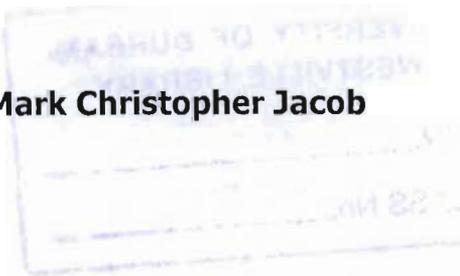


CONSTRUCTIONS OF IDENTITY IN MARGUERITE POLAND'S
SHADES (1993) AND IRON LOVE (1999).

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS** in South African Literature and Language, University of Durban-Westville, January 2003.

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DECLARATION

The Registrar (Academic)
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Dear Sir

I, **MARK CHRISTOPHER JACOB**

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"Constructions of identity in Marguerite Poland's novels, *Shades* (1993) and *Iron Love* (1999)"

is the result of my own investigation and research and that it has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree or to any other University.



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ABSTRACT

Constructions of Identity in Marguerite Poland's novels, *Shades* (1993) and *Iron Love* (1999)

In this thesis I will examine Marguerite Poland's two novels, Shades (1993) and Iron Love (1999) in terms of how they provide constructions of identity in a particular milieu and at a particular time. In order to do this; the thesis will focus on Poland's historical context and that of her fiction as represented in these two works. My primary aim is not to present a particular interpretation of colonial history, but rather to put into perspective personal, social and cultural identities that emerge from particular periods in South African history, especially as pertains to the Eastern Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal, and particularly as illustrated in Poland's fiction.

My approach would be to look at constructions of identity from a feminist as well as a Marxist perspective: "To Marx, man was a being whose identity and nature arose out of his purely practical attempts to make his livelihood in what amounts almost to a struggle with a hostile, physical environment" (Robertson 1985:204). This implies that socio-historical conditions are largely responsible for forming ideology and consciousness, which I will argue, is true for Poland's fiction under discussion. Poland's own position as a broadly liberal feminist will also be discussed.

I have chosen the above-mentioned novels of Marguerite Poland not only because she is one of South Africa's leading contemporary writers of children's literature and adult fiction and has received numerous awards for her books and stories; but also because she is a most inspirational and perceptive writer meriting serious academic study. Her novel Shades (1993) – a matric setwork in 1998, 2001 and 2002 – proved highly successful as a setwork and was nominated for the MNet Fiction Award. Shades deals primarily with love, dispossession and identity, and the title itself refers to the spiritual manifestation of those gone before. Poland chose the title because she was writing about her own 'shades', her ancestors and the role they played in the small valley of the Mtwaku River in the Eastern Cape at the end of the nineteenth century (Poland 2000). Her core source was her great-grandmother's diaries, which related anecdotes about life at the St. Matthew's Mission. In 1999, Poland wrote Iron Love, again using her great-grandmother's diaries, but she insists that this book is not a sequel to Shades (Jacob 2002). Furthermore, the main character, Charlie Fraser, is a descendant of Poland's ancestors. In Iron Love (1999) Poland depicts the role of colonial private schools in indoctrinating young colonial leaders. The book "subtly questions the humanity inherent in a system teaching the suppression of emotions, sexuality, individuality, freedom"(Webster 2000:8).

The thesis will open with an introduction outlining reasons for my choice of writer, her novels to be discussed, and the theoretical approaches I intend using. I will discuss the life and works of Marguerite Poland in an historical context and

discuss the factors that influenced her in the writing of her novels. In this chapter I will also discuss identity construction in terms of feminist and Marxist ideology on patriarchy, religion, and capitalism. Chapter Two and Chapter Three will focus on a literary analysis of Shades (1993) and Iron Love (1999) respectively. Both novels demonstrate how identity is shaped by socio-historical forces, which I will analyse in depth in this thesis. Chapter Four will conclude my thesis further confirming the importance of socio-economic forces in determining ideology as manifested in Poland's fictional characters and in her own life.

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Chapter One

In this chapter, I propose to supply a brief introduction to Marguerite Poland and her oeuvre generally; and then to look more specifically at the issues she tackles and how these may be understood using some of the contemporary theoretical tools of Marxism and feminism. In the later chapters these positions will be fleshed out more fully. Poland's own liberal feminist position will be considered especially as it influences her construction of identity for her fictional characters. The significance of place as pertinent to identity will also be mentioned briefly here and more carefully in the sustained analysis of the chosen novels.

Durban based writer, Dr Marguerite Poland, is of the opinion that " it is a place that makes the story come" (Schwartz 1993:3). Her beautifully constructed allegorical novel, Train to Doringbult (1993), was awarded the CNA Literary Award and the ever- popular matric setwork, Shades (1993) was short-listed for the MNet Fiction Award. This highly acclaimed novel was followed by Iron Love (1999) which, like her previous adult novels, is set mostly in the Eastern Cape. Poland's novels contain vivid descriptions of a landscape she obviously loves. She has taken historical facts and made them interesting for the reader without sacrificing the authenticity of historical detail.

Marguerite Poland was born on 3 April 1950 and at the age of two she moved to the Eastern Cape where she spent most of her formative years. Since both novels, Shades (1993) and Iron Love (1999), are set in the early 1900's, they are influenced by the Victorian era, the South African War (1899 - 1902) and World War 1 (1914- 1918). Poland says of her choice of setting and historical period that "it has about it everything that is beautiful in this country and it echoes a legacy too of all that is tragic from our past" (Poland 2000). Her books, although fictional, are based on Poland's great-great grandparents' experiences and those of other family members and may therefore be seen as a search for her own 'shades' and her identity in an historical context.

Dr Poland was educated at St Dominic's Priory in Port Elizabeth. She completed her BA degree at Rhodes University, majoring in Social Anthropology and Xhosa. In 1971 she was awarded her Honours degree in African languages at Stellenbosch University. When she married Martin Oosthuizen, an attorney, she moved to Kloof in Kwazulu – Natal, and at the University of Natal, she attained her Masters degree in Zulu literature. The title of her dissertation was "A study of the Zulu Folktales with special reference to the Stuart Collection". Marguerite Poland wrote numerous books for children, two of which were awarded the Percy Fitzpatrick Prize for South African children's Literature: The Mantis and the Moon (1979) and The Woodash Stars (1983). Nqalu, the Mouse with no Whiskers (1979) and Once at Kwafubesi (1981) also received honourable mention at the

Percy Fitzpatrick Awards function in 1980 and 1981 respectively. Some of her stories were translated into Afrikaans and published: Die Muis Sonder Snorbaard (1979); Die Bidsprikaan en die Maan (1981); As die Boerboonblomme Val (1983); and Die Vuurkoolsterre (1983). In 1989 The Mantis and the Moon (1979) was translated into Japanese and it won Japan's Sankei Award.

Her love for the South African landscape and its diverse cultures encouraged her to become deeply involved with the indigenous people and their languages. Like her great-grandparents were, she is well versed in Xhosa and isiZulu. In 1997 Dr Poland obtained her doctorate in isiZulu folklore and her thesis, "Uchibidolo: The Abundant Herds", 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 novel Shades (1993), cattle play a major role in the lives of the protagonist and the migrant labourers.

Poland believes that it was her 'shades' that led her to the writing of her novel, Shades: when she was fifteen years old, she visited the St. Matthew's Mission at Keiskammahoek on the banks of the Mtwaku River in the Eastern Cape where her great great- grandparents had been missionaries from 1862 to 1913. At the church she experienced a vision of ghostly shadows and of voices of the past to which she belonged. Later she dreamt that her great great-grandfather, Charles

Taberer, was supporting her in some arduous endeavour. Consequently, she embarked on her novel, Shades, basing it on the lives of her ancestors. In her research she 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, the iniquitous migrant labour system, the tragedies of the rinderpest and the destruction of traditional Xhosa culture. Similarly, Iron Love (1999) is "set within a carefully researched time-frame and in a much-loved place in which the real history of the school and the recall of the community provide texture and background" (Iron Love 1999:ix). Poland says 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" (ibid). In her research to the book Poland ensured that she painstakingly read every school magazine produced by St. Andrew's School for boys. She even had a teaching stint there in order to familiarize herself with the machinations of St. Andrews' School history. Although Poland is not overtly critical of hierarchy, corporal punishment and colonialism, she subtly criticizes the role of colonial private schools in indoctrinating young colonial leaders. In Iron Love Charlie Fraser, the protagonist, is a representative of all the young and promising men who firmly believed that what they were fighting for when their 'motherland'

(Great Britain) became engaged in World War 1, was worth the sacrifice.

The British were, during the nineteenth century, the foremost colonial power in the world and their influence was particularly dominant on the South African indigenous people. The evangelical Charles Farborough, Walter Brownley, Hubert Brompton and the Drakes (characters in Shades) were all 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 'civilized' 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, religions and cultures of the indigenous people. The introduction of Christianity to the people of colour resulted in cultural and religious conflict. Although the intentions of the missionaries may have been noble, in their zealous propagation of Christianity, they often failed to recognise the cultural richness of the indigenous people.

With the resulting acculturation, a new identity was born. Max Weber's theory concerning sociology and religion posits that the system of ethics of Calvinism not only conforms with, but also is an important preparation for, the growth of capitalism. He believed that the Protestant ethic "underscored those virtues of thrift, discipline, personal responsibility, self-help and unremitting toil which were congenial to the capitalist spirit" (Weber cited in MacIver 1957:173). Weber saw the cultural and economic elements as congenial. He was of the opinion that

each influences the other and he believed that "there is a direct relation between the practical ethics of a community and the character of its economic system" (MacIver 1957:173). The missionaries in Shades belonged to a society that had to fend for itself. They were dependent on agriculture and husbandry and had to work extremely hard to survive in an alien landscape. The belief was that if you suffer, you suffer for God, and their main aim was to Christianize the 'heathens' of South Africa. The mission station at St. Matthias flourished economically and culturally. Marx' analyses of class conflict portrays the individual members of both the owning bourgeoisie and the labouring proletariat as ultimately motivated by their conflicting economic interests. In his view religious form becomes a superstructural complex to be explained in the final analysis by the objective material interest underlying them. In fact, for both Marx and Weber, "religious systems express the creation of human values, which are not 'given' in the biological make-up of man, but are the outcome of the historical process" (Giddens 1971:212). The application of these views will be part of my analysis of Poland's two novels in the following chapters.

The colonial life portrayed in Shades is steeped in the religious and economic history Marxism so clearly analyzes. Marx is very sceptical of religion and man's search for a spiritual identity. He treats religion in general as "the self-consciousness and self awareness of man who either has not yet attained to himself or has already lost himself again"(Molyneux 1983:7). This statement is

true for Benedict Matiwane in Shades who is in a dilemma since he is a black person 'adopted' by a white missionary family. His sponsors are adamant that he portray the picture of a well-groomed Victorian gentleman, embracing European culture and beliefs. In his search for identity he contemplates his place within his own culture and his place in the Christian world. He is, however, forlorn and alienated. Giddens' interpretation of Marx is that religion is always a form of alienation because religious beliefs involve the attribution to mystical entities of capabilities or powers that are in fact possessed by man (Giddens 1971:212).

In her novels, Poland, though influenced by the teachings of her own religious upbringing in the Christian church, displays an admirable tolerance for the indigenous people's beliefs and cultures. According to her "A child is conceived in conjunction with the 'shades'. They worked in the blood of the parents, shaping the spirit"(Shades 1993:102). Thus the concepts 'religion', 'identity' and 'belonging' are for Poland largely facilitated by the 'shades' of ancestors. Mike Boon, in his book The African Way (1996) posits that the missionaries of the past attempted to destroy this life-view, as they believed that belief in the ancestral spirits competed with a Christian belief in God. The Christian church considered the sangomas (diviners), who were spirit-mediums through whom the living could communicate with the 'shades', as evil and threatening. In collaboration with Marx, Friedrich Engels analyzes early Christianity as "the religion of slaves and emancipated slaves"

(Molyneux 1983:10). Marguerite Poland however, does not see the indigenous people as slaves "though historical research has made her 'cynical about missionaries' "(interview with von Klemperer 1993). -

Poland deals with historical facts, with social forces and energies, which interest her, as they have bearing upon the individual spirit. In this regard, the novels represent a prolonged contention against the intractable social realities, on behalf of the freedom and rights of the individual spirit. "Marx saw bourgeois society with all its contradictions as a society in the process of becoming" (Fischer 1970:27). The problem therefore, was to turn men, reduced to an empty individuality, away from purely private interests and preoccupations, to unite the individual with a community based on the freedom of all rather than on a dominant few. A social being has more individuality when his or her conduct is not simply imitative, when he/she is not entirely the slave of custom, when his or her responses to the social environment are not altogether automatic and subservient.

For the purpose of this thesis, I will now briefly outline some of the theoretical positions which will be helpful in the analysis of Poland's novels which I will undertake in Chapters Two and Three. Social feminist strategies for ending oppression seek to combine the traditional Marxist emphasis on changing the material conditions of life with the twentieth century feminist emphasis on

gender relations and the importance of changing ideas on gender roles. The creation of a woman's culture is essential to facilitating women's sense of themselves. One of the things, which distinguished Marx's view of history and society was the emphasis, it placed on the socio-economic element in any society as an ultimate determinant of that society's character. One of Marxist feminists' primary aims was to "open up the complex relation between gender and the economy"(Jefferson 1982: 54). Many of Poland's female characters in Shades are influenced by the socio-economic conditions in which they live and as a result their identities as independent individuals are affected.

Simone de Beauvoir postulates that proletarians have not always existed, whereas there have always been women (de Beauvoir 1953:141). Since women have been, throughout history, subordinated to men, their dependency is not the result of a historical event or a social change: "The turning point of all history is the passage from the regime of community ownership to that of private property"(de Beauvoir 1953:153). In order to understand the proletariat versus bourgeois struggle in terms of male and female, husband and wife, we need to look at family, marriage and relationships. Instinctively one would associate the word 'family' with marriage, children and domesticity. The word, however, was derived from the word 'famulus', which means domestic slave, and 'familia' refers to the total number of slaves belonging to an individual. The term was invented by the Romans to denote a new social organism, whose head ruled over wife,

children and slaves. Paternal power assumed the rights of life and death over the subordinates. Thus, within the family the patriarchal husband could be taken to represent the bourgeois and the wife to represent the proletariat. Marriage is very similar to "the feudal relation of vassalage: it provides a means for exchanging support and protection from the husband in return for services and devotion from the wife" (Stimpson 1980:27). The oppression of the housewives can be understood in structural terms: housewives depend on their husband for comfort and survival and consequently are materially subordinate to them. The institution of marriage thus makes women an absolute dependent, a parasite. It incapacitates her for life's struggles and annihilates her social consciousness. Emma Goldman (1992) claims that marriage is primarily an economic arrangement, an insurance pact. This insurance, however, can be seen as more binding and more exacting than an ordinary life insurance. The protection and comfort marriage offers is, in these terms, in reality a trap, a travesty on human character. This theoretical position is useful when studying Iron Love (1993) in which the mothers' presence in the boarding school is absent and the subordination of females by males is quite conspicuous. It is the women who teach their sons, by example, how to be the custodians of 'iron love'.

Poland's novel Iron Love deals with the power of patriarchy forcefully. August Bebel (1992) believed that the female sex has a double yoke to bear. Firstly, women suffer because of their social dependence on men and the inferior

position allotted to them in society. Secondly, they suffer because of their economic dependence – in the majority of cases the husband has to earn a living and support the family. This gives him a position of supremacy. Patriarchal power in the nineteenth century took away from women all her rights to possess and bequeath property. Thus, marriage to a girl may have greater benefit for her, than for the man, and hence she is more eager to tie the knot. However, she frequently fears the institution of marriage bearing in mind the enslavement that it carries. The phenomenon of enslavement is “a result of the human consciousness, seeking always to exercise its sovereignty in objective fashion” (de Beauvoir 1953:182). In most traditional cultures when a woman becomes a man’s property, he anticipates that she is a virgin and he requires complete fidelity. For the woman, the danger of fornication is impregnation and illegitimate children. This danger of such immense magnitude can constitute a sexual restraint sufficiently powerful to make many young girls keep their chastity as prescribed by tradition. In Shades Frances’ sexual behaviour may, in this light, be seen as a criticism of the position of men and women in a capitalist society. More will be made of this in Chapter Two.

The subordination of women in the nineteenth century in the ‘home’ made its inroads into the economic and practical spheres with the development of capitalism. At the end of the nineteenth century the discovery of diamonds and gold in South Africa was a boom for capitalism in colonial history. According to

Giddens, patriarchy certainly does not originate with capitalism, but the emergence of capitalist production systematically alters pre-existing patterns of sexual, as well as racial oppression. Social feminists see class and racial oppression as part of the patriarchal structure of society and regard gender as being socially produced and historically changing. Clearly evident in Shades is the suppression of the female identity and the exploitation of Blacks. Black oppression was evident in the migrant labour system, which had its roots in the discovery of gold and diamonds. Recruitment officers and agencies were ruthless and unscrupulous in destroying the cultural lives of the indigenous people. History teaches us that in certain circumstances it is very easy for the colonialists to manipulate and to impose their domination on a people; “[b]ut it also teaches us that whatever may be the material aspect of this domination, it can be maintained only by the permanent, organised repression of the cultural life of the people concerned” (Cabral 1993:42). The Glen Grey’s Act of 1894, instituted by Cecil John Rhodes, ensured the final destruction of the culture of the Black people by integrating them into the industrial society as a severely dependent labour force. According to the Glen Grey’s Act, black men had to pay hut tax and poll tax and it also stipulated that only the eldest son could inherit his father’s property. This act, together with natural disasters like floods and the rinderpest, left the black people poor and devastated. Since the men needed money to pay taxes, they had to seek employment and the most lucrative and accessible option was the mines. Here, however they suffered untold hardships. In order to ensure

that others would not be deterred by the horror stories of life on the mines, the mine bosses attempted to stop abuse by forming recruitment agencies and the Native Affairs Representative Council. Abuse, however prevailed – bribery, corruption and blackmail was rife. Thus European customs, urbanisation and the migrant labour system destroyed the very fabric of the traditional identity of the black people.

Linked to the belief that the traditional people are culturally dispossessed, cruelly oppressed and consciously exploited is the notion that they are trapped and restricted in any potential for change. Within the Marxist tradition, work is valued both for its direct products, which fulfil specific and historically determined human needs, and also for the possibility it offers of developing the potentialities of the workers. According to Mary Eagleton, the proletarian worker finds it hard to change because an environment that is impoverished and limited in opportunity socially traps him. He is “trapped by the system and the demands of industrial, capitalistic society” (Eagleton 1979:73). He is trapped by a determinist philosophy, by having no power to transcend or transform these limitations. Hence, it is because the capitalist system is so pervasive and controlling, affecting all aspects and stages of an individual’s life, that the working class is so vulnerable. The relevance of this to Shades is clear. The Pumani brothers in Shades and the other black miners exist in relationships of domination and subjugation. The ‘boy brides’ on the mines reiterate the vulnerability of some and

issues of domination, and also indirectly address the feminist issue of subjugation. 'Boy brides', in the late nineteenth century, were the young, fragile, and feminine-looking boys on the mines who were dressed like women and who had to provide sexual favours to the indunas (chiefs) in return for gifts and other privileges. White capitalist mine-managers condoned these practices simply because they benefited monetarily when gifts were purchased from the mine shops. The feminine Sonwabo Pumani's vulnerability in Shades restricted his potential for growth and he can be seen as a representative of the many other marginalised workers on the mines.

Furthermore, Marguerite Poland illustrates in her fiction the way that women have been subjected to men through the guise of love and duty. By unpacking old racial and sexual stereotypes, Poland explores the various manifestations of Black resistance and gender consciousness. In particular, the continuing intransigence and repressiveness on the mines and society in general in the early nineteenth century served to provide increasingly extremist opposition and to create an atmosphere of intense hostility. The root cause of South Africa's internal unrest in the late 1800's is to be located in a rising black consciousness among black workers which was in turn a response to the exploitative nature of the apartheid-capitalist system propagated in the mines.

The strikes on the mines in Shades reflect that the proletariat was becoming more explicitly polarised and radicalised. A capitalist means to exploit miners was the issuing of 'loafers' tickets. The build up to the strikes was a direct result of the issuing of the 'loafers' tickets, which guaranteed that the men would work over their contract time at no extra pay. This obviously was a means to an end for the capitalist class mine owners. When the South African war broke out, the mineworkers who had to carry passes wanted to go home. One group of Sotho workers burned their passes when the British relieved Johannesburg. Their jubilation however, was short-lived because military rule was re-established immediately. This meant that the workers had to go back to work in the mines so that they could save money to buy their passes. The rebellion by the disgruntled Sotho workers was met by the military might of the imperial army who callously fired upon the unarmed workers. This confirmed the lengths the ruling regime was prepared to go in defense of its interests.

Shades reflects the build up of resistance that pervaded the British Empire in its latter stages, particularly the resistance on the part of those in power to accept moves towards equality by women and Africans. The gun, as used by the British soldier on the Sotho workers, is a symbol of colonial conquest. During the Victorian period in England, white upper-class males were firmly and securely entrenched in their role as conqueror and overseer of other groups such as women and blacks. One of the reasons, it can be argued, that men go to war is

because of women. Men fight, not only for women's protection, but also in the service of an ideology that yokes together aggression and masculinity; that men 'prove' their manhood before they can win the love of a woman (Byrne 1993:52).

By means of arms, the capitalist imperialist is able to appropriate and subordinate other producers, productive forces and other products. The capitalist is not a producer, but an appropriator who follows the paradigm of predatory acquisition. In Iron Love the young boys have to undergo extensive military training and must be prepared for conscription and war. The honing of their predatory skills for the acquisition of land and power begins at school. When World War 1 broke out, military and naval armaments had grown to monstrous proportions and England and Germany emerged as the dominant forces in world power. The rapacious power of these countries gave birth to the imperialist war. Imperial ideology was male-centred and this, then, brings us back to the question of male domination and female subjugation. The separation between males (war) and females (family) is thus part of the social consciousness of the dominant classes. In Shades and Iron Love Marguerite Poland's stories revolve around the South African War (1899-1902) and World War 1 (1914 -1918) respectively and she offers a critique of inequality and subordination wherever she finds it. She seeks out roots of how things came to be the way they are in South Africa.

In my next chapter, I will show in more detail how the theoretical arguments, which have been introduced in this chapter, are pertinent to an analysis of Poland's Shades. In particular, I will focus on capitalist imperialism, and the role of race and gender in the construction of identity.

CHAPTER TWO

SHADES (1993): MARGUERITE POLAND

Marguerite Poland postulates that "a child is conceived in conjunction with the shades. They worked in the blood of the parents, shaping the spirit"(1993: 102), thus the concepts 'belonging' and 'identity' are largely facilitated by the 'shades' of the ancestors. In other words, the term 'shades', a traditional Xhosa belief, refers to the roots of an individual giving one an identity and a sense of 'belonging'.

The main characters who supposedly 'belong' to the St. Matthias' Mission Station are: Father Charles Farborough; his wife, Emily, and his children, Frances and Crispin. A regular visitor is the son of the late Major Drake, Victor Drake, who is related to the Farboroughs through his mother's second marriage. Victor is a tall, blond, twenty-one year old, virile young man and his 'war games' are the means of honouring the 'shades' of his father. In these games Victor always made Frances play the role of his wife, secretly yearning to make her his wife in reality. His competition arrives in the form of Reverend Walter Brownley, who is in his early thirties and who, although not as good looking as Victor, has a noble and admirable character. A love triangle develops and the pathos and events leading to the conclusion of these relationships force the reader to review his/ her perception of what love is all about by comparing and contrasting the relation

between Frances and Victor and that of Frances and Walter. The love saga is played out against the backdrop of the outbreak of the rinderpest disease in 1899, the discovery of gold in South Africa, the corrosive effects of the migrant labour system, the Second World War and the effects of Christianity on the indigenous people of South Africa.

The story shifts alternately from St. Matthias, to Mbokothwe, then to the mines in Johannesburg. The compassionate and self-sacrificing seventeen-year-old Crispin is in the centre of the sub-plot as he tries to protect his displaced and dispossessed 'heathen' friends. When his Xhosa friends, Tom, Reuben and Sonwabo Pumani are killed, he takes it upon himself to bring their 'shades' home – the Xhosa belief is that when a person dies away from home, his/ her spirit turns to 'shades' and is left wandering but it can be led home to find peace by touching the body of the dead with a branchlet of the Mphapha tree, which carries the spirit. Poland portrays in her main protagonists the need to belong to our past, our families and the landscape in which we live. Benedict Matiwane contemplates his future by reflecting on his past, his ancestral shades and the cultural milieu in which he finds himself; Walter Brownley, a foreigner to the African soil feels dispossessed and an "odd sense of predestination"(1993:8) assails him at St Matthias Mission Station and at the barren Mbokothwe Mission; Crispin bears the strange cultural mix of Xhosa and Christianity, and the love of the land and its people ultimately leads to a tragic end; and finally Frances rebels

against the conventions of her time in order to empower, not only herself but, women in general. This chapter, then will focus on:

- ❖ Socio-historical conditions responsible for - forming ideology and a consciousness in the protagonists in this novel;
- ❖ The role of 'shades' in the construction of identity.
- ❖ The role of race and gender in the novel.
- ❖ Capitalism, The Glen Grey's Act and the migrant labour system, and their impact on this novel.

All these categories are inter-related and a fair degree of overlapping will result.

The term 'shades' has been fundamental to most tribal people in Southern Africa. It basically refers to the spirits of ancestors who were noted for their good deeds on earth. Whereas the good spirits became 'shades', the bad ones remain 'lost'. The concept of 'shades' assumes an intimacy with the living – it occupies an intermediary status between that of the living and that of the after-world. Mike Boon, in his book The African Way (1996), posits that the missionaries of the past attempted to destroy this life-view in the belief that the ancestral spirits contradicted one's belief in God. The church considered the sangomas (diviners), who were spirit-mediums through whom the living could communicate with the 'shades', as evil. Mission life-view infiltrated the lives of the indigenous people resulting often in the breakdown of cultural identities. This serves as an example

of how identity, which is an existential reality, is always in a state of flux, always in process, never finished.

The main characters in Shades (1993) explore various frontiers and transgress many boundaries not normally associated with the norms of society in order to resolve their identity crises. 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. From this child of the South African veld comes the beginnings of feminist ideas, then only starting to stir in Europe; and with it she shatters the smug and comfortable conventions of her day. In her rebellion against oppressive formalities, Frances deliberately seeks out her lover and indulges in sex outside the bonds of marriage. She attempts, in these telling actions, to make a statement on the enfranchisement of women and on all artificial forms of social subjugation.

While Frances battles in the cause of feminism and women's rights, Benedict Matiwane, Father Charles' Black protégé reflects on the existence of God and the existence of his 'shades'. Benedict's identity crisis, his search for the meaning of life, his history and his quest for the truth in an overwhelming colonial environment is illustrated by his reflections, his behaviour and his productivity surrounding the printing press. Entrapped in the dilemma of 'belonging', Benedict uses the printing press to express his feelings and the response he receives from

the black readers of his articles encourages him in his quest for liberation. Benedict symbolises the corrosive effects of religious anxiety within a patriarchal system of belief and the printing room becomes the bleak inner place of self-discovery. As with the other 'natives', Benedict's cultural fabric and sense of belonging was wrenched away from him by his sponsor and the missionaries who came to South Africa in the hope of converting the 'heathens'. He was indoctrinated by the colonial language, beliefs and mannerisms and if he strayed his actions were condemned and frowned upon. His dispossession even went to the extent of blackmail – emotional and financial. If he did not conform, then his sponsor in England, Ms Prudieaux Brune, would be notified and his sponsorship curtailed. According to Emily, his education and other privileges would be stopped immediately and this would make him no better than the 'heathens'.

Benedict exemplifies the fact that human beings, irrespective of colour, desire a sense of acceptance and identity and the need to be recognized as individuals. Being an abandoned black boy and being adopted by a Christian world demanded that Benedict reflect on his own culture and on his place in the world of the missionaries. Not knowing his parents meant that he did not possess an identity. Even his name, Benedict Matiwane, was a contradiction and a conflict in his life. The mixture of the English forename and the Xhosa surname disturbed him and the fact that he had no 'shades' haunted him even further: "Perhaps, 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" (1993:102).

The magnitude of his dispossession and loneliness always assailed him when he thought of his parents and his 'shades'. Therefore, he tried not to reflect too often on these issues. He buried himself in his work and, just like the catechist, Mzantsi, he "remained in a strange state of bondage and dependence" (ibid). Although Mzantsi and Benedict were both subject to colonial brainwashing, Mzantsi, the elder of the two, was more inflexible in his newly acquired culture and he could not conceive of Benedict having an identity crisis. Like a puppet, Mzanti adheres to all the demands placed on him by mission life and even condemns and criticizes his traditional, native way of life. He loses his compassion and rationale and follows rigidly the mission teachings and principles, which he does not fully understand. He believes in the rules of the mission without exception and lacks Benedict's spirit, restlessness and need to come to terms with his own culture and past. He does not believe that if one severs one's self from one's past, one's family and one's environment, one cannot function effectively. It is in this context that the quest for identity and the tragedy of displacement and dispossession unfold in the novel.

The St. Mathias' Mission Station, a self-sufficient, thriving community surrounded by a barren landscape, can be viewed as a place of the lost, the lonely and

forsaken. It should be perceived not in absolute terms but through the refracted light of human consciousness since Benedict's, France's and the other characters' identities in terms of place are defined less by **where** they are in a topographical sense than by **whom** they are with. Existence is therefore social. Benedict had lived here all his life but he had no claims to the land: "Iranuga: stranger, wanderer. That was the word to describe him. Here were no ancestral lands of his. No relatives, no shades"(1993:101). When one studies a contemporary novel set in the late nineteenth century one is aware, that the novel will inevitably have to tackle the major issues of the day as is true of all fiction. The issues are particular to their own age displaying aspects about the culture, which are unique and distinct from an earlier or a later period. At the same time the debate can also have a meaning for our own society, enabling us to comprehend it with a clearer perspective and to understand better the forces that are at play within the work. Poland's Shades is no exception. At the root of thinking about nineteenth-century developing feminist issues and issues of race, is a demand for change and the acknowledgement that change is desirable. Marguerite Poland portrays Frances as young, vulnerable and impressionable yet at the same time she shows her to be morally vulnerable, for example when she goes against the teachings of the church on matters sexual. Benedict is aware of the race and class discrimination against himself and is clearly in opposition to the mission rules and regulations - not defensively or apologetically - but defiantly and directly; for example, he goes beyond the mission grounds at night to see

his girlfriend. Unlike Mzanti, he goes against self-interest rather than compromise himself and be won over.

The main characters in Shades struggle to locate what they perceive as correct behaviour through the variety of moral attitudes, lifestyles and codes of conduct with which they come into contact. Although Frances fully internalizes the prejudices of conventional morality, she either knowingly or unwittingly devalues herself in a moment of weakness or perhaps rebellion. Her actions take the form of a nascent feminist statement. In most traditional or conservative societies men expect their wives to be virgins and demand complete fidelity. Moral quality, however, is not dependent on a single action. So, although Frances is no longer a virgin, she is certainly not a whore. Although she is dispossessed of her virginity by the amorous Victor Drake, Frances knows that the kernel of her predicament is that she is dispossessed in a colonial landscape because she is female and therefore disempowered. Frances is so emotionally starved by her upbringing that she is rendered vulnerable to the seduction of Victor. 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. These 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 usually with herself.

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 identity that society has imposed upon them. Their search for an identity is obstructed by their status as women, and the enclosing landscape from which they try to escape can itself be seen as emblematic of their trapped condition. The Story of an African Farm and Shades are both set in the Eastern Cape and the landscape may be seen as almost having a character of its own. The novels are prototypical South African novels as they deal with land appropriation, dispossession and identity. Colonial intervention, like the Glen Grey's Act of 1894, physically alienated large populations of colonised people and the farm and mission station in Shades mimic the cultural ignorance and material greed of colonial society. The people are forced to move to different regions and to build new identities with the land and their culture. On the farm and mission station the characters are confined to a place (the Karoo). 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 at these places.

Frances is forced to evolve her own life patterns, often living much of her life alone, learning about the aloneness of life (which the myth of marriage, discussed in Chapter One, obscures) and about the reality of illusions. She is caught somewhere between accepting society's view of her – in which case she

cannot accept herself - and coming to understand what damage this 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. Her mother, Emily, expounds the reasons for Frances' marrying of Victor - besides the moral issue, she contemplates the value of marriage in purely rational terms of benefit and material comfort. Frances could imagine her mother and Mrs. Drake arranging the wedding and deciding what she would wear as society had to see her, "a model of propriety, modest, quietly spoken. Meek" (1993:375). Frances knew her mother too well - "Propriety above all else. Even if it compromised the truth" (331). The Marxist view on this issue was discussed in Chapter One: marriage is seen as a feudal relation of vassalage where the husband is the bourgeois and the wife the proletariat. Shades reflects not only the condition of life for a woman in the colonies, but also the more universal truth of restrictions placed by Victorian society on women in general. The novel reveals not only the types of women formed by that society, but also the internal revolt against their suppression. So, although marriage may provide security, it also brings a sense of conformity and potential non-entity. Although women may, by and large, be socialised into the myth of marriage, they may not necessarily like it.

Frances' role is emblematic of the way that women want to deconstruct the prevailing status quo, so as to transform the existing order of reality. She encapsulates certain stereotypical masculine fears about women especially when she arouses Victor's jealous streak by being in the company of Walter. In challenging Victor's masculinity and ego, she allows herself the space to explore hidden aspects of gender formation. Frances attempts to move away from the single, monolithic woman subject who is discriminated against and has become marginalised. She becomes proactive. The picture of a woman complacently accepting her lot is replaced by that of a woman who, aware of the unfairness of the system, powerfully attempts to right the wrongs. One can distinctly see her attempts for a paradigm shift towards female emancipation and a reversal of patriarchal subjugation. The Victorian era repressed the natural sexuality within Frances. Her perception of sex as distasteful stems from her upbringing. To Frances, if she could not give in to this inherent sexuality and if she could not identify with the people around her (especially with Dorcas and the other Xhosa females), then the loss of her identity was inevitable.

Frances is seen by Victor as an object of his lust because he is preoccupied with getting her into bed again; but she sees him later as a figure of authority. Their relationship is founded on utilitarian principles- sex for material rather than emotional needs. Helmina, her governess, warns her that "the passions of men are easily provoked" (129) and that she should not be "a cause of their sudden

arousal, for that is your sin rather than theirs and any consequences would be your fault entirely”(ibid). Frances’ perceptiveness ensures that she is not a passive figure; 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. Unlike her mother, Frances does not allow her mind to become incarcerated with only preconceived, inflexible thoughts and ideas even though she is exiled to Grahamstown to live with Victor’s mother before the wedding. Her mother banishes her because she recognises the change in Frances and realises that she has become “deviant and angry” (278). Frances’ sense of social isolation and alienation later enables her to develop the ‘detached’ or ‘objective’ stance necessary to make a feminist statement. In Grahamstown, alone, alienated and ostracized, she recalls her dearly loved father’s advice, “feel the truth and live by it, even if it means you must be alone” (442). Through the kind of choice she makes, she affirms her moral values, as well as protests against the accepted values of the day.

The events she concentrates on are those of the inner life: conflicts, aspirations, moral dilemmas, doubts, fears and the deviations of the human heart. To Mrs Drake “a girl who could sin so brazenly had to be handled with circumspection (306). Later, however, while living with Mrs Drake, Frances pawns her engagement ring for a musical box, which had belonged to Hubert Brompton.

Finding the musical box in a pawn- shop in the isolated town of Grahamstown reminded Frances of the sentimental values attached to it: Crispin had repaired it and Walter had reprimanded Victor for mocking Brompton's obsession with it. These memories propelled her to take the drastic measure of pawning her engagement ring. Her actions symbolise all the thwarted energies she bears within her, and to her even the engagement was a farce. Victor had not been present and it was his mother who had slipped the ring on her finger. It was "placed there without ceremony as if it had legitimised her sin" (304). It was also Victor's mother who had laid down the ground rules of her home – Frances was not to encourage familiarity with the servants and the garden boys: "It quite upsets the order of things" (ibid).

The characterization of Frances illustrates that she is not a one-dimensional character. Being on the brink of womanhood, she is shown by Poland as trying to assimilate and comprehend the tension within her in order to find her identity. She is torn between the convention of the time and with the enthusiasm of youth that rebels against the status quo of male dominance. Her anguished mother implores her not "to dissect the work" she had done or "the motive for it" when Frances questions her if she had ever thought that she must have had her "own vocation for something other than being someone's wife and being comfortable" (378, 379). Frances fully understands the prejudices of conventional morality. Although a part of her believes that despite all pressures, she ought to have kept

to the straight and narrow, 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 a subordinate role in social and personal affairs. Frances knows she has no business marrying Victor. But both she and Victor were "trapped: by their childhood, their families, the expectations, the much vaunted destinies"(384).

John Molyneux states that "it is not social consciousness that determines social being, but social being that determines social consciousness" (Molyneux 1993:6). Paradoxically having suffered submissive degradation, Emily, Frances' mother, is not prepared to let her daughter escape the vicious cycle demanded by a colonial consciousness. And Emily's situation, instead of leading her to reject these arbitrary laws, eats into her conscience and she becomes weighed down by scruples. In her isolation she reflects on her dispossession: "none were held in bondage as she had been. None yearned to be released as she had done" (277). So, although she knows the value of the sense of responsibility conferred by systems of thought and behaviour, she knows too, that these are human conventions, not ultimate realities. To her children, Emily ensured that she was "their shield, the buffer set against the unknown treachery beyond the gates of St Matthias" (273). She dearly loves her children, Crispin and Frances, but conventionality and inhibitions suppress her expression of this love. She is driven by the need to conform. The passionate intensity with which she tries to

preserve all things English is typical of some settlers of her era. It shows, however, that she has not adjusted to this alien world, its people and their culture.

She does not accept the 'heathen' traditions and is constantly trying to change them. Furthermore, she is adamant that her children not be subjected to and influenced by any traditional rites. Emily forbade her children from watching any heathen activity like the 'umngeni' (initiation rites); and "speaking Xhosa within hearing of her was a punishable offence" (80). Her intolerance of the indigenous people's language and traditions was destructive to the Xhosas as well as to her children. The idea that the mission station was a refuge from a hostile landscape ensured that domesticity was the daily culture of the family. Emily tries to use the daily domestic round to transform space into a home but with little success. As a missionary's wife in a lonely and alien spot she knows loneliness in its bleakest form: in an isolation broken only by joyless encounters with the 'heathens'. What afflicts her the most is a sense of not belonging. The hostility shown towards her makes the construction of her identity all the more demanding. Emily is haunted by her sense of inadequacy as a mother, which explains the position in which she finds herself. Her early feelings of guilt and inadequacy prompted her to embrace the domination of men and to depend on them. The reality is that she does not truly understand her children because she

is wrapped up in her own life, inflexibly principled and dedicated to her work which comes before her own children.

Once again the ground note of this stern exterior is that of suffering, and the suffering is linked with a lack of autonomy, with emotional dependence on a man. Having lost two children at childbirth –“God had demanded more than just a life. He’d demanded two”(275) – Emily yearns throughout the novel for a more fulfilling relationship, which will provide emotional security and moral support: “None knew the fear that had stalked her in all the years since Charles had brought her here” (277). She sees Benedict’s affair and Frances’ sexual behaviour as a sense of betrayal. She blames herself for “believing she (Frances) might withstand the wild influences and the isolation” (278). Self-deprecatingly she convinces herself that she has “bred a nest of heathens and idolaters without knowing it” (ibid). Being a product of a prudish, in some ways bigoted and intolerant Victorian upbringing, Emily abnegates herself and, in so doing loses all vitality and identity. Her search for synthesis of self with society is mirrored in the fragmentation of her own psychology. It is her inability to integrate her inherited culture and the alien landscape around her that finally destroys her.

Just as Emily exemplifies the fact that all human beings want acceptance as individuals, Helmina, the governess, also longs to love and be loved. Although

she was made to feel a part of the Farborough family, "the sense of belonging evaded her" (50). As governess she has a small income and is totally dependent on the family. She suffers constant feelings of insecurity and is uncertain about her future, fearing that her services would not be required any longer as the children are now grown. Furthermore, she has not found an eligible young man to marry and the alien, hostile landscape does not help her cause. Since very few whites visit the mission station, it seemed as though the "land had been abandoned, not from choice but from compulsion, and that something of the brooding of a battlefield remained" (10). The setting dwarfs her and her quest for identity is made all the more difficult. She longs for the love of a good man and for the identity, which such a love might confer. She knew that "Walter Brownley was the final hope against the fading of her youth" (49). Her romantic yearnings are conveyed effectively in her daydreams, in which her world of dull reality becomes fantasy filled. To Frances, Helmina is "a little bird, empty of blood, with a heart beating so faintly but so inexorably without expectation, without life" (130). Men, as objects of love, impinge on Helmina's consciousness and when Walter Brownley arrives at St. Matthias, Helmina sees the last hope of finding a husband. Her Victorian upbringing, however, restricts her actions and thoughts. In a male-dominated world, women were not allowed to express their feelings freely. Women themselves were afraid to venture into the male-dominated world to establish their identities. They were afraid of the repercussions and looked upon themselves as the weaker sex. Helmina

represents this ideology and as she seeks to resolve her identity crisis, lacking in confidence and confused, she fails to confront Walter about her feelings.

When Walter Brownley arrives at St. Matthias, he too immediately feels an overwhelming and unexpected loneliness. He feels abandoned and his isolation is heightened when he sees four young people intimately involved in each other's activities. He immediately feels as if he does not belong, as if he can never become a part of that group. His insecurity and discomfort reach new levels and he feels as if "the very thorn trees held him in their gaze" (11) and "an odd sense of predestination assails him" (8). Ironically, he is later to be posted to Mbokothwe, a place even more desolate and depressing than St. Matthias is. St. Matthias, in comparison to Mbokothwe was a thriving, self-contained colonial community, whereas, Mbokothwe was barren and empty reflecting bitterness emanating from colonialism. Walter feels like a monk "abandoned ... a man set down in an unfamiliar plain, with neither map nor path to show the way" (22). Later he even comments acidly that "God could not live here" (71).

The stiff and pompous Rev. Hubert Brompton does not give Walter a warm and cordial welcome at Mbokothwe. He is the epitome of inflexible and uncompassionate Victorian snobbery, and it seems as if the landscape and the loneliness have affected Brompton for to Walter he appears slightly deranged. Everything in his room is incongruous and, like Emily, he tries to preserve

everything English: In his room he has a huge garlanded picture of Queen Victoria, china tea-cups, a silver ladle and fork, a little stuffed English lark in a bell-jar and a large mahogany musical-box inlaid with rosewood and ivory. Walter feels overcome by a "creeping malaise, the insidious madness seeping in" (299). He fears that he too may become like Brompton, if he does not have someone to love. This encounter intensifies his attraction for Frances.

Walter is honourable and noble and is fully conscious of the age difference between Frances and himself. At the mission station he is in a position of trust and it would be wholly incorrect and immoral of him to make advances to the daughter of a man for whom he works and respects. Besides, he is also aware of Frances' feelings for Victor, who is a more likely suitor for her. Walter and Frances, however, develop a private and secretive relationship when they use the fantasy world of 'Plotz and Brodowski,' which Walter had invented for his niece in England, to get closer together. They each have to face painful aspects of themselves, about how much they want things their own way, and they come to realise that they have to compromise and adjust to one another's identity. 'Plotz and Brodowski' offer Frances and Walter an avenue to explore their feelings and to develop a deeper relationship. The characters are their mouthpieces and they have to assume illusionary persona in order to construct their identity in the real world. Looking at the handsome, broad-shouldered and supercilious Victor, Walter is driven to jealousy and has a secret desire to destroy

his rival, but because of his character and his position, he does not take action. He is inexpedient and "loneliness and need, exacerbated by Frances' presence" (106), force him to accept the post at Mbokothwe – "He had been content before he knew her. Content with himself and with God and sure in his vocation" (ibid). His identity had been complete but with the introduction of Frances in his life, his entire being was turned upside down.

Mbokothwe, with its barren surroundings and hostile inhabitants, can be dehumanising. The predestination Walter felt at St. Matthias was stronger here. He questioned God's whereabouts "in this strange, small outstation at the edge of the world" (71). The place had transformed the Reverend Brompton into a deranged idiot. Walter realises this and not wanting to "end in a grave on some abandoned slope" (ibid), Walter buries himself in his work and vocation. He displays neither bitterness nor regret at having to lose his self-respect and dignity at having to accept such an offensive place to live in. Unlike Brompton, he is willing to learn the culture of the indigenous people and incorporate it in his own. He insists that "we would serve them better if we understood their customs and respected their age old rights" (73), and he contends that, "It is a great arrogance simply to impose ourselves on them" (72). Walter is aware that the rich mythologies and traditions of the natives were drawn from nature and in order to marry the two cultures, he had to adopt a unique and tolerant approach. He has to allow them the moral and religious space to live in their own

world. Poland argues, in an interview with Ingrid Shevlin, that the seeds of repressive apartheid system was sown by the British and although the missionaries "came with the best of intentions, they were also carriers of the policies of the empire" (Shevlin 1993:6). Poland said, in this same interview, that " There is a saying among the Xhosas that the missionaries came with the Bible and no land and gave them the Bible and took their land" (ibid). In the name of evangelism and missionary work, the Xhosa and other tribes were victims of the British colonialists. Superstitious beliefs, like Brompton's "mshologu"(149) and Pusey's "thwasa'd"(150), which refer to black-magic and being bewitched respectively, enhanced the course of the missionaries and the gullible and impressionable ones were converted. Traditional beliefs were seen as the work of the devil, and the missionaries, in their proselytising enthusiasm, took prompt advantage of the situation. The new religion with its catchy hymns was attractive in its difference, and seemed to clarify troubling concepts. These issues are clearly delineated in Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart (1958). In Achebe's book, and as history shows, discrete native tribes were culturally homogeneous. There was mutual dependence and a sense of communion and solidarity within the group. The missionaries sought to eradicate this by adopting the divide-and- rule method: Mzantsi, St Matthias' catechist, is a typically displaced Xhosa from whom "the spirit had been extracted and replaced with the trappings" (104). He was given food, shelter and clothes. In other words, he was offered material benefits by the missionaries that made him look European and in return he lured the

others. The course anchored itself and then gained momentum. A new identity was born for the 'heathens'.

Walter, however, displays selflessness, courage and genuine compassion for the indigenous people and he becomes a role-model worthy of emulation. Initially, he saw Mbokothwe as sterile and dehumanising but with his faith, hard work and faithful followers he transforms the mission station and develops a more profound insight into his heart and psyche. Living in Mbokothwe teaches him how "arrogance and ignorance divide us from our fellow men" (36). The destructive presence of colonial arrogance and authority at the mission station is represented by, inter alia, Victor Drake, who exercises his control over Frances, Benedict and the Pumani Brothers whom he later recruits as mineworkers. Though both the mission stations (Mbokothwe and St Matthias) may be seen as 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.

Victorian patriarchal ideology contributes to Victor's life-view that as a member of the privileged white race, he must stay firmly in that group, dominating and controlling those of other race groups whom he considered inferior. He symbolises Victorian heroism in its grossest and most jingoist form – concerned with nothing but self-assertion, power and material success. Bristow claims that

the Victorian boys, belonging to the same class as Victor, "do not pay heed to an authoritarian state" (Bristow 1991:79). In the small isolated community of St. Matthias, "the world was ordered not by what it was, but by what Victor Drake ordained it ought to be" (1993:20). He was totally in command. He was strong, handsome, and assertive and displayed the Victorian culture of masculinity. His identity crisis revolved around the fact that he had to prove to society that he could carry himself as a man should and manliness, to the Victorians, was a delicate balance between rational reflection and decisive action. In Victor, Poland makes the double standard operate by allowing power, especially sexual power, to be a heedless and aggressive pursuit of self-gratification, while for Frances, Truter's daughter and the prostitutes near the mines, it is an activity into which they are compromised and must bear the consequences.

Poland constructs Victor as a satirical representative of a class partially responsible for the establishment of the migrant labour system (Poland 2000). He represents an autocratic presence to thousands of black miners who observe their employers from the outside, and judge them not as they are, but as they appear to their embittered minds and hearts. Poland's own Christian morality colours the representation, interweaving fact and fiction as she moves her narrative from social document into romance and exploitation. Poland feels that she has a duty to her ancestors, especially Victor. Of her characters she says that "they were real and [she] could not take liberties with the time they lived in"

(Shevlin 1993:6). 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. In Shades Victor is acutely aware of the political and social discriminations existing in the country. He displays no ethical principles and as a consummate imperialist, he exploits those he rules over, destroying the very fabric of the individual and society. Poland says that Victor, who is closely based on a distant relative of hers, was known as "the architect of the migrant labour system" (Poland 2000). She portrays him 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).

Evangelism and mining, may be seen, both in their positive and negative aspects, as contributing factors for the black South African condition both past and present. The Victorian belief was that suffering brought one closer to God and the deplorable conditions experienced by black miners was a means to an end. Not only were they supposedly striving for salvation, but they were also accumulating capital in order to live and be like the 'civilised' white people. Although this may be seen as a liberating factor, Karl Marx sees technology as the objectification of what human intellect and labour can create. The implication of Marx's theories is that the mines should not be the properties of whites or of

Europe but rather of those who work them. For the blacks of South Africa though, their lives and identity would be determined and lived on the margins of the white economy.

John Molyneux posits that "the bourgeoisie has an interest in changing, indeed is continually compelled to change the natural world in order to accumulate capital" (Molyneux 1983:8). Viewed thus, South Africa is exposed then in the late nineteenth century as an exploitative territory, not only in terms of commodities, but also in terms of its people. Poland gives a chilling portrayal of this racism when she describes the ill-treatment and ultimate cold-blooded killing of the Sotho miners who rebelled against the conditions in the mines. The miners had prematurely burned their passes, thinking that the South African War (1902), in which some of them were recruited, was over and that they were free. Since the production in the mines had to continue, the mine manager insisted that they go back to work and he labelled them deserters. They however, did not obey him and they boarded the train without passes. To the white manager, the lives of the black labourers were insignificant and less important than the point he intended to make: that his word is final and is to be listened to at all cost. The massacre that follows emphasizes the manner in which the white man at the time suppressed the blacks, treating them like animals, and this can be compared to the killing of the cattle (earlier in the novel) that were suspected of being infected with the rinderpest disease. The treatment of Sonwabo Pumani

also leaves much to be desired. Firstly, his identity is taken away from him – he is simply referred to as Sonny-Boy, and secondly, he is stripped of his dignity when he is made into a 'boy-bride' and forced to perform humiliating sexual acts whilst living in the mine compound. Later when he is badly beaten up, he laments, "Have they not killed me already with their words and their deeds" (1993:318). In the treatment of Sonwabo and the Sotho workers we see the dehumanising effect of apartheid, the subjective nature of the law, and the injustice of the judicial system. The resulting strikes reveal an identifiable and working-class culture which is supportive of its members and resilient, and in many ways challenging the dominant culture. Figuratively, the strikes may be seen as defiance against their (blacks') debased state or loss of identity.

The quelling of the strikes on the mines by Victor reveals his understanding of the subtleties and intrigues of the human spirit of the world. His attempts at political expedience may be seen as praiseworthy as he pacifies the strikers by giving in to their demands, knowing full well that war is imminent. War meant the closure of the mines, and in order to guarantee that the miners would come back, with other recruited members, Victor acts as if he is on their side. Just as he was victorious with the bedding of Frances, he is once again victorious over the miners. Pienaar claims that "a person's name encapsulates his identity, his self concept and his self-esteem" (Pienaar 1990:17) and this proves true in Victor's case, whose triumph had long been orchestrated by his passionate

attempt to gain identity and mastery over others, to be like his father, a decorated war hero.

In summary, Poland's target in this novel is to look at various aspects of Victorian life observing the tendencies of the age to repress individual identity and to stifle female independence. She is concerned with capitalism and evangelism, the two major expansionist movements of the era, which she regards as symptomatic of the Victorian Zeitgeist (Poland 2000). Poland sees in Shades the social good as demanding that individuals act in a principled way, despite social constraints. This is of concern to her also in Iron Love, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

IRON LOVE (1999) : MARGUERITE POLAND

Shades and Iron Love (1999) are adroitly juxtaposed by Poland to suggest both a pattern of common concerns and unresolved tensions in the two works. Both novels revolve around the ideas of identity formation and 'belonging' in terms of socio-historical conditions.

For Iron Love, Marguerite Poland's inspirational resource material was an old photo album belonging to Charlie Fraser, an ex-pupil of St. Andrew's School in Grahamstown. She uses the album to recreate in fiction the lives of six boys at school during the late Victorian era. One photograph in particular – the Rugby First XV of 1913 – caught her attention. In it was Charlie Fraser, one of the fifteen handsome and manly rugby players of the school. Within five years, seven of the fifteen boys lost their lives fighting for 'King and country' in World War One. The pathos of their deaths is graphically portrayed by Poland as she subtly criticises the school hierarchical structures and the demand society makes on the boys. The fictional worlds of the novel in Iron Love are a series of perspectives within whose order each character must find his or her meaning, in relation to other members of the group and in relation to the physical environment in which s/he finds himself / herself. Charlie Fraser is sent to school through the beneficence of the bishop. Charlie's father had committed suicide and his impoverished mother had to bear the

shame of this cowardly act. Charlie has no real home and he quickly learns the basic tenets of survival: "Silence and denial, and not to fail at footer"(5). In Shades, Poland says she was "exploring what she thought of heroes and in Iron Love she continues to examine conceptions of manliness" (Poland interviewed by Rosenthal). Percy Gilbert, one of the boys, offers a detached and critical insight into the lives of the boys and the conventions of the times, as does another character, Unwin, who is marginalised for being physically inept and who does not possess qualities necessary to be an asset to the Empire. The boys' mothers' physical presence is absent as they are in boarding school; though they long secretly for their mothers, they learn quickly to be independent men. Somehow, it is not what the text says but what it does not say that reveals its relation to dominant ideas and values: the silence of the mothers in Iron Love is resounding. By drawing attention to the silence and absence of the mothers, the issue of female subjugation is also addressed. The Victorian era, thus, is not only guilty of the social evils of race and class oppression but also of gender oppression.

- Oppression implies power for someone over another. Experience tells us that it is power, both economic and gendered, that creates the positions of authority and of subservience which people assume in society. The inequality between men and women is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of this authoritarian system and, in Iron Love, while the subjugation of women is made conspicuous by their absence on the scene, by contrast the need for validation, recognition and identity amongst

the boys in the all-male boarding school is most pronounced. One of the boys, Percy Gilbert, acutely intelligent and sardonically critical, holds the narrative together and provides a fascinating critique of the boarding-school environment. Although the focus is on the all-male boarding school environment during a particular era and in a particular place, the themes are universal and timeless. Poland explores the educational institution as a source of identity creation and, by excluding blacks and females, she portrays the reality of colonial mentality. The primary aim of colonial private schools was to groom, through colonial indoctrination, young colonial leaders who would unquestioningly sacrifice their lives for the Empire. Webster says that for these boys "to reach this position of social arrogance and authority required that they divorce themselves from genuine emotion" (2000:7). Very little emotion is displayed publicly and this is evident in Iron Love. According to Bristow, aristocratic masculinity is the major shaping force in British imperialism and the duty of the public schools 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). Charlie Fraser epitomises this masculine requirement and the other boys in the boarding school find in him a character worthy of emulation. Poland's characters are realistically portrayed - we either hate them and fear them or else we are them. Poland treats us to penetrating exposures of colonial school life and in her satire of society, she lashes out at the conscience of the dominating class, who are prescriptive in qualities required for the construction of identities.

The basic tenets of survival at Poland's boarding school (unnamed, but based on St. Andrew's School in the Eastern Cape) are "Silence and Denial, and not to fail at footer" (1999:5). In the boys' quest for identity, they quickly learn how to cope with homesickness, corporal punishment, being bullied and humiliation. They couldn't cry and shouldn't as that would be unmanly and unpardonable. Bristow posits that "public schools were places where boys had to learn to stand their own ground" (Bristow 1991: 54). It was a matter of honour. If they had to cry "then it would be silent"(Poland 1999:5). It was expected of them to let sorrow just "leak out without a sound, without a breath"(ibid). If they lay still alone or alienated, it would in the end "leak inward, undetected"(ibid). From an early age, Charlie Winton Fraser, the protagonist, was taught to "soldier on. Walk straight. Eyes wide. Chin up." (263). He was raised by his grandparents because his mother had to go to work to support the family since his father had committed suicide. Charlie would not admit this, though, that his father was dead – " take his name and make it meaningless" (26). On almost all issues he was silent, and the 'denial' came spontaneously. Charlie portrays a sensitive and resilient character, endowed with a vision and a tenacity to take his place in the world. He seems well-equipped to lead but the fact that his father, although being a doctor, had committed suicide, made the authorities conclude that Charlie himself may be unstable.

Charlie's existence is defined altogether by his participation in the life of his microcosmic school world, by his objective presence there. This is so much the case that he is scarcely at all a personality in his own right, but is rather a persona for the culture of the sporting class in society. MacIver postulates that "society exists only where social beings 'behave' towards one another in ways determined by their recognition of one another" (1957:06). Charlie's recognition stemmed from his ability to play rugby, more so because he had once secured victory for his school by scoring a glorious and courageous drop-kick in the dying moments of a vital match. The post-match report in the local newspaper, The Journal, dedicated an entire paragraph to Charlie; and it seemed as if they had forgotten that the highest scorer of the day had been Archer. Archer pondered thereafter "what it was like to carry all that adulation around. To never doubt, never feel disapprobation or regret. Never fail" (1999:231). But the unassuming Charlie Fraser was "unburdened by his reputation" (7). He would acknowledge the congratulatory cheer but he did not bask in his glory. Whilst other boys kept their honours cap hanging above their beds, Charlie kept his in his drawer. Every boy wanted validation. "Without it, self-esteem was tenuous" (91); but Charlie Fraser seemed different and indifferent - he just got on with "the job of putting the ball over the line or through the uprights"(7). He concentrated on his duty and abided by what his mother had told him: "Always do your duty and not buckle, Charlie" (184). Twenty-one years old, with a child-in-arms, and almost destitute, she too had not buckled.

Charlie Fraser's idealisation of his mother, although he is silent on the issue, is completely in keeping with Victorian bourgeois morality which places one's mother on a pedestal of impossible perfection, removed from the snares that the world might offer. Considering the circumstances of his upbringing, Charlie Fraser's view of his mother is expected and although her presence in the novel is silent, she is the longed for representative of home and security. Similarly, Davey Bennet, on his deathbed longs for his mother: "Call my mother ... Call her now" (162). Charlie had instead given him the privilege of looking at his photo album. The photo labelled "Mother and CWF" was most captivating. "They echoed each other in the eyes, the brow, the decided chin" (159). Charlie's mother's hand was on his shoulder as if to say, "This is my son. Look at him" (ibid). The Victorian era was repressive in terms of emotional expression but the pride and love evident in the photo was quite expressive - "iron love: undisclosed, undisclosed" (48). Love was supposed to be an understated and aesthetic experience, not an ostentatious public or political one. Like iron, the love seems cold and inflexible, but that was the norm of the era. The restrained sadness is quite evident throughout the novel and Poland subtly criticizes "the silence and denial ethos of the period which forbade expressions of emotions" (Oosthuizen 2000:1).

Charlie's mother reflects the extent to which her own identity is tied up with her son's. Her own sense of self is predicated on his untimely death on the battlefield during World War 1. Like most women of her time, her existence has a quality of



death-in-life, which is accentuated by their (the mothers') silence. Death is symbolic of the shackles placed on these women and the women in Iron Love are portrayed as simple and ordinary people. They live impoverished lives metaphorically speaking, and believe that the role of women must be subservient. They do not undertake any great feats against male domination and are always conscious of the politics of patriarchal society. The mothers are silent and obscure and there are no blatant attempts by them to overturn the patriarchal society. The patriarchal power base is upheld since it is perceived that there exists a social contract where women are expected to obey and comply with the wishes of men whose responsibility is supposed to be to support and protect them. According to Bristow, this ideology, "one connected with war, honour" (1991:57) was established in the mid nineteenth century and was an accepted type of public-school ideology. Charlie's mother assumes her subservience because of the conventions of her time and out of fidelity to herself also. It is through men's eyes that women see themselves and the approval of men remains essential to their self-esteem. Although the boys are sent away to a boarding school, the mothers foster unconditional, indiscriminate love for them. For them, to love is to serve and the profundity of their love is also 'iron'-like. The limitlessness and greatness of their love is the ennobling aspect of their relationship. Charlie's death takes this relationship of mother and son to a higher spiritual plane. After Charlie's death, his mother did not speak about him - "The silence is customary of an era" (Webster 2000:7). Her love was "all in the heart -

iron love to guard the fragile flame within; iron love to keep intrusion out" (Poland 1999:431).

Nothing highlights a mother's need for a social identity quite as vividly as her weekly vocational polishing of her son's plaque at his grave. It is not only Charlie's mother who has to suffer this fate but also the other Victorian mothers who are dispossessed of their sons sent to strange male-only boarding schools to learn how to cope with the expectations of society. Poland not only foregrounds the mother-son relationships, but she also underscores the plight of the boys showing how the separation impacts on their lives too. Herbert Cummings' initial departure to school by train was a stiff one. He was only thirteen, yet because of convention "he had kissed his mother rather stiffly ... and had made small embarrassed snorts to counter all her snuffling" (22). En route, the train had picked up David Bennet whose mother went against the conventions of the era: "This mother was crying. It was a great embarrassment" (25). Herbert is shown to be glad that his mother had not come to the station. Sparrow Bell on the other hand is shown not to care. He was always jovial and the other boys considered him simple and childlike. "He was the only boy who could admit - quite freely and without the slightest hint of shame - that he adored his mother" (39). Adoration, love and a sense of belonging had preoccupied them all. Besides Sparrow, all the other boys were silent on the subject - "It was needed and denied. Explored voraciously. And silenced" (48).

The boarding school experience for the boys fulfils the stronger universal need to belong, to be recognized, to have an identity. This need was partially satisfied by the school's hierarchical structures. Besides the master in charge, the older boys were entrusted with the care of younger boys. Thus prefects had the authority to decide on appropriate punishment for any misdemeanour. Iron Love evokes the reality of forced, exclusively male community, and the effects of a hierarchy of power acting upon individual lives. Poland juxtaposes the college boys' mental anguish with the physical and mental suffering of their mothers: their oppressive existence and the pain at having to be separated from their sons. In Sparrow's mother's book, The Perfect Woman, he reads that a woman "must not lose sight of her most divine and sublime mission in life - womanhood and motherhood" (70).

The ambiguity of the Victorian philosophy of life is demonstrated by the role of the mothers in Iron Love. They display a passivity towards their fate; anything that transpires is simply a retribution for their wrongs, yet their reason tells them that they are the equals of men. Their submissive instincts force them into an attitude of sexual submission; both physically and mentally and they have to submit to the exigencies of male society. For individuals to see through the layers of false consciousness, to confront reality and change their lives, however, is a daunting task. The schoolboys' perception of love is that it is unreliable - "even the mother's" (263). They feel that in the end "she'll pack your trunk, send it to the station, scrub you up and march you out" (ibid). According to Helen Brain (2000:5), the mothers

are absent but ever present. The mothers watch from the sidelines, and let their own sorrow leak inward". Although the boys feel that "all love is betrayal" (ibid), the mothers who are not physically present, are with them in spirit - brooding and pining for their sons. Poland knows exactly what she is writing about. She understands the mothers and their predicament - not with the detached understanding of the intellect, but with the weary comprehension of the heart. This is her "heart book" (interview with Jacob 2002). Her knowledge and understanding of her subject is profound, penetrative and strong and arises out of her own historical research and family experience. Poland's teaching stint at St. Andrews School in the Eastern Cape enabled her to identify the atmosphere and minute detail of boarding school life. She manages to recreate the conventions of colonial school life and she presents different strands of Victorian values; first criticizing, then balancing and finally reconciling them in a bid to construct her characters' identities.

In Iron Love, Poland shows that males too can be marginalised. A social system, which is based exclusively on hierarchy, like the one at the boys' school, is capable of subverting normal human relationships with disastrous results. 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 captain of a team makes boys feel and act superior. Percy Gilbert, Archer MacCullum and Hugh Unwin belong to different levels on the hierarchical structures – whilst the first

is a prefect, and the second the rugby captain, Unwin - like the many other juniors - is dominated, taken advantage of and marginalised in different ways. All of the juniors, however, behave in different ways in order to cope with their marginalisation – though "some don't obviously and that's the tragedy for these boys" (interview with Jacob 2002).

Poland's concern about the hypocrisy of sexual puritanism is subtly explored in her characterisation of Percy, who is involved in pubescent sexual experimentation and who fosters desire for a peer, Herbert Cummings. Percy writes many secret letters but he does not give them to Herbert. Once this phase is over he gets over his obsession and hero-worship, marries and settles down. According to Bristow, the Victorian public schools for boys created the conditions for the desires like that experienced by Percy. However, "unlike smoking, cribbing and straying out of bounds, homosexuality was not an open secret. Nor was it adventurous and manly" (Bristow 1991:82). The evidence of a repressive society is everywhere and Poland explores the emotional and social implications on individuals. 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, which frowned on emotional expressions.

Poland shows how family and class create individuals. According to MacIver, "Social classes, like the community itself, are more or less spontaneous formations

expressive of social attitude" (1957:348). In the example of Hugh Unwin, who is cut off from his family, and an isolated, misplaced individual in society, his marginalisation is extreme. "Ousted from companionship" (Poland 1999:19), he comes across as a whingeing, puny individual who cannot cope with the harsh rigours of boarding school life. In his loneliness, his quest for identity is further stunted, as he is gifted neither academically nor sportingly. He is appropriately named 'Unwin' since he does not win at anything and is a loser in all spheres of life, especially in the social world. "If Unwin's loneliness was circumstantial, Archer's had been earned" (94). Charlie Fraser had usurped Archer's berth in the rugby team and Archer could not accept it. At every opportunity he got, he took out his anger and frustration on the helpless Unwin by physically and mentally tormenting him. He provoked and intimidated his victim and made him feel totally useless. According to Bristow, fighting, breaking rules and straying out of bounds are ways of testing the limits of the closed societies in which they occur; though these efforts are often thwarted by the hierarchical structures of the school. Although Unwin took refuge in the sanctuary of the church chapel, he was blasphemous. He swore vulgarly, blamed God for his situation, and was overheard by Davey Bennet telling God "Because you hate me, so I will hate you too; and I hate Archer"(91). As Poland's narrator notes, all boys are not born equal, "the meek do not inherit the earth"(312). Archer, though, was also undergoing an identity crisis. All Archer wanted was validation - the need to be recognised. His need took aberrant forms. He joined forces with the

boys in the lowest rung of the hierarchical order and, together, their sporadic rebellion was a means to counter their insignificance and loneliness.

For Unwin, however, there was no means to cope with his crisis. He had no expectations, unlike his father who had fostered many expectations and his mother, who "blindly nurtured them as well" (366). In another visit to the chapel, Unwin complains to God that He had not made all the boys equal and that He did not love them all the same. In his allusion to the Bible he contradicts it and says, "the meek do not inherit the earth" (312). Thus, spurred on by his revelation he retaliates when Archer victimizes him. He physically attacks the bigger Archer. "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" (ibid). But even the Head did not have any faith in him. The Head believed that when Unwin had finished his schooling career all that would remain was his name in the register: "Unknown after 1914. No footer team, no cricket team, no aquatics or athletics. Nothing of his subsequent life: if there was one" (218). Poland captures poignantly the almost life-or-death struggle for acceptance. She could easily have got him to commit suicide but she says she wasn't going to do that because "the Unwins survive to be those thoughtful people one meets later in life" (von Klemperer 1999:4).

And so Poland throws Unwin a life-line in the form of Robbie, the presiding –officer in charge of the boys. Robbie was a terror. He “made men at any price” (Poland 1999:56). His passion was rugby and if any pupil was guilty of insubordination, the ultimate punishment was not ‘six-of-the-best’ but a suspension from playing or watching the inter-school rugby games. Charlie Fraser, the team’s brightest prospect, had put Robbie in the worst moral dilemma of his life when he was caught transgressing the school rules by straying out of its borders: “Honour against Expedience. Expedience against Honour” (284). Robbie could not jeopardise the forthcoming match by suspending Charlie, but he did punish him with the cane, which was acceptable during that era. The punishment meted out was so severe that Charlie could barely play his normal game. At this particular game Robbie had surprisingly called upon the lost Unwin to be in charge of First-Aid. At last, some recognition is offered to Unwin. His sudden awareness of his worth, his feelings and emotions, is a real discovery. Subsequently, Unwin becomes a medical orderly with the Rhodesians during World War I and, ironically, 6000 miles away from his school he meets his ex-school friends to whom he had to administer first-aid. Thus, in his own journey of emergence, Unwin redefines himself as a person, through shifting the terms of his relationship with the soldiers through whom he gains some measure of self-worth.

With the outbreak of World War I, a cataclysmic event in South African history, we see the tranquillity of the school altering as the first eddies of social change make

themselves felt. Patriotism was instilled in the boys and it was used as an “instrument of disciplinary control in the 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). Initially it was just a matter of preparing the pupils for conscription – a requirement of a male-centered imperial ideology. Those who were leaving school had to go directly into war to fight for God, King and Country. “Which Country?” said Mostert to Edward (Poland 1999:330), and the shackles of imperialism started weakening. Edward’s response of “England ... I suppose”(ibid), reiterates the confusion in the boys. Living in South Africa they were still the sacrificial lambs of England and their own mothers betrayed and indoctrinated them – “we’ll have no tears. We’ll soldier on” (263). “All love is betrayal. Even the mother” who “doubts the certainty of her own heart” (ibid). The restrictive conditions placed on the boys meant that freedom of choice was denied. A hard line discipline was administered in school, similar to that expected at army training. The norms of society were stringent and had to be adhered to. Race and class determined masculinity, which in turn was constructed along patriarchal lines. Individuality of thought and expression was not allowed. Morrell postulates that “while masculinity is not automatically acquired, it is also true that boys and men are not entirely free to choose those images which please them” (Morrell 2001: 8).

In Iron Love, the coach of the rugby team, Robbie is also the training instructor who prepares the boys for life in the army. He was responsible for propagating the imperialist ideology and his task was to make men of boys. He had scorned "hot water, interior bogs and warm beds" (Poland 1999:56) and the boys were proud of him. He taught them the art of bearing arms and he practised manoeuvres with them. They were well-trained to serve and "serve they would" (329). " They would do their duty and defend that Empire, even with their lives" (ibid). They were indoctrinated to believe that death in battle was 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. But the sublimated anger and fear was there; questioning whether death was going to make them men.

In retrospect one may question the masculinity of Charlie Fraser's father. Was death a means of constructing his identity? Dr. Fraser had committed suicide on 13th June when Charlie was still being breastfed. Charlie, therefore, had no memory of him and later, when he had grown up, he had taken a photograph of the grave, "almost apologetically, fixing some identity" (184). From this grave he had brought back a small plant with him but it had died. Like Benedict's dilemma in Shades (1993), Charlie questions his connection with his father. Both characters experience a sense of dispossession. In their quest for meaning and identity they experience an existential need to belong – to their families, their pasts, their environments. No one spoke of Charlie's father. It was the 'silence' and 'denial' ethos of the era. It seemed

as if no one had ever known him. "He was a man without character"(257), and a character according to the Head was "that which makes a boy a man in afterlife" (217). The priest in the church had contended that suicide was "the direst sin of all. It is death without honour" (264). Yet Charlie too seemed to have signed his own death warrant. Once when he was on guard duty with his closest and dearest friend, Arthur, two soldiers asked them for some cigarettes. Arthur offered them the cigarettes and took one for himself, but before he could light it, Fraser grabbed it from him and lit it. Charlie had never smoked before. It was the boy's belief that the person who smoked the third cigarette would be killed and Charlie tried to save his friend. It was "a symbolic sort of suicide" (411). What lends pathos to the plot is not only the death of Charlie but the fact that half of the fifteen members of the rugby team, in the prime of their lives, had to sacrifice themselves so that they could have an identity and be called 'men'. This is what Robbie had indoctrinated in them all the time – a masculinist construction of identity, which was particularly successful among the middle classes in Victorian and Edwardian England and her colonies.

CHAPTER FOUR

Even the most cursory glance at contemporary fiction will reveal the deep changes in attitudes and sensibility since the Victorian period. When one looks at Marguerite Poland's Shades and Iron Love, one is stuck by the way a contemporary writer is able to revive the past through fiction with such accuracy and authenticity. Poland tackles the material realities of land, property and dispossession in an imaginatively compelling manner.

In these novels, Poland engages with a number of issues. One of these is certainly racism. In South Africa racism has traditionally and generally been seen as white people discriminating against black people, but racism goes a lot further than that. Racism may be seen as any behaviour directed against people or property that is motivated by prejudice based on race, religion, gender or appearance. "During the colonial era it was the colonists who, through mechanisms such as missions and schools oriented to the Western way, began the destruction of tribal societies" (Boon 1996:49). In Shades, I have looked at acculturation in a particular setting, that is the Eastern Cape, but this cultural stream of dispossessed consciousness holds true for the rest of South Africa as well. Poland displays a fine-tuned sensitivity to her characters drawn against the backdrop of World War 1 and against the migrant labour system.

A second feature of these two novels has been Poland's portrayal of patriarchy. In the preceding chapters, I have highlighted instances of female compliance which reinforce male authority and, at the same time, I have discussed the different ways in which certain characters challenge patriarchal domination. In Shades, the female protagonist, Frances, defies her family's morals and values outright and is consequently banished to her room, a symbolic personal and domestic space. Her escape from confinement is a means of establishing her autonomy and it is the ultimate defiance of patriarchal authority. Her refusal to marry Victor, with whom she has had sexual intercourse, is a challenge to society's promulgation that all women should marry, especially if one has indulged in sex outside marriage. Womanhood, as we know it, is a social construct, that is, that the subordination of female to male does not represent an immutable state of nature, but is a result of various social pressures. Submission to the act of patriarchal domination amounts to the psychic rape of identity. Frances is tied deep into female psychology. Her rage is not aimed specifically at men – it is displaced and aimed against whatever injustice is happening. She is severe on women too (especially her mother) and she sees her own victimization in other women. Dorcas' mother, Emily and Mrs. Drake allow themselves to be dominated just like the mothers in Iron Love. As long as women are encouraged to look to other people (especially men) to establish their place in the world, then they will be frightened of constructing their independent individuality.

Both novels, Shades and Iron Love, centre on the twin issues of motherhood and mothering. For Marguerite Poland, what is immediately at issue is not the coercive nature of Victorian men, but rather, in a displaced form, the oppression of the female and the oppression of the spirit. She is fully aware that the domination and the division between the sexes was not exclusive to the colonies, but was an inheritance from the metropolitan power, where women were just as underprivileged. The subservient woman declares that to love is to serve. Seen from the vantage point of today's progressive society, the mothers' concerns (in Iron Love) about the ethics of their own 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" (Morrell 2001:145). Thus, while many women operated in oppressive gender contexts, many gave their whole-hearted support to 'their' men. Religious belief and traditional observations during the Victorian period were staunch and Morrell postulates that "the loss of a loved one produced a search for spiritual reassurance" (ibid).

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. Masculinity, however, is also not something that is inherited or something that comes naturally. Rather, it is a "gender identity that is constructed by a number of complex processes" (Morrell 2001:208). These processes include, inter alia, the interaction with people in definite gendered settings, social norms and the process of growing up under direction. In Iron Love, the boys grow up in an all-male boarding school and each individual reacts differently to different situations, but ultimately they have to behave like 'men'. According to Morrell, "boys develop a masculine gender identity which is deficient relative to the adult masculinity of men" (Morrell 2001:8). In Iron Love, Poland observes the affinities and practical tendency of Victorianism and masculinity through the characterization of Robbie in the execution of his duties. In making men of boys he resorted to, inter alia, brute force and corporal punishment and his lambasting of Charlie Fraser one week before a crucial match, not only humiliated Charlie but also made him so sore that he could not play to his full potential. Morrell states that, "hegemonic masculinity does not rely on brute force for its efficacy, but in a range of mechanisms which create a gender consensus that legitimates the power of men" (ibid). Robbie is shown as a product of a range of entrenched and even unconsciousness attitudinal and behavioural patterns of an ethnocentric character. Charlie Fraser, brought up in a school that forbids crying and represses emotion, accepts his punishment stoically, without a sound. In the

novel Shades, Crispin displays similar traits as Charlie but the difference lay in Crispin's moral dilemma – whether to participate in the war, or to search for his black friends and ensure that they were safe. Crispin's role model is his missionary father and although they are Christians, they respect the beliefs of the Xhosas and make the attempt to understand their traditional rites. Crispin develops a strong and sincere relationship with the Pumani brothers and when they cannot be found on the mines, he decides that their welfare was bound to his own - "Before valour. Before glory. Before honour" (Poland 1993:333). He knew that that is what his father would have done. His father had always maintained that "sinning was not about the bad things you'd done and regretted, but about the failure to do what you should have done. Especially for others" (337).

Issues of what constitutes 'masculine' behaviour are also evident in Walter Brompton, who displays compassion and warmth in his dealings with the Farborough family and with the 'heathens'. He works hard, is self-sacrificing and buries himself in his vocation when he realises that Frances, whom he loves, is unattainable. According to Morrell "masculinity is an important device and it assists men in the daily challenges" (Morrell 2001:284). Walter is under the misapprehension that Frances is beyond his grasp, because both have not communicated their mutual feelings verbally. He displays enormous strength of character in repressing his emotions and in refusing to take advantage of

Frances' youth and inexperience. Nevertheless, he still "could not dismiss the small but insistent desolation that he felt" (Poland 1993:22). His loneliness is aggravated when he witnesses Dorcas' and Benedict's clandestine meeting amongst the trees, and he finds it difficult to come to terms with the emptiness in his life. To him, being posted to the hauntingly desolate Mbokothwe mission station is a form of penance for some dreadful sin he had committed. As time goes by, however, he discovers a community thriving in their own way, to satisfy life's needs, both spiritual and physical and to construct their own identities. Walter strives towards attaining better race relations between blacks and whites and, through his strenuous efforts, he is able to break through the definitions of white masculinity imposed by an imperialist ideology.

Walter is a total contrast to Victor who, like Robbie in *Iron Love*, epitomises the Victorian masculine spirit. "In colonial patriarchies, fearful men produced fearful families" (Morrell 2001:142). From Major Drake is born the aspiring, arrogant Victor; the compassionate Crispin is the stock of Father Charles Farborough and; Fraser, who superstitiously signs his own death-wish, had the 'unstable' Dr Fraser, who had committed suicide, as his father. The characters of Victor, Robbie and Charlie and his team emphasise the need for physical and mental toughness and the need to win. Expertise in a particular field counted for nothing unless it could be turned into victory. Charlie's forte was rugby and according to Morrell "rugby stressed physical confrontation, perseverance and

skill, and these equated with white masculinity" (Morrell 2001:23). In *Shades* every facet of Victor's life had to be a challenge which he had to dominate. In his relationship with Benedict he ensured that he (Benedict) was subservient, especially when they went fishing or played 'war games'. Benedict had to carry the rods and clean the fish and in the 'war games' he had to play the villain whilst Victor was always the hero. In Victor's relationship with Frances, he sees her as a sex object and after he 'conquers' her, he feels victorious – believing that she now belongs to him, to have and to hold. To him it was a game. He had only bedded Frances so that Walter could be eliminated from the love triangle. Even in his sexual escapades with Truter's daughter, he ensured that he only saw her at night so that he did not have to look her directly in the eyes. At the mines he visits the whore-houses, sleeping around with prostitutes, not once questioning his fidelity to Frances. In his domination of women and in his oppression of men he had to be victorious, just as white society demanded of their men. Victor's callous manipulation of these men and women deprives them of human quality. It continually compromises and inhibits them by making it impossible for them to tell freely of their subjugation and to unshackle themselves from oppression.

This thesis has also shown how Poland in these two novels highlights the issue of a wider social exploitation – that of the burgeoning capitalist mines. Victor epitomises the imperialist ideology and, eager to expand his prosperity through

active investment, he is inclined to view the human community in terms of opportunities for economic advancement. In Victor we see how capitalistic forms of control over human productive capacity is reinforced and at the same time how the labour force is marginalised. In the gold mines, which has been the backbone of South Africa's economy for over a century, certain groups were given specialised tasks. Blacks were given menial tasks and, because of their large numbers, whites considered the labourers expendable. The mines are "sleeping giants that must be fed with men" (Poland 1993:158) and the opportunistic Victor uses the rinderpest epidemic to his advantage where, through cattle bribery and a lucrative recruitment drive, he gets the black fathers to send their sons to the mines. David Evans, the Welsh missionary in Ukhahlamba believes that the hundreds of black 'heathens' brought to the mines is the result of God's will – "that they might hear our Gospel message and take the message home" (349). Crispin believed that "there was greed in the doctrine. Another kind of greed to rule and to extract and to hold ascendancy" (ibid). Poland thus portrays an exposition of working class vulnerability, not only in terms of labour exploitation but also in terms of culture and identity dispossession. In the mines we see political structures and system makers that are iniquitous. According to Morrell "male identities serve as key coping mechanism for dealing with high risk working conditions, through encouraging men to be brave and fearless in the interest of supporting their families" (Morrell 2001: 276).

As highlighted in this thesis, during the late nineteenth century, when gold mining was booming, many black men, forced by the Glen Grey's Act, Poll Tax, Hut Tax, and the general need for money moved to Johannesburg. Since women were absent, lengthy celibacy led men to indulge in homosexual activities, which would not have been considered in other circumstances. These circumstances can be equated to the all-male boarding school in Iron Love and the desires that Percy fosters for a person of the same sex, although nothing physical takes place possibly because he realises that he would be ostracised from society. Morrell contends that "homosexuality was suppressed as an alternative expression of masculinity through isolation and a conspiracy of silence" (Morrell 2001:169) and this is certainly true in the case of Iron Love. Poland also makes mention of 'boy brides' in Shades but she does not portray any graphic descriptions of homosexuality. Bristow also contends that "since it contravened the guiding principles of Judaeo-Christian religious law, homosexuality could only be mentioned obliquely in fiction"(Bristow 1991:82). Morrell believes that in the case of the miners, whose masculinity amongst the hundreds of males is threatened, that they resort to sexual intercourse to make them feel masculine (Morrell 2001:272). Thus, as an illustration of this point Sonwabo Pumani, a victim of circumstances, was given wooden breasts to wear and was initiated into sodomy in exchange for privileges from the indunas. This, however, led to his imprisonment and ultimately to his death.

The two novels show place and setting to be important to Marguerite Poland. The school in Iron Love and the mines in Shades are not neutral settings – Morrell claims that “masculinity also constructs the social reality of institutions” (2001:245). Whereas the mines are filled with black people, the school in Iron Love does not have a single black person. Inevitably these demographic groupings lead to differing constructs of identity among, on the one hand, the white schoolboys; and on the other, the black miners. Place in terms of identity is important to Benedict Matiwane. Though he had been ‘adopted’ by the Farborough family, Emily tried to preserve everything English. She was rigid in her attitude and ensured that her children and Benedict were kept in their (white) place of obsequiousness. Benedict’s ‘shades’, however, silently help him survive the onslaught of exploitation and domination brought about in the name of colonialism and evangelism. At the cattle dip he is forced to dip himself like an animal and it is here that he is ‘reborn’. He loses his faith in the whites because of the indignity he has suffered and he becomes bitter and resentful. On the one hand, he feels no sense of belonging to the mission and on the other, he is treated as an outcast by his own people who despise him for being one of the mission people. He realises that he is an outsider in his own land – without heritage, without land. He attempts to liberate himself, and in his quest for identity, he uses the printing press as a refuge. The printing press symbolically allows him freedom of expression and in his writings he is able to

empower his people by conscientizing them. The printing press becomes for him, his avenue to self-expression.

Poland's "affinity with nature, and her sense of the almost sacred significance of certain landscapes, are features that enrich her novels" (Louw 2000:2). According to her "an author's work can only exist within a landscape" (Poland 2002) and the landscape is the "first and dearest source of inspiration" (ibid). The physical setting in Poland's novels is almost always given in such a way so as to achieve other ends as well. In Shades, for example, the setting is along the Mtwaku River and people are always crossing the river. This is symbolic of their crossing over to another state of consciousness. For Frances, it is the reawakening of her sensuality and womanhood and for Benedict, it is the rejuvenation of a suppressed spirit. Crispin, like his sister, fits perfectly into the rural environment and being in tune with nature, it is only someone like him 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" (219). Crispin's dispossession and that of the Pumani's - the loss of place, of identity and everything to which they belonged and which they loved - is a result of the greed that motivates society

Thus, "while men oppressed women, some men also dominated and subordinated other men" (Morrell 2001:7). Identity then in Iron Love and Shades is constructed in the context of class, race and gender within a particular place and at a particular historical moment. In her novels, 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. In the construction of identity her characters in these two novels – women and men, both black and white – question sexual and racial stereotypes of the time. By extension, as contemporary readers of these works, we are encouraged by Poland to question our own attitudes to these same issues today and to evaluate to what extent change is evident in South Africa more generally.

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