This lack of socialisation and firm identity drove him insane. In the rescue operation Walter, Benedict and Crispin are forced to sing this hymn in order to subdue Brompton who had started shooting at them. When he did drop his gun, Walter edged his way to him and looked into his eyes: "It was as if some small, furtive creature was captive in the skull, detached from the thing that sheltered it" (Poland 1993: 142). Brompton had gone over the edge. The musical box that had given Brompton company and had kept him sane was in Pusey's possession. He had taken it knowing its value to Brompton, because Brompton had not allowed him to practise his traditional rites – to be a diviner. In fact, Brompton had confiscated Pusey's prayer goods, medicines and gifts and had hidden them in the ceiling; and, as I have shown earlier dominant capitalist groups often restrict and define the 'others' access to space (see pages 7-8 of this thesis). Now Pusey had taken revenge; when the box is thrown in front of Brompton, its breaking signifies Brompton final breakdown. "Like the mechanism in the musical-box, it seemed that Brompton's reason had broken up inside him, leaving only fragments of coherence" (Poland 1993: 147). Walter reflected on how Brompton had been shaped by the landscape: "Perhaps Mbokothwe was the Bishop's penance for those who had erred or the mortification for those who wished to test a steely resolve" (71). Walter also reflected on how Brompton would become the subject of analysis and ridicule by other ecclesiastics and critics:

- Do you remember Hubert Brompton? An Oxford man.
He wouldn't let you forget it. In imitation – Are you an
Oxford or a St. Augustine's man, sir?
- Did you know he named his servant Pusey! I fear he meant
offence in giving it.
- Poor old Brompton. Anyone been to see him?
- Doesn't remember a soul, poor beggar.
- They say he sits all day and listens to a musical-box that no

longer plays.

Laughter.

-- If you ask me, they should take it away. It's obsessive with him. He has an extraordinary attachment to it. Seen him myself. He looks off into space for all the world as if a choir of angels is singing.

-- I doubt it's angels. More likely some denizens of the inferno!

(149)

Such critics could comment from the safety and comfort of their homes, cathedral stalls and thriving landscapes. None would have experienced "the silences of this place nor sensed the presence of another God" (ibid). Only Crispin, half heathen, half Christian, understood this.

Crispin undoubtedly longed to follow in his father's footsteps. He had spent all his life trying to please his mother, but try as he might, he realised that his scholastic achievements would always disappoint her. She did not take cognisance of Crispin's worth and compassion and the irony is that Emily hoped that Victor would take Holy Orders, not Crispin. Crispin's and Victor's characters are poles apart. Whilst Victor is the typical brusque capitalist, Crispin is the sensitive English offspring who was in a position to reach easily to the indigenous people's hearts. He understood their language and their traditions and throughout the novel we see that Crispin enjoys a strong and sincere relationship with the Xhosa people amongst whom he lived. He has true compassion and acts upon it. There is no patronage in Crispin's affection for his Xhosa friends Benedict, Tom, Reuben and Sonwabo. Right at the outset when Walter makes his acquaintance, he recognises Crispin's love for his friends when he notices him smuggling scones from tea-time to give to his less fortunate friends. In the incident where Victor locks Sonwabo in the vestry cupboard for using a Xhosa oath, Crispin is angered and raises his voice to Victor. This is the first instance in which Crispin stands up to the dominating and commanding Victor. Crispin knew that Sonwabo was claustrophobic and he crouches beside the cupboard trying to calm him. Towards the latter part of the novel, when Sonwabo is sent to the mines, Crispin, although

disappointed, understands why he takes on the role of a 'boy bride'. A 'boy bride' (*nkhontshana*) is a young miner who, adorned with wooden breasts and female attire, gives sexual favours to the induna (chief) in return for certain privileges. Sonwabo was afraid of enclosed spaces and, therefore, was afraid of going down the mine shafts :

There are some men who can work in the stomach of the earth and there are some who cannot. Sometimes, when a man is a child, a thing comes to his heart or his spirit that he fears. This man, Pumani, feared to be closed in the dark. It was like a madness with him. (318)

According to Relph, every image, idea and conception of place is compounded by personal experience, feelings and consciousness (see 1976: 43). Sonwabo's image of the mine-shafts had been internalised and he was afraid to venture therein. Sonwabo was delicate, young and pretty, and the induna quickly seized the opportunity to make him into a 'boy bride'. The oppressive colonial system is to be partially blamed for the sodomy, crime and corruption on the mines. Women were prohibited from entering the mine hostels and men looked for outlets for their sexual desires. Unfortunately, Sonwabo was one such victim. Compound supervisors turned a blind eye to the transgressions on the mines and pretended that they were unaware of the magnitude of the suffering endured by the miners. Identities were forsaken and the dispossession of integrity and human values was rife in the landscape of the mines. Not only was Sonwabo's masculinity taken away from him, but his name too was changed. The name Sonny-boy was easy on the lips of the authorities, but it was also demeaning and took away Sonwabo's identity. One of the clerks succinctly sums up the identity process, or rather, the loss of it:

How must we know all their names? The names were written but how can we tell if they are right? You get a native here with ten different names. So you choose the one that you can write. What does it matter? (Poland 1993: 350)

Crispin, too, is taken by Victor to work in the mines as a clerk and interpreter. When the war breaks out, many mine labourers are sent home and some of the colonists enlist themselves in the army. Crispin, however, goes looking for his friends – Sonwabo was rumoured to be in one of the prisons charged for sodomy (a means of getting back at Victor who had supposedly taken the side of the black miners) and Tom and Reuben had absconded for fear of being beaten up by disgruntled mine officials. Crispin was “not Crispin Farborough here. He had no history. No family. The men he worked with were furtive like himself, fugitive from the army or from the law, or from their families” (347).

Crispin believes his search for his friends is his obligation. If he failed to go looking for them, then it would be, as his father would say, “a sin of omission”. Crispin joins David Evan’s Holiness Mission with the ulterior motive of using them as a pass to go into the mines, hospitals and prisons to search for his friends. Finally he finds Tom and Reuben working in a railway compound using false identities and papers. He too decides to work for the railways with the hope that he could get Tom and Reuben safely on a train heading south. In a moment of desperation Crispin tries to bribe a clerk for two rail-permits for his friends. He is reported to his senior, Edgar Lemmer, and he realises that he has been lured into a trap. In another desperate bid for freedom, Crispin encourages Tom and Reuben to join and mingle with the Sotho coalminers in a train heading homewards. Unfortunately, soldiers stop the train and all those who did not have passes are made to get off and are cold bloodedly shot and killed. Crispin hears the gunshots and rushes to the scene:

He found them at the edge of the little battle field. They had died together. Side by side. Tom and Reuben Pumani, bartered for cattle, buried among strangers, dispossessed of the right to lie beneath the earth where those they loved might tend them. Vagabond shades forever. (397)

The voices in his mind torment him. He needs to get away – to a familiar place, a landscape that could offer him comfort. “And he repeated to himself, saying over and over, like a litany to keep the thoughts away.

'Queenstown tomorrow. Dohne. Stutterheim. Queenstown tomorrow. Dohne. Stutterheim.' From there he would walk down the Donsa, right along the southern slopes of the Amatolas, fasting like a pilgrim, and find, at last, St. Matthias safe among its trees. If he could just get home" (399). Crispin does get home. However, when once he would have found comfort in the landscape – fishing, mimicking birds, or just lazing on the ground under the African sun; now he dared not be alone. "He did not go fishing anymore. He did not hunt. He kept to the mission grounds in the company of Benedict. It was something he had never done before" (400). The thought of his friends' deaths was overwhelming. He takes personal responsibility for their deaths and this is one of the main reasons for his committing suicide.

Generally, Christians view suicide as something that is against God's will – if He gives life, then, only He must determine when to take it away. A person who commits suicide is believed to be in a state of despair, which, subsequently, is a sin against the Holy Spirit. For this sin, there can be no forgiveness and Christians viewed this so seriously that up until recently a person who committed suicide could not be buried within the boundaries of a Christian cemetery. Crispin is not buried in the St. Matthias' cemetery but rather, interred beneath the great oak tree near the church. Is Poland taking a biased approach to religion and is she promoting one religion over another? To the contrary, Poland rarely proffers an explanation of the religious beliefs held by her characters – whether it is the staunch Christian faith of Father Charles, the faith Pusey has in ancestral spirits or the pantheistic belief of Crispin. In the presentation of her characters we hear their conversations, see their actions and take note of the consequences these actions have on their lives in a particular place.

For Crispin to be buried under the oak tree is most appropriate as can be seen by Helmina's summary of Crispin's relationship with nature and place : "I never knew anyone who loved a place as much as he loves it here. There's not a tree, a bend, a heathen or a Christian boy that isn't a friend of Crispin's" (217). Crispin's suicide raises many questions and the main argument is how can a son of a Christian missionary commit suicide, knowing full well that it is

against Christian teachings? Whilst many may criticise his actions, others may see him in the mode of Christ, a saviour and sacrificial lamb for his black brethren. Still others, may see him as too sensitive and too young to carry the burdens of political oppression, English standards of morality, and cultural intolerance. In other words Crispin is unable to come to terms with his mother's attitude to blacks; Hubert Brompton and Victor's treatment of the indigenous people; and the unchristianlike behaviour of the mine supervisors and the Boer soldiers who killed his friends. Christian hypocritical morality combined with the oppressive Victorian standards precipitate feelings of guilt in Crispin. He is unable to live with himself after the deaths of his friends because he truly loved and cared for them and his suicide contradicts Cosgrove's postulation that in our relationship with others and the land, we have an element of personal control over the external world (see 1984: 18). But Crispin's suicide also confirms that identity is shaped by the intimate relationship of people in a particular place and in a particular time. To Crispin the concept of place was very important. Benedict tried to fathom out what Crispin would have done and where he would have gone "and he remembered how he had stood at the depression in the ground in the forest at Mbokothwe, where the *isivivane* cairn was made at its edge, and tried to expunge the little burdens of his own heart and offer them up to whatever presence waited in the shadows to receive them" (Poland 1993: 423).

Benedict had guessed correctly. The landscape had created a sanctuary, a glade, a place where an animal would have sought refuge from the midday sun. Crispin lay in the leaf-mould, at one with nature. Next to him, on the cairn, was a stone he had placed. Benedict remembered the time at Mbokothwe and how Crispin had taken a stone, laid it on the *isivivane* cairn and said, "*Qamata, ndiphe amandla* – God give strength to me" (ibid). And said in Xhosa, "'May God and the shades of our fathers walk with us in our hour of need': He spat on the stone in his hand and placed it besides the one Crispin had laid on the cairn: '*Qamata, siphe amandla*' – God give strength to us" (426).

Throughout the novel Poland has portrayed Crispin as a victim who has suffered profoundly. By portraying him as a victim and anti-hero Poland is inevitably criticising the hidden layers of deceit, which she perceives in the nature of Victorian society. Crispin's suicide becomes an act of heroism in a sense that the act itself launches the burden of responsibility and of moral awakening to others (especially to his cousin, and capitalist, Victor). Victor, for his part, is portrayed as an arrogant young man, who takes delight in controlling those around him: "Frances and Crispin had obeyed his every bidding, awed by his height and his age and his *savoir-faire*" (30). In fact, Benedict believes firmly that because of Victor's domination and influence on Crispin, he (Crispin) had committed suicide.

"Surely you don't blame him for this?" Victor looked at him and a frown had closed in to mask the disquiet. "Blame him?"

Benedict gazed back steadily. "No, I do not blame Crispin. Some men would say it is fate, some accident, some bad luck. Some would even say it is *umthakathi*. Only God has the power to lay blame. Perhaps He might blame you". (418)

From an early age Crispin was forced to emulate Victor in an attempt to gain the same sort of acceptance, recognition and identity that Victor acquired from Charles and Emily, the mission workers and from the indigenous people around them. In compensation for usurping Crispin's place, Victor protected him, both at school and at home. "In consequence, Crispin would die for him – a word, a gesture would suffice. It was another burden, heaped on all the other fulsome presumptions" (121). The only time Crispin had stood up to Victor was when Victor had locked Sonwabo in the vestry cupboard. Although Victor believes that Crispin "would die for him", we can see that Crispin would go against Victor for Sonwabo, risking both physical and emotional abuse. In fact, Victor is responsible for the formulation of the complex psychological layers of power dynamics responsible for Crispin's ambivalent feelings towards him. These feelings were generated during their formative years:

The night before each holiday was always the same: Crispin – no more than twelve – sitting on her bed, legs drawn up, encircled by his arms, chin on his knee, unable to sleep because Victor would be home. Terrifying, wonderful Victor, coming from town in the wagon with his cricket bat and his rugby ball and his wild imaginative entertainments. Frances had to stay with Crispin and tell him stories in an attempt to make him sleep. (30)

Crispin's emotional landscape was fundamentally cultivated by his neurotic mother, but more especially by the overwhelming and intimidating Victor. As the name suggests, Victor is the person who triumphs and who is the hero. His victory in all facets of life, however, has a detrimental effect on Crispin's psychological make-up. Victor's physical prowess, his dazzling looks and his self-confidence is parallel to his contempt of those who do not meet his high standards: "The world was ordered not by what it was but by what Victor Drake ordained it ought to be" (20). His cruelty knows no bounds to those whom he perceives as weak, and he knew exactly how far to push his superciliousness and scorn. "He had an air of someone teasing, knowing to which point of familiarity he might stray which would flatter and not offend" (14). Although Crispin is also good looking and athletic, his dyslexia is his shortcoming and because he cannot meet his mother's expectations, he gives in to the domination of Victor. The relationship, however, leaves him psychologically traumatised and he finds solace in the bed-time stories that Frances narrates to him.

Crispin is not the only person traumatised by Victor, whose influence spreads from one landscape to the next, from St. Matthias in the Eastern Cape right through to the mines in Johannesburg. In terms of mining Susanne Seymour posits that the "concept of 'landscape' has in recent years constituted a highly contested terrain of study and interpretation both within geography and beyond" (2000: 193). She goes on to present a rich account of the way landscape has been used to maintain colonial power through, *inter alia*, mining and military might. Victor is the epitome of Victorian masculinity. In the

war games that he invents, he is always the hero and the black children have to take on the role of imps and other mundane, inferior functions. His relationship with Benedict is an ongoing antagonistic one, and it is Benedict who induces Victor to take stock of his actions at the culmination of the novel. At the *umngeni* Victor challenges Benedict to a stick-fight, and the traditional stick-fighting prowess seems to come naturally to him. He defeats Victor, but Victor deals Benedict an unfair blow, embarrassing him in front of his girlfriend, Dorcas. These actions are symbolic of the cultural conflict in the colonised locale. Victor does not accept defeat and strikes Benedict a cowardly blow in an attempt to reassert his power and domination. His action is an attempt at dispossessing a man's dignity and self-respect; but Benedict, representative of the oppressed blacks, is not obsequious or sycophantic. In fact, as discussed earlier, it is incidents like these that trigger Benedict's activism in politics and the search for his identity and roots.

Benedict's piercing comments at the end of the novel not only startle Victor, but also raise his consciousness about his abuse of all those around him, especially the blacks. Benedict succinctly tells him that, "It is not what you do, it is what you fail to do" (419). Victor is made aware that he is the imperial representative in a colonial landscape, and that some of the politically conscious indigenous people were making the naïve inhabitants aware of imperialism, and subsequent colonialism, and its effects on the people of the South African landscape:

There are men like Soga and Rubusana who see, who know, that when you are finished this war of yours and have raised your flag all over this country and brought it to the glory of your Empire – the one that we, as black men, are supposed to revere for having bestowed on us an education, faith, prosperity and all the other high-sounding gifts – that you will sell us out – perhaps against the advance of metaphorical cattle – and say it is expedient. (420)

This prophecy proves correct when one looks back at the history of South Africa in terms of the Anglo-Boer War, The Zulu Wars and the Migrant Labour System.

As an historical novel, *Shades* foregrounds historical context, particularly the migrant labour system where it was compulsory for wage owners to leave their homes for varying lengths of time in order to work in other areas so that they could, above all else, pay their poll tax and hut taxes that were imposed upon them by the colonial government. Poland claims that Victor, whose character is closely based on a distant relative of hers, was 'the architect of the migrant labour system' (in Cilliers 1993: 15). The novel explores the part Victor plays in the recruitment of mineworkers. Victor knows better than to recruit openly so he uses Klaus Otto, the transport rider, as a front in his recruitment drive. In his letter to him Victor says:

I have just heard that many of the people at St Matthias have lost their cattle during the rinderpest. I am aware that labour agents for the gold mines are taking advantage of the losses in other districts to recruit boys and I am anxious that they should not stake first claim in an area, which is of particular importance and interest to me. I think, through the unique experience of having been raised at St Matthias, that I could gain the confidence of the local natives and – even if the beginnings are small – secure a steady supply from the area. I am aware that, at present, you are not engaged in recruiting but would consider it a privilege if you would work as an agent with me and, in the course of your own activities – with which I do not think such an arrangement would interfere – engage labour from the St. Matthias area for which a capitation fee for each recruit would be paid.
(Poland 1993: 214)

The tragedy of Victor is that he has to internalise the prejudices of the times, allowing himself to be trapped in the world of imperial greed and in the need

to uphold the dictates of being a hero. As F.G. Robinson posits, "Social reality and individual identity, in their variety and mutability, are manifest constructions, fictions rooted in self-interest and the need for order" (1995: 46). Victor is quick to seize opportunities and exploit working-class vulnerability in the pursuit of material wealth, status and individual identity. His aspirations and motives, however, must be seen in the context of colonisation, place, space and the social pressures of the Victorian age. Blessed with abundant leadership qualities, his vision is to make his mark on his South African environment, knowing full well that any failure will undermine his ego, as well as be a reflection on society. Klaus Otto approaches Kobus Pumani on Victor's behest. The devastation wrought by the rinderpest pressurizes Kobus into bartering his sons, Tom, Reuben and Sonwabo, for cattle. Victor, then, is indirectly responsible for the recruitment of the Pumani brothers and ultimately, their deaths.

Victor is not afraid to use people in his search for a powerful identity. Walter recognises this trait when he sees Victor commanding Benedict to carry the fishing rods and to clean the eel. He is also aware that Victor meets Truter's daughter for a nightly romp, although Frances' mother was grooming him to marry Frances. At the mines Victor goes out with prostitutes and is unfaithful to Frances. He even goes to the extent of influencing the naïve Crispin when he gets his friends to take Crispin to Sylvio Villa, a local brothel. He uses Crispin to communicate with the mineworkers. Crispin interprets the workers' demands and Victor makes it seem as if he understands every word that has been said to him. In fact, the mine owners are so impressed with Victor that they laud him for his dealings with the blacks. Victor, however, only had his own interests at heart. His attempts at political expedience may be seen as praiseworthy as he is able to pacify the strikers by giving in to their demands knowing full well that war is imminent. War meant that the mines must close temporarily and the shrewd Victor knew that to ensure that mineworkers returned after the war, with more recruited members, he had to put on the façade that he was on their side. His ulterior motive was to get the 'natives' to spread the word that the conditions in the mines were good and that people were looking after their welfare. After negotiations Victor says to the mineworkers that he

was “glad to have met men of (his) place – the ‘homeboys’ of (his) colony” (322). Although he was putting on a façade, we can see that subconsciously the concept of place was to him a means of identity construction, a nostalgic, parochial sense of attachment and identity. He displays loyalty to the St. Matthias Mission station and to the people associated with it. His actions reveal his understanding of the subtleties and intrigues of the human spirit in a landscape, which he seems to have made his own.

South Africa, in the late nineteenth century, may be seen as a territory both exploited and exploitative, not only in terms of commodities, but also in terms of its people. Poland’s portrayal of colonialism, racism, ill-treatment and ultimate cold-blooded killing of the Sotho miners rebelling against the conditions at the mines, is chilling, to say the least. The massacre emphasises the oppressive nature of the colonists, and the killing of these workers like animals can be paralleled to the killing of the cattle that were suspected of being affected by the rinderpest disease. Amazingly, the rinderpest disease had not affected the white man’s cattle and one cannot blame the blacks for believing that the inoculations of their cattle, which did not help the cows survive anyway, was, in fact a conspiracy headed by the Queen: “Words been put about among the tribesmen that the Queen wishes to harm the black man and that the serum causes the disease” (187). The treatment of Sonwabo and the Sotho workers reveals man’s inhumanity to man, the subjective nature of the law, and the injustice of the judicial system in the colonial landscape. The strikes reveal an identifiable working-class culture, which is supportive of its members, and, in numerous ways, challenging of the dominant culture. Metaphorically, the strike is an expression of defiance against their (blacks’) debased state and loss of identity. Victor represents an autocratic presence to thousands of black miners who observe their employers from the outside, and judge them as they appear to their embittered minds and hearts.

Thus, Poland’s construction of Victor is “a satirical representation of a class partially responsible for the establishment of the migrant labour system” (Jacob 2003: 40). Historically, the inexorable dispossession of the indigenous

people of South Africa of land, of social, cultural and personal identity and of freedom was a result of the migrant labour system. Victor, acutely aware of the political and social discriminations in the country, displays no ethical principles and as a consummate imperialist, exploits those he rules over. Poland portrays Victor as vividly as possible because she “wished to lay the ghost of the past and bring into perspective, for [herself], the history of [her] own family and the dual role – both light and dark – that members of it played, not only in the history of that small valley, but in the history of South Africa as a whole” (Poland 2000: 2).

According to Alan Jeeves, an historian, the mobilisation of the indigenous people of South Africa as a labour force constitutes early industrialisation in the country. The “formidable recruiting system and the associated racial division of labour quickly became the industry’s most notorious feature. From the outset the mines provided the pattern for labour mobilisation and exploitation, which were soon copied throughout the economy” (Jeeves 1985: 3). This grotesque legacy of the mining industry then, can be attributed in some part to, according to Poland, her distant relative, Victor. Subsequently, the landscape of Poland can be seen as a landscape intimately interwoven in her family’s construction of identity. Grounded in missionary vocation, capitalism, the mines and the labour recruitment, her family has played a profound role in contributing to the colonial landscape and thus, reinforcing the colonial identity of South Africa at a certain time in its history. At the same time, *Shades*, like other historical fiction, is true to its own historical intention, of serving a functional, moral purpose of overturning white historiography, placing humanised black people in the movement of history and sending out its warning against power and its concomitant plea for tolerance. The fictional and factual landscapes of the novel influence and interpenetrate each other, creating a charged atmosphere that challenges the reader to go beyond a simple aesthetic appreciation of the novel and to engage the historical and political landscape on his or her own terms.

The miners in this peculiarly South African urban space experience the general suffering caused by poorly paid jobs and the absence of good

opportunities. That they are black people simply aggravates matters for them, but that they are severely deprived lends them the transparent identity shared among all those who rank somewhere below any standard classification of any society, people who are sacrificed on the altar of progress and development. Benedict's revelation to Victor, that he is the cause of many men's miseries and deaths, imposes itself in Victor's constellated internal landscape and this spurs him on to seek reconciliation with himself and with God. As much as it was his internal landscape that prompted him to introspection, it was also the external, physical landscape that actually made him aware of his actions:

He went on down a kloof, hardly aware of the bush about him for it was he – not Crispin – who was the hunted in this place. It was as if he could hear footsteps at his heel. He stopped, fighting for breath. Water trickled down the rocks, broadening into a stream, flanked by flat river stones. He stretched out on one of these to drink. He turned on his back then and lay a moment in the great, breathless silence with his face to the sky, his arms flung out, exposed to the Gaze-of-God. And Victor knew, that moment, what Crispin must have felt: the abyss glimpsed, the darkness closing in, and he struggled up, drawing his limbs in as if they were an armour and he stood, shaken. (Poland 1993: 421— 422)

The landscape contributes to the inquisition within Victor, and looking at nature he realises "he was looking God in the eye and could not bear the fire of that scrutiny" (421). He comes to the realisation that he is responsible not only for the death of Crispin, but also for the deaths of the Pumani brothers. Benedict's words ring in his thoughts too, and for the first time he becomes aware of someone other than himself. The visualisation of entrapment cogently defines his predicament and it is not Crispin he is hunting – he becomes the "hunted in this place" (ibid). He imagines "footsteps at his heels" (ibid). Trying to flee from his conscience is an act of escapism, a means of denying a confrontation with reality. He is reduced to a psychological state

within which he can feel the demons of the past catching up with him. He is overcome with emotion and in his panic state of self-realisation, he starts "fighting for breath" (422).

The therapeutic effect of the water in the landscape is highlighted by Poland. As the "water trickled down the rocks" the calming effect of the landscape swathes and he lies down "stretched out on one of the rocks". Just as Crispin had gone to the *isivivane* cairn to commune with the shades, Victor looks at the heavens, turns "on his back with his face to the sky" and examines the thoughts in his heart. Drawing in his limbs "as if they were an armour" he lay there "shaken", consumed by his past. Frances had realised earlier that "Victor, the hero, had cracks in his armour" (121), and now Victor lies on the rocks, exposed in the landscape under the scrutiny of God.

Initially Frances had held an illusory picture of Victor, seeing him as a Victorian hero. She, however, suspected his superficiality and the deeper and more complex layers of psychological dynamics working within him. Frances too is complex. She felt indebted to Victor for being an accomplice in her struggle for liberation from colonial suppression: for her, sex outside of marriage was the ultimate blow to Victorian dictates. Being a young woman she fully understands and internalises the prejudices of conventional morality and in a moment of extreme rebellion, either knowingly or unwittingly, sacrifices her virginity. In most traditional or conservative societies men expect their future wives to be virgins and they demand complete fidelity. Frances knows that the kernel of her predicament is that she is dispossessed and disempowered in a colonial landscape because she is female. Feminists, over the centuries, have defined their grievances towards patriarchal dominance in compelling ways. Only when women define and confront their life situations will they be in a position to establish visions of improvement.

Frances' plight is similar to that of Olive Schreiner's main character, Lyndall, in *The Story of an African Farm* (1883). Both protagonists, confined to the colonial attitudes of the late 1800's, try desperately to unshackle themselves from the roles, obligations and identities that society has imposed upon them.

Lyndall's search for identity, like Frances', "is obstructed not only by the restrictions of the farm and the monotonous plains by which it is encircled but by her status as a woman" (Wilkinson 1991: 110), and the enclosing landscape from which they try to escape can itself be seen as emblematic of their trapped conditions. Both *The Story of an African Farm* and *Shades* have the Eastern Cape as their setting, and the landscape in both may be seen as almost having a character of its own. These novels are prototypical South African novels as they deal with land appropriation, dispossession and gendered identity.

Frances is so emotionally suppressed by her Victorian upbringing, that she is rendered vulnerable to the seduction of the landscape. She acts in accordance with her inner compulsion to be a more complete and freer human being than her society cares to allow her to be:

Barefoot, she ran swiftly across the backyard. She scrambled through the fence and down the slope beyond. Here was sanctuary. Safe from view, she stopped and breathed again. The bush that stretched down to the banks of the Mtwaku River drooped in the heat. She would wade upstream to the place where the boys bathed in summer and lie in the shade of the yellowwood that arched above the bank. A great dull-coloured bull loomed suddenly among the bushes. Frances caught the startled flash of his eye. So large and yet so cryptic among the afternoon shadows. He lumbered on, a truant like herself. (Poland 1993: 91)

The hostility shown towards Frances by her mother, Emily, and by the governess, Helmina, makes the construction of an independent identity all the more demanding. The fact that Frances has left the sanctuary of the house 'barefoot' is indicative of the extent of her rebelliousness. Her mother demands a strong Victorian moral and dress code at all times, but Frances is undaunted and seeks sanctuary in nature. Being 'barefoot' makes her one with nature. She prefers to live simply and is an 'earthy' person. If her mother

had seen her wading in the river with her skirt tucked up, she would have punished her. But Frances is independent and bold and wrings from life what she wants – to be mistress of herself and of her space. Like the dun-coloured bull, she too is “a truant”, looking for her space in a landscape that offers her freedom and “sanctuary”, as in the passage above.

Her needs and actions over a period of years bring her into painful conflict with people, situations, the accepted ways of thinking, feeling and behaving, until she is at continual war with everything around her, and also usually with herself. Frances is forced to evolve her own life patterns, and when Crispin is away at boarding school, she lives much of her life alone, learning about the loneliness of her life. She is caught somewhere between accepting society's view of her – in which case she cannot accept herself – and coming to understand what damage her sexist society has done to her. Even when she is offered the legal sanction of marriage, Frances refuses. Like Lyndall in *The Story of an African Farm* (1883) she refuses precisely because she is aware of the auxiliary and diluted identity she is offered – in her eyes such identity is no identity at all. Victor reaffirms her philosophy when he sends her a letter from Johannesburg:

“How I wish I was lazing down at the river now, instead of in this dusty office. We all had good times there but I suspect I shall not be seeing St. Matthias for some time unless I am called for any unexpected reason...” (Poland 1993: 209).

The “unexpected reason” Victor refers to is the possibility of Frances being pregnant. Even at this young stage there seems to be an estranged relationship between the lovers and Francis is perceptive enough to sense this and thus confirm her views on marriage. Walter Brownley had noticed Frances's perceptiveness, but he also realised that she was ambivalent in her moods: “How interchangeable the sweet and the sardonic in her smile. At times she was reflective and then, in sudden counterpoint, impetuous and boyish” (41). These characteristics endear themselves to him and although much older than her, he realises he is falling in love with her. Drawn to the

African landscape, he also realises that Frances' assimilation of the indigenous local culture also attracts him to her:

Unexpectedly, she sang a little incantation, the gruffness of her voice changing, catching an echo of something else, distant from him and strangely sad:

Oh you, *unongub'endala*, are a little ragged one,
And you, *ikhwebula*, the one who waits to call
the cattle home,
And you *unomaswana* are the drop of calabash
milk, so white and fat.

Averting his gaze from her face – despite the starched whiteness of her petticoats and pinafore – Walter could not have distinguished her voice from those of the Xhosa girls he came across at homesteads in the hills, heathen girls half naked and working in the fields. (40)

Walter and Frances begin to have a more intimate relationship when Frances shows an interest in the fairytale landscape that Walter creates for his niece Miranda in England. Miranda is nine years old, confined indoors because of her health and Walter makes up stories to keep her entertained and amused. Now that he is in Africa, he has to write and post the stories to Miranda instead of telling them to her directly. Walter's story is entitled "Mr. Plotz goes to Africa. The Green Lion and Other Stories". Frances' interest is piqued and soon the fictitious Mr. Plotz becomes the intermediary in the conversations between Walter and Frances. Subsequently, Walter invents a female co-conspirator for Mr. Plotz, Mrs. Brodowski, who becomes Frances' alter-ego.

In the months that followed, Walter came each afternoon, when his other duties were done, to teach Frances Latin or English grammar or mathematics and Plotz and his stories crept into their conversations, their way of speaking to each other. His presence allowed a kind of intimacy that would

otherwise have been impossible. A solitary Latin lesson was not so tedious when shared – just now and then – with Plotz, the green lion and Miranda. Plotz had no need to observe the formality of calling Frances ‘Miss Farborough’ and, in consequence, a new character-Mrs Brodowski- was added to the cast. (45)

These fairytale characters offer Walter and Frances an opportunity to develop a deeper relationship. Since Plotz and Brodowski become their mouthpieces, they were able to communicate without the constraints created by the artificial barriers imposed upon them by the Victorian and colonial landscape. Being in the company of Walter enables Frances to encapsulate certain stereotypical masculine fears about women as evident in her arousal of Victor’s jealous streak. In challenging Victor’s masculinity and ego, she allows herself the space to explore hidden aspects of gender formation. In some ways she is the prototype of a new feminine consciousness. She is conscious that she has been deprived of certain liberties by a Victorian patriarchal regime and locked within her are confused, half- formed longings. Romantic notions and the natural sexual act itself are seen as corrupt because of the nature of colonial society.

According to Victorian Christian ideology, any heathen activity, especially initiation rites (*umngeni*), is totally taboo. Frances is prohibited from watching the stick fight the Xhosa boys took part in before initiation because they were traditionally dressed in loin-cloths only, and the girls, “bare-breasted, swayed collectively, linked by gesture as if a little wind had touched them and sent their hands fluttering in unison here and there” (81). Frances could not resist this occasion to take a stand for feminism and in true rebellious spirit she camouflages herself in the landscape, climbs a “tree with low, spreading branches and balances against the trunk” (80) to watch the congregation below her. The sexually charged atmosphere and Victor’s provocative sauntering awakens within Frances a consciousness of her sexuality, a consciousness which is the product of external stimuli impressing upon her identity character as female.

Later that afternoon she is banished to her room and in a fit of rebellion and anger she seeks solace in the sanctuary of the landscape. Down by the river she encounters Victor, who takes advantage of her vulnerability and the privacy the landscape provides them. When Frances reveals to her mother her improper behaviour, she is exiled from her familiar space to Grahamstown, where she has to live with Mrs Drake in preparation for her marriage to Victor Drake. Here, alone, alienated and ostracised Frances finds comfort in her father's advice: "feel the truth and live by it, even if it means you must be alone" (442). Through the choices she makes, she affirms her moral values, reinforces her individual identity, but at the same time protests against the accepted rigid norms of the colonial environment. Hall posits that,

Identity is empowered when we act in accordance with
our own interests rather than react to others' interests.
Regardless of others' demands upon us, we must center
ourselves in our own identity and commitments. (1990: 73)

In empowering her identity, the events Frances concentrates on are those confined to her emotional landscape: conflicts, aspirations, moral dilemmas, doubts, fears and the matters of the human heart. To Mrs. Drake, another product of Victorian ideologies, "a girl who could sin so brazenly had to be handled with circumspection" (306). Frances is prohibited from being too familiar with the servants and the garden boys as "it quite upsets the order of things" (304). Dispossessed and disempowered she accidentally comes across a familiar musical box in a pawn- shop in Grahamstown. The musical box had belonged to Hubert Brompton, broken by Pusey, repaired by Crispin and mocked by Victor, who had subsequently been reprimanded by Walter. Not only does the musical box bring back memories of these characters, but it also reminds Frances of the landscape back home at St. Matthias. Impulsively she pawns her wedding ring for the musical box. According to Pocock "this experience with intimacies and seeming trivia is part of the same continuum whereby the memory indelibly records major events by fusing place and person" (1981: 16). Frances' actions symbolise all the thwarted energies she bears within her, especially the anger over the fact that the engagement ring was a farce as Victor had not even been present when his

mother had slipped the ring in her finger. It was "placed there without ceremony as if it legitimised her sin" (Poland 1993: 304). Frances realises that she has no business marrying Victor; both she and Victor were "trapped: by their childhood, their families, the expectations, the much vaunted destinies" (384).

Kate Chopin, a feminist author, posits that a "woman's whole life is one long lesson in patience and submission" (1994:151). Contrary to this philosophy Frances does not allow her mind to become incarcerated with only preconceived, inflexible thoughts and ideas. Her sense of social isolation and alienation later empowers her in a sense that it enables her to develop the 'detached' or 'objective' stance necessary to make a feminist statement. Suffocated by the conventions of a colonial landscape, she rebels against the status quo of the Victorian patriarchal system. She fully assimilates and comprehends the prejudices of conventional morality, and a part of her believes that despite all the external and emotional pressures, she ought to accept the dictates of the time. She takes full responsibility for attempting to liberate herself from her mother's authority and the demands of society. "She is aware that her identity will only be realised if she overcomes societal pressures to accept the subordinate role in social and personal affairs" (Jacob 2003: 31). Her upbringing, the landscape in which she finds herself, and the emotional environment automatically become part of her psychological composition and thus guide her actions and behaviour. Although she is on a quest to resolve her identity crisis, trapped by Victor she is unable to confront Walter directly about her feelings for him.

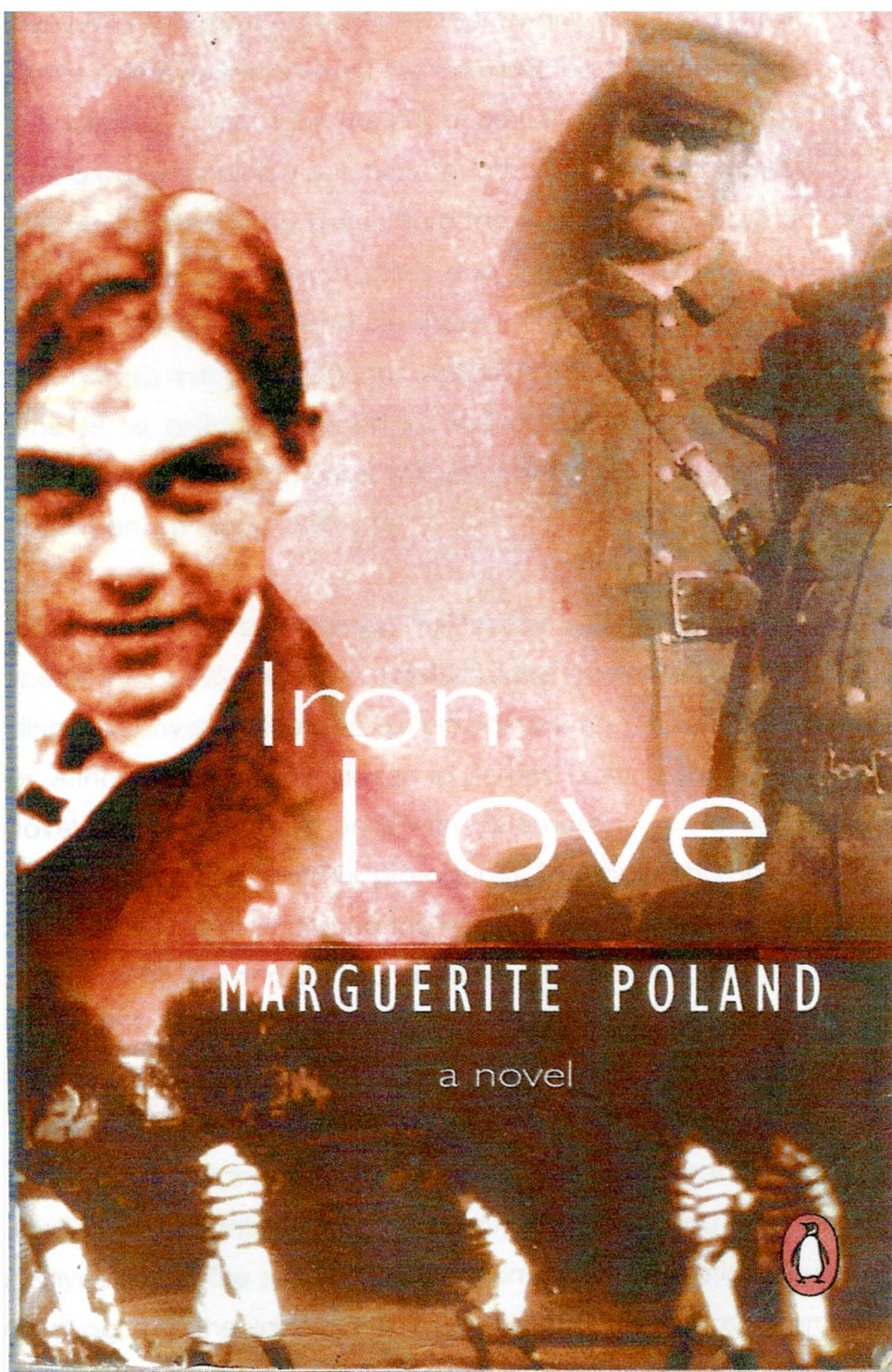
Walter too, dictated to by his Victorian conventionality, could not openly disclose his feelings for Frances: "Such feelings were not only inappropriate, they were inconceivable" (Poland 1993: 59). Honour and nobility ensure that he is fully conscious of their age difference and the prevailing status quo. Besides, he is also acutely aware of Frances' feelings for Victor who is a more likely suitor for her. He decides that as a priest he would have to deny his feelings: "Extinguish them. Laugh at them. Scorn them to death" (ibid). He does, however, develop a private and perceptive relationship using the

fantasy world of 'Plotz and Brodowski' as previously mentioned. Frances and Walter realise that they both have painful aspects of themselves to face about how much they desire certain things, and what compromises they needed to make to construct their identities in the real world.

On being sent to Mbokothwe, Walter experiences a sense of predestination he had experienced earlier at St. Matthias. The church and the mission station were desolate and had an air of abandonment about them. The landscape was barren -- no crops, no livestock. Walter concluded "Mbokothwe was the Bishop's penance for those who had erred or the mortification for those who wished to test a steely resolve" (71). He realises that the diocese in England did not understand the stress and pressures that their men had to face at the missions. "No exile devised by God or man, could have been more absolute for Walter" (283). When Brompton loses his sanity, in this God-forsaken landscape, it is the Bishop's instruction that Walter Brownley takes over the responsibility at Mbokothwe. On his first visit to Mbokothwe, Walter had chosen a passage in the Bible from Isaiah to read to Crispin and Benedict: "Behold I have refined thee but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction". This passage is significant since it was by Isaiah, a prophet chosen by God, who suffered greatly before becoming one of the greatest prophets. So too Walter had to suffer "the furnace of affliction" before achieving success. Mbokothwe was barren and the inhabitants hostile. Being an outsider, Walter realises, that if he behaves like Brompton, he would go insane and "end in a grave on some abandoned slope" (71). He needed to become an insider. Pocock comments, "to become an insider means to reduce one's isolation from place by developing a constellation of experiential ties: a knowledge of how to orient, a feeling for the hidden dimensions of particular places, an understanding of people and events, a sense of personal and interpersonal history in relation to place" (1981:89). Walter displays a willingness to learn the culture of the indigenous people and incorporate it in his own. He buries himself in his work and vocation, displaying neither bitterness nor regret at having to lose his self respect and dignity at having to accept such an offensive place to live in. Walter is aware of the rich mythologies and traditions of the 'natives' – that they were drawn from

nature and the landscape – and in order to marry the two cultures, he adopts a unique and tolerant approach. He understands that “we would serve them better if we understand their customs and respected their age old rights” (Poland 1993: 73), and that it is “a great arrogance simply to impose ourselves on them” (72).

Walter’s selflessness, courage and compassion for the indigenous people and his commitment and passion for the landscape help him to become part of the community. The sterile and dehumanising Mbokothwe is transformed and Walter develops a more profound insight into his heart and psyche. Though St. Matthias and Mbokothwe may be seen as embodying pre-capitalist models of feudal relationships, it later suggests a far more sophisticated and imperial mode of relationship, firmly based on a capitalist model of a highly individuated will to power. Poland’s target in this text, then, is to look at various aspects of Victorian life in a strange, but ultimately conquerable landscape. The textuality of her work is generally quite subtle, mirroring the subtlety with which language, landscape and texts help to shape the cultural identities of societies and the personal identities of the individuals she describes. She concentrates on individual and community identity, female emancipation, capitalism and evangelism, which she regards as symptomatic of the Victorian Zeitgeist (Poland 2000). All these issues manifest themselves not only in the landscapes in *Shades* but also in the landscapes in *Iron Love*, as is evident in my discussion of this work that follows.



Iron Love

MARGUERITE POLAND

a novel



4.3 *Iron Love* (1999)

Herbert was thirteen when he came to school. And what he remembered most – it had bewildered and distressed him in those first few weeks – was the unexpected disappearance of distance and of light. The hills at Molteno, the width of sky, the great unending vault, horizon to horizon, miles and miles apart, were what he knew. Here, he was sunk in a bowl of hills with the two church spires and the neat gardens, the white-fronted houses and the shops in the High Street where everything was out of bounds. And at school, all around him, the stone buildings leaned in and made deep shadows, which touched each other without the sun to warm them in between. (Poland 1999: 21)

This extract succinctly summarises the social setting and geographical landscape of the novel, *Iron Love*, capturing the loneliness and dread of the surrounding that envelops the all-male boarding school in which the narrative develops. Although we are introduced to Herbert Cummings on the first page of the novel and the narrative ends with his philosophy on events that take place at the school, he is not our protagonist. The main character is Charlie Fraser and the plot revolves around the lives of five other boys and their inter-relationships in a hostile and stark landscape. Marguerite Poland explores the school's hierarchical structures and the demands society imposes on these boys. The boys' painful journey from innocence to adulthood and maturity is clearly depicted against a primordial Eastern Cape landscape. The placing of the story predominantly in a specific environment, that is, the school, makes that place habitable and gives solidity, continuity and durability to the life that is lived there. The school itself is not simply an aesthetic feature, but is juxtaposed against the landscape as a sign of the imposed process of education and order. In addition, it is intended to serve as a site of continuing historical and ideological activity in terms of colonialism and the influence of the Empire.

Iron Love explores the lives of pupils in an all-male private school during the first decades of the twentieth century. Although the name of the school is not mentioned, Poland discloses that her inspiration for this novel was a photograph of the rugby team of St. Andrew's College in Grahamstown (see Rosenthal 1999: 5). As in *Shades*, where she resurrects the memory of her ancestors through the characters of Frances, Crispin and Victor, here she acknowledges that the protagonist, Charlie Fraser, is indeed her great-uncle. Her other characters are fictional, but Poland did serve a stint at St. Andrews College as a teacher and as researcher (see Chapter Six), and thus, she is able to capture authentically life experiences of the boys. The boys, Arthur Graham, Herbert Cummings, Davey Bennet, Sparrow Bell, Percy Gilbert and Hugh Unwin, are faced with issues pertaining to sports, bullying, girls, smoking and conscription just before the outbreak of World War One. The war itself is touched on by Poland, highlighting universally man's greed for power and land.

The control, which the boys try to exert over their situation, is so overwhelming that we easily overlook the power of the environment over the boys. It is a common assumption that most environments, once modified and conditioned by human existence, must inevitably be appropriate for human life. The novel constructs a clear distance between the students and the school, and the world outside. It is in fact "a hermetically sealed, male society, where deep bonds are formed and the world outside hardly intrudes" (von Klemperer 1999: 5). The setting becomes stifling as some of the boys, exerting their authority and power over others, make life unbearable and unhappy for the "nubs" (smallest new boys) and those considered "weak". Instead of an educational institution associated with uplifting thoughts, we have a traumatised landscape that reflects colonial repression.

Foucault postulates that "space is fundamental in any form of communal life; space is fundamental in any exercise of power" (in Robinson 1984: 252). The landscape in *Iron Love* is dominated by the boarding house and the reader needs to understand the way space and identity is produced as a social space the better to analyse use of spaces in this novel. Social interaction

takes place within spaces, which are subjectively determined and produced. According to Smith, "the production of space also implies the production of meaning, concepts and consciousness of space, which are inseparably linked to its physical production" (1984: 77). Living in a boarding-house implies that the boys are always in close proximity to each other. It is inevitable that each will encroach on the others' space, both literally as well as figuratively. What is important is the recognition of social locations, material realities and relations as they impact on identity formations and create the conditions for power relations within a specific environment. Also of importance are the actions and reactions to specific situations and activities. In *Iron Love*, rugby is the central activity and through this sport, reputations are built, identities developed and power and authority stamped. In all the photograph albums belonging to the boys, "it was the photograph of the rugby team that was placed reverently on the centre page" (Poland 1999:7). "But in Charlie's album there was only one picture of the team. It was not at the centre, surrounded by scrolls and annotated with names and captions. It was simply there for the record" (ibid).

Charlie Fraser was unlike the other boys. His indifference to his achievements and to words of glory made him an enigma amongst his peers, especially to the younger boys. Everyone looked up to him, a role-model of the times and place. The boys dreamed of being like him. All of them sought his validation. "Without it, self-esteem was tenuous. Without it they were lonely" (93). Influenced by the dictates of a prior Victorian era, it is inevitable that Charlie should interpret his actions as dictated by an imperial ideology, leaving the reader and the young nubs with the impression that he (Charlie) is something of a mystery. Charlie's difference stems from his developed inner resources, which enable him to live an actively analytical and critical relationship with his world. His struggle for a more reliable sense of self is because of his family background, including his disappointment at losing his father when he was quite young. His father's suicide had left an indelible mark on his life: "No one would ever speak about his father. No one would recall him. No one, it seemed, had ever known him. He was a man without character" (257). His mother was only twenty-one years old when he died. Charlie was still a baby

and as such had no memory of his father: "no face that he could constitute beyond the stiffness of the studio photograph, only remembrance of a little grave, in the high, barren cemetery with a view of hills" (215). Poland has an acute affinity with the natural world of the Eastern Cape, and her sense of the almost sacred significance of certain landscapes is a feature that dominates and enriches her novel. She poignantly describes Charlie's father's grave:

They had stood by the grave in the wind, in that high, bleak place, with the hills a deep, distant stain of blue, lost in dust-haze.

Eyes to the front.

No sentiment.

No betrayal.

Iron love.

Was this how it must be?

She had not brought flowers. She had picked instead two sun-speckled roses from an old briar on the hedge, almost peremptorily. (184)

By recognising and confirming the sacredness, in terms of respect, of the land, Poland, by extension, then recognises and confirms the sacredness of Charlie's own existence and identity. To confirm the reality of the grave is in essence, confirming the reality of Charlie's existence. The grave was "unadorned, but for the wild helichrysums, brave and wind burned, just inside the iron palisade (215)". As Cosgrove contends, "Landscape can be a powerful force in shaping an individual's emotional world of sensations and moods, thus contributing an affective dimension to those of function and intellect" (1984:13). Charlie's hard exterior is merely a façade for his immediate interior world. Beneath his deep-seated sorrow and anger are feelings of tenderness and care. This is evident in his selection of his "fag", Giles Braithwaite, and in his actions towards the dying Davey Bennet. These episodes will be discussed later in this chapter.

Ironically, Charlie was a decorated hero on the rugby field, within the bounds of the school, but during the war he displays streaks of recklessness and seems to dice with destiny. In his last letter to his mother he writes,

The other night, two sentries came for a light. Arthur was with me. He was the third to use the match but I took the cigarette from him. The third to use the match- he is the man who dies. I lit the cigarette for him. They laughed because –dispensation- I don't smoke. They said it wouldn't count. But it will. (Poland 1999: 423)

Charlie seemed to have signed his own death warrant – “a symbolic sort of suicide” (411), similar to his father's death. He knew that he was going to die that day and the sacredness of the landscape in which the battle takes place is especially poignant. When Charlie is shot “Even the mountain, in its far aloofness, seems to tremble” (425). Poland imbues these places with an emotional texture that feeds the reader's imagination. The mountain seems to communicate sorrow and grief at the loss of someone with so much potential. It is, to a great extent, the sacrifice by Poland of her protagonist, which takes the relationship of the boys, their development and Charlie's love for the landscape to an abstract symbolic plane. Thus, the demise of the protagonist is not a ‘real’ death as much as a dissolution, a merging into the landscape. This can be compared to when Charlie visits his father's grave and takes a small plant to place on top of the grave as a sign of homage- but the plant had died before he could plant it. “Did it mean that his connection was not real?” (215). As a form of remembrance and homage, Charlie had kept the small shrivelled root “tucked away among his things” (ibid).

When Davey Bennet, a pupil at the school, suddenly died, his body could not be transported home because it was too far and too expensive. Instead, he was buried in a municipal cemetery. The argument was that it was a more dignified place than being interred under a thorn tree in the veld. This is not only a contrast to Charlie's father's grave but also to Crispin Farborough (*Shades*), who was buried under the great oak instead of in the cemetery. Crispin's affinity for nature and his relationship with the landscape has already been discussed earlier in this chapter. Davey Bennet too, had an affinity for nature and was enthusiastic about landscape, his home and his sense of place. Before he could die, he had hidden one of his treasured photographs, entitled “My Hut”, in Charlie's album. Charlie had found it and studied it:

"obscure against the side of the boulder was a little packstone house with a thatched roof. Beyond, a hillside rose and to the side, fell off towards a gorge. A spindly kannabos grew up into the pale sky" (165). There is a vividness and detail in description of place, which elevates an otherwise insignificant spot.

It must be reiterated that a necessary condition for meaningful human existence is an attachment to a specific place. According to Catherine Middleton, "Attachment to a particular place gives a person security in his uniqueness by enabling him to appreciate some of the sources from which his life springs; roots in a particular place at a particular time influence a person's life by encouraging his growth and development while providing a firm emotional, social and intellectual foundation on which to build" (in Pocock 1981: 101). Charlie's attachment to home is plain to see: he is constantly looking out through his boarding room window beyond the "Amatolas that rise up out of the green-blue distance" (Poland 1999: 7). His photographs of his home were on the first page in his album. "And in between them, intermediary, was the landscape. Rivers and passes and hills and buildings and something called 'The Ruins' which Charlie Fraser had taken from every angle" (159). These photographs of the landscape and 'The Ruins' bear outward testimony to what Charlie holds dear. It speaks volumes of his attachment to the landscape, the place in which he had spent his formative years. It was the source, which influenced his growth, development and emotional make-up.

The concept of rivers, even if tangentially, is a motif that runs throughout Poland's works and Poland's landscapes are more often than not transected by water which becomes the tonal aspect of the scene. According to Cosgrove, "rivers inscribe the landscape with direction and their value in place is that they give space direction" (1984: 50). In fact rivers were explorers' guides or aids and were a means of "civilizing the landscape, bringing it into orderly being" (58). As much as rivers contribute to mapping topography, they also hold an aesthetic content which may actually stimulate a psychological response. In *Shades*, almost all the characters have an association with the river and in *Iron Love* Charlie's psyche unconsciously

associates the river with his home and his formative years. In *Shades* the setting is along the Mtwaku River and people are constantly crossing the river. According to Jacob, "This is symbolic of their crossing over to another state of consciousness" (2003: 72): for Frances it is the reawakening of her sensuality and sexuality; for Benedict it is his liberation; and for Crispin, it is the formation of an ideal: to be in tune with nature and everything that the South African landscape has to offer. Charlie Fraser, too, longs for the ideal, for his home, for meaning and identity and the existential need to belong, but the "silence and denial" ethos of the time dominates and controls his feelings. This means that the boys had to endure any hardship and suffering without complaining. Even the school motto reiterated this attitude: "NEC ASPERA TERRENT : nor do hardships terrify, nor adversity dismay" (Poland 1999: 387).

When speaking of the Victorian era, A. Webster says that for school-boys to acquire a position of social arrogance and authority, meant that they had to "divorce themselves from genuine emotion" (2000: 4). Bristow, too, postulates that aristocratic masculinity was the major moulding force in British imperialism and the duty of the educational landscape was "to cultivate, on the one hand, the virtues of the proper gentleman (fair play, team spirit, decorum) and to embrace, on the other, the values of competition, independence, and a wilful strength of mind" (1991: 58). The ethos of the time ensured that the boys, in the quest for an identity in a hostile landscape, quickly learned how to cope with homesickness, corporal punishment, being bullied and humiliated. Bristow posits that, "public schools were places where boys had to learn to stand their own ground" (54). It was a matter of honour and character and according to the school's Head, " Character is not what you know or do – but what you are. Character is that which makes a boy a man in afterlife" (Poland 1999: 271).

As outlined by Bristow's study of 'Empire Boys', on almost all issues Charlie was silent; the 'denial' came spontaneously. He was tenacious and resilient but at the same time sensitive and compassionate. He was aware of what the world expected of him, was endowed with vision and skill to be a leader. But,

because his father, who was a doctor, had committed suicide, the authorities drew the conclusion that Charlie himself must be unstable.

In the novel, Charlie's existence was defined altogether by his participation in the microcosmic school world, by his objective presence there. In fact, this was so much the case that he was barely an individual in his own right, "but rather a persona for the culture of the sporting class in society" (Jacob 2003:49). MacIver and Page posit that, "Society exists only where social beings 'behave' towards one another in ways determined by their recognition of one another" (1957: 6). The majority of the boys idolised Charlie. He was the epitome of colonial masculinity and his prowess on the rugby field further contributed to his identity construction. Once, he had secured a fine victory for his school by calmly scoring a glorious drop-kick in the dying seconds of the match. The local newspaper sensationalised the goal. The highest goal-scorer, Archer, was side-lined, and Charlie was the hero. But the unassuming Charlie was "unburdened by his reputation" (Poland 1999: 7). He was different and indifferent – a role model for up and coming youngsters to accept accolades without emotion, since this was the ethos of the era. He carried out the "silence and denial" commandment to the letter, always concentrating on his duty and never forgetting the words of his mother: "Always do your duty and not buckle, Charlie" (184). Charlie did not buckle. And if he were not practising with his rugby ball, alone, he would sit staring out his window. The window itself frames the landscape in classically picturesque fashion and although Charlie is insulated by the window from any hostility the terrain itself might afford, he longs for home and the familiar landscape in which he is most comfortable.

As far as mothers are concerned, in the landscape of the novel they play the most vital role. In fact, the title *Iron Love* has a direct bearing on the love of mothers whose task is to ensure that their boys are in fact 'men'. The Victorian era was repressive in terms of emotional expression and the concept of love, and the outpouring of this emotion was supposed to be an understated and largely hidden experience, not an ostentatious public or political one. Charlie Fraser's idealisation of his only surviving parent, although silent, is completely

in keeping with Victorian bourgeois morality, which places one's mother on a pedestal of impossible perfection. In the boarding house, mothers are visibly absent and they are the longed for representatives of home and a secure environment.

Poland captures poignantly the initial departure of Herbert Cummings from home to the boarding-school and the longings within him for his mother and the home landscape. He had journeyed by train and en-route had met Davey Bennet at Conway, past Cookhouse Station, Alicedale and other places which Poland briefly describes. The two boys were so engrossed in conversation that they "hardly noticed how the veld changed, drier and more distant, going south-west" (25). Finally, when they reached their destination they "subsided into silence as the great grey stone buildings of the school loomed in sight" (26). The overwhelming grey buildings 'looming' over the boys seem threatening, and raise within the boys feelings of anxiety and nervousness. This graphic detail paints a sombre picture in the Eastern Cape landscape and highlights the plight of those who cannot cope in an alien and hostile landscape. The use of the word "silence" is significant as it can be linked to the 'silence and denial' commandment of the environment. It reiterates the expectations of manliness and the departure from something or somewhere familiar. What is impressive here about Poland's style of writing is the integration of setting and theme, where the story grows organically out of the setting; and the setting is characterised by means of the narrative. Thus, the 'silence', 'stone buildings' and the landscape becomes a reflection of colonial expectations, the ethos of the era, and the desperate inner reality the boys were experiencing at that moment.

According to MacIver and Page, "Life and environment are, in fact, correlates" (1957: 74). They argue that the capacities and attributes of characters are relative to the whole environment in which they find themselves. Even when we move to a new environment, we adjust and so "through a process of constant selection and constant adaptation, the moving equilibrium of life is maintained" (ibid). When Herbert and Davey entered the dormitory they "stood forlornly and misplaced at the door" like

“temporary intruders” (Poland 1999: 6). For Herbert this environment was more telling than any which he had encountered earlier. That night, while changing for bed, he had glanced out of the window, looking at the landscape: “Out there was space and distance. Out there was wind. Home” (4). In bed he had cried silently, but Boag, the prefect, had heard someone snivelling and had pounced into the room, looking for that “mother’s brat” (ibid). Charlie Fraser, whose bed was next to Herbert’s, took the blame, contending that he had a bloodied nose from fighting earlier in the day.

After that – for ever after that – it was a matter of honour, Herbert’s due to Charlie Fraser: if he had to cry, then it would be silent. Let sorrow just leak out without a sound, without a breath. Lie still, quite still. And in the end, it would leak inward, undetected. (4-5)

And so, Herbert makes the appropriate adjustments in his life to fit in to his new environment. The environment becomes a ‘conditioning’ factor in his life and in the lives of all the other boys. The experience itself fulfils the stronger universal need to belong, to be recognised, to have an identity that blends in, rather than asserts itself.

Poland recreates “the conventions of colonial school life and she presents different strands of Victorian value first criticising, then balancing and finally reconciling them in the bid to construct her characters’ identities” (Jacob 2003: 54). She explores and exposes the fact that males too are subject to marginalisation in a social system, which is based exclusively on hierarchy, as is evident in the all-boys’ boarding school. Such an environment is capable of subverting normal human relationships, which can result in disastrous consequences. Furthermore, this isolated community, confined to the school’s boundaries, with its overabundance of hero worship, can cultivate a certain aristocracy of spirit – being prefects or the captain of a team can make a boy feel superior, resulting in condescension and a patronising attitude towards the lower orders. Percy Gilbert, Archer MaCullum and Hugh Unwin belong to different levels on the hierarchical structures. Percy is a prefect, Archer the rugby captain and Unwin, like many juniors, is dominated, taken advantage of, and marginalised in different ways. The evidence of a

dominating and repressive society is everywhere and Poland explores the emotional and social implications thereof. She penetrates the layers of hypocrisy, self-righteousness and selective morality that society has swathed itself in and she convincingly captures the 'silence and denial' ethos of the period in a representative landscape.

A significant character whom Poland presents as marginalised, dispossessed and alienated is Hugh Unwin. "Ousted from companionship," (Poland 1999: 19), Unwin is portrayed as a whingeing, puny, bedraggled individual who cannot cope with the rigours of the hostile social landscape in which he finds himself. He is academically and physically challenged and his quest for identity and recognition is extreme: "Unwin was a boy who, if the smallest attention was paid to him, grasped at it and then became a leech" (83). Appropriately named 'Unwin', he does not win at anything and is a loser in every sense of the word, especially in the social world. Draper (1987) posits, "Names suggest identity, so that to know the name is in some measure to know the person." Unwin knew he was a failure and fostered neither aspiration nor expectation: "But his father did. His father, so far away in his civil servant's office in Bulawayo, had many expectations. His mother – blindly – nurtured them as well" (Poland 1999: 366). Like Crispin (in *Shades*), who sought identity and refuge in the cairn and pirie bush, Unwin too seeks sanctuary in the generally familiar setting of a chapel. Ironically, he is blasphemous and blames God for his predicament. Poland's narrator reaffirms Unwin's belief that all boys are not born equal, and contrary to the biblical allusion that 'the meek shall inherit the earth' this is not so: "the meek do not inherit the earth" (312). From this we gather that Unwin's relationship with God, with his environment and with the people around him, is fraught with great difficulty.

Having been humiliated and the butt of jokes all his life, Unwin resigns himself to a state of permanent docility. His urge to retaliate against his condition is constantly thwarted and his internalisation of his predicament produces within him a state of repressed anxiety. What he is really criticising in his angry outburst in church is the school environment – his failure to adapt, to control it or to change the conditions. MacIver and Page posit that "Man does what

every living creature does in proportion to its intelligence: he selects and modifies his environment in such a way that the inevitable adaptation shall admit the greater fulfilment of his wants" (1957: 77). Unwin fails in the boarding-school environment and is driven to such frustration that he gets involved in a fight with one of the leaders physically bigger than himself: "Unwin was not fighting an equal in strength, but he knew- beyond his own rage and hate – that he and Archer were using each other for the same end. For validation. For notice" (Poland 1999: 312).

Both boys were young men in conflict with themselves. Their conceptualisation of colonial masculinity precipitates in their frustrated physical battle with each other. They needed approbation in a landscape that demanded masculinity: "They needed to be men" (313). But the respect Unwin had earned from the fight, from his blasphemous outburst and from his disrespect for Robbie, the head coach, was not enough to overcome his own shortcomings. He ran away from school to join the war "by default", was caught, brought back to school, and then expelled. Poland confirms that Unwin is a very important character in the novel and she wasn't going to do what might have been expected and have him commit suicide, like Crispin in *Shades*. Instead she says that, "the Unwins survive to be those thoughtful people one meets later in life" (von Klemperer 1999: 5). When World War I breaks out in 1914, Unwin is conscripted six thousand miles away from his old school. The geographic landscape changes, becoming even more hostile, and Poland graphically describes Sergeant Unwin, now a medical orderly with the second Rhodesians, in his role of assisting his ex-school friends and other war casualties.

With the outbreak of World War I, an important event in South African history, we see the tranquillity of the school altering as the first eddies of social change make themselves felt. A hard line discipline, similar to that at army training, was administered at school, which even offered basic cadet training. Patriotism was instilled in the boys and it was used as an instrument of disciplinary control in public schools. "It stood at the apex of a hierarchy of interconnected loyalties -- to one's house, one's school, and one's country"

(Bristow 1991: 69). Robbie, the rugby coach and cadet training instructor, prepares the boys for life in the army. He is responsible for propagating the imperialist ideology and his task, in the institution in which he finds himself, is to make men of boys. According to Saakana, "The colonial middle-class do not create institutions, but function in them on the behalf of the colonial, and as such, are victims of the institutions themselves" (1996: 166). Robbie's position in the Victorian dichotomising system is symptomatic of his colonial mentality, and in a sense, Robbie represents an insight to a larger vision of colonial society. To Robbie it is the unquestioned matter of maintaining and promoting the cultural identity of Victorian society, of inculcating colonial attitudes among his boys and increasing their consciousness of the life and destiny they have in common. Mills posits, "The development of a sporting culture for boys within public schools and for middle-class men as part of a national culture was intrinsic to the evolution of a particular form of colonial masculinity" (2005: 59). In other words this cult of fitness was acutely important within the colonial context and helped to develop the concept of imperial manliness. Physical prowess at the all-boys' boarding school was emphasised, in keeping with the British ideology that stressed these concepts of physical fitness and manliness.

Robbie had scorned "hot water, interior bogs and warm beds" (Poland 1999: 56) and the boys were proud, if afraid, of him. He taught them the art of bearing arms and practised war manoeuvres with them. They were well-trained to serve and "serve they would" (329) – a requirement of a male-centred imperial ideology. It is about conserving the 'fundamentals' of culture and identity; about sustaining cultural boundaries and boundedness. "They would do their duty and defend that empire, even with their lives" (ibid). Those who were leaving school had to go directly into war to fight for God, King and Country. "'Which Country?' said Mostert to Edward." Edward's response of "England... I suppose" (330), begins to question the imperial bond of the boys. Being part of the South African landscape, they were ironically, still the sacrificial lambs of England and their own mothers were guilty of betraying and indoctrinating them: "we'll have no tears. We'll soldier on"

(263). Thus, it is evidently clear that the ultimate responsibility for the boys' condition is the society which bred them.

The novel represents a journey from innocence to experience; it contrasts the early excitement of being in an all-boys' boarding school with the sense of alienation, stasis and entrapment that it brings. The boys are indoctrinated to believe that death in battle is the most glorious and manly of ends and the ultimate price to pay for one's identity – "there is no more heroic sacrifice than that" (317). Stoicism was required at all times. Poland conjures up a picture of young men anguished and consumed by late Victorian mindsets, incapable of transcending a history and a past, which represses and controls them. But the sublimated anger and fear was there; questioning whether death was going to make them men. Answers were "needed and denied. Explored voraciously. And silenced" (48). Valour on the battlefield gave the men mythical status and during this period there was an abstract worship of military heroism stemming from the brainwashing ideology of masculinity as mentioned earlier. The boys strive to emulate the master (British) culture and social realities as indices for status. They feel trapped within the syndrome of personal fulfilment, attempting independent constructions of identity whilst being wary of contravening the Victorian dictates of the times. There is, however, a sense that the colonial landscape, as defined earlier, has spiritually empowered them, uplifting them above their ordinary lives and yet nullifying these lives in the process. What adds pathos to Poland's text, though, is the knowledge that of the fifteen members of the first Rugby Team of 1913 – the focus of her narrative – only half survived beyond World War I. The deaths of the boys are not merely physical, but also have an enduring psychological effect on the parents and on the other boys.

Poland describes the deaths of the boys and compares them to the "perceived flair of the sordid deaths in France" (Webster, A. 2000: 4), where the horrifying deaths of the soldiers seemed glorious because of the romanticised places of their deaths. According to Percy, "Dying is dying, no matter where it is done" (Poland 1999: 407), but Herbert disagrees, romanticising the battlefields of France: "Who's ever heard of Latema Nek or

Salaita Hill when you've got Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge with all their grandeur? Who's ever heard of Taveta when you've got Tyne Cot and Poelcapelle?" (408). Herbert treats the landscapes of France as approaching the sublime, something inspirational and awesome. His landscape portrayal is similar to those of the Romantic painter Turner and the Impressionist painters Monet and Cézanne discussed in Chapter One. A feature of Poland's war landscape is that it functions on the level of both history and historical comment, describing the physical setting based on a reality and creating a mental perception of the events that transpired there. The boys' worlds of fantasy and reality, though, become so confused and the notion of self-identity so diluted that it is almost impossible to grasp comprehensively what is fiction and what is not.

When Arthur dies, Unwin compares the cemetery with its "picket fence and masses of bougainvillaea" (413) to that of Taveta "which is bleak and strong" (ibid). The healing power inherent in the landscape surrounding Arthur's grave is foregrounded and is portrayed as a nurturing spirit, to look to as a source of revised, healing identity. Unwin does not find it a gloomy place, "not like Davey Bennet's little palisaded plot above the station; not like the stark and lonely stones at Taveta ranked below the iron hills and the far, dispassionate eye of the great mountain floating in its tropic dreaming, crowned with snow" (413 - 414). This was the place Charlie Fraser's grave lay, obscure and unadorned. In this landscape Unwin redefines himself as a person, shifting the terms of his relationship with the soldiers through whom he gains some measure of self-worth. Poland reiterates the idea that the identity of the land precedes and informs human existence. The soldiers become inanimate objects fused with the geometrical shapes of the land and their merging with the landscape is complete. The portrayal of the landscape becomes effective as it is now a symbolic resource for the construction of collective identities.

Following the social code of stoicism, the mothers, like the boys, are largely silent on many issues. The silence of the mothers in *Iron Love* is, however, resounding. As mentioned earlier, the title *Iron Love* revolves around a

mother's love although she is physically absent from the hostile environment of the boarding school in which her boy must survive. By drawing attention to the silence and absence of the mothers, the issue of female subjugation in a colonial landscape is addressed. "The mothers are silent and obscure and there are no blatant attempts by them to overturn the patriarchal society" (Jacob 2003: 51). The patriarchal power base is adhered to and upheld since it is perceived that there exists a social contract where women are expected to assume the subservient role and obey and comply with the wishes of men. Charlie's mother assumes her subservience because of the conventions of her time. In *The Perfect Woman*, a book belonging to Sparrow Bell's mother, the opening lines reiterate these concepts: "Men must rule the Race, but women govern its Destiny. We must not lose sight of her most divine and sublime mission in life -- womanhood and motherhood" (Poland 1999: 71).

Poland juxtaposes the boy's anguish with the physical and mental suffering of their mothers: their oppressive existence and the pain at having to be separated from their sons. Mothers are forced to submit to the exigencies of male society and they show difficulty in seeing through the layers of false consciousness, to confront reality and make a difference in their lives by attempting a paradigm shift. This stoicism, this holding back from emotion, is a concept passed on from generation to generation. Fraser's grandmother had always said: "We'll have no tears. We'll soldier on. Walk straight. Eyes wide. Chin up" (104).

The ambiguity of the Victorian philosophy of life is demonstrated, both by the mothers and by their sons in the narrative. The mothers display passivity towards their situation – anything that transpires is simply a retribution for their wrongs. It seems as if the mothers had, by default, abandoned their sons. The boys on the other hand had also to hide their feelings yet they longed for affection and their mothers' touch. When Davey Bennet was delirious on his death-bed, he longed for his mother: "Call my mother. Why didn't they call his mother. Call her now" (162). Fraser's mother at his father's grave hid her emotion, while he secretly wanted to share their sorrow together: "She did not look at him. He had wished she would" (184). Herbert too recalls his own

mother “tracing a proprietary finger over his. And that look” (20). The schoolboys’ perception of love, “even the mother’s” (263), is that it is unreliable. Although the boys feel that “all love is betrayal” (ibid), Helen Brain feels that this is not the case, as the mothers, although absent, are present spiritually and they “watch from the sidelines, and let their own sorrow leak inward” (2000: 5).

According to Nfah-Abbenyi, “identity must be constantly constructed in the context of other identities, always shifting depending on whom one encounters” (1997: 33). Though written in relation to African women’s lives, the same is true for the white women of this novel. In a closed landscape such as this, in which women’s identities are drawn through engagement in the same mindset and holding similar dispositions, these spaces offer some sense of stability, avoiding the risk-taking and uncertainties of that which is new and unexpected. This implies strongly that individual identities are a shared understanding of what it is to belong to the environment, as well as to the social groupings within the landscapes. Any deviation during this “silence and denial” era was so minor that it did not make any impact to foster change. In fact, any effort to emancipate women merely served to catch them at a deeper level of patriarchal entrapment. The colonial culture in *Iron Love* and *Shades* demonstrates the silencing that the imposition of a male symbolic order forces on the feminine.

Charlie’s mother visited his memorial plaque in the church every week to polish and shine it. This was the only means, considering the ethos of the times, by which she could validate herself and prove her motherhood. She did not speak about him – “The silence is customary of an era” (Webster, A. 2000: 4). The old black verger, who helped Herbert locate the plaque, told him that the soldier’s mother was very young and although she did not tell him that she was the mother, he drew his own conclusions: “She doesn’t talk when she is here. But only the mother of a boy who is dead has eyes like that” (Poland 1999: 432). Nothing highlights a mother’s need for a maternal identity quite so vividly as her weekly vocational polishing of her son’s plaque (Jacob 2003: 52). Her love was “all in the heart – iron love to guard the fragile flame within;

iron love to keep intrusion out" (Poland 1999: 431). It is not only Charlie's mother who has to suffer this fate, but also the other colonial mothers who are dispossessed of their sons, sent to war, defending the Empire and the colonies. Charlie's death graphically portrays the profundity of his mother's love. The limitlessness and greatness of the mother's love is the ennobling aspect of their relationship. "And love was something sunk in each of them and in the very stones, just as bound to them as the great door of the House was bound to the rugby team in each immortal annual photograph posed against the backdrop of winter creeper and iron-studded wood" (53).

Poland intricately incorporates women's psychology, alienation and aspirations with elements from the landscape, reiterating the iron-love of the mothers by sinking it in 'stone'. Along with the urge of every female to affirm her subjective existence, Poland seems to suggest there lies the urge to forego liberty and become an object, deprived of every value in certain circumstances. Seen from the vantage point of today's progressive society, the mother's ethics and forms of behaviour may seem unduly sensitive, but seen in the moral context of their period, these scruples are fully justified. According to Morrell, there was in the mothers of the Victorian era a "strange interweaving of devotion to the martial virtues of the British Empire with a sense of the personal tragedies inherent in that involvement" (2001: 145). Although we are not given an insight into the mothers' thought-processes, we recognise their battle with the contradictions inherent in their lives and the multiple demands that these same contradictions make on them as wives and mothers. The relationships between mothers and sons in the narrative explicitly portray gender-related hierarchies and dualisms that prescribe and ground women's entrapment as is evident in the novel. Thus, while many women operated in oppressive gender contexts, many gave their whole-hearted support to 'their' men. Furthermore, the repressive, colonial landscape, as described by Poland becomes an embodiment of human emotion.

It is the women who teach their sons, by example, how to be the custodians of 'iron love' and so contribute to their construction of an imperial identity.

Thus, while the subjugation of women and gender stereotypes are made conspicuous by the women's absence from the narrative, by contrast the need for validation, recognition and identity amongst the boys in school is most pronounced. Poland's exploration of the all-boys' educational institution as a source of identity creation, where she pushes blacks and females to the background, portrays the reality of colonial mentality. In her penetrating exposure of colonial school life, she attacks the dominating classes, who are prescriptive in qualities required for the construction of limited and pliable identities.

CHAPTER FIVE

INDIGENOUS LANDSCAPE

- Uchibidolo: The Abundant Herds: A descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour-pattern terminology and naming practice (1996)

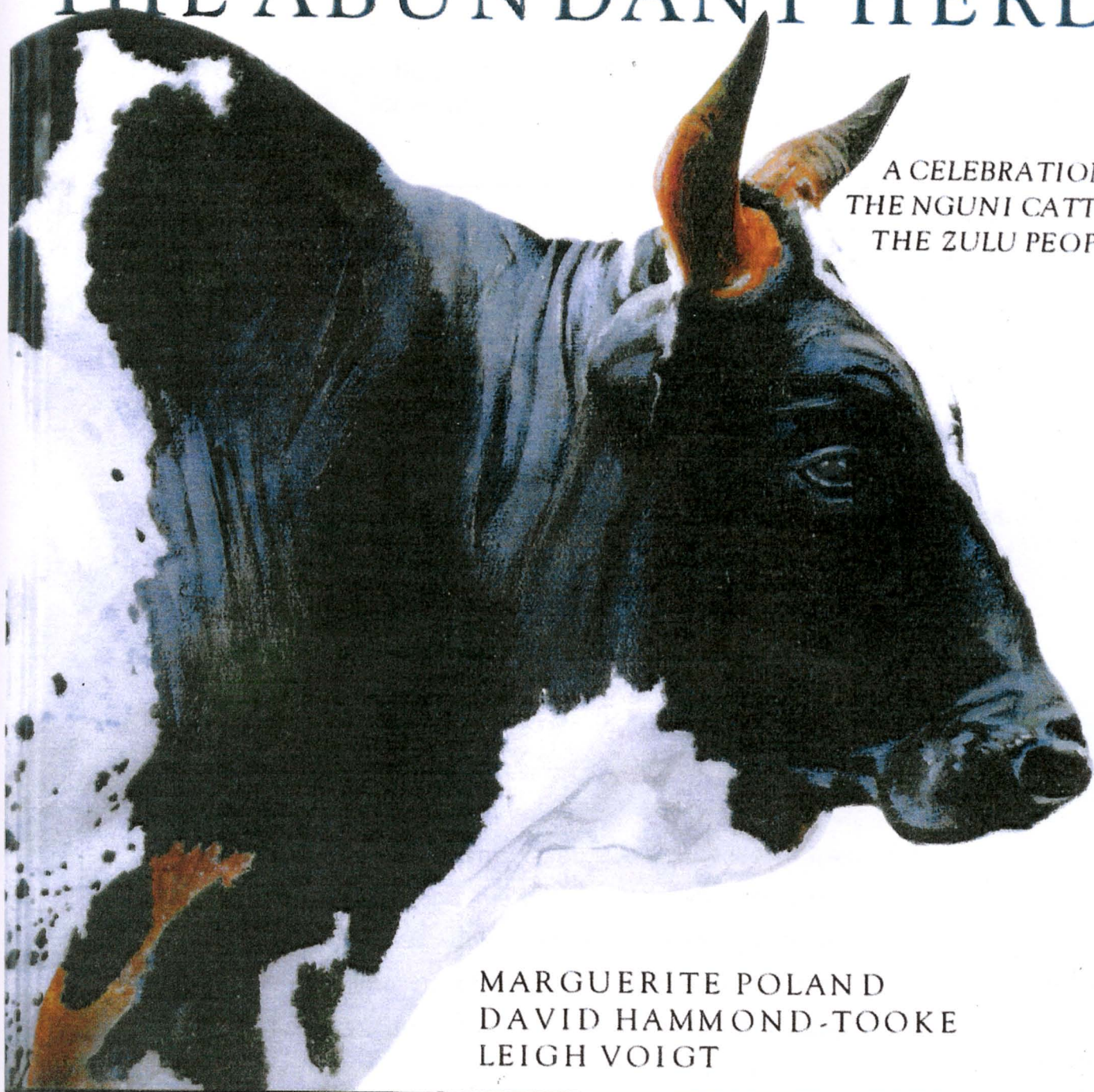
and

*The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni
Cattle of the Zulu People* (2003)

- *Recessional for Grace* (2003)

THE ABUNDANT HERDS

A CELEBRATION OF
THE NGUNI CATTLE OF
THE ZULU PEOPLE



MARGUERITE POLAND
DAVID HAMMOND-TOOKE
LEIGH VOIGT

5.1 UCHIBIDOLO: THE ABUNDANT HERDS: A descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour-pattern terminology and naming practice (1996)

and

The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People (2003)

Descriptions of the environment are not neutral, but imply values and meanings; keywords such as landscape and nature are the locus of complicated, and often conflicting, feelings and ideas.

(Murphy 1998: 158)

In this section I have undertaken to examine Poland's doctoral thesis, UCHIBIDOLO: THE ABUNDANT HERDS: A descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour-pattern terminology and naming practice (awarded in 1996 by the University of Natal); and to look simultaneously at the book, *The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People* (2003), which is a reworking of her thesis. Both pieces of work are largely sociological and based on factual matter. The term 'uchibidolo' in the title of the thesis is a reference to the abundance of the Nguni herds, not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of diversity, multiplicity, evocation and metaphorical associations linked with naming cattle and with their colour-pattern terminology. Poland's research culminated in the writing of the novel *Recessional for Grace*, which is a fictional reworking of *Abundant Herds*, which in turn is bringing her PhD thesis to a more popular audience. In an interview with Molver, Poland explains why she wrote *Recessional for Grace*:

I'm a novelist, not an academic, but of course the cattle work was academic. The cattle somehow are a metaphor

for love, and writing that book was bringing together everything I've ever written ... and somehow the work on the cattle brought together that whole way of seeing, of the most ordinary and prosaic and unthought of things that are full of poetry and beauty. (2004: 9-10)

The Abundant Herds: A Celebration of the Nguni Cattle of the Zulu People differs from Poland's previous books being more a reference book rather than a fictional narrative. Poland's aim in writing this book is not only to record a part of the Zulu heritage for posterity, but also to celebrate the richness of Zulu linguistic versatility and creative imagination for a larger audience than the limited academic audience of a doctoral thesis. For her efforts Poland was awarded a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Department of Arts and Culture (2005). Written in collaboration with the late David Hammond-Tooke and Leigh Voigt, this coffee table book with its array of finely textured illustrations offers a historical perspective of Nguni cattle; their role in Zulu cultural life and in the oral tradition; and more importantly how they are identified and named in relation to natural phenomena and to the indigenous and cultural landscape. As explained in Chapter One, an indigenous landscape refers to a space that is inhabited by the indigenous people of a place making that particular spot into a humanly meaningful place, by the very living that takes place within it; whilst a cultural landscape refers to a way of seeing landscapes that emphasises the political, social, economic, spiritual and aesthetic interaction between human beings and nature over time. As noted earlier in Chapter One, inhabited landscape is socially produced and is pervaded by a cultural heritage. Thus, in analysing Poland's reference book my emphasis will be on indigenous landscape although it should be borne in mind that one cannot separate indigenous landscape from cultural landscape in this context.

Poland uses chapter headings as conduits to link each aspect of cultural and indigenous life and, for the purposes of this thesis, I will use the same sub-headings to facilitate my discussion of her thesis as well as the reference book, which grew out of the thesis:

Chapter 1: Cattle in Zulu Life

Chapter 2: The Poetry of Naming

Chapter 3: Cattle and the Oral Tradition

These sub-headings will fit my thesis, as it will show how Poland's fascination with Nguni cattle speaks to her deep links to a particularly African landscape and her efforts to find a place within it for herself.

5.1.1 Cattle in Zulu Life

In this section of Poland's thesis and subsequent book, *The Abundant Herds*, Poland gives us a brief overview of Zulu tradition, a succinct history of Nguni cattle and an in-depth look at the role cattle play in the life of the Nguni. The term 'Nguni cattle' is derived from the name of the people who owned the cattle – the black tribes of Africa, collectively known as Nguni people. The genesis of Nguni cattle is the Bos Taurus and the Bos Indicus cattle that came to Africa some 8000 years ago. With migrating tribes, cattle moved southwards with their owners and evolved into the hardy breed we know today as Nguni. In 1932 Professor H.H. Curzon attempted to breed true to type Nguni cattle and this resulted in the formation of the Bartlow Combine Breeding Station at Hluhluwe (see Poland 1996: 10). For purposes of this thesis I will be focusing on the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people of KwaZulu-Natal.

The relationship between Zulu and cattle is symbiotic and intimate: cattle are regarded as companions, intermediaries between the living and the spiritual world and as a source of milk, meat, hide for clothing and even dung, which may be used for fuel and as a bonding agent in construction work. Every facet of Zulu life is influenced by cattle, from social events, to religious beliefs, to status in a community and even to thought processes. Cattle play a role in every important landmark in a Zulu's life: in conception, in birth, at puberty, as bride price, in matrimony and in death. This extra-ordinary intimacy and complex relationship with their cattle is often referred to as "The African Cattle Complex" (Poland et al 2003: 15). Hammond-Tooke ascribes this

intimacy to the landscape. For hundreds of years the physical realities of South Africa, in terms of vegetation, animal life and climate profoundly influenced the settlement patterns of human beings. Hammond-Tooke posits that the Zulus had intentionally or unintentionally strategically occupied the regions between the Drakensberg and the Indian Ocean, and have now become an intimate human ingredient of the landscape. It was a landscape of "tumbling hills, bisected by many rivers and streams, with deep valleys and ravines buried in indigenous forest, and where, even in winter, the dry ochred grasslands of the Midlands sport green mantles of sweet thorn (*Acacia karroo*)" (14). Although the specific geographic identity of the KwaZulu-Natal landscape is described, with the subtle implications of the potential for human community development and the survival of cattle, landscape becomes a complex notion stretching beyond geography. According to Noyes, "The structures of human society are thus not only describable in historical terms, they are also eminently spatial" (1992: 11). Paul Carter has also admirably demonstrated this in his book *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987) – which was referred to in Chapter One of this thesis. For all its tangled wilderness, the KwaZulu-Natal landscape is the place where the Zulu society and cattle can be perfectly accommodated within the natural surroundings.

Poland et al show how the lay of the land in KwaZulu-Natal, its fundamental topography and the underlying anatomy of the landscape are suitable for agropastoralism. Agropastoralism demands suitable soils for growing crops and for pasturage. The northern part of KwaZulu-Natal, noted for its undulating terrain and grassy hills and slopes is ideal for cattle grazing and pasturage. The many streams that flow from the Drakensberg Mountain to the Indian Ocean ensure rich, arable soil for crops and the landscape abounds in vegetative life – "The Drakensberg Mountains chain acts as a conduit for the rains that travel in from the Indian Ocean" (Mason: 2003: 4). The result is the creation of a strap of woodland between the mountains and the sea that is both well watered as well as fertile. The early nineteenth-century Nguni-speaking inhabitants occupied not only the Drakensberg coastal sector, but also the entire coastal corridor of South Africa: from an area close to Delagoa Bay to the frontier of the Cape Colony (see Roberts 1974: 39). Thus the

nineteenth-century Zulu communities were blessed with a landscape in which they could be self-sufficient, without having to move out to look for green pastures like the other pastoral nomadic nations of Africa. In the establishment of a spatial domain for history, it is this interrelation with nature, which produces space. This may be supported by Noyes' statement that "Society establishes its territories as real spatial fields structured in a certain way by subjects acting in the world" (1992: 15). After the Zulu's 'colonisation' of this area in the nineteenth-century there existed a stability to this traditional landscape, to the animals inhabiting it and to its past. They had made this pasture land their home.

Within such a settled, stable landscape, the Zulu homestead (*umuzi*) is a microcosm of the world, a central arena in which the symbolic relations of people and place are negotiated. The homestead itself is a circular construction of dome or bee-hive shaped huts surrounding the cattle byre; the spatial arrangements of homesteads and the use of space within each dwelling hut carry a symbolic message (see Poland 2003 et al: 22). As the basic unit of settlement, the *umuzi* is, wherever possible, built on a slope to provide drainage during the rainy season and it is constructed almost entirely from material resources attained from the natural landscape. Sizes vary according to the status of the occupants and the huts are made of thatch-grass and reeds. The interior floor is a densely compacted mixture of anthill soil and cow-dung polished to give it a dark green marble appearance. Thus, homesteads dotting the hills and indigenous landscape of Kwa-Zulu Natal are in keeping with the natural environment and they create indigenous identities that have a palpable presence. It is the traditional, cultural attitude of the Zulu people to define their places in and responsibility to the rural landscape. That culture is rooted in the earth and creates a surrounding equivalent to the poetry of Zulu speech and syntax.

The intimacy of cattle and Zulu people is indicated and reinforced by the fact that the cattle byre (*isibaya*) is to be found in the centre of the family settlement. In other words, the Zulu dwellings encircle the 'kraal' ensuring that the cattle presence is always there, forming a close and interactive

relationship. Cattle represent wealth and the central cattle-pen is an area of both hierarchical and ritual significance (see Roberts 1974: 28). It houses the herds at night, winter grain is stored beneath it in flask-shaped pits, and all important administrative and religious ceremonies are conducted within its boundaries (ibid). The spatial, concentric arrangement of the huts affords the cattle protection from wild animals and cattle rustlers. Furthermore, it ensures that the Zulus' wealth is always close at hand since the possession of cattle is of vital importance to the structure of Nguni society: both the substance and status of individual chiefs was estimated in terms of cattle ownership.

Over and above this the family settlement is the nexus of symbolic and social relations among the living and between the living and deceased relatives who continue to live as ancestral spirits. The ancestral spirits, known as *shades* (already discussed in Chapter 3) are a guiding force in a traditional Zulu's life and they believe that the spirits embrace solutions to all earthly problems. Mason contends that contact with the spirits is maintained as a part of everyday life and at all ceremonial occasions, and they are worshipped through song and dance, and invoked when eating or drinking (2003: 16). Among the Nguni, the process of death and burial does not automatically make the deceased an ancestral spirit. In fact, a special ritual is necessary "to effect the change of status from deceased person to ancestor" (Hammond-Tooke 1993: 153). The belief is that the *shades'* local habitation, "where chiefs and headmen were always buried" (152) is the cattle byre, and this accounts for the sense of the sacred, a reverence allotted to every cattle byre. Furthermore, the ancestral sphere of the byre functions as a place of important religious practices where the spirits are invoked to either maintain harmony between living and dead, bestow blessings, or protect the family from evil. Thus, the centrality of the byre in the homestead has a double significance – to house the valued herds, as well as function as a place of worship and spirituality. A common reason for housing both entities in one environment is that certain cattle have been identified according to their appearance and beauty and have been conceptualised and consecrated in association with the deceased. For example, in many homesteads a cow referred to as "the *inkomo yamadlozi* (beast of the *shades*) is singled out for its

great beauty and consecrated to this role" (Poland et al 2003: 27). In attributing such an important status to the animal, cognisance is taken of the cow's conformation and emotional stability rather than its colouration. The belief is that these attributes will appease the ancestors and the *shades* will "feel happy" (28). The *inkomo yamadlozi* is restricted from all types of labour, is never physically punished, never slaughtered, nor sold.

In this regard Grace's *inala* cow in *Recessional for Grace* is afforded the same reverence when Godfrey and Grace consecrate their cow. Working with indigenous cattle in an African landscape, both are fully aware of the rituals necessary to keep in touch with the spirits of the ancestors and in true Zulu tradition they anoint their *inala* "bringing this cow to them (the ancestral spirits) and making them glad" (Poland 2003: 137). One of Godfrey's endnotes in *Recessional for Grace* confirms his profound understanding of Nguni culture and the importance of the ancestral beast to them:

Endnote 23: Inkomo yeminyanya: beast of the ancestors. This is an animal that may never be slaughtered, or sold or exchanged. In doing so lies the greatest sanction. The beast of the ancestors is chosen as a sacred trust. Its covenant is binding through life until death. No expedience – financial or scientific – should interfere with its status. (245)

Also important to the Zulu are the three *ukwendisa* cattle that newly married women take to their new homes (this should not be confused with the *ilobolo*, which the men have to pay their fathers-in-law). When the bride's father-in-law accepts her gifts it signifies that he has accepted her into his family. Through the *ukwendisa* cattle the bride remains "in contact with the ancestors of her father's family" (Poland et al 2003: 28). Like the *inkomo yamadlozi*, the *ukwendisa* cattle are revered and may not be slaughtered irrespective of how old they may be. The official traditional engagement of the couple also revolves around cattle. When the boy's family approaches the girl's family to ask for her hand in marriage, they negotiate a bride price.

The *ilobolo* negotiations revolve around how many head of cattle the girl's father is prepared to accept for his daughter. This is a form of compensation to the father for the loss of his daughter and the labour she provides at home. Since the cultural landscape of the Zulu allows polygamy – as long as they had cattle for *ilobolo* – the *ilobolo* system produces an exponential curve of wealth: more cattle means more wives, who produce more children, who in turn provide more domestic labour and productivity. Furthermore, when the daughters are married off, the father gains more cattle in the form of *ilobolo*. Thus, the *ilobolo* system means that a husband has legal control over his wife and future offspring. The richer a man, the more wives he can afford to buy. It is an effective way of consolidating wealth and future prosperity. If a wife is barren and cannot conceive, or if she dies before giving birth to children, the *ilobolo* has to be returned and subsequently, she is to be replaced by another woman from the same clan (see Poland et al 2003: 31).

This system or attitude towards women locates, in terms of subject positionality, the Zulu women lower than their men and Booker reinforces this hypothesis by positing that “central to the issue of women as property are the traditions of polygamy and of motherhood” (1998: 47). The taking of another wife (polygamy) is the fullest expression of the inequality between men and women and is a clear depiction that traditional Zulu society is patriarchal. The homestead, too, is a form of hegemonic male space, structured in such a manner that it reveals a gendered logic that is visible in the attitude towards wives and women. The spatial layout of a man's homestead reveals the number of wives he has, ranking them in order of marriage. The function of this social expression has major legal implications since it determines and governs inheritance and succession to chieftainship. All these cultural practices have influenced the social constructions of traditional Zulu women's sexual identity and have relegated them to an inferior status. Furthermore it reinforces patriarchy and the man's status as the undisputed head of the traditional Zulu homestead.

In terms of cattle imagery, Zulu men aspire to be like bulls – virile and powerful. A large bull in a cattle byre is very important to a traditional, rural Zulu

homestead. Derwent posits that “the image of a bull standing majestically in the middle of a cattle byre, neck stretched back in a bellow, is strongly linked to the Zulu patriarch and his virility” (1998: 62). Traditionally, the head of the household has to get up very early in the morning to urinate before his bull does. If the bull urinates before the master, then it is believed that the “bull’s aura or energy will overshadow that of his master” (ibid). The bulls’ horns also played a vital role in the lives of the Zulu, especially perceptible during the Anglo-Boer war. During the reign of Shaka, the encircling tactics – *impondo zankomo* (bull’s horns) – were employed on the battlefields. The main body of warriors (*isifuba*, ‘chest’) would face the enemy and the two wings (*izimpondo*, horns’) would encircle the enemy and force them towards the centre. In attack, the ‘chest’ was the strongest contingent, which closed with the enemy and held them fast, while the two ‘horns’ (flanks) performed their enveloping action. “Ideally, when the tips of the horns met, they combined to attack from the rear” (Roberts 1974: 45). Historically, this strategy, devised by King Shaka, became famed for its ingenuity and association with cattle. Poland posits that cattle are not only known “by names which describe their colour pattern and horn shape but also by various terms which concern the type of beast, its age, physical features etc” (1996: 218). Poland covers much of this ground in her doctoral thesis, which centres on the importance of cattle in Zulu life and identity. More will be made of this in the next section, ‘The Poetry of Naming’.

5.1.2 The Poetry of Naming

According to Poland’s thesis and *The Abundant Herds*, most breeds of cattle have a fixed colour pattern that is characteristic for that particular breed. For example, Hereford cattle have a red body colour with a white face, Charolais are white. Some other breeds may have more than one basic body colour, whilst others still may have multiple colours, which may constitute spotting, or brindling. Brindling refers to a pattern of intermingling colours, which may be marbled or streaked. Poland observes, “ The striking aspect of the naming of cattle colour-patterns in metaphorical terms is the very close

link between the colour-patterns of the beast and the bird, plant, animal or object with which it is associated" (347). Nguni cattle are noted for both their solid as well as multiple colour patterns. As tribes became less nomadic and more settled in South Africa, more focus was turned towards the landscape. In other words, sensitivity to and association with nature increased and Nguni cattle subsequently acquired names that were richly and vividly associated with the settled landscape. Images of rural life provided the symbols and analogies through which cattle names were most tellingly expressed. In categorising the cattle Poland et al claim that "the system of naming is highly complex, and, although primarily used for purposes of identification, it is nevertheless, characterised by metaphorical and allusive language" (2003: 34). Poland, in her thesis, proceeds to undertake a painstaking cataloguing of cattle names from cows with solid colours to those with some characteristic or function that they may perform. Many of the terms are linked with birds, plants, trees and other natural phenomena. Each description involves the extensive use of Nguni descriptions that create a sort of textual collage. It is, however, not merely a piece of intricate verbal tapestry but a profound statement of traditional Zulu consciousness that endows cattle with a multiplicity of significances. Thus, the specificity of their vision of cattle -- their knowledge of the names and uses of all flora and fauna surrounding them -- comes through in the text, representing their experiences with the landscape. In this regard, Zulu names for cattle may not necessarily have an exact translation in common language, displaying an insight or configuration of experience peculiar only to the herdsman.

For her thesis, Poland obtained photographs from Schroeder and de la Harpe's *Nguni Cattle Register*, which was compiled early in the twentieth century. The pictures were taken by Mr Roger de la Harpe of the Natal Parks Board and Mr Robert Papini of the Natal Museum Services (see Poland 1996: 85). In her published book, however, Poland utilises the artistic talent of her cousin, Leigh Voigt, whose cattle portraits in *Abundant Herds* are accompanied by captions. The captions, translations and pictures have strong attachment to the indigenous landscape. Leigh Voigt expertly captures these textual descriptions in her paintings enabling her to capture

the nature of the cattle, which she translates into paint. Poland's observations of the natural phenomena depicted on the hides of the cattle are acute and it is through her keen observation and word play that the cattle's allure is constructed. In fact, her minute detail conveys a flawless photographic verisimilitude.

There is a distinct thread of using photographs and paintings to authenticate the narratives in Marguerite Poland's works (see Chapter One, Poland's photographic inspiration for *Iron Love*, Grace's photograph in *Recessional for Grace* to be discussed, as well as the rock art discussed in Chapter Three). Together with their aesthetic value, the paintings in *Abundant Herds* form an important documentary function in recording oral history. The paintings are not only about the construction of cattle identities, though that is what Poland's study has taken as its focus. It is about place, vanishing naming practices, imbricated time, disappeared places, and the co-existence of these places with the places we inhabit now. The images of the cattle and parts of the Zulu heritage which Poland has recorded for posterity (Poland et al 2003: 13) assert their having been in the world before the introduction of colonial cattle and cross-breeding. They are also a means to an identification that is qualitatively different from Poland's descriptions and the Nguni's evocative imagery. Paradoxically, of all the visual arts, photography is the one "in which representation is simultaneously, ontologically, closest to the object and furthest from it: closest since it is the direct, physical emanation of the object, its luminous imprint, which sticks quite literally to its skin (the celluloid); furthest because it maintains the object as absolutely separate, distant, opposite to the real" (Petro 1995: 167). In other words, whilst some may view the metaphorical descriptions as strained, decorative or superfluous, the paintings and the photographs represent a mirror reality of the actual animal under discussion. Thus, these forms authenticate and verify the captions although they are haunted by their separateness from the thing captured in film or paint.

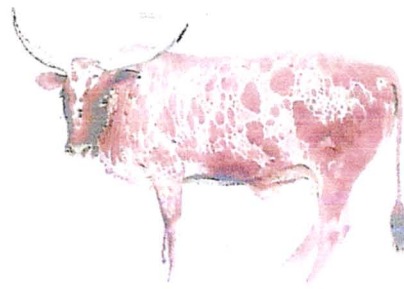
Abundant Herds illustrates that it is not only the paintings of colour patterns that help one describe and identify the cattle, but also metaphorical terms.

Poland and Hammond-Tooke posit, "Metaphor works by identifying things perceived as analogous and postulating an identity between them – so that one is the other" (Poland et al 2003: 35). A metaphor provides a multidimensional quality of experience. It is a natural – even essential – way of expression. Unlike a simile, a metaphor does not demand the use of extra words of explicit comparison; it conveys a relation between two things by using a word (or words) figuratively instead of literally. The Zulu construction of terms is a parallelism or inflexion and imitation of similar objects. It reveals their grasp of the environment with all its complexities and ambiguities. Thus, more often than not the metaphorical expressions are related to the African landscape and its prime importance is to make identification by association possible. They present to us a world that appeals to our senses by giving us a more or less vivid and recognisable impression of some natural scene or natural phenomena. A typical example is the traditional description given to the *Onychognathus morio* cow, a tricoloured beast whose colour-pattern suggests metaphorically a Redwing Starling in flight. Its head, hump and points are purplish black while the flanks are rich red or brown (see pictures below). Whilst the *Onychognathus morio* is the 'Redwing Starling', the black, dark brown or red *intulo* with its speckled head and rump is the 'lizard'.



The traditional Zulu's keen powers of observation and intimate knowledge of nature assists in the creation and formulation of identifiable constructs for their most prized possessions. Their choice of subjects to conjure up such analogies and metaphors are "local and contextual" (ibid), making it easier for herdsmen to memorise, since they are then able to create visual pictures of

what is familiar to them. Stockwell claims, "Some conventionalised conceptual metaphors are so powerful and pervasive, that they generate many expressions and become the 'naturalised' way of recognising and communicating the world" (2002: 110). They observe the surrounding world and ultimately find instances in it reflecting a personal interpretation of experienced reality. A suggestive example is the construction of the term *inkomo engamatshoNgoye*, which refers to "the beast which is the stones of the forest" (pictured below).



The animal is either brown or red with large spots defined by a faint white edging. Its name is constructed by the fact that the patterns on the hide resemble certain rock features found in the Ngoye Forest in Kwazulu Natal. Because each rock is framed by vegetation and seems as if it has a halo, the rocks stand out and are a feature of the Ngoye Forest. As cattle have a privileged position in Zulu society, so too can rocks be held sacred. Fitter posits that rocks are "the dwellings of spirits, the monuments of the dead, the markers of sacred places, and the centre of energy at the heart of magico-religious activity" (1995: 7). These concepts were expounded earlier when I discussed the *isivivane* in *Shades* and the cattle byre in *Recessional for Grace*.

Clearly, to understand the imagery evident in these metaphors one must be aware of the associational context. According to Fitter, "The landscape-consciousness of every culture is historically distinct and subjective, a fact often belied by superficial continuities of landscape presentation" (2). To reinforce Fitter's statement one needs only look at the colour-pattern term *umngqithi* as an example. The term describes a light brown and white speckled beast (cow, bull or oxen – pictured below).



The term also refers to the name of the Kori Bustard bird whose plumage is also light brown and speckled (see Poland et al 2003: 50). As the Kori Bustard is no longer found in northern KwaZulu-Natal it seems that the term had originated a long time ago in a different socio-cultural context. Using imagery associated with the landscape, in general, personalises the meaning of the visual image. It depicts a cultural engagement with nature on an affective level. In a sense, these images are inventories of possession, belonging to the land and to the people who named them.

The system of identifying cattle through colour patterns is open-ended and flexible. It is possible for new and modern colour-pattern terms to arise. For example, the *impemvu* is a beast with a coloured body and a white face. On the market today is a tinned product known as corned beef marketed by Bull Brand. On the outside of the can is a picture of a bull, which has a coloured body and a white face. The Nguni had named this beast *impemvu* because it looked like the White Helmet Shrike. Today, this beast is identified as *ibullybeef* because of its close resemblance to the picture on the Bull Brand product (see Poland et al 2003:37). Other modernised names include *uSosishi* (sausage), *uKhimbali* (Kimberley) and *uBhasikidi* (basket) (see Poland et al 2003: 94).

Although the colour and its pattern are the key criteria used to describe cattle, they may also be described and identified by the configuration of their horns, especially where these features are outstanding in the animal. It must be noted, though, that in most instances, the cattle are dehorned for practical reasons. The main reason is to prevent injury to the herdsman as well as to other cattle. Horns may vary in size and shape, but generally they take

on the lyre shape in cows and are shorter and thicker in bulls. According to Poland's doctoral thesis, at least fifty-six different conformations of horn have been identified. Many have metaphysical associations similar to the evocative imagery used in the colour pattern terminology. An interesting example is the *bafazibaphikicala*, which roughly translated refers to women repudiating a case. These horns curve forward, out and the tips point backwards, resembling women throwing up their hands in firm rejection or despair. The *inkomo ebafazibethwelamanzi* on the other hand, is a beast whose horns curve up and inwards, almost meeting above the head (132). This resembles a woman carrying a pot of water on her head. Similar to this but with widespread horns is the *inkomo ebafazibethwelizinkuni* – woman carrying large bundles of wood on her head (ibid). In *Recessional for Grace*, Poland refers to a dun grey bullock with milk-white legs and the lazy lapping line marking out the dark from light as:

ebafazi bewela: women crossing the stream. Such a name for a bullock, associated always with a concourse of wading women! No wonder it seems bewildered, standing splay-legged at the gate, neither going forward, nor retreating, until roughly nudged from behind. (2003: 131)

Although these terms border on abstractions, they are abstractions that are justified by usefulness and appropriateness and are totally meaningful; even to the non-Zulu speaker, once translated. Indeed, the terms can act as bridges of understanding between Zulu and non-Zulu speakers. Of utmost importance is the fact that descriptions of these cattle based on the conformation of their horns must ultimately be contextually based, similar to that of colour pattern terminology.

Although Nguni cattle may be named by their patterns, horns and gender, many are often monochrome or may have a singular colour. The most distinctive of the plain beast is the milky white (*inyonikayiphumuli*), which generally belongs to the Zulu monarch. If a white calf is born into the herd of a subordinate, it is immediately and without question given away to the king.

Consequently, the role of these cows is also to reinforce powerfully the social hierarchy and more especially the status of the king. It also reveals an unquestioning acceptance of hierarchy and status. The term *inyonikayiphumuli* refers to the Cattle Egrets, which are always found in abundance around grazing cattle of the royal household (Poland et al 2003: 39). A direct translation of the term is 'the bird that does not rest'. The birds are part of the natural landscape and sometimes they may seem almost peripheral to the scene, amounting to little more than an illustration or an ornament. The birds are, however, central symbols and, like the cattle, they are a reference to the power and glory of the traditional Zulu monarch's kingdom – where such cattle were highly prized and in abundance, so much so that the egrets following in their wake had no time to rest. A symbiotic relationship exists between egrets and cattle: the birds follow the cattle and eat whatever is disturbed by the cattle hooves, whilst most times they are perching on the cattle feasting on ticks and other parasites, thus keeping the cattle tick-free. The colour white is symbolic of purity and chastity and has obvious spiritual connotations. Amongst the Nguni, it is also associated with the ancestral shades.

To the Swazi monarchs pure black cattle are just as significant as white cattle are to the Zulu. Commonly referred to as *imnyama* they may also be referred to as *inzima*, which means dignified. In the First Fruits Ceremony, which is the most important national ceremony of the Zulu, a black bull is always sacrificed. Black cattle, like the white, are also used in mediation between the people and the ancestral shades. Symbolically, these cattle are associated with thunderclouds and so are always sacrificed in times of drought (41).

In essence, the poetry of naming cattle is an art form. It is shaped by ideas, influenced by the landscape and defined by the community appreciative of their environment. Personal histories are contained in colour-pattern terminologies and Poland's research and Leigh Voigt's artwork explicates and validates them. From pre-literate days, the myths of history of the Nguni, their religious rituals and awareness used colour-pattern terminology, which has

facilitated its transmission from generation to generation. We, the current readers, are put in a position to appreciate the image value, the light and shade, the colour-pattern, the terminology, the completeness of the view and the aesthetic composition.

There is in Poland's study of the naming of cattle poetry, a painterly craft, and an exploration of landscape as a field of finely discriminated physical stimuli. In fact, what is remarkable is that Poland records an identification with nature with great delicacy and authenticity for a non-native speaker. Through the naming process for cattle Poland shows that, traditionally, the Nguni people were in harmony with the environment. It also reveals the interplay between the physical elements of the landscape and the resultant consciousness of the people. The association of images of flora and fauna of South Africa with cattle connects indigenous Zulu people to their total physical environment; not only to the grazing fields of the cattle. Indigenous knowledge, thus, is derived from observation and traditions that are intimately linked with the idea of the sacredness of the land. In other words, the poetry of naming cattle according to colour patterns is, as discussed above, teeming profuse, and replete with images of sharp naturalistic observation that hold symbolic resonance for the people whose cattle they are.

5.1.3 Cattle and the Oral Tradition

"Whether through oral or documentary 'literature', most cultures hold verbal expression as a high status form of art" (Stockwell 2002: 5). The oral tradition of the indigenous people of South Africa has already been briefly discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, but what must be noted is that cattle play a particularly central role in traditional Zulu stories, poems and other verbal expressions. In Zulu daily speech and prose of different kinds there exist often 'painted pictures' using metaphorical language which more often than not have featured cattle in idiomatic expressions; for example, *nginjenje mntanethu ngoniwa yinkunzi* (I am what I am, dear ones, because I was spoilt by the bull) is used by a young man who reminds an over-critical girlfriend

that he is what he is because of his father (see Poland et al 2003: 96). Poland posits that "The way cattle are perceived is an integral part of the cosmology of the Zulu people and the oral art which is a product of that cosmology uses images and references which are significant in leading to an understanding of that perception" (1996: 413). The influence of cattle is so overwhelming in Zulu oral poetry that they have also frequently become the subject of praises known as *izibongo* (for examples see Poland et al 2003: 85). Besides cattle, other subjects may be identified and praised in the poetic mode.

"The art of praising involves the identification of a subject through a process of laudatory 'naming', the language of which is apt, typically allusive, and presented in images that capture important characteristics of the person or thing praised" (Poland et al 2003: 84). Cattle are not only protagonists of mythological tales and adventure, but are also here the subjects of praise. In fact, cattle imagery is evident in all forms of the oral tradition. The praising of cattle takes on an almost religious fervour and the reason is obvious: cattle are praised because of their significance in terms of material possession, their role as mediators with the spiritual world, and also because of the beautiful aesthetic qualities they possess. Praises are designed to encourage the beast in whatever it is doing as well as to affirm to onlookers its magnificent qualities. They are presented in images that are precise, differentiated and carefully thought out giving rise to much of the Zulu's poetic expressions, for example, *Inkom' ehambayo kayiqedi tshani* – a beast that is passing finishes no grass – (96). This expression recommends the humane treatment of strangers. These poetic expressions capture the delicate interrelationship between cattle terminology and the natural world.

Whilst Nguni cattle terminology forms the core of a system of classification, cattle imagery also abounds in Nguni proverbs. An analysis of the proverbs may provide a gateway to the culture of the people as it reveals a depth of rich colourful language, imagination and creativity. According to Ikenga-Metuh "Without proverbs, the language would be but a skeleton without flesh, a body without spirit" (1987: 31). Proverbs flesh out languages with their philosophies on life and the environment; for example, *umhlambi kazalusile* is

a proverb, which refers to a herd, which is not being tended, or a herd, which has to look after life itself (see Poland et al 2003: 96). The contextual interpretation herein is that a family without any parental authority lacks control and discipline. Another interesting proverb goes as follows: *Inkom'isengwa ngoyaziyo* (the cow is milked by one who knows it) – an individual is happiest when he has the task of milking the cow he knows well (ibid). The proverb means that a person who is thoroughly *au fait* with an issue is in the best position to tackle it in order to ensure success. Many Zulu proverbs thus reveal the relationship the Zulu have with their cattle and the symbolic value with which they are imbued.

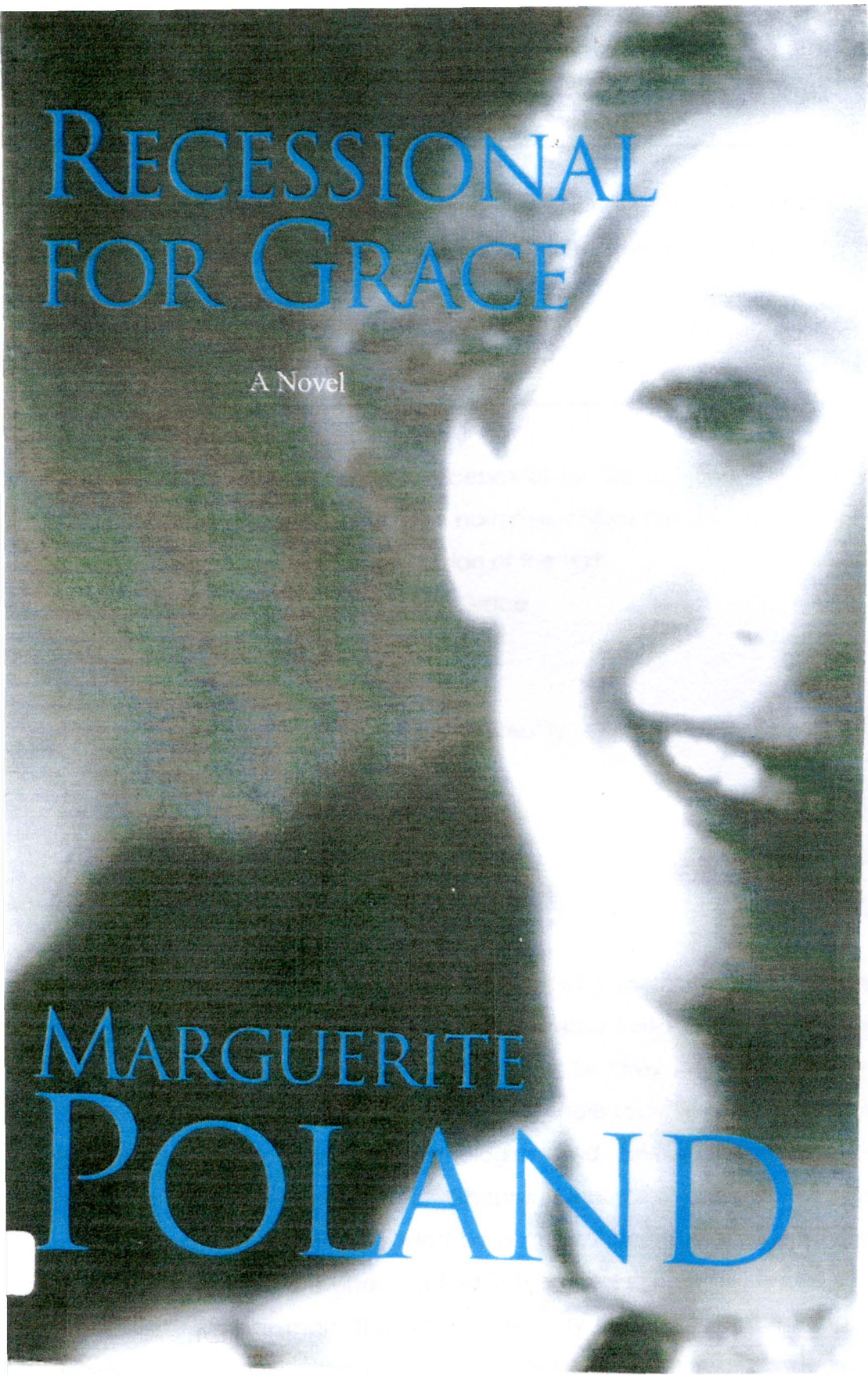
Poland's life and works have instilled in her an in depth knowledge of Zulu proverbs and oral traditions. This offers her a resource to appreciate the various dimensions of the world of cattle and the poetry of naming based on the various perspectives offered by these genres. All the components of the written words, oral tradition and elements of nature act together as a single artifact, as a reliable univocal signifier that celebrates the abundant herds as part of the cultural landscape of a once great nation. It must be noted though, that many oral traditions have been revitalised and formatively influenced by perceptions of nature and rendered through anthropological transcriptions and folklore. Gurnah contends, "The oral tradition depends on constant restatement, and each articulation is also a modification" (1993: 138). Since landscapes are ever-changing and dynamic, it would stand to reason then, that the names of cattle would change or phase themselves out depending on time and place. Urbanisation has contributed greatly to this process and the fact that those actually engaged in husbandry nowadays have little or no knowledge of the colour pattern terminology constructed by their ancestors is also a factor. Thus, one aim of Poland's book, as mentioned before, is to preserve this heritage for posterity: "This work is offered as a record of and tribute to the long and intimate association between the Zulu people and their herds" (Poland et al 2003: 11).

Any interaction between the world of nature and cattle herds, which is always at the forefront of traditional Nguni consciousness, produces

imaginative and creative descriptors in storytelling. The gamut of symbols successfully addresses dominant images found in the natural world; but the genesis of these descriptors cannot be fully understood outside its proper historical and traditional context. Many research programmes, including Poland's thesis, and historical works have drawn from oral sources. Poland, like other storytellers, in her works *Uchibidolo* and *The Abundant Herds*, is a custodian of history and her knowledge of the land and the cattle it sustains is significant. In this project of recovery, she has drawn extensively on oral tradition; a practice corroborated by Losambe who maintains: "Oral tradition has, for a number of years now, acquired credit as one of the few and reliable sources of African history" (1996: 6).

Poland, in order to record the symbolic attributes of cattle, has classified and listed the images of praises drawn from a set of animal metaphors and natural object images. Her portrayal of the abundant herds is at pains to be accurate and detailed. Each portrait expresses the essence of the beast in a way that is possible only because the beast is what it is, in terms of the Nguni people and the author's conception of that particular beast. As in all Poland's work, in *The Abundant Herds*, we discover several ways in which the natural environment is closely bound with Poland's stylistic propensity: her sensitivity to minute sense impressions and her meticulous descriptions of these observed phenomena. Her fascination for cattle, especially, can be traced through from her mythological stories, "The Rain Bulls" (1979), through to her depiction of the rinderpest in her colonial landscape in *Shades* (1993), her doctoral thesis (1996), and finally culminating in her portrayal of cattle in the indigenous landscape in *Recessional for Grace* (2003) and *The Abundant Herds* (2003).

The Abundant Herds and *Recessional for Grace* share the same publication date indicating a simultaneous working on this subject both from a fictional and factual point of view. I turn thus now to an analysis of *Recessional for Grace*.



RECESSIONAL FOR GRACE

A Novel

MARGUERITE
POLAND

5.2 *Recessional for Grace* (2003)

The ability at least to respond to a landscape, if not read it, is consistently an important moral register for characters, which is why landscape is rarely treated brusquely by authors.

(Hooper 2005: 136)

Due to the complex nature of *Recessional for Grace*, and the variety of pertinent issues emanating from the narrative, I have employed the following sub-headings to facilitate my discussion of the text:

- 5.2.1 Preamble to *Recessional for Grace*
- 5.2.2 Gendered Identity
- 5.2.3 Environmental Symbiosis
- 5.2.4 Photography, Landscape and Identity
- 5.2.5 Women in Society
- 5.2.6 Animals in the Landscape

5.2.1 PREAMBLE TO *RECESSIONAL FOR GRACE*

Recessional for Grace is set against the background of the South African indigenous landscape, but the narrative is filtered through the 'colonial' eyes of the two main characters, Grace and Godfrey. Generally the term 'indigenous' refers to the thousands of small-scale societies who have distinct languages, kinship systems, mythologies and ancestral memories and landscape, as noted earlier in Chapter One, and refers to a socially produced space that is pervaded by a cultural heritage. Intimate relations with the landscape are often evident in the names given to specific places, trees, rivers and animals. The names given by the locals to the indigenous landscape not only maps local spaces, but also it can express deep inner relationships with one's own life.

One of Poland's potential aims for *Recessional for Grace* is to sensitise the reader to gender discrimination, female identity, and to the shaping role of a landscape in an entire culture's evolving sense of identity. As much as it is a fictional narrative, the novel also revolves around the processes of research and writing. The narrative traces out diachronically the movement of the narrator and the main character from time to time as they criss-cross relationships, gradually creating a place which becomes charged with the subjective meaning of the story that is being enacted within it. Poland's use and translation of the descriptors for cattle in this narrative are an implicit acknowledgement of the significance of language in the formation of cultural identity and indigenous landscape. She seeks to affirm the continued relevance of landscape and place, and of the local, on the face of progressive discourses that tend to subdue the distinctive histories of indigenous people and place. The narrative deals with aspects such as, inter alia, love, cattle, research practice and the indigenous landscape. What complicates things for the reader when engaging with Poland's text is the fact that Poland employs different narrative techniques – from the flashback technique to the omniscient narrator; from writing a semi-autobiographical account to her tendency to intrude and play the role of voyeur in the lives of her main characters.

Recessional for Grace received supportive national critical response on its publication. "The fragmented nature of how research and writing operate and the unlimited ability of the imagination to get inside the minds of others, is also there in *Recessional for Grace*" wrote von Klemperer (2003:5). Anthony concurred that *Recessional for Grace* "covers anything from deconstruction to cattle dips, from linguist to indigenous lore to lost loves, from the colour of the cowhide to reconstructions of the past" (2003: 2). Ingham also confirmed that *Recessional for Grace* is a fascinating book, which looks at "how a biographer reconstructs her subjects and the nature of biography examin[ing] the peculiar dance of fact and fiction, what is imagined and what is real" (2003: 5). To reiterate the complexity of this novel Schwartz summed it up thus: "In it are many of the elements of her previous novels – the passion for the sights and sounds and feel of South Africa's rural reaches with

their complex interdependence of climate and flora and fauna and their demands on those humans who choose to make their lives and their living there; the sensitivity to cultures and experiences that many would simply dismiss as alien; the impact of the past and the ancestral shades that hover over the present; the enduring, creative, and sometimes destructive power of deep love" (2003: 4). Davis further summarised the complicated content of Poland's narrative. He observes, "There is a tender love story, the stifling politics of academia, hidden family secrets, cleverly unobtrusive social commentary, and an insightful historical perspective" (2003: 1).

In summary then, the plot is multi-layered. The first person narrator (whose life may be paralleled to that of Marguerite Poland) explores the life of a young woman, Grace, embarking on postgraduate study. Grace discovers the unfinished work of Professor C.J. Godfrey and decides to complete the work as part of her own thesis:

I found this in the old stacks. It's lists and lists of the colour-pattern terminology in Zulu for indigenous cattle. Full of natural references. It's all the most beautiful metaphor and association with birds and animals and plants. There's a comparative section with Xhosa terms. It's wonderful!
(Poland 2003: 7)

Whilst the incomplete lexicon of metaphorical names for indigenous cattle becomes her subject, the life of Dr. Godfrey becomes an obsession with the narrator. She delves into his life voyeuristically, unearthing his passion for cattle and for his lover, the eponymous Grace. The narrator seems more interested in the life of Godfrey than in her thesis as she journeys through his home, his school, the farms he had visited, and the shop he had frequented. She studies his photographs and conducts interviews with all those who may have come into contact with him. In her research she finds some of Dr. Godfrey's lexicon cards annotated with little messages to a mysterious 'G'. She also uncovers a photograph of Godfrey and an *inala* cow, but it is the shadow of the photographer that piques the narrator's interest. The 'shadow' and the letter

'G' on the cards become references to Grace and by using her skills as an artist/writer, Poland fleshes out the titular Grace.

The narrator discovers that the 'G' stood for Grace, the primary school teacher who, on holidays, helped Dr. Godfrey with his research. Grace was "something of a linguist, brought up in the rural areas" (44), a woman who spoke very good Xhosa and taught at Vlakfontein. Married to Jack Wilmot in 1939, widowed in 1944, she was coerced into staying with her brother-in-law, Hugh Wilmot, whose spouse also passed away while Grace was living with them. Grace spends a lot of time after school hours with Dr. Godfrey, much to Reverend Hugh's disapproval: "We live in a small community, Grace. I don't want people misjudging this..." (123). Reverend Hugh's fears are realised and Dr. Godfrey and Grace become involved in an adulterous relationship. The narrator, however, considers their relationship sacred – like the *inala* cow; and this is where the title *Recessional for Grace* has its significance. Godfrey has to let go of Grace, and Grace of Godfrey, because he is married to another. The title gives this parting a sacredness associated with the final benediction in a church. The term 'recessional' has all the connotations of leaving and redemption; from falling from grace to the sacredness, grace and abundance of the natural elements. The characters' names are also associated with the divine. It is interesting to note that Godfrey ('God free') may have the connotation of lapsing from belief and if this is the case, then Godfrey's affair makes perfect sense.

In *Train to Doringbult*, Jan has an extra-marital affair at the dam-site and in *Shades*, Victor has affairs at the mission station and at the mines. In both instances, place influences human action and moulds character. The environment is absorbed by characters and character is shaped and identities constructed. Similarly, in *Recessional for Grace* emotions and physical relations are utilised as filters through which the natural world is distilled. The indigenous landscape is refigured as a source of love and pleasure whilst within the closed spaces of Godfrey's research milieu and the writer's narrative, options for the self are firmly controlled. The landscape affords the characters the opportunity to give in to emotion and desire. What

contributes most to a conducive atmosphere of romance are the metaphorical and lyrical phrases used to describe the indigenous cattle in Godfrey's research (this aspect will be discussed later in this chapter). Not much is said in terms of seduction, but the poetic language of the researcher induces this effect. In fact, the language is so magical that it seems as if the narrator too has fallen in love with Godfrey. Thus, we have a love triangle – the narrator's love for Godfrey and Grace's love for him too.

To complicate issues in the text, it seems as if the narrator's life has some parallels with the author's. Firstly, Poland's formative years were spent in the Eastern Cape and the narrator too has an affinity for this place as discussed in Chapter Two. Secondly, the subject of the narrator's research – the metaphorical names for indigenous Sanga-Nguni cattle – is that of Poland's doctoral thesis, 'Uchibidolo – the abundant herds', (Poland 1996). Poland is proficient in the indigenous languages, Zulu and Xhosa (see Chapter Two), and Grace, coincidentally, is also "something of a linguist" (44). And finally, Poland's love of the landscape and proclivity for the minute details in nature is also evident in the narrator's narrative.

The narrator captures the essence of the landscape by making reference to Thomas Baines, the nineteenth century artist, explorer and adventurer who painted a background for the narrative's setting a hundred years before:

It is a glowing picture – gracious in its composition – and recognisable even now. There is little that can change the outline of the mountain to the west, its flat crown, the wisp of cloud that drifts across its summit in the heat. There is a grandeur in his landscape. (48)

The painted canvas by Thomas Baines provides the romantic setting for Grace and Godfrey's relationship. It offers a visual image that one might picture as a backdrop to the action of the novel. There is no sleaziness in it, but a fullness of spiritual life and personal significance. It glows in its grandeur like a person in love. The landscape is as important as any of the individual

characters. In other words, the landscape is much more than picturesque – the whole context is rich with sensuous suggestion and virile pleasure. “The wisp of cloud that drifts across its summit in the heat” (ibid) conjures up an image that seems to burn with an intrinsic fire of vitality and passion. Poland describes the natural world with a great deal of felicity and her passionate love for the landscape is ingrained in her images. She not only knows the landscape intimately with the life that emanates from it, but captures the moods and communicates all the joys and/ or sadness she experiences acutely. Her characters in *Recessional for Grace* are also measured in terms of the degree of affinity they have with nature.

In her own research, whether fact or fiction, the narrator fleshes out the life of Godfrey. She visits his childhood home and describes the landscape he would have played in as a boy:

He used to play here. That pepper tree against the fence is very old; it would have been less gnarled, perhaps, but not much smaller. The red corrugated fence sends its concertina shadow down across a dusty row of cypresses. There is a little conservatory in its shade. It is empty. I know the scents of such a place, the rust-coloured spores. He might have hidden sometimes, under the cool dripping tables, which held the pots of plants, in a mossy, spidery gloom. (18)

Unlike the previous extract where Poland captures the excitement created by the grandeur of nature, this one elicits feelings of emptiness and gloom. We sense the lack of exhilaration and words like “gnarled”, “shadow”, “dusty”, “shade” and “empty” contribute to these feelings and communicates a sense of desolation and expectation. Godfrey’s values and identity are closely tied to his childhood environment. Nelson posits that, “the land, as a living reality, simply and surely precedes whatever values humans, as individuals or as a cultural collective, might later impose on that reality” (1993: 133). At a tender young age Godfrey understood that the most fundamental act of perception that he could experience was the act of seeing himself as

a living part of a living place in which his life takes place. "He used to play here," indicates that he is not separate from the land, but an integral part of it. He loves the landscape and everything that goes with it, and, like the narrator, he develops an acute sense of perception. His character is defined by the values imposed on him by nature and by the society with which he interacts. The process of interaction inadvertently includes power struggles, gender issues and identity searches. At first glance the indigenous landscape may be read as typically pastoral and innocent, but on closer inspection we find that it is patriarchally oriented as well.

5.2.2 GENDERED IDENTITY

Godfrey's love for nature is dramatically captured in his relationship with his childhood friends, Gertrude, and a calf – "Umvemve; the wagtail – as frail, as ubiquitous as a little bird" (Poland 2003: 27). Young Godfrey's loneliness forces him into unorthodox relationships with a girl and a calf. According to Gurnah, "a sense of community strengthens the individual, aloneness diminishes him or her, because it takes away the context in which actions have meaning" (1993: 156). Humans are gregarious and social interaction contributes to personal development. In Godfrey's situation there were no boys around with whom Godfrey could play and young Godfrey and Gertrude had no choice but to associate with each other :

Gertrude Mary Hayes. How could she sustain a name like that? Neither boy nor girl. The androgynous companion of his childhood afternoons. Like the *umvemve* calf, she was a victim of expedience. (Poland 2003: 36 – 37)

The narrator describes Gertrude Hayes as a "chip-toothed girl" who "wants to be a boy" (27). As much as Gertrude is not one of the main characters, her role against colonial oppression is symbolic and significant. She strives to break free from the shackles of being stereotyped a female. "Gertrude. Gert. Such a little girl" (ibid). The shortening of her name, is itself a means of

enveloping a male identity and domain. Even Godfrey develops the habit of calling her “young fellow” (34).

On his fourteenth birthday, Godfrey is given a microscope. Now he is collecting things. It is a serious pursuit. Sometimes he allows Gert to look down it. Other times, she is invited into his room to see his trays of iridescent pinned beetles and the muddy sludge taken from the *spruit* to examine on the glass slides. She does not dither at them as another girl might have done. The interest is real. She can catch vlei-frogs just as well as he. It is all she can offer. (ibid)

Gertrude struggles to define herself against other females and the standards of femininity they represent. She struggles to push beyond gender conventions but her life appears in the novel as transient episodes in Godfrey's life. Gert's pursuit of individualism projects her as an intimate part of Godfrey's formative years. She becomes, like Frances in *Shades*, a penetrating representative of the conflict between the individual and society. Her questioning of her place in society opens up the debate as to an individual's position in society and enables us to look deeper to where that question arises in the context of social relations in a colonial space. Wanyeki contends, “The social status of women and the relationships between them and men cannot be thought of outside the power that determines social dynamics” (2003: 32). Gert and Godfrey's relationship is contrary to Wanyeki's apotheosis. They break colonial constraints forming their own microcosm. Their world, with the *umvemve* calf, is a natural world of refuge, an escape from debased colonial mentality and a site of self-discovery. As a child, Gert denies the boundaries between what are conventionally conceptualised as male ‘space’ and patriarchal dictates. She is, however, far too young really to grasp and understand her situation and, therefore, cannot really evade the obstacles that she will encounter in her social environment.

To some extent then, she finds herself insulated on a practical level from some of the effects of the colonial mentality of her time. As she grows older, she

gradually becomes aware of the ways in which patriarchy and the colonial landscape contribute to the definition of individual identities : “She treads the edges – a creature sniffing and retreating, then bolder – alert – bolder – then gone” (Poland 2003: 35). Gert and Godfrey’s relationship may be paralleled to Godfrey’s relationship with the *umvemve* calf:

The calf was red, red as fresh blood, with a face which is the rust ‘*veld locust*’ and a rump which is ‘the eggs of the rufous-naped lark’.

It is blood.

It is the *veld* locust.

It is the lark.

A trinity of being. *It is*, this metaphoric calf.

And he loves it. He loves it for its embroidered hide, for the translucence of the white, the luminosity of red, the tender little ridges of the skin at the muzzle, the wet nose, the hooves too big—‘my calf has boots’ – standing poised, slightly turned out, with the cloven tips, the knees woolly. Oh, silken tail and underbelly, navel-fold and lamb-soft scrotum.

It is guileless. And trusting.

It is just like Gert. (28)

There was no treachery or hidden animosity present in Godfrey’s friends: Gert and the *umvemve* calf. Both were trusting and enjoyed an open relationship with him; but, ironically, both were, knowingly or unknowingly, subservient to him. They relied on “Godfrey for direction” (ibid). Generally, this is exactly how patriarchal principles operate. Central to the issue of man as the authority figure is the masculine desire for power and dominance. Godfrey’s relationship is poised uneasily between the desire for personal fulfillment and the dictates of social expectation. This is clearly evident in his treatment of Gert after the death of his calf :

The dam, the little calf – cattle in honour of a marriage payment, a contract with the lineage shades in respect of a

woman and her child – will have to be exterminated. The butcher arrives on his bicycle, with an assistant. Bibleman gets twenty shillings in compensation. (31)

Godfrey's father had ordered the slaughtering of Bibleman's cow and its calf based on the rumours that the foot-and-mouth disease was prevalent in the area. He could not allow his dairy herd to be affected by Bibleman's cow, which had been acquired from a stock sale in the location. Father, however, being the removed authority figure, did not take into account Bibleman's resultant financial loss nor young Godfrey's emotional connection with the calf. Young Godfrey had spent many hours with the calf and it was clearly evident that he had a keen interest in cattle. He had examined, knew and could identify each fold and aspect of the calf's physical being. He could determine "on its rump and head intricate patterns of cross-hatch and stripe, of brindle and flash, red-white, white-red in mirror-pattern forms, spot to spot in perfect counterpoint, which distinguishes it from the other calves, the stolid little jersey, the cast-eyed Afrikander with its mulberry hocks" (27—28).

After school Godfrey had gone in search of the *umvemve* calf. He had found it "skewered at the sinew of the hind elbow, hanging in the gloom of the meat-room with its corrugated roof and its double flyscreen on the door and the hot wind shaking it" (31). The sight had devastated him. He had run blindly to his room and sought refuge under his bed. "The dark is dense with his breath but he holds each one as long as he can, to keep the silence" (ibid). Like the boys in *Iron Love* he tries to hide his feelings ("silence and denial"). Gert found him and attempted to comfort him:

'Why are you crying?' Godfrey says abruptly.

Stung, she does not reply. She cannot say that she is crying for him.

'It is not your calf.' Godfrey is fierce.

She does not contradict him. She never contradicts him. No, it is not her calf. She tilts her head as far back as it will go so that the tears will sink inward, but it does not help. He is rigid,

his face turned away from hers. He breathes the flat, dry scent of old dust, of iron bedsprings. It cauterizes him – from her. From everything. (32)

Godfrey's treatment of Gert is typical of a boy wanting to prove his masculinity. Poland places her characters in a precisely created setting with which the characters interact as they interact with each other. The darkness creates a refuge for Gert and Godfrey. They are able to hide their expressions on their faces and the look in their eyes. The darkness is stultifying and there is oppressiveness in the air reminiscent of the stultifying, corrosive nature of colonial male mentality. Metaphorically, the darkness chokes and strangles the inner society and the processes associated with the thoughts and actions of the characters. A product of the colonial environment, Godfrey appears restricted to the instinctive emotion associated with mourning and obstinate pride. His verbal outbursts, spontaneous and impulsive, are reactions to internal and external forces, as opposed to premeditated, contemplated and willed choices of behaviour. In other words, Godfrey's character is distinguished in the context of the colonial world – this fact predetermines the content of his thoughts and the quality of his actions. The 'under- the- bed' episode gives us an insight into the intense human struggle against the oppressiveness of the colonial and patriarchal landscape. The children are caught in a web of circumstances from which they cannot be extricated. By individualising each character, Poland allows us to observe Godfrey and Gert's specific responses to the same incident in the same social environment. It is not surprising, then, that Gert and Godfrey exhibit certain thoughts, desires and actions predetermined by colonial upbringing and an earlier Victorian mentality. In other words, it is inescapable that the characters are what they are, think what they think, and do what they do because the landscape is, literally and figuratively, what it is.

5.2.3 ENVIRONMENTAL SYMBIOSIS

The theory of death is quite an abstract concept for little children and Godfrey and Gert have differing perceptions on what happens after death.

From the point of view based on a Christian upbringing Gert is of the opinion that the spirit of the dead calf has gone to heaven. Like Crispin in *Shades*, Godfrey is a “strange mixture of heathen, Christian and pantheist”. He believes what the local inhabitant, Bibleman (an ironic name, given his ‘heathen’ background) tells him:

The Afterlife is not conducted Above, but Below. The ancestral shades keep herds of cattle under the earth, in another country. The pasture is very good. The cattle are fat, white as *amasi*, or roan as *amabele* mixed with milk. This is where the earthly cattle go when they are dead. (33 - 34)

In Bibleman’s culture, and in the spiritual traditions of many indigenous groups of South Africa, the spirit and the life of the people derive from the land: life is a ‘property’ of the land as well as of the creatures occupying it. Godfrey’s love of the landscape demonstrates the mutual entanglement of cultural practices and interests. Anthony posits, “Cows are linked to the land and its dispossession and repossession, and the hierarchical distinction between bush-cows (local, indigenous cattle) and imported cows (colonial cows) rehearses the South African political dispensation (2003: 2). Godfrey’s association with the *umvemve* calf and his love for it early in the novel establishes in the narrative, a link between his formative years and his years as a researcher.

The narrator in *Recessional for Grace* has many qualities similar to Godfrey. “Like him I am now acquainted with each carefully annotated photograph, each diagram, each and every beast in his forgotten herd. I know the grey-roan bull, the dun. I know the little *inala* cow – so particular – with the white face and painted eyes, black-lined and the red-speckled pattern of her hide: *I am the Kei apple, I am Abundance; I am the bridal party beast with the moon-white face*. He played with patterns as he played with words” (Poland 2003: 15). Our unnamed narrator, like Poland, is busy writing a PhD thesis based on the incomplete lexicon and academic papers of Godfrey, which detail the indigenous naming practices for cattle. In her academic research,

she inadvertently, allows her imagination to take control and like an obsessed love-sick teenager attempts to reconstruct Godfrey's character and life from the papers he has left behind.

Dr C.J Godfrey MC (1898 – 1963)

I found him in a document.

It comprised a hundred and twenty pages of annotated diagrams and lists. The writing, the drawings – part of both design and composition were meticulous. There was artistry in the simplest figure. (4)

Godfrey's enthusiasm for his subjects is impressive. He is able to capture and understand the metaphorical language of the indigenous people to describe the colour patterns of their cattle mainly because of his upbringing and his love for the landscape. His acute perceptiveness is the reward of diligent observation, and the ability to use that which had been assimilated and reflected upon. He develops an intuitive knowledge of cattle and a desire for fulfilment through close interaction with the natural world. His aesthetic pleasure is consonant with both academic fulfilment and scientific inquiry. In order to understand the metaphorical usage and linguistic versatility of the Zulu people, Godfrey becomes a frontiersman to explore it, a scientist to observe it, a nature lover to feel it and a writer to depict it. The narrative illustrates the way Godfrey integrates his emotions and impulses, making the indigenous landscape an extension of himself. His identity is constructed by his knowledge of the environment and through his kinship with cattle:

'I've been working on Zulu cattle terms, going through old archival stuff and working in the field in Natal. I've wanted to do comparative work among the Xhosas for some time.'

'Do you know both languages?' asks Grace.

'Yes,' says Godfrey, 'but only in an academic sort of way. I suppose that's why I might be useful to Crawford. Quite recently, he set up a team from his department to survey all the reserves. They talk to cattle-owners, take counts at

Government dips and are trying to sort out the proportions of exotic and indigenous animals in herds in African areas. It's a difficult job and there aren't really enough people to look at the phenomenon comprehensively.' (44)

To understand the motivation in Godfrey's relationship with cattle, with the indigenous people, and with the landscape, it is efficacious to bear in mind the symbiosis of the environment and its effect on the construction of identity. Godfrey's home is in England and some of his actions in the African landscape evoke contradictions within each environment and between each environment. The most telling and ethically questionably experience is Godfrey's relationship with Grace – which I've already touched on, and on which I shall elaborate later in this chapter. Engaged with the natural environment, Godfrey invariably becomes aware of the specificities of place and location. Because of his involvement and preoccupation with indigenous cattle, Godfrey is exposed to the myriad currents of cultural formations, which influence and at times determine his reactions to the world. Dulcie Trollip recalls, fifty years after Godfrey leaves South Africa, that in one of his journal articles, he had written about "respecting what's important to other people – the natives. Their customs and stuff like that" (ibid). Godfrey displays sensitivity towards the 'locals'; and his overwhelming fascination with the indigenous landscapes results in his temporary burial of his English identity and the creation of another, temporary and more local identity.

His relationship with the indigenous landscape and its people undergoes a transformation and he becomes an engaged participant. He immerses himself in the landscape becoming an explorer and scientist who gathers observations and notes first hand and as a result opens himself to all of the influences of place. Edwards postulates, "Places are more than environment – places and their inhabitants are one: people belong to environments, adapt them, and adapt to them" (2002: 38). Working for Dr Crawford, Godfrey becomes a key figure in a countrywide cattle survey under the auspices of the Department of Native Agriculture. His task is to compile a dictionary in Zulu on colour-pattern terminology in indigenous cattle whilst,

among other things, making comparisons with the Xhosa equivalents. In his journal entry entitled *The Nomenclature of Indigenous Cattle: an aesthetic appreciation* he writes:

Although my discipline is Social Anthropology and my particular interest the Nguni languages, I was struck, as Crawford and his team from the Department of Agriculture were, by the necessity and the wisdom of according the indigenous cattle of the subcontinent the status and attention they deserve and which has been so assiduously ignored and neglected by Government, scientists and farmers alike. These cattle have, after all, adapted to the conditions of Africa over millennia. To dismiss their importance and denigrate their astonishing qualities is not only shortsighted, but arrogant. (Poland 2003: 243)

One of the first things Godfrey does is to make contact with a local white farmer, Herman de Waal, whose innovative idea it is to cross-breed Nguni cattle with settler cattle. The principles of indigenous breeding for food and milk are digested deep into the fabric of a vitally new and experimental product. Furthermore, de Waal sets out to prove that nature can be transformed, its wealth harnessed to serve all mankind. He also sets out to prove that with a little innovation different breeds of cattle can come together and even breed and live harmoniously as one: "I've decided the best thing to do about the problem of breeding in the right characteristics, is to bring in some Afrikaner stock and use Nguni cows and Afrikaner bulls" (62). The human implications of such change are phenomenal and Poland's metaphor tends to sustain itself through the second half of the novel. Ammons postulates that no particular race group exists as a fixed, stable category or concept. "It changes over time, plays different roles in different cultures and for different people within any given culture, it is invented to serve complex social and political ends" (1999: 71). Inter-cultural marriages and relationships in South Africa post 1994 sanction acculturation and assimilation of values. Subsequently cultural landscapes change. As a scholar

and researcher (in an earlier era, however) Godfrey begins to realise the interconnectedness of the world's cultures via de Waal's cross-breeding exercise. Godfrey internalises the new ideas on husbandry and genetics and he decides to start a small herd of indigenous cattle himself. This brings mixed reactions from his fellow white settlers. Tommy Cooper, the boarder at Grace and Hugh's dwelling is highly agitated and critical:

"Why on earth does he want bush cows? In 1936 they brought in a law to stop people breeding with native bulls. In Natal, the place was just running wild with bush cattle! I mean, is the chap right in the head?" (Poland 2003: 121)

Grace, however, understands fully Godfrey's reasoning and she knows quite well that her response to Tommy is pedantic: 'They are adapted to the environment much better than other breeds' (ibid), and she goes on to explain that the bush cows are 'tick resistant' (ibid), obviating the need for cattle dips. Godfrey's old friend, Humphrey, from the Veterinary Department, is also impressed and in favour of Godfrey's contribution to the indigenous landscape: "The old fellow's doing nice work. Quite pioneering, really" (170). As much as Godfrey's work was pioneering, he still had to contend with the condescension of some of his fellow colonists – as revealed in the extract above. According to Humphrey, breeding with European bulls in the indigenous landscape originated in the idea that 'improving' things was necessary and only European stock 'improves'. His uncomfortable statements strike at the heart of the South African political and social systems. Godfrey's response shows that he can subvert power relations of a discourse of dominance through his cathartic engagement with the cattle and with the landscape: "And a wealth of indigenous characteristics bred in over millennia is lost along with traditional African wisdom and experience – not to mention the wider damage done to society by such monumental condescension" (166). Poland's commentary thus re-highlights the phenomenon of colonial attitudes in general and the concept of discrimination in particular, both before and during the apartheid era.

As the narrative develops, elements of the environment accrue deeper meaning and Godfrey becomes aware of the depth of the impression the environment makes on him. The land and cattle, he sees, are vital resources for all its inhabitants; but culturally and symbolically land and cattle are sacred objects that ensure the connection of people to the sacred. According to Wanyeki, cattle, as well as the land, "is an element of social status in the sense that it determines the relationships of individuals to the different social networks to which they belong" (2003: 34). Godfrey's purchase of indigenous cattle and construction of a typical indigenous byre to house them, is described in transcendent terms:

-- *It is so quiet here.* Grace's voice had been hushed.

-- *holy,* Godfrey had said.

He had pushed the gate in across the tussocks of grass and the little wiry bushes that had grown up. She had not followed him inside. She knew that a cattle byre was the preserve of patrilineal shades. She had stood at the threshold, watching him. Away in the bush, a bokmakierie had called, its ringing territorial note encircled them. Godfrey had cocked his head, listening. – *Well, that's a sign!*

-- *A sign?*

-- *The place where a bokmakierie calls is always good for a cattle byre. It is a direct intimation that it would be propitious!* (Poland 2003: 122)

The silence and tranquillity at the byre creates a hallowed atmosphere, and Grace, although white and female is fully aware of the sacredness of the byre and its association with the "patrilineal shades" (ibid). She had shown her respect by not entering the byre for she was aware that the indigenous inhabitants forbade women from entering the byre. The calm atmosphere suggests some consecrated place where all movement and gestures, undisturbed by the business of life, have a perpetual, ritual significance. Her actions figure as an outward manifestation of her inward experience of the other's culture and traditions and she displays a spiritual involvement with the

'shades' and the Zulu ancestors. Grace's actions are intense enough to be characterised as religious or spiritual even though her beliefs have a different source to the locals'. Robinson posits that, "social engagement, defined globally as living inside society, is also a single concept that joins quite disparate persons in a generalised servitude" (1995: 98). In other words, many broadly god-fearing people are able to tolerate others' religious beliefs, even subscribe to them. Grace's shared engagement with Godfrey, the cattle and this place transcends a narrow sectarian definition of 'the sacred'.

5.2.4 PHOTOGRAPHY, LANDSCAPE AND IDENTITY

Once Godfrey establishes his byre and herd he decides to supplement his cattle with three more indigenous heifers from a Mr Xaba. Grace accompanies Godfrey to make his purchase and even at Mr Xaba's "she does not approach the byre. It is a secret place which a woman may not answer" (Poland 2003: 131). A small, slender cow that has the *inala* pattern transfixes Godfrey:

Godfrey stops, separating a small animal from the rest of the herd. It is a cow. She has the *inala* pattern. She gazes at him, head down, then turning from him, nosing for a way through. She is white-faced, dark-eyed, scattered with the faintest rust, glistening along the flank. She regards him gravely, with a still attention. He says coaxing things. She lowers and tentatively extends her head, sniffs again, reaching out her nose to him. She is diffident of him. She is diffident of all. She knows nothing of the pattern of her flanks and how the curve of her rump arouses such admiration. She tosses her head – it is almost coy – as Godfrey puts his arm across her neck. She settles into the noose of his embrace. Treading softly closer, Grace prepares the camera, checks the direction of the sun, steps forward and takes a picture. Her shadow reaches out across the ground towards Godfrey's feet. (131 – 132)

The *inala* cow and the photograph taken by Grace are key motifs in the novel. Not only is the photograph motif significant in this novel, but it is also a recurring motif in *Iron Love* (see Chapter 4), in *The Abundant Herds*, and in Poland's most recent work, the history of St. Andrew's College in Grahamstown. In the narrator's quest to flesh out the lives of Grace and Godfrey, she comes across the photograph of Godfrey and the *inala* cow. This particular photograph intrigues the narrator and she finds the content enchanting. The heifer (a young cow, especially one that has not as yet given birth to its first calf) is mythical in its appearance. Godfrey's features are finely chiselled and in the sun and shade captured by the camera "there is an odd self-effacement in the tilt of his head" (6). What intrigues the narrator most is the fact that in the foreground "faintly stained across uneven ground, blurring at the edge of the print (is) the cryptic shadow of the photographer" (ibid). Using a magnifying glass, the narrator identifies the shadow, the curve of the arms, as being female.

Crary (1990: 136) postulates that the camera is an apparatus fundamentally independent of the spectator yet which masquerades as a transparent yet corporeal intermediary between observer and world. The photograph (which is the end product) is the ability of the camera to converge a field of vision through its unifying eye. According to Crang and Thrift, "The bodies the camera admires become the bodies with which we identify" (2000: 189). As the narrative progresses we realise that the narrator aspires to be Grace. She identifies with her, delving into her consciousness, wanting to form a closer relationship with the protagonist, Godfrey, via Grace. She explores Grace's consciousness, adding her own desires to it, and contributing to Grace's construction of identity, and ironically, hers as well. Thus, there is an interaction of real and imagined worlds conjured up by the photograph. The photograph, it would seem, is about perspective – what we see is related to the position from which we are looking. These concepts are closely related to the pictorial art discussed in Chapter 1 and the San art discussed earlier in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 3.

Poland uses the photograph as a metaphoric instrument of vision when she uses her narrator as witness and observer of Godfrey and Grace's relationship. She constructs a fiction and uses the photograph to verify the fiction as authentic. The photograph is stimulating and is able to generate meaning from itself and from the impression it makes upon the characters. Whilst words may be used to create Godfrey and Grace's world, the photograph has the power to authenticate. Beloff posits that "photography is part of science, part of recording history; it is used for personal documentation, for providing social evidence outside our immediate environments, and not only for reproducing art, but as an art form to be appreciated in its own right" (1985: 20). Like Mrs Trollip (Herman de Waal's daughter whom the narrator is interviewing), people's personal histories are not only contained in family albums, but are validated by them. When the narrator visits Mrs Trollip, in her quest to find out more about Grace and Godfrey, she is shown a collection of family photo albums:

I open the first album, going from page to page, stiff charcoal paper, the pictures labelled in white ink. So many grandmothers in long coats and large hats, so many schoolboys in junior teams, so many merinos and angoras and views of ships in Table Bay – some memorable holiday when the camera was new and atmospheric landscapes were the rage. (Poland 2003: 83)

Family albums are visual representations of family bonds, and people's closeness is captured in the photographs. More often than not their arms are entwined or they hold each other around the shoulder. In *Iron Love*, Charlie's photograph with his mother resonates their bond: "they echoed each other in the eyes, the brow, the decided chin. Her hand was on his shoulder: this is my son. Look at him" (1999: 159). In the heifer photograph Godfrey loops his arms around the heifer, enforcing his bond with the cow; whilst the shadow of Grace's arm facilitates her involvement with them both.

Poland employs the photograph, both as a document, and also as an experience: the image creates a vehicle for moving from a physical form of inspiration to the creation of a narrative. Many of the photographs Poland employs bring the landscape to life. The reader feels this quality especially when the landscape is brought to life in the narrative, and whenever Poland records intimations of the life and uniqueness of the landscape. The photograph also functions as a kind of testament – a record or evidence of a real person, a moment lived. Like all family albums, the photographs preserve and create memory: it is a site of remembrance and commemoration. Hirsh posits that, "Pictures should not be read only for their documentary value, but as constructions to be taken apart, analysed and understood (1997: 135). Poland analyses and interrogates Godfrey's photograph, attempting to evoke feelings, to understand it from the vantage point of both Grace, the photographer, and from the narrator's perspective. Grace's presence is ethereal and her corporeal body casts barely a shadow of her arm and hand. The image she presents here is like her persona – coyly inviting, yet shadowy and subservient. Her hand is only barely visible, leaving the peripheral areas of the image in mysterious darkness. To an extent this reveals the aspects of Grace and Godfrey's relationship. At this juncture it must be reiterated that Grace is Godfrey's mistress and the era in which they were living did not condone their actions. Hugh Wilmot's berating of Grace is proof of this. Thus, Grace and Godfrey's relationship had to be discreet and mysterious.

Poland observes and delves into the photographs and art work with her hermeneutic gaze and reveals how objects, tone and colour become symbolic and meaningful. Symbolism is a key feature in Poland's works, and in Godfrey's photograph, and in the novel as a whole, the heifer becomes intensely symbolic. Generally in Zulu and Xhosa traditional practice, cows are linked to the land, and are symbolic of the dispossession and the repossession thereof. Godfrey and Grace's heifer is transfigured by Poland into a holy, ancestral cow and it displays more and more the qualities evident in Grace. The oblique suggestion in the photograph is that it is both revelation and concealment. Godfrey's photograph reveals his relationship with the cow as

well as with Grace, who is in fact concealed and may only be identified if one scrutinises the shadow in the photograph. Rugg posits, "Photography exposes the individual to the harsh light of constant scrutiny, opens up the possibility of being looked at without being able to return the look" (1997: 136). We assume that what is visible is real, and yet we are able to read into photographs – we are able to derive meaning from the concealed. Photographs are, in essence, evidence of personal existence and worth. Beloff contends that photographs "can give us the illusion of visual omniscience. But it is a counterfeit power" (1985:20). In other words, photographs celebrate the simple irreducible fact of being alive, of having an identity.

Furthermore, there is a multiplicity of relationships. The narrator is looking at Grace taking the photograph while Grace is looking at the subject. Godfrey, the subject himself, is looking at both Grace and the narrator. Because of the complex inter-relationship between Godfrey, Grace, the narrator and the reader, one is forced to conclude that the narrator is really looking at herself. As much as the narrator wishes to remain unseen, when she puts pen to paper she inevitably exposes herself. Similarly, although Grace wishes to remain behind the camera, when she snaps the shutter, her shadow reveals her presence. Thus the act of photography and the photograph itself seem composed of many parts, reflecting disparate needs.

Stereotypical women characters are not the norm in Poland's opus and there are many occasions when we see her expose the limitations of orthodox, conventional behaviour, subtly criticising in an effort to drive beyond gender conventions. Grace uses her position as photographer to connect gender stereotypes on both literal and figurative levels. Her enactment of the simple process of shooting a photograph has a profound echo. It may seem as an expression of the problem of feminine representation and subjecthood, that is, addressing the question of whether a woman can act, think, be creative or even exist in ways that are not defined and interpreted by the patriarchal symbolic order. According to Wanyeki, "Women's subordination, existing in societies of every degree of complexity is not something that can be

changed by arranging certain tasks and roles in the social system" (2003: 31). Grace proves that despite their academic achievements and contributions to society, during and after the colonial period, and without having acquired the same status as men, women have, to a large extent, played a significant role in development and technological advancement. The introduction of the camera bestows on the female here, characteristics and qualities of an all-seeing compositional gaze. Poland makes use of the camera to capture the essence of female positionality, and this complex question of positionality embraces considerations of gender and status as well as factors such male domination of the social order.

The control of the camera enables Grace to move from her subordinate position as female to that of self-determining subject who gains consciousness as her relationship deepens with Godfrey. Her manipulation of the camera endows her with some sort of control she gains as she bridges the gap between herself as spectator and as object of representation. She emerges from this situation created by these two equally unacceptable subject positions as a feminist agent capable of claiming the power that comes with self-knowledge. Rugg questions whether photographs are "evidence of the existence of things in the world, or are they constructions, manipulable and manipulative (1997:1)? In Grace's context, her shadow in the photograph shows her presence, proof of her existence in Godfrey's life. Furthermore, the photographic situation offers a representational image for the intrusive act of looking at oneself, as well as a metaphor for the intrusive act of interpreting and analysing the subject. The photograph's meaning resides in the relation between subject and photographer that it both creates and abrogates. Subsequently, Grace and Godfrey's photograph has the capacity to be a potent symbol of social identity and power and Poland goes beyond the deconstructive process to define a new aesthetic – one which assembles and reconstructs personal and domestic images that are individual yet collective, revealing Grace's position as subordinate, yet *present*, and also how colonial dictates expect her to be seen. Daly and Reddy posit that, "in learning how to subordinate their own desires, they [women] have failed to develop a sense of separate self, the kind of which would make connections between

subjects possible" (1991: 135). Grace's behaviour contradicts this assertion, making her an active instrument of feminism redefining herself in the context of her society's relations of gender.

5.2.5 WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Related to issues of identity construction and the influence of the milieu is the question Poland raises on the place of women in society in this novel. An interesting extract showing Grace's stance against stereotypical views concerning women may be found in the episode where Tommy Cooper feels that his girlfriend had deliberately fallen pregnant so that he would be forced to marry her:

Then Tommy Cooper says, 'I think she caught me out, on purpose. That's what some girls do, you know. They catch you out.'

'No they don't, Tom. There are times when no one thinks. Not her. Not you.'

'But it's different for blokes.'

'Who says it's different for them?'

He says. 'You're not a bloke Mrs Wilmot.' -- *Let me tell you about the vicar's wife; -- Have you heard the one about this popsie in the bar ...*

Grace wants to laugh: yes, of course -- everyone knows the guile of women. Their cunning and mendacity. Meretricious – all of them. But Tommy Cooper would not understand these words, so there is no use saying them.

-- *Women are full of shit.* That's how he'd explain it. -- *Catching blokes. Pinning them down.*

'Females just want babies.' Tommy Cooper says. 'And that's okay, that's fine...' Reasonable Tom, emphasising what he says by a gesture, laying out a principle. 'It's how they go about it.'

'No, Tom. They don't just want babies.'

'What do they want then?' He folds his arms and looks at her.

'Tell me.' He is defiant. 'What do they want?'

Belief, Tom.

Instead, Grace says, 'Consistency.'

Tommy represents many men who hold the same circumscribed view about women. That his attitudes appear to have been ordinary and matter-of-fact simply suggest how 'male' he is, how deeply immersed he is in a world of male opinion – a patriarchal world. Women have, however, historically contributed to the creation of this worldview since they tend to conform to culturally determined expectations, duties and power relations within the socio-economic system of society. In other words, gender identity is not constructed by men alone; but by society as a whole (including both men and women). Wanyeki claims that, "Gender roles and behaviour and culturally ascribed status develop the subjective awareness that one is a member of the male or female sex" (2003: 31). However, since gender relations favour men, men tend to support the status quo. This is clearly evident in Tommy's conversation with Grace. His philosophy on women's actions illustrates his position as an individual informed by patriarchal attitudes. It is interesting to note, though, that Tommy Cooper comes across as a simpleton who, whenever he features in the novel, inadvertently blurts out impulsive, ascerbic comments that not only rile the other characters but the readers as well. He constantly makes jokes at the next person's expense (see emphasis in passage above) and tries desperately to be humorous. As narrator, Poland comments that, "it is unfair to denigrate Tommy Cooper. He is, after all, a young man who went to the war. He fought bravely through the Western desert. Perhaps, then, his closest link to normality – to sanity – was his repertoire of jokes" (Poland 2003: 167). Poland uses the war and desert landscape to interrogate colonial sites of marginalisation and loneliness. The desert becomes a complex image that suggests the search for masculinity and gender identity. The sense of the alien world, a physical world, which Poland can so vividly bring before us, conjures the sense that man's existence is ringed by a landscape, which, while it exists apart, confers a profound meaning upon man's life. Further, Tommy's behaviour, stemming from his childhood and reinforced by the desert,

reiterates Poland's belief in the power of landscape to shape people. For Tommy, the landscape is a site to be interrogated in his search for an identity. His behaviour and words are mere defence mechanisms; he loves Grace secretly but does not acquire an identity of which she would take cognisance. Later, when he does marry, he names his daughter Mary-Grace, evidence of his partiality to Grace.

Herman de Waal, the scientist experimenting with a herd of Nguni cross-breeds, agrees tongue-in-cheek with colonial and indigenous customs concerning women's social status: "Good idea paying cattle for women," he says. "Keeps them in their place. No nonsense" (64). de Waal is circumscribed by the conventions of society and perpetuates the same gender distinctions and prejudices, as did his forebears. In his experiences with Grace "he avoided speaking to her as much as possible. The only concession to her presence, after their tour of the camps, is that he had expected her to pour the tea: "She is safe in this duty. In asking her to do it, he is circumscribing her" (ibid).

On the flip side of the coin, however, women too contribute to their oppression. Mrs Mabb, Godfrey's father's mistress, harbours these thoughts when Godfrey visits her after the death of his father:

-- *Do not pity me.*

She does not say it: she only feels it. It is something that she knows will never change, as long as men have power and women give their tenderness. However futile or misplaced.

(261)

Mrs Mabb complacently accepts her lot. She demonstrates women's constraints and proves that if they are willing to remain inactive, then their real emancipation will be hindered. In fact, like other women in her position, she has become an accomplice to male domination, and is a picture of the fractured and disrupted developmental progress of the female subject. The circumstances in which she finds herself reflect much uncertainty, but Mrs

Mabb is so conditioned to her tragic circumstances that she seems almost oblivious to the extent of her suffering. She has accepted the fact that she has become a dormant participant in her own objectification. Not only does she allow herself to get trapped in the inconsistencies of the roles assigned to her, but she also assumes personal responsibility for conflicts intrinsic to those roles. Her refusal to attend Godfrey's father's funeral is an expression of her suffering, helplessness and dependency. Grace's relationship with Godfrey follows similar lines, but being an educated, career-oriented woman, she is better able to contend with the contradictions in her life. Nfah-Abbenyi claims that "naming women in binary terms is a discursive act that not only discloses their hyphenated identities as a reflection of the hierarchical society in which they live, but also exposes the problematic nature of womanhood as it relates to mothering, reproduction and sexual pleasure" (1997: 85). Many women are programmed and motivated primarily to fill subordinate roles even when their goals are of high societal value. As much as Grace is an expert in her own field – "spoke the language, understood the orthography, was competent and meticulous" (Poland 2003: 49)— she is still subordinate to Godfrey in terms of their fieldwork and is looked down upon by Herman de Waal who refers to her as "girlie" (62). In fact, when she comments on the role of cattle when the two men are talking, de Waal gives her a glance "as if something unaccountable has ruffled his train of thought: Had she spoken? Had she asked to be excused?" (ibid).

Gender emancipation comes with self-knowledge and self-empowerment and how one fits into a particular landscape. Real emancipation is not mere opposition to patriarchal values of power and authority, although confrontation is sometimes a successful strategy for change. Hall posits that a "woman's challenge is to go beyond the status quo, to create structures and norms that do not merely adapt to existing conditions" (1990: 4). Grace, like Frances in *Shades*, recognises important nuances and complexities in the destructive conditions of her subordination and is better prepared than Mrs Mabb and Emily (in *Shades*) to survive and to overcome the personal and social consequences of living life in a rural African landscape. She is fully aware that she is unable to have a meaningful identity without

acknowledging her emotional relatedness to others, and, in this context, Godfrey. Hall too is of the same opinion. He posits, "Connectedness characterises our layers and dimensions of self " (15). By deliberately going against the norms of society and having an affair with Godfrey, Grace is deliberate in her construction of her identity:

'... she never walks, she never runs.

but proudly, deliberately, boastfully she walks.'

That is how Grace Wilmot walked before Godfrey into his house that day, stepping over her own diffidence, deferring guilt. (Poland 2003: 134-135)

Their union is matched by the setting, and indeed, the rural setting plays a part in their interpretation of each other's behaviour. Grace attempts to negotiate a stable and viable sense of her own identity amid the multifaceted and powerful social forces that surround her in a colonial South Africa. She is fully aware that Godfrey is a married man, but the circumstances in which both of them find themselves, unconsciously dictate their actions :

They seldom speak of their domestic lives. It is a matter of honour, of discretion towards others, to keep it circumscribed. The longer they have worked together, the more they have created a separation from the outside world and this retreat. Identity, for each of them, remains within the precincts of this place. (177)

She represents a subtle but emerging voice of feminist dissent, a woman who resists a value system not her own. The situation, in which Grace and Godfrey find themselves, represents an alternative way of life, and living in this particular idyllic landscape changes their perceptions of themselves and their future. They are fully aware that they are transgressing codes of behaviour in a social landscape where such actions, if found out, may prove destructive. Violating society's ethical judgement, she realises, incurs a very high risk, "Voices closing in. People watching. Someone listening on the party-line?"

(160). With this realisation, Grace has a painful recognition of her own place at the transgressive margins of society. Initially, she thrives in her state of unresolved and often warning emotions and feelings, and she sees any inconsistencies in her feelings or her world as opportunities for greater self-development. She knows that in a society that sees itself as beleaguered, cultural conformity follows desire. Her redemption lies in the way Hugh Wilmot, as family member, gives her support and comfort rather than judgement and social incarceration. It is no wonder, then, that she is able to anticipate and prepare herself for Godfrey's parting.

Both have created particular creatures within themselves – sinners in their own way – as a result of place and circumstance. The physical immensity of the African geographical space, that enabled them to find solace in each other, is now complemented by inner amplitude. They are united in their opposition to the traditional snobbery and inequality of colonial society. If the roles were reversed, and this narrative had been set in an English landscape, then the chances of this type of behaviour succeeding would have been lower. Godfrey's wife, Stella's, circumstances and way of life reinforce this statement:

She is in her English place.
 There is no ironstone or aloe. No mythology of stars.
 Her meanings are clear. She is precise.
 She is a woman of unimpeachable honour and intelligence.
 There is right and there is wrong. To betray her quiet integrity,
 her order, is reprehensible. (183-184)

Stella's inner resources and resolve are fine tuned and highly developed by the landscape in which she finds herself. Murphy's contention that, "People are bound to their place and women's roles within house and community are strictly inscribed" (1998: 214), suits Stella. The aspects of her personality and elements that define her are the sources of her strength. On the other hand, Godfrey's strength, when confronted by his father, collapses. Being a complex and multi-layered character that grows increasingly concerned about the

development of his relationship with Grace, Godfrey's conscience, values and thoughts of his wife trouble him. His fears and anxieties are rooted in his experience of trying to reconcile attitudes and behaviour that come from two very different worlds. Time spent in the indigenous landscape with its "mythology of stars" influences him to be impulsive, passionate and provocative, whilst his Englishness fostered in an English landscape, ensures that he remains rational and logical in his thinking. His dual nature reflects his status as the product of two worlds, Africa and England. Physical spaces and class are at the heart of the tensions Godfrey faces between life in Africa and the world of England. He cannot afford to act spontaneously and his travels from England to Africa and back again are a quest for something he cannot name; perhaps a sort of grace, or a form of self-knowledge.

As much as we cannot condone Grace's relationship, she too, like Godfrey, cannot be condemned since the direction in which the narrative has been straining, is towards the liberation of the individual soul. This is due, primarily, to Poland's alertness to the way landscapes impress upon people – she finds morality in geography; her choice of location is not incidental. She juxtaposes the sheer immensity of the South African landscape with the tentativeness of human presence upon it. It is an experience that tends to dwarf human pretensions, and furthermore, one that has made a virtue of survival. To complicate the issue, Poland portrays Grace in a particularly complex and precarious position in relation to the various social categories, thus complicating Grace's identity all the more. When Godfrey decides to go back to his wife, Grace discovers that she is pregnant with Godfrey's child:

Disbelieving -- oh, but knowing -- she had denied its existence until, one morning in the classroom, she had felt a flutter, fragile as an insect wing brushing skin, and turned alert, seeking the movement outside herself. It had come again. A little thump, a tremor. She had stood -- poised -- with a terror and an exultation. (Poland 2003: 212)

It is significant to note that "pregnancy is the condition of their greatest vulnerability, and it is this condition, or the fear of it, which more often than

not, expose the moment of crisis for women" (Gurnah 1993: 152). Fortunately for Grace, she is able to cultivate a profound understanding of her life and can draw strength from this:

She places her hands together on her tummy. A small benediction. She had never thought of tearing this child out of her flesh. It is hers. And it is his. It is their blood, which cannot be divided (Poland 2003: 237).

She is aware that she must change the historical pattern of the narrowness and restrictiveness of the few roles that constitute the substance in her life. Even Dulcie Trollip had reinforced Grace's thoughts when she tells her, "I'm sorry you couldn't have what you wanted. Women very seldom do" (231). Grace's pregnancy is paralleled to Tommy Cooper's girlfriend's pregnancy. Both had fallen pregnant out of wedlock. Both pregnancies were brought before Minister Hugh Wilmot to pass judgement:

'Tommy came for advice, that's all. And I don't think he wants to hear the advice I had to give'

'What about?'

'He's obliged to get married.'

Grace does not look at him. 'No one is obliged to get married,' she says. (208)

The defiance in Grace is palpable. She emerges not as a flat and one-dimensional symbol but as a strong human being. Her baby, thus, becomes a conduit, so to speak, of a polyphony of discourses from Grace. Fittingly, the baby is a girl – Ruth. The cyclical concepts of oppression, suppression, patriarchy, male domination and gender discrimination rear their heads again. However most importantly, the baby symbolises the idea of rootedness and attachment to a particular landscape. Ruth is rooted not only in a geographical landscape, but also in a social and emotional one.

5.2.6 ANIMALS IN THE LANDSCAPE

Like Ruth's rootedness in the indigenous landscape, Poland grounds firmly the importance of indigenous animals into the milieu. "She introduces realms of wonder and a kinship with those who seek out beauty in small things" (Jordan 2003: 3). Her use of the metaphors normally associated with the Nguni languages for these animals is explicit and beautiful. It is a world of wonder which Godfrey researches and brings to life. The symbolism of the Nguni cattle – cultural, political and spiritual – is infused in Godfrey's research and is projected by Poland in such a way that the indigenous landscape springs into life as an utterly mesmerising phenomenon. The names of the cattle, which are determined by the markings on the animals, are evocative and poetic. Poland looks at the abundant herds in her own way, filtering what she sees through her own particular and cultural perspective. Descriptions of the cattle are cleverly manipulated by Poland to bring to life her own interpretations. She uses their features as springboards for a variety of interpretations :

'And this,' I say, 'is *ezikhala zemithi*, which is the dappling, or whatever, of the trees. The silhouettes of them. You know, against the sky. It's just like branches'. (Poland 2003: 7)

Poland is evidently very much at home among rural phenomena, having studied African languages, and having completed her doctoral dissertation on colour-pattern terms for indigenous Sanga-Nguni cattle as discussed earlier in this thesis. Her commentary in *Recessional for Grace* reflects a unique style of writing, indicating a propensity to, not only to amuse, but also to educate the reader:

'The ox which is the stones of the forest.'
How can an ox – so bland, so bovine – be a stone of the forest, or a cloud made up of whey, or the eggs of a lark?
How can an ox be vivid and poetic: the drowsing onomatopoeia, the lift and fall and grace of tone – so exact? A love affair in metaphor. (Poland 2003: 5)

When she looks at the cattle and oxen, they are merged with the landscape, providing the physical indigenous landscape with the colour for which it is noted. The naming of the animals is onomatopoeic – naturally suggestive of their qualities. To Poland it's a "love affair in metaphor" -- the aesthetics of naming:

--*makhwifikhwif*

--*makwangukhwangu*

--*manangunangu*

--*mampilimpili*

There is something in dabbling with such words: they make their own rhymes and poems. Godfrey and Grace toss them between each other in laughter. It is a secret language, a secret joke, summoned – even in public places – love words in metaphor, as cryptic as the language of the cattle names. (132 – 134)

The cattle are named in metaphoric terms, which are like small imagist poems in themselves. The cattle and the elements are absorbed into each other and become signifiers of poetic imagery. The mythology of cattle names, in turn, becomes reabsorbed as statements of complex identities of successive generations. As an example, one can cite the following: Herman de Waal possesses a young bull which he calls Bitchaan Shiki -- 'Somewhat Cheeky' -- but the stockman, defines it in all its complexity :

'Intulo elizotha elisomi ebafazi baphik' icala': lizard of a sober colour, like the Redwinged starling, which is the women saying 'we have had enough, we repudiate the case', because he has horns that tip backwards like a woman throwing up her arms in resignation and despair. (133)

In contrast to the bull is the *inala* cow that Godfrey purchases. This heifer is one of the leimotifs mentioned earlier and it is the same calf that the narrator

sees in the photograph. This heifer's rebellion against conventional behaviour is successfully captured in the episode when the bull provokes her:

The bull advances, the little cow retreats.

Advance. Retreat.

Advance. Retreat.

Then suddenly she stands – unabashed, provocative – and takes a small step forward. The young bull is confused. He lowers his head and extends his lip, tasting the air between them. He is awkward and exposed. The *inala* cow pivots, with a touch of disdain, turns her back on him and trots away.

Godfrey looks over at Grace, suddenly laughs. 'She reminds me of you,' he says. (ibid)

Poland uses the *inala* cow to represent Grace. The feminist stance is quite obvious in the extract above with the *inala* standing her ground, squaring up against the bigger, more powerful beast. The extract also hints subtly at Grace and Godfrey's relationship. In subsequent months their relationship grows and deepens -- always by delicate advances and retreats -- and then suddenly, "unabashed, provocative", Grace takes a stand. As much as Grace's attitude arises from the intimate nature of her relationship with Godfrey, it also arises from the strength, independence and determination that she demonstrates in all of her activities. The unassuming heifer is connected "immutably, with Grace -- and in it, through it, with Godfrey's mythopoeic world" (134). Thus, the heifer and the two protagonists create a new cosmology. They reflect and affirm each other and all that they stand for.

Grace and Godfrey decide to make their heifer their '*inkomo yeminyanya*', their ancestral cow, so that they can keep in touch with the spirits of their ancestors. The indigenous inhabitants had a tradition in this respect, and plant life from the indigenous landscape had to be used to authenticate the process:

'A beast of the ancestors, the intermediary between the living and the dead, must be treated with the leaves and the flowers of the everlasting plant, have it rubbed along the back... so the ancestors can feel this thing that belongs to them, bringing this cow to them and making them glad.'
(137)

While Grace is witnessing the anointing of the *inala*, she comes to a realisation that both, she and the *inala*, "are sacrificial now" (ibid). When her relationship with Godfrey ends, it is Grace who is the loser – the sacrificial beast. Godfrey goes back to his wife, keeping his marriage intact. Grace, on the other hand, is forced into a marriage of convenience with Hugh Wilmot, her late husband's brother, so that society will accept her and her child. In a landscape of colonists and indigenous inhabitants, Grace realises that stereotypical values and judgements are socially constructed, historically shaped and often irrelevant to a particular situation. Women have always been forced to assume reduced roles in society and those Grace plays in the novel surely make her an admirable woman, although she may not be deemed the triumphant heroine some readers might want her to be. She has been drawn in by the indigenous landscape and by its inhabitants both colonial and indigenous, and like the *inala*, she is chastened by her experiences.

Marguerite
Poland

The Boy in You



A Biography of
St Andrew's
College,
1855–2005



A FERNWOOD PRESS PUBLICATION
IN ASSOCIATION WITH
ST ANDREW'S COLLEGE, GRAHAMSTOWN

CONCLUSION

As a term widely employed in painting and imaginative literature as well as in environmental design and planning, landscape carries multiple layers of meaning. (Cosgrove 1984:13)

The theme of identity linked to place is a vital one in landscape discourse as this thesis has endeavoured to show, and if we are to appreciate its function, we must realise its multi-dimensionality. This thesis has argued that identity construction in Poland's work is evident against a number of different types of landscape: colonial, mythological and indigenous, linked as these are. My thesis has focussed on cultural and spatial relations between people and places. I have shown in my thesis that identity linked to place has to be seen in terms of context. Poland's novels, *Shades* and *Train to Doringbult* illustrate the importance of context showing social forces that were contesting the construction of identities in colonial societies that were facing a transitional period.

The importance of context is stressed in Chapter 2, where Poland's biographical context is outlined showing that she was raised during the turbulent period of anti-apartheid protests and social transformation. In turn she shows the South African landscape as not stable, either physically or politically. It was being transformed not only by climatic conditions, but also by change in the lives of its inhabitants. Thus, landscape is a landscape of history and social change, which Poland shows in her fictional landscapes, set in different time periods.

Poland's ability to address issues surrounding the migrant labour system, poll tax, hut tax, the South-African War, discrimination, religion, sexual conventions, apartheid and political influence on cattle breeding displays her intense engagement with the South African land and its historical context. Booker and Juraga assert that "because of the conscious understanding of

the need to exorcise the ghosts of the past and find ways to draw upon that past in an attempt to build a better future, colonial writers quite often engage history in their work" (2001: 27). Though Poland may not be regarded solely as a colonial or postcolonial writer, she does certainly draw on her past and that of the country in which she sets her writings. Her works reveal her need to assert her affiliations to Africa, and the female protagonists in her novels frequently appear to be her mouthpiece in the sense that they all strive to attain a sense of belonging to a place, in both a geographical as well as an existential sense. The problems of identity, which are evident in *Shades* are embodied by the female characters in *Train to Doringbult* and *Iron Love* and are finally realised completely in *Recessional for Grace*.

As mentioned earlier, elements in this last novel are conspicuously drawn from the life experiences of the author, and landscape is the conduit that establishes the connecting threads in the various issues being addressed. To Poland landscape is inseparable from story, contributes to story, and often becomes a character in story. Thus, landscape in her narrative is not merely the habitat of her characters – through it she perceives sensations and attitudes towards life and it becomes an independent character. The characters are presented as distinct individuals with their own histories, needs and desires and at the same time presented as members of a single shaping landscape. Pointer, too, claims that "an environment is always more than just the physical world, more than the interrelations of objective historical conditions, but also human attitudes" (2001: 29). Thus, the creation of an effective physical setting, which involves the interrelationship of characters and environment, is one of Poland's characteristic technical strengths.

As previously mentioned, the photographs, portraits and other images Poland uses in her work, authenticate the people and the objects in the landscape and by extension, their stories and traditions. So too, does Poland's extensive research into her subject matter lend authenticity to the landscapes and identities she creates. For example, Poland, in her research for her doctoral thesis, consulted the works of; *inter alia*, Bleek and Lloyd, Kuper, Berglund, Finnegan and Okpewho. For authenticity and accuracy she also interviewed

traditional herdsmen, and through her fieldwork she uncovered that through the Zulu oral tradition, much information is cascaded through the generations albeit with some modification. As discussed in earlier chapters, when tales are repeated through the generations, changes in terms of style, plot and performance are inevitable. Poland posits that an exploration of oral tradition and cattle-lore “adds to the appreciation of the metaphorical content of many of the names, deepening insight into the interrelationship between the cattle and the environment” (1996 :412).

Even Poland’s children’s stories, though magical, are given authenticity through Poland’s faithfulness to the redolence and texture of Zulu, Xhosa and oral traditions. Her engagement with the land, her Honours degree in African languages, her Master’s degree in Zulu literature, her PhD in a descriptive study of the Sanga-Nguni cattle of the Zulu people with special reference to colour-pattern terminology and naming practice, and her adult fiction testify to her remarkable ability to capture the contours and cadences of the South African indigenous spoken languages. This clearly demonstrates her acute awareness of the texture and importance of oral culture. She has an affinity with San-Xhosa-Zulu worldviews, and as an anthropologist, she interprets the tradition as a highly dynamic one. Poland’s knowledge of Zulu and Xhosa worldviews is clearly depicted in her children’s literature, which, as discussed earlier, bears similarities with African folktales – the use of African mythology, the use of pregnant and sensual imagery and allusions, and the use of animals and plants conspicuous only in the indigenous landscape of Africa. One has only to contemplate, momentarily, a Marguerite Poland depiction of indigenous landscape, and it will be apparent that she has not only a great interest in landscape, but also a great love for the indigenous people (and those who have settled there from elsewhere), animals and flora of South Africa. Her aesthetic appreciation for the indigenous landscape is clearly reflected in her literary celebration of the bountiful flowers, trees, rivers, birds, insects and other animal life. Her work is essentially, therefore, South African in its sources and vision.

This thesis has traced Poland's trajectory from the mythological landscape of her children's fiction, to the colonial landscape of her novels to the indigenous landscapes of her academic work and latest novel. Where might her work move to now? Poland confirms that her next work, due for release simultaneously with the completion of this thesis, goes back to a colonial landscape, seen in fictional form in *Iron Love*. (Poland 2008) The setting of her current commissioned project is St. Andrew's College in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape and the subject matter is a history of the school. According to Eve, "a sequel to the publication of *Iron Love* has been the installation in St. Andrew's College chapel of a memorial window honouring a previously unsung hero, Charles Winston Fraser, the young person on whom the Charlie of Poland's *Iron Love* is based. Thus have place and literature, fact and fiction interacted" (Eve 2003: 129).

Iron Love, like Poland's other novels, *Shades*, *Train to Doringbult* and *Recessional for Grace*, complements, in different ways, Poland's current project. Entitled *The Boy in You: A Biography of St. Andrew's College, 1855 – 2005*, this book revolves around the formative years of the boys who schooled there and it explores the loyalty they demonstrate towards St. Andrew's. In *Iron Love*, Poland's fictional setting is based on the real colonial landscape of St. Andrew's College and her main character, Charlie Fraser, is based on the life of Charles Winston Fraser, an alumnus of St. Andrew's. Incidentally, and as corroborated by Poland, Charles Winston Fraser was actually a relative of hers and her grandchild, born in 2008, has been named after him (Poland 2008). From the start, Poland has depended upon the places she knew, and upon the people who lived there, for the texture of her novels and for the memories they evoke.

Salvesen recognises "the power of the landscape to fix and to evoke a particular memory, to fuse a remembered occasion and a present emotion" (1970: 50). Poland too, confirms that a sense of place is much more than setting; it explores the author's strong personal connection to a place (Poland 2008). According to Poland, many of her main characters in her other novels were actually scholars at St. Andrew's. These include Jan de

Villiers (*Train to Doringbult*), Godfrey (*Recessional for Grace*) and Crispin and Victor (*Shades*). In looking at landscape Poland was guided almost entirely by her own direct responses, but it is natural that she should reflect the various attitudes of her relatives' sensibilities. Thus, in recreating the landscapes around her novels, Poland enters another terrain in terms of the biographical nature of *The Boy in You*, but she still does it with deep personal associations.

St. Andrew's College, being one hundred and fifty years old, would definitely have many historical stories in its annals, from the time Chief Socishe in 1855 released six hundred acres of land to Bishop John Armstrong to the present. As in the writing of all her adult novels, Poland has found inspiration in photographs, memoirs and in her conversations with people associated in some way or the other with St. Andrew's. In fact, Poland had a stint teaching pupils at this school in order to familiarise herself with all the intricacies that go along with an all-boys' school, particularly St. Andrew's. Moody contends that a writer understands an environment first by "living in at a period of life in which one experiences much more than one is aware of" (1994: 25). Thus, Poland has undertaken her work of writing a biography of St. Andrew's by experiencing first hand the lives of the pupils, by combining photographs and memoirs and thereby creating a composite narrative. Furthermore, the attributes of landscape as a clear marker of space and time are established and reinforced. It is this construction by Poland of a real space that allows her characters to act and interact in the context of a shared history and a common identity. Here again she ties up fact and fiction, landscape and literature.

Generally underrated by the academy, Poland has provided her wide and popular readership with a consistently drawn canvas of South Africa in its differing phases and political moments. This is not virgin terrain through which she meanders, but her work is unique and imaginative and within its contours are seeds sown for much geographical and historical debate on landscape, and how this in turn shapes its inhabitants.

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