

**“A Bunch of Grapes”:
A Reading of Lindsey Collen’s *The Rape of Sita***

by

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Abstract

This feminist analysis addresses Lindsey Collen's intertextual use of myth in *The Rape of Sita* and how her reformation of the parodied texts becomes a resistance to patriarchy. Collen's examination of possible counteractions against patriarchy is analysed and it is determined whether or not she posits writing, especially demythologization, as the best resistance to patriarchal discourse. Also, her assertion that transformation and a unity of the sexes are needed to bring about equality is studied.

The methodology used is qualitative and inductive. The sources are examined and interpreted through close-reading strategies which reveal the complexities of the text and the way in which Collen subverts myth. Classical and Hindu myths and other texts, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, are re-read and re-examined to investigate to what extent they have challenged or championed patriarchal ideology, through which it is hoped that a greater understanding of the way in which mythology contributes to attitudes to rape is gained. Three other texts dealing with rape are also studied, in order to better place Collen's novel in context of the genre.

Primarily, feminist criticism, particularly with an African feminist viewpoint, is used. However, because a conflation of post-colonial and postmodern approaches is embedded within feminism, these concepts are dealt with also. Theorists drawn upon include Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, Mircea Eliade and Margaret Atwood.

Key Terms

Androgyny

Coetzee, J.M. - *Disgrace*

Collen, Lindsey – *The Rape of Sita*

Demythologization

Duff, Alan – *Once Were Warriors*

Eliot, T.S. – *The Waste Land*

Feminism

Intertextuality

Myth

Post-Colonialism

Schuster, Anne – *Foolish Delusions*

Shakespeare, William – ‘The Rape of Lucrece’

The *Ramayana*

The Rape of Lucretia

Rape

Remythologization

Abbreviations

<i>Dis.</i>	<i>Disgrace</i> by J.M. Coetzee
<i>EHR</i>	<i>The Early History of Rome</i> by Livy
<i>Fas.</i>	<i>Fasti</i> by Ovid
<i>FD</i>	<i>Foolish Delusions</i> by Anne Schuster
<i>FQ</i>	<i>Four Quartets</i> by T.S. Eliot
<i>Met.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i> by Ovid
<i>OWW</i>	<i>Once Were Warriors</i> by Alan Duff
<i>RL</i>	'The Rape of Lucrece' by William Shakespeare
<i>TA</i>	<i>Titus Andronicus</i> by William Shakespeare
<i>WL</i>	<i>The Waste Land</i> by T.S. Eliot

Chapter 1

Introduction

This opening chapter establishes the delimitations of the dissertation and discusses briefly some of the theories that are used in the main body of the argument, though many of the theories are discussed within the general argument itself. It also provides a definition of mythology for the purposes of the hypothesis of the dissertation: that rape is the product of a society which denigrates women as second-class citizens, and that Collen posits writing, especially demythologization, as the best resistance to patriarchal discourse and, further, that she asserts that transformation and a unity of the sexes are needed to bring about equality and an end to rape.

Two different notions of myth are used in this study. They are, as defined by the Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1994, s.v. 'myth'), firstly, 'a traditional story containing ideas or beliefs about ancient times or natural events' and secondly, 'an idea that forms part of the beliefs of a group but is not founded on fact'. These rather basic definitions are expanded on below. Traditional mythology is shown to have given rise to the popular mythology of sexuality and rape. An example of this popular mythology is the idea that women are guilty for having been raped. The connection between myths and metanarratives, and the way in which mythology perpetuates the oppression of women by creating archetypes and stereotypes, and thereby reifying women, are discussed. To this end, Roland Barthes's theory regarding the sign and how it is a social construct is used, and so are his views on intertextuality as the principal text selected for examination draws upon a number of preceding texts on the topic of rape.

The methodology used is qualitative and inductive. The sources are examined and interpreted using close-reading strategies which reveal the complexities of the text

and the way in which Lindsey Collen subverts myth. Myths and other texts, such as T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1996), are re-read and re-examined to investigate to what extent they have challenged or championed patriarchal ideology, through which it is hoped that a greater understanding of the way in which mythology contributes to attitudes to rape can be gained. This dissertation's examination of literature ranging from the ancient scriptures of the *Ramayana* to South Africa's Nobel Prize winner, J.M. Coetzee's postmodern work, *Disgrace*, will provide an exploration of the mythology regarding rape which will contribute to the academic debate on this pressing sociological problem and the way it is represented in literary texts.

The Rape of Sita,¹ originally published in 1995 by Heinemann, is about a woman who is struggling to remember a day lost in memory. Ostensibly, this was the day she was raped, after submitting in fear for her life, by an acquaintance named Rowan Tarquin, because he 'wanted her, and any other woman for that matter, to be unimportant and inferior' (66). The trauma of the rape shuts down Sita's memory of it for more than eight years and the novel explores her search for the memory and her attempts to deal with the act of violation. To quite a large extent, the author uses colonial oppression as a trope for the oppression of women, because women

in many societies have been relegated to the position of "Other", marginalized and, in a metaphorical sense, "colonized", forced to pursue guerrilla warfare against imperial domination from positions deeply imbedded in, yet fundamentally alienated from, that *imperium*. (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:174)

This fulfils Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie's² (1987:10) notions of the female writer's commitment; she should 'be committed in three ways: as a writer, as a woman and as

¹ Page references for *The Rape of Sita* are from the 2001 edition, published by Bloomsbury.

² Molaria Ogundipe has published under both that name and under Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie. Both are used in this study.

a Third World person'.³ What most post-colonial writers attempt to do, is to subvert discourse to give voice to the 'other' and reveal the master discourse that gives rise to oppression. An exception to this is the work of J.M. Coetzee, who is discussed later in this study. The concepts of the other and voice are especially relevant in South Africa,⁴ because of its notorious history of rank oppression. Post-apartheid South Africa is ripe for retelling suppressed stories and re-examining mythic structures.

The subjugation of both women and colonial subjects is a way of maintaining power relations. Rape is one of the more extreme and violent examples of the tyranny against women. It is not so much a sexual act as a violent act of power assertion. The best definition of power, for the purposes of this research project, is the following: '[p]ower is commonly defined as the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his or her own will despite resistance' (Green 1999:152). Rape is therefore a physical manifestation of power. 'Sexual violence is used by men as a way of securing and maintaining the relations of male dominance and female subordination, which are central to the patriarchal social order' (Radford & Stanko 1996:65). Juanita Isaacs (2002:7) points out that, in the act of rape,

anger is released towards a victim, not in a sexualised way, but as a way of exercising control and maintaining a position of authority. Feminism identified the body as the site of power, that is, as the locus of domination through which docility is accomplished and subjectivity constituted.

The study of the body is a central feminist characteristic. Liz Kelly (1996:37) states, '[t]he linkage of power, violence and sexuality has been one of the foundations of feminist analyses of male domination' and, furthermore, that, 'as in other political

³ For more of Ogunjide's ideas about the woman writer's commitment, see James 1990:65-73.

⁴ Lindsey Collen was born in South Africa, but lives in Mauritius, where much of *The Rape of Sita* is set.

systems, men's gender power is ultimately backed by force, that force is used when power is in jeopardy'. *The Rape of Sita* parodies discourses in which the ideology of male power is maintained. Catherine Belsey (1985:46) writes that ideology

obscures the real conditions of existence by presenting partial truths. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than lies, smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions which in reality it evades, and masquerading as coherence in the interests of the social relations....

This study, in turn, looks at some of the discourses that are parodied in Collen's novel, specifically the story of the rape of Sītā⁵ as told in the Sanskrit text, the *Ramayana*, as well as the story of Lucrece as told by William Shakespeare in his 'The Rape of Lucrece', T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, and modern rape mythology as expressed in contemporary literary texts. The interaction and fusing of myths is a common occurrence. As people from different localities and with different beliefs clash through war, trade and so on, each faction takes on elements of the others' beliefs. 'Myth, then, is a dramatic shorthand record of such matters as invasions, migrations, dynastic changes, admission of foreign cults, and social reforms' (Graves 1968:vii).

In the preface to *The Rape of Sita*, Collen's text is referred to as a 'bunch of grapes' (5) and as such is essentially a narrative that seeks to rethink the narratives before it within twentieth-century discourses. What the author refines her intertexts into, is a 'bunch a grapes': a collection of discourses or micro-narratives, each one adding to the whole to create something holistic and bountiful. The metaphor is effective as the natural image speaks against the image of the ivory tower, with its implications of man-made contrivance, which symbolizes western intellectualism. The description of

⁵ The *Ramayana*'s heroine's name is spelt with the diacritic macrons that denote the Hindu pronunciation in order to distinguish her from the Sita that appears in Collen's novel. Other Hindu names are not given the same treatment.

the novel as being a bunch of grapes accords with Graham Allen's (2000:13) definition of discourse as 'the idea that within society at any one time there are many different ways of speaking or writing'. Terry Eagleton calls the postmodern tendency to imagine that there is either one single metanarrative or an array of micronarratives a 'misleading choice' (1996:110) and he hypothesizes that what should be referred to is a 'plurality of metanarratives' (1996:110). And, in fact, what Collen does is transmute or recontextualise a number of metanarratives.

This transmutation is a type of deconstruction. It was Jacques Derrida who originally came up with the practice of deconstruction, which seizes on an aporia in the text and works on it until the traditional understanding of the text is undermined and the text is unravelled. Deconstruction

arises out of a fundamental critique of humanist discourses and their conceptions of subjectivity and language. It rejects unitary intentional subjectivity, locating meaning in texts and their relation with other texts, insisting that this meaning is not only plural but constantly deferred in the never-ending webs of textuality in which all texts are located. (Weedon 1999:163)

But

[d]econstructionist approaches to textual analysis which share a disregard for the wider historically specific discursive context of reading and writing and the power relations which structure the literary field itself do not meet feminist needs. (Weedon 1999:165)

Deconstruction would make for an interesting reading of *The Rape of Sita*, but its refusal to factor historical and sociological aspects into its analyses makes it an inappropriate tool for the intentions of this study, hence the use rather of the related theories of Michel Foucault, and of woman-centred criticism. Deconstruction, nevertheless, is demythologization.

Transmutation is a form of parody, which is ‘one of the major ways in which women and other ex-centrics both use and abuse, set up and then challenge male traditions in art’ (Hutcheon 1988:134). The primary tool of analysis that is used in this dissertation is feminism. However, because a conflation of post-colonial and postmodern approaches is embedded within feminism, these concepts are inevitably touched upon also. The study seeks to address Collen’s use of intertextuality – that is, ‘the way in which one text echoes or is linked to other texts either by direct quotation and allusion or simply by being a text’ (Peck & Coyle 1993:163) – in *The Rape of Sita* and how her re-formation of the parodied texts becomes a type of counteractive force against patriarchy. It further seeks to examine Collen’s seeming assertion that transformation and a unity of the sexes are needed to bring about equality.

The text begins ‘[o]nce upon a time’ (7); as well as implying a universality which renders the text eternally applicable, the traditional fairy tale beginning also points to the fact that the text is a story, fiction. Collen will have already made this clear in the preface; the characters ‘are obviously made up’ (6). The narrator, however, is quick to point out that the events ‘were’ (6; emphasis in the original) made up. They are remnants of earlier stories, collected and condensed. These earlier stories are some of the ‘grapes’ that make up *The Rape of Sita*. This intertextuality, this borrowing of other stories, is a characteristic of postmodernism and points to that theory’s tendency to draw attention to itself as artifice or product.

Northrop Frye first developed intertextuality in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1971), where he saw ‘literature as an entity containing life and reality in a system of verbal relationships’ (Kehinde 2003:372). Frye (1971:139-140) would arguably identify

Collen's novel as romantic, because it contains the 'tendency to suggest implicit mythical patterns in a world more closely associated with human experience', but it also conforms to Frye's 'mythos of winter' (1971:223-239) in that it is a form of parody:

[a]s structure, the central principle of ironic myth is best approached as a parody of romance: the application of romantic mythical forms to a more realistic content which fits them in unexpected ways.

Writing, such as *The Rape of Sita*, which acts as counter-discourse, can be viewed as a kind of myth-making. Frye, in his discussion of the Bible, writes that myth

is neither historical nor anti-historical: it is counter-historical. Jesus is not presented as a historical figure, but as a figure who drops into history from another dimension of reality, and thereby shows what the limitations of the historical perspective are. (Frye 1991:16)

This is precisely what Collen's borrowed characters do; they step out from myth and literature, not to condone the current status quo, but to suggest the origins of the current problems and the need to challenge contemporary reality.

In the discussion of myth, the question of authority quite naturally arises. The author is Lindsey Collen, but the narrator, or storyteller, is the gender-blending Iqbal the Umpire. It is supposedly he who knows the characters and he who goes to the publishers with the manuscript. Iqbal even states that if the publishers will not publish it he will print out copies on his own computer, glue them together and sell each one to the 'fifty readers who will buy copies like that' (5). In fact, the actual publication of the novel happened in a very similar way; Collen explains:

the publishers had brought out coupons for one hundred rupees Then after selling about one hundred and fifty coupons, they went to print. So, my friends delivered the one hundred and fifty copies to those who had paid for them, home visit by home visit.⁶

⁶ Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 20 September 2004.

Iqbal is furthermore aware of this tendency to mask the author; he acknowledges that it is not his own story that he is telling: ‘I, the teller of the tale, must almost become the heroine. Like it’s a mask, or a character, take it on’ (8). As well as admitting that the stories are made up, Iqbal admits that it was not he who made them up. The authors, the authorities, are Shakespeare and whoever before him wrote the original stories of Sītā, of Lucrece/Lucretia. This tendency to stress the artificiality of the text, its metanarratorial quality, is common in postmodern writing. *The Rape of Sita* could be referred to as what Linda Hutcheon calls historiographic metafiction, in which postmodernism self-consciously rewrites ‘history through its modern re-contextualizing [*sic*] of the forms of the past’ (1988:29).

Myth or, more specifically, a remythologized narrative, is an effective vehicle for this as ‘[m]yth, one might argue, is “metaphorical”, in that it represents a substitute structure of significations for the historical’ (Eagleton 1998b:121). Rewriting the past appears to be a natural thing to do, because it echoes the pattern of history itself. Frye (1991:3) observes that history

moves in a cyclical rhythm which never forms a complete or closed cycle. A new movement begins, works itself out to exhaustion, and something of the original state then reappears, though in a quite new context presenting new conditions.

To re-examine and rewrite history is to be, in a sense, a mythologist. As Barthes (1972:135) argues, ‘[s]ince myth robs language of something, why not rob myth?’

The world we live in is a world, in Barthesian terms, ‘of signs which support existing power structures and which purport to be natural’, and the mythologist must ‘expose these signs as the artificial constructs that they are, to reveal their workings and show

that what appears to be natural is, in fact, determined by history' (McNeill [s.a.]).⁷ Nadine Gordimer (1988:223) noted this tendency and called behaviour determined by history a 'habit; the unnatural seems natural'. She is discussing apartheid, but the same could probably be said of all metanarratives, including patriarchy. Barthes (1972:110) writes that 'mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the "nature" of things'. Barthes (1972:109) defines myth as '*a type of speech*' (emphasis in the original) and writes that myth

is not defined by the object of its message, but by the way in which it utters this message: there are formal limits to myth, there are no "substantial" ones. Everything, then, can be a myth? Yes, I believe this, for the universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions.

Myth, in other words, pretends to be denotation, when it is in fact connotation. This dissertation, however takes a more tempered, and traditional, view of what constitutes myth, omitting popular icons which Barthes discusses in *Mythologies*, in which he points out the mythicity of everyday things, such as margarine, wine and toys.

Furthermore, Carolyn Heilbrun (1990:109) declares that we can only contrive new fictions from the old, and uses the word 'tales' to encompass 'everything from Greek myths through Genesis, Snow White, General Hospital, and Pac Man'. This dissertation discusses what Robert Graves calls the second function of myth, in his introduction to the *New Larrousse Encyclopedia of Mythology* (1968:v): 'to justify an existing social system and account for traditional rites and customs'.⁸

The novel also involves border theory. Grant Farred (2002:16) writes that the 'border is the first enunciation of postmodernity – that point on a nation's psychic and

⁷ Available at: <<http://www.orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.html>>. Accessed: 15 December 2005.

⁸ The first is 'to answer the sort of awkward questions that children ask, such as "Who made the world? How will it end? Who was the first man? Where do souls go after death?"' (Graves 1968:v)

geographical map where it encounters itself in relation to others'. Heewon Chang (1999)⁹ notes that a 'cultural border connotes a barrier that a more powerful side constructs to guard its own political power, cultural knowledge and privileges'; it is thus an instrument of power. In addition, Franco Rella (1994:6) explains that the border 'became the very site of difference: that *regio dissimilitudinis* which from the beginning – from Plato – *all* of Western thought has opposed' (emphasis in the original). Border theory, which is discussed again in Section 2.4, is also connected to magical realism, which Isabella Maria Zoppi (1999:151) defines as

an oxymoron which represents a binary opposition between reality and imagination, a permanently contradictory relation between two worlds, or apparently incompatible systems of signifiers and signifieds. These find a meeting-point in magical-realist writing, thus giving voice to the unthinkable, and unspoken....

Valeria Guidotti (1999:230) discusses the fact that magical realism's blurring of the boundaries between reality and non-reality 'may help accelerate the dismantling of the monolithic imperatives, both political and cultural, entrenched by the rule of apartheid'. The same should be true of the monolithic imperative of patriarchy. But a border further implies a set of delimitations which is naturally exclusive, and that in itself connotes power, hence Collen's, and Iqbal's, reluctance to accept authority. This idea of magic is employed in many post-colonial and/or feminist magic realist novels, for example, Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981), Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1992), Milan Kundera's *Immortality* (1999) and Angela Carter's *Nights at the Circus* (2003). Lindsey Collen's *The Rape of Sita* would certainly fit this category, as, to a lesser extent, would her later novel, *Mutiny* (2001).

⁹ Available at: <<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/papers/heewon.html>>. Accessed: 14 July 2006.

Magical realism tends to subvert realism by making use of parody, extraordinary characters and strange plot details. Magic happenings frequently occur and myth is often alluded to (Peck & Coyle 1993:130). The magical elements are combined with realist ones, the result of which is a type of metafiction which distrusts representation and re-examines what had previously been considered ideologically sound. Magical realism is thus an effective genre for feminist texts as it renounces ‘masculine’ realism with its rationality, objectivity and intellectualism. John Peck and Martin Coyle (1993:31) note the following –

[w]hat the feminist novel does is make us realise [*sic*] again how the world is structured, but, as with magical realist fiction, it also has the great strength of not just despairing at the state of the world but also offering us something positive by carrying within it a sense of challenge and renewal, the possibility, however utopian, of restructuring the world.

Guidotti (1999:230) writes:

magical realism represents a literary discourse which has an important role to play in the dismantling of worn-out, simplistic dichotomies and in the indictment of the eurocentric stereotypes, as well as of political and social obsessions.

In the figure of Iqbal, these dichotomies are erased.

It is Iqbal’s ‘bounden duty, to make [the story] more true’. This fits with Mircea Eliade’s insistence that myths are true in the sense that they deal with realities, such as mortality (1964:6), and Karen Armstrong’s (2005:10) contention that a myth ‘is true because it is effective, not because it gives us factual information’. She argues further that ‘[a]s our circumstances change, we need to tell our stories differently in order to bring out their timeless truth’ (2005:11). Ulli Beier, in his introduction to *The Origin of Life and Death*, uses an anecdote to make clear this distinction between truth and fact:

[d]uring a history lesson in a well-known Nigerian grammar school a bewildered student once asked his teacher: “Who came first – Neanderthal

Man or Adam and Eve?” This was brushed off by the teacher simply as a rude question, for he had himself not understood that truth and fact are not necessarily the same. (1966:x)

This why Iqbal’s narrative is ‘more true’.

Charles C. Lemert and Garth Gillan (1982:63) reveal that ‘[d]iscourse, animated by the will to truth, is a form of dissemblance. The will to truth distorts itself in order to reappear in the guise of ideal truth’. The suppression of the will to truth is the ideal of true discourse, and this is what Lemert and Gillan call an ‘original transgression’ (1982:63). *The Rape of Sita* could thus be considered a type of transgression. Iqbal states his¹⁰ reason too, to help:

Dharma [Sita’s boyfriend] wrote a short story about me called “Iqbal the Umpire”, and gave it to me, as you will find out later, and I decided to write a long story down as well. As a kind of present to him. When he wrote about me, it helped me. So I write for him. (6)

What is noticeable, then, is that this discourse is the result of another one and, in fact, this is one of the leading premises behind the novel: that this text is the result of the texts which came before it. These discourses are counter-narratives which seek to subvert the patriarchal grand narrative. Patriarchy can be seen as ‘a web of public and private structures, ideology and mechanisms for the control of women’ (Green 1999:1). Sita, while writing an article, called “Who was raped before”, posits, ‘[r]ape was not possible in human society until males came to dominate females by force’ (160).

The narrative itself is a kind of power against patriarchy. Foucauldian theory claims that power is not hierarchical; it does not come from above to below. Rather, power exists in every level of society; concrete examples include prison riots and protest

¹⁰ Later sections of this study discuss Iqbal’s androgynous nature. He is discussed using masculine pronouns only, however, as this is the course Collen takes.

marches: activities which defend against the dominant discourse. Barthes (1972:148) notes that '[s]tatistically, myth is on the right'. And it is important to remember that '[p]ower is a relation. It inheres in difference and is a dynamic of control and lack of control between discourses and the subjects, constituted by discourses, who are their agents' (Weedon 1987:113). Being aware of the power relations which subject, makes it possible to more effectively resist them, and '[i]t is not only power ... but also resistance to power that is embedded in each discourse' (Peck & Coyle 1993:142). Resistance to the patriarchal discourse is what lies at the heart of *The Rape of Sita*. Helen Tiffin (1985:98) neatly sums up what constitutes post-colonial discourse: 'a mapping of the dominant discourse, a reading and exposing of its underlying assumptions, and the dis/mantling [*sic*] of these assumptions from the cross-cultural standpoint of the imperially subjectified "local"'. Part of this dissertation's objective is to analyse how Collen performs this dis/mantling, although the focus here is on gender, rather than race.

The 'docility' of the body was mentioned above. This stems from Foucault's assertion that the modern age is concerned primarily with creating strategies to control the body and train it to fit in with contemporaneous political policy and economic expansion – this he terms the 'docile body' (Foucault 1984). This body, then, is trained, regulated and studied to fit into a normalized society. Any factor (such as madness or homosexuality) that deviates from this norm is also studied and an attempt is made to normalize it. Foucault thus saw the act of homosexuality itself to be transgressive as it departs from the heterosexual hegemony. For Foucault, '[s]exual instinct ... becomes a power opposed to power; hence a force that must be forbidden and repressed

Sex is a theory' (Lemert & Gillan 1982:82). Iqbal's deliberately ambiguous sexual orientation is thus part of the narratorial structure.

Moreover, Foucault's view of sex is itself interesting, because it is so inextricably linked to the body, a primary site of power relations; '[y]et sex does not exist outside of its realization in discourses of sexuality. Like the signifier in language, it is always historically and socially specific and its meaning is a site of constant struggle. Sex has no essential nature or meaning' (Weedon 1987:119). So for Foucault, '[s]exuality is the meaning inscribed on the body by the politics of life' (Lemert & Gillan 1982:81). If the idea of sex as having an essential quality is negated, it is opened up to alternate readings. In other words, if sex and, by implication, gender and sexuality are not seen to be defined by God, nature or the like, they are open to interpretation. As Chris Weedon (1987:127) explains,

[p]atriarchy implies a fundamental organization of power on the basis of biological sex, an organization which, from a poststructuralist perspective, is not natural and inevitable, but socially produced. While biological differences exist, the degree to which they are emphasized, and the meanings they are given, vary.

Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:5) states that '[w]oman's biology is indeed an important and necessary aspect of her but it is not all she is and it should not be used to limit her'.

Foucault understood this notion of essential sexuality and sought to show how it was formulated by history and society. So too does Collen understand this; so in her novel she allows the alternate and unexpressed history of women to surface.

Only those people who accept the dominant power system are considered normal.

Disciplinary power not only punishes that which deviates from the norm, but rewards that which complies with it. In this way, the norm is strengthened and confirmed. It is

not only those dubbed abnormal who suffer, ‘but all the rest of us who must suppress that part of ourselves that identifies with these excluded others in order to remain normal’ (Simons 1995:32). ‘Normal’ society thus regulates itself by excluding and alienating those people whom it labels as abnormal. Included in this category of the abnormal would be women who deviate from their traditional feminine roles as silent, passive, self-sacrificing objects. But, as the novelist Angela Carter claims, myth ‘deals in false universals, to dull the pain of particular circumstances’ (2000:5).¹¹

Similarly, individuals normalize themselves, because they fear being considered abhorrent. In the words of Lois McNay (1994:142), the ‘pressure to conform obliterates the autonomy of the individual’. This is important because it is central to Foucault’s insistence that resistance is possible and furthermore that it exists within the system of power relations. This is significant for feminist literary theory, which ‘takes up from Foucault ... that the constraining limitations that subject one as a woman are also the enabling limits that empower one with the capacities of a subject who resists’ (Simons 1995:108-109). So it can be said that ‘Foucault understands the Subject to be one of a series of historical substitutions for the idea of a centre which controls thought’ (Lemert & Gillan 1982:136). In fact, it is a bit of an irony to use Foucault in an argument against rape as Foucault, an amoral atheist, argued, in fact, for rape to be desexualized, and punished only insofar as it involved physical violence (de Lauretis 1989:225; Lehman 1994),¹² a contention that ignores the undeniable connection between patriarchal gender inequality and rape, and those concepts’ relationship with myth, which this dissertation seeks to examine.

¹¹ Heilbrun (1990:110) agrees with this. She quotes Carter as this study does and declares that a ‘fair definition of myth is consolatory nonsense’.

¹² Available at: <<http://www.mugu.com/cgi-bin/Upstream/lehman-passion-foucault>>. Accessed: 16 April 2006.

Barthes's definition of myth is also of particular use in this study. In his *Mythologies* (1972), it functions as 'a synonym of "ideology"' (McNeill [s.a.]).¹³ Eric Gould (1981:116) states that, for Barthes, myth 'is both social language and ideological event' in 'modern rituals, such as advertising or sport, as well as in writing' and, further, that 'myth is the incarnation of ideological intent' (1981:128). Barthes argues that apparently neutral cultural texts actually produce all sorts of connotations. Eagleton (1983:135) writes of ideology thus: '[i]t is one of the functions of ideology to "naturalize" social reality, to make it seem as innocent and unchangeable as Nature itself. Ideology seeks to convert culture into Nature'. In Tony McNeill's words, '[w]hat myth does is appropriate a first-order sign and use it as a platform for its own signifier which, in turn, will have its own signified, thus forming a new sign' (McNeill [s.a.]).¹⁴ Barthes (1972:126n7) writes that what 'is sickening in myth is its resort to false nature, its superabundance of significant forms'. Frye's conception of myth differs from Barthes's. His understanding of myths is that they reflect profound reality and represent what we believe and intuit innately; he calls them the 'functional units of human society' (Frye 1991:4). The role of these 'functional units' in the formation of ideology is thus clear.

It is the overriding ideology of patriarchy that *The Rape of Sita* transgresses by rewriting the myths that make up the canon. For Foucault, thinking 'is a continual transgression of established norms of truth. Thinking is a political act because these norms are socially constructed and maintained' (Lemert & Gillan 1982:137). McNay (1994:45) asserts that '[l]anguage gestures beyond itself to a transgressive moment'.

¹³ Available at: <<http://www.orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.html>>. Accessed: 15 December 2005.

¹⁴ Available at: <<http://www.orac.sund.ac.uk/~os0tmc/myth.html>>. Accessed: 15 December 2005.

Language, then, is itself the means of transgression. Foucault compares transgression to a lightning flash. It takes place in darkness, and in doing so both intensifies the darkness and is clarified by the darkness: ‘the flash loses itself in this space it marks with its sovereignty and becomes silent now that it has given a name to obscurity’ (Foucault 1980b:35). It is interesting that Margaret Atwood (2003:158), contemporary Canadian novelist, uses a similar image: ‘[w]here is the story? The story is in the dark. That is why inspiration is thought of as coming in flashes’. McNay (1994:46) defines transgression as ‘the need permanently to push experience to its limits to discover new ways of being’. Gerald A. Larue writes:

[b]ecause man was not prepared to live with the absurd, he developed myths. Because he did not know *how* to live with the absurd, he canonized his myths. (1975:211; emphasis in the original)

It is these canonized myths which Collen seeks to redress.

Chapter 2

Canonized myths/intertext, transformation and counter-discourse

One of the canonized myths Collen seeks to redress in *The Rape of Sita* is that of Kali.

2.1 Kali: transformation and the transcendence of time

In this chapter, the intertextual use of Kali, the Hindu goddess of eternal time, is examined and the theories of myth and contemporary reality are discussed in greater detail. The raped heroine of Lindsey Collen's novel adopts Kali's aggression and dogged determination to endure and these characteristics are examined as techniques of rape survival. Writing and forgetting are viewed in this study as being aggressive, rather than passive, tactics that counteract rape. The acts of remembering and forgetting are investigated in accordance with Walter Benjamin's theories on the subject. Benjamin connects the weaving of remembrance and forgetting with the weaving of a text (Benjamin 1973b:91) and points out that Mnemosyne – goddess of memory – was the Greek muse of the epic (Benjamin 1973b:97).

Memory is connected with time and Collen's inclusion of the poem entitled 'Time'¹ at the start of the novel is important. Collen herself said that 'it stands like a kind of doorway, like Mauritius is, that could lead from other places into India' (*Triplopia* 2005).² The poem states 'I am Kali' and in Indian myth, Kali is known as 'the dark one' or 'time'. Her role in the pantheon is to annihilate demons who threaten the order of the universe. In Collen's poem, she states

*I am Time
Who knows no good nor bad
Nor right from wrong
I move forward
Ever forward,
Onward, upward, downward,*

¹ This poem in its entirety is included as an appendix.

² Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005.

Never backward. (1)

Kali is a violent and horrifying goddess. Traditionally, she emerges from the forehead of Durga (she will be discussed later) when the latter is angry. J.L. Brockington (1981:129) writes that Kali's function is to be 'the representation of the destructive aspect of reality' that must, through mastery over the self, be 'confronted and overcome', in accordance with the Kula Tantric Sect of Hinduism. As representative of time, she must therefore be transcended, and that is done through the writing of the story itself, which is itself the primary counter-discourse. Also, Sita's experiencing anger and her urge to kill herself or her rapist must be transformed if she is to transcend time because Kali's rage is not always productive. This accrues from the fact that, in her efforts to annihilate demons, Kali '*is liable to become so drunk with blood on the battlefield that she begins to destroy the world*' (Brockington 1993:83; emphasis in the original).

When contemplating killing her rapist, Rowan Tarquin, Sita imagines hanging his head, and those of other rapists, on a string around her neck (191). Kali is frequently depicted wearing a necklace ornamented with heads (Brockington 1981:126). The comparison between Kali and Sita is bolstered with the words, 'Woman the creator. Woman the destroyer' (191). It does not follow that violence is an effective solution to violence. But anger is also needed for Sita to recall the rape: the memory got 'set free by the rising rage' (37) that she gradually begins to feel. This is the rage represented by Kali and symbolized by Time: destroyer and healer.

Kali's role in the Hindu pantheon is not limited to that described previously. Kali's proactive role in Hindu mythology changes (Brockington 1981:123-124). She is

variously an independent goddess, a face of Durga or aligned with Devi as the horrifying aspect of the benign Parvati. Kali, is the *shakti* (that is, the embodiment of power, which is feminine) of Shiva³ and appears in a variety of forms. Sati is the good and chaste wife, Parvati is the beautiful wife who talks of love and metaphysics with her husband, ascetic Uma resides in the Himalayas and attracts Shiva with her austerity and Durga is the warrior goddess. Kali is an especially horrific incarnation of Durga. As well as encompassing time as healer and destroyer, she is the power that makes rebirth possible (Masson-Oursel & Morin 1968:335). In aligning herself with Kali, Sita rejects the praxis of subservience and passivity usually associated with the feminine and instead adopts a more traditionally ‘masculine’ attitude. Wendy Doniger (1995:25) posits that Kali’s outstretched tongue is ‘in a certain sense a phallus, but it is also an antiphallic vagina. It is, moreover, the organ of language’. Alignment with Kali is thus a rejection of silence and a taking up of a kind of voice.

When Sita recalls her realization of Rowan’s intention to rape her, she goes through an initial period of fear. She then thinks to herself that “‘I’ll forget the whole thing as soon as it’s over” (152). This suggests that, to a certain degree, Sita does, in fact, consciously forget about the rape, has ‘buried’⁴ the memory of the rape; and Kali is associated with burial grounds (Stutley & Stutley 1922:137). Iqbal includes additional examples of intentional burials in the narrative: ‘[t]o rub a word out. To hide a cigarette stompie in the sand. To cover a stain on the sheets. Guilt. Shame. Pain. Bury

³ Shiva is the destroyer god in Hindu *trimurti*, or trinity, of gods, of which Brahma and Vishnu are the other two. Shiva is also said to be in possession of *shakti* himself, and is occasionally represented as Ardhanarishvara, who is androgynous. Collen’s use of the theme of androgyny will be examined in greater detail later in this essay, from Section 2.4 onwards.

In Hindu theology, unlike many other belief systems, the feminine is the active principle and the masculine the passive. Shiva’s active energy is his feminine *shakti*. (Gunther c2002, available at: <<http://www.art-and-archaeology.com>>. Accessed 18 September 2006.) Sita’s adoption of *shakti* is therefore not an embracing of the passivity usually associated, especially in Western thought, with the feminine, but the opposite.

⁴ This word recurs throughout the novel in reference to Sita’s hidden memory. It first occurs on p. 32.

them all' (80). The implication is that, in burying the evidence, the act itself is erased. This image of a kind of palimpsest evokes deconstruction's understanding of the manifold layers of meaning in a text.

Another reason she forgets the rape is this: Sita cannot tell anyone about the rape, because she was '[n]ot capable of making the space for the words she needed to say' (177), because of her responsibilities towards the movement of which she is a member, the All Women's Front, and to her friends. As a descendant of Ana de Bengal, a women's movement heroine (Collen & Kistnasamy 2002),⁵ Sita 'could be expected to have every chance of being a political visionary' (59), especially given her parents' political involvement (59). This implies that political activism is a sort of legacy left to Sita. Notably, it is as a delegate from the All Women's Front that Sita must attend the Seychelles Conference held by the Ministry of Women's affairs, and it is on her way there that she is raped. Indeed, her friend Devina – the 'diviner' (179) who deduces the reasons behind Sita electing not to tell of her rape – notes that Sita's political responsibilities were part of what prompted her not to make mention of her rape: '[y]ou had to help everyone else. Who would have helped you?' Then Devina (whose name is connected to the concept of deity as Sita's is)⁶ asks if rape is ever a political priority (182) and states '[o]f course, it is a priority, Sita, but when?' This idea is particularly pertinent to South Africa at this time. An article written by Lisa Vetten (2004),⁷ gender programme manager for the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, points this out: '[South African President, Thabo] Mbeki's response [to statistics saying that South Africa has the highest rape rate in the world]

⁵ Available at: <<http://www.lalitmauritius.com/diegochagossian.htm>>. Accessed: 20 September 2004.

⁶ Sita's connection with the divine is strengthened by the fact that, when hunting for the memory of her rape, she is compared with Diana (35), significantly the patron of 'margins and savageness' and 'goddess of women' (Price & Kearns 2003, s.v. 'Diana').

⁷ Available at: <<http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artvet15.htm>>. Accessed: 15 July 2005.

was that the police are combating rape effectively and those who suggest otherwise are not only racist, but also guilty of demonizing the sexuality of men'. Here the blame is shunted onto people who are not guilty, and men are made to seem the victims. Racial priorities supersede gender ones.

Sita has a dream about her act of forgetting which implies she was right in submitting:

[s]he summarized: *The dream told her you had to pay a price to get out alive sometimes, and you sometimes could not tell about it afterwards, even if you wanted to. The dream said that.* (116; emphasis in the original.)

Sita 'didn't agree', because she felt 'ashamed of the dream' (116) and Iqbal asks where deferred dreams go. Sita concludes: '[p]riorities were priorities' (116). Iqbal's conclusion is that the experience was so awful that Sita did not want to think about it and this 'was how she, on purpose, didn't think about it even at the time it was happening' and 'she had taken it, the whole horrible deed, all unthought-out and raw, on her own shoulders, carried it to a hole and buried it' (185). The idea of women having to submit to rape in order to survive and men being unsympathetic to this is expressed in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad* (2005). The following excerpt takes place at a court hearing:

Penelope: ... But most maids got raped, sooner or later; a deplorable but common feature of palace life. It wasn't the fact of their being raped that told against them, in the mind of Odysseus. It's that they were raped without permission.

Judge (chuckles): Excuse me, Madam, but isn't that what rape is? Without permission?

Attorney for the Defence: Without permission of their master, Your Honour.

Judge: Oh. I see. But their master wasn't present. So, in effect, these maids were forced to sleep with the Suitors because if they resisted they would have been raped anyway, and much more unpleasantly?

Attorney for the Defence: I don't see what bearing that has on the case.
(2005:181-182)

The fact is made especially strongly given that this final remark is made for the attorney for the *defence*.

The act of rape strikes Sita more forcefully because the situation has been defamiliarized; it has not been 'subject to the distortions' (Geyer-Ryan 1994:47) of memory, Sita's remembering the rape could thus be compared to Collen's writing of the novel: the author does not create something entirely new, but rather repeats the old patriarchal myths. However, more than just repeating them, she transforms them and recontextualises them to expose them for the lies that they are. Carol J. Singley (1993:3) asserts, '[t]ext after text in western culture claims that women, lacking adequate selfhood, can neither read nor write; women who do so, must confront female textuality on male grounds'. This is a trait of postmodern texts, and Hutcheon notes that '[p]ostmodern intertextuality is a formal manifestation of both a desire to close the gap between past and present of the reader and a desire to rewrite the past in a new context' (1988:118).

By way of this recontextualisation, Sita discovers a '*new truth*'. Awakening, or remembering, is therefore a transgression and interruption of time, since the past is recalled in the present, and in the old mythologies. Sita is aware of this, of her remembering there is '[s]omething very timed. Somewhere in her mind there had been a decision right at the time. She had made an original time-bomb' (185). This recalls Collen's frequent use of the word 'deferred', for example on page 5. The word 'deferred' is a reference to a 1951 Langston Hughes poem, "Harlem" (1996:1324). The poem, which appears in the appendix of this dissertation, ends by questioning if

perhaps deferred dreams ‘explode’. The image of the time-bomb, with its implications of the inevitability of retaliation to oppression, also appears in Collen’s *Mutiny* (2001). In this novel, the narrator, Juna, is in a jail cell with two other women: Leila and Mama Gracienne. It is Juna who writes down what occurs in the prison.

The imprisoned women are drawn from the mythical idea of the triple goddess. Mama Gracienne is elderly, Juna is middle aged and Leila is young. The triple goddess appears frequently in myth. The Fates, for example, measure out the metaphorical thread of life and in Hinduism, Sarasvati, Lakshmi and Kali together form the Great Goddess, or MahaDevi. Similarly, the virgin/mother/crone trinity in Greece is Persephone, Demeter and Hecate. The three prisoners in Collen’s text together form the sum of femaleness. The three plan a mutiny which will allow them to escape. For this, however, they rely on a coming cyclone which will destroy the technology of the prison and they await the eye of the storm to attempt their escape: ‘[w]ait for the eye. Like another time-bomb’ (2001:123).

Collen, in *The Rape of Sita*, also uses the image of the time-bomb to describe the revolutionary actions of the people from Peros Banos. The people’s defiance is brought about by *deferred* anger, which was ‘everywhere on the faces of the people. Deferred until when?’ (105). The answer, it would seem, is that the anger is deferred until an effective counter-resistance is built up, as occurs when the people ‘rise up’. What is important to note, is that whether ‘they are winning or not is not known. It is certainly not at all likely. But what is known is enough. There is mutiny’ (21). Like the ‘children born into the heart of submission, Reunion’ (20), Sita is fighting against an oppressor, but for her weapon she uses the ‘power of the word’ (26) and her

reclamation of her voice, the act of speaking out, is the detonation of a ‘time bomb’ (19). Susan Brownmiller (1976:396) contends that in ‘making rape a *speakable* crime, not a matter of shame, the women’s movement has already fired the retaliatory shots in a war as ancient as civilization’ (emphasis in the original). Gubar (1982:86) asks, ‘[m]ired in stories of our own destruction, stories which we confuse with ourselves, how can women experience creativity?’. The answer, as implied in the novel, is that in ‘a violent context where the spoken word is in the control of the powers-that-be, subversion comes through text, the written word’ (Geyer-Ryan 1994:73).

Sita feels the culpability that is often attendant upon rape and considers various ways of alleviating her mental anguish, including suicide and murder, the two traditional corollaries of rape. However, as noted earlier, her immediate response is to forget the violation altogether. This tendency for a rape survivor to forget the rape is a symptom of Rape Trauma Syndrome. December Green (1999:249) reports that, in 1992, the Supreme Court of South Africa accepted evidence that was presented before it which stated that, following rape, the survivor often forgot the incident. Green (1999:196) also makes clear that this act of forgetting is a kind of active defiance ‘by taking what control is possible in the circumstances. Even by forgetting or minimising the abuse, women are attempting to control its impact on them’.

Sita’s attempt to remember the rape is described as diving into water. She cannot remember what she has forgotten, but she knows it is ‘[s]omewhere down here. A great big hole. A nothingness so strong that it was a presence’ (30). This ‘hole’ is, for the moment, an aporia in the novel. The telling of the rape story is the solution to this aporia. And she is diving for ‘a body. For a corpse’ (31). This is the corpse, either that of Sita who has metaphorically died since the rape, or of the mythic Rama after his

watery suicide, that is sprouting in the garden in Eliot's *The Waste Land* (WL ll. 71-72) which Sita reads about just before her violation by Rowan Tarquin. While trying to recall the rape, Sita wonders if Rowan killed her, 'in some way' (83). If so, her recalling the rape is a kind of rebirth, hence the references to the sprouting corpse (39). Her forgetting puts her in 'limbo' (177), a word implying both temporariness and a state between death and life. This is linked to the idea of time as expressed in the poem of that name: '*I am Time/ Ever being born*', quoted earlier (see the appendix).

Rape has lasting consequences for the survivor, who feels there is no escape from the past (Clancy 1998).⁸ But there *does* appear to be an escape, albeit a partial one: forgetting, which could be considered a form of resistance to time. Sita is only able to forget the rape once she is safe. Her reluctant compliance with Tarquin, her initial fury and her decision not to kill him or herself effectively save her life: '[s]he had escaped. She had survived. She hadn't been murdered. She wasn't in prison She wasn't buried in the little bit of veld. She was alive' (175). Sita consciously 'dives'⁹ for the memory of her lost day, but always finds only a black hole – the aporia mentioned earlier. Her memory of the rape is prompted by her memory of the word 'buried' which comes *unbidden*. When Sita '*tries to remember now, she bumps into nothing except this, this hard ball of anger*' (82; my emphasis). Sita's desire to remember becomes ever more anxious and desperate:

[s]he couldn't remember anything more. Just those few glimpses. And then blackness. Nothingness. The hole. The buriedness. No matter what she tried, she couldn't remember.... (130)

⁸ Available at: <<http://www.medicineau.net.au/clinical/psychiatry/rts.html>>. Accessed: 5 November 2003.

⁹ A recurring term, first appearing on p.30.

A parallel between the images of Sita's diving for her buried memory and Atwood's of inspiration coming in flashes (mentioned in Chapter 1) can be drawn, especially when compared with the rest of the paragraph in Atwood's (2003:158) meditation on inspiration:

[g]oing into a narrative – into the narrative process – is a dark road. You can't see your way ahead. Poets know this too; they too travel the dark roads. The well of inspiration is a hole that leads downwards.

Sita's search for her memory and the act of writing are in this way linked.

Sita's inability to remember what happened to her some eight years previously causes her deep distress and she is unable to stop crying (130) but once she stops looking for it, the memory comes back to her. This is what Proust called *mémoire involontaire*, or as Helga Geyer-Ryan clarifies, 'no free act of will can bring about recall' (1994:32). Rather, recollection is entirely involuntary. Interesting too is the fact that both Collen and Proust use the metaphor of the sea for the act of forgetting. For a memory to be vivid, Proust asserts it must be 'washed clean by the waters of forgetting' (Geyer-Ryan 1994:31).¹⁰ Just before Sita stops looking for the memory, she takes a walk to the ocean and tries to find her memories in it:

"Are you there, in the deep blue sea, oh memories, oh devil or the deep blue," she said, looking down, peering into the waves. No.
And so she went back. And she stopped looking. (131)

For Hélène Cixous, 'water is the feminine element *par excellence*' (Moi 1985:117) and Frye (1971:146) points out that water 'traditionally belongs to a realm of existence below human life, the state of chaos or dissolution which follows ordinary death'. He states further that the

world of water is the water of death, often identified with spilled blood, as in the Passion and in Dante's symbolic figure of history, and above all the

¹⁰ Eliade has also written about the amnesiac effects of water in myth. See Eliade 1961:152.

“unplumbed, salt, estranging sea,” which absorbs all rivers in this world, but disappears in the apocalypse in favour of a circulation of fresh water. (1971:150)

He also mentions ‘the purgatorial or cleansing fire’ (1971:150), which may be represented in Collen’s text by Sita’s daughter, whose name, Fiya, is onomatopoeic with ‘fire’. During a section of the novel explaining how Sita became involved in politics, Ton Tipyer explains the need to continue to ‘do things’ (62) as all actions have cumulative effects, by using the image of fire:

[f]rom mixing glycerin and Condi’s crystals comes fire. Or from the bottom of a glass bottle and a dry bit of straw comes fire.

From fire, he said, comes heat and from fire and heat come ashes. (64)

These ashes are the dissolutions of patriarchal discourses.

Memory is not controlled by the subject because it is triggered by the repetition of an experience that occurred in the past. Because it has been forgotten, once it is recalled, it is found to have preserved the essence of the past experience. The effect this has is to defamiliarize (incidentally, another trait of postmodernism). That the memory of Sita’s rape is defamiliarized is, to a large extent, helpful to her as it inhibits her from committing an act of violence, to herself or to Tarquin, after the rape. Forgetting is thus a form of ‘protection’, as Geyer-Ryan asserts (1994:31). Geyer-Ryan furthermore points to the connection between the act of remembering and the act of literary creation:

breaking through the convention of memory involuntarily by means of the *mémoire involontaire* does not lead to the creation of something entirely new but rather allows us to re-experience things forgotten. *Likewise in art, it is not a sudden, conscious and forceful renewal which leads to a new truth, but only repetition.* (1994:32; emphases in the original)

Eliade states that one ‘frees oneself from the work of time by recollection, by *anamnesis*’ (1964:89). Interestingly, the word ‘text’ is from the Latin *textus* which

means ‘to weave’ (*Chambers’s Etymological Dictionary* 1961, s.v. ‘text’). Sita too, through Iqbal, weaves the text of her rape as a way of reclaiming her ‘castrated’ voice. Atwood (2003:134) points out that “[r]emembering” as a pun may of course have two senses – it is the act of memory, but it is also the opposite of dismembering’. In myth, as well as in many modern narratives, mutilation or dismemberment is often concomitant with rape. For example, in the ancient myth of Philomela, which Eliot discusses in *The Waste Land*, examined later in this study, the raped woman has her tongue cut out. This is emblematic of the silencing of women, of the denial of the female voice. Atwood uses the image with great success in *The Blind Assassin* (2001). Marina Warner asserts that now is the time for giving women back their selves, their voice, for

attempting to reconstitute, re-member that body which has been exploited and violated again and again for this cause and that cause, for politics and propaganda and pleasure, and dismembered to shape up to imposed signification. (1996:333)

This mutilation and dismemberment is a kind of castration, as Geyer-Ryan (1994:72) notes when she says that:

the ever-present threat of rape hanging over women in patriarchal societies and the speech controls to which they are no less continually subjected are part of a desire to castrate the female which can be seen as the wish to destroy her autonomous individuality and sexuality.

Collen’s Sita suffers no physical mutilation, but has nevertheless been effectively castrated because she has internalized patriarchal society, through the act of rape.

Doniger (1995:25) explains the connection between the tongue and the penis:

the phallus, as Lacan tells us, is a word, a “tongue” in the other sense of the word. The usual Sanskrit word for penis, *lingam*, primarily means “sign” or “characteristic” or, finally, “the image of a god or idol.” That is, it is both a part of the body and a part of speech.

Doniger throughout this article discusses the archetype of the Silent Woman, and the primary image she uses is that of a woman who has been beheaded, that is, who no longer has possession of either eyes or a tongue.¹¹ After all, the head is

the anatomical part of the female body that gives women a voice and an identity and that thereby threatens to unmake and disrupt the classic gender distinctions that have linked men to speech, power, identity, and the mind. If the head is typically thought of as masculine, then what is to be made of the female head? (Eilberg-Schwartz 1995:1)

Doniger discusses René Magritte's *Le Viol* (The Rape, c. 1945) to illustrate this idea. *Le Viol* features a 'portrait' of a woman, but, while the neck and hair are intact, the entire face is replaced with a female body. Breasts represent the women's eyes and her genitals are where a mouth should be. This image shows the replacement of rationality, personality and power with pure physicality, in which the woman is defined solely by her gender.¹² This castration is what prompted Germaine Greer to describe women living in patriarchal society as eunuchs (in Gilbert & Gubar 1979:9).

This internalization of the myth that women should silently endure rape and that they are guilty for their own rapes is so widespread that nearly all women feel guilt and shame after being raped (Clancy 1998).¹³ Before Sita remembers the rape, her inner anger is '[w]ound up tight like fine single-ply wool, having been worked out of a loose skein, and wound into an immense, fraudtly tight ball of fury. As if you

¹¹ Correspondingly, Warner (1994:27-28) discusses the representation of beheading in a French print from 1660, called '*Le Médecin céphalique*', or Skull Doctor. This doctor's job is to take a hammer to a woman's head in order to remake her as a good woman.

¹² This association of a woman's mouth and genitals also appears, rather more positively, in Greek myth in reference to Baubo, who is often represented in art as being a head resting upon legs, her mouth located in the genital area. When Persephone is dragged to the underworld by Hades, her mother, Demeter – goddess of corn and agricultural fertility – refuses all nourishment until her daughter is returned to her. Baubo raises her skirt and her obscene gesture makes Demeter laugh, and accept an invigorating drink. Baubo has therefore come to be associated with bawdy and ribald humour (Price & Kearns 2003, s.v. 'Baubo').

¹³ Available at: <<http://www.medicineau.net.au/clinical/psychiatry/rts.html>>. Accessed: 5 November 2003.

couldn't knit from it' (36). Unremembered and untold, her story is not able to be woven, and 'knotted into that anger, was imprisonment' (37). Sita

saw herself trapped, or was it locked up, or tied down physically, or handcuffed, or ball-and-chained, or paralyzed, or perhaps with a rock on her chest under water. Or being buried alive. A weight on her. Gyves. (37)

This list of images, with their intimations of powerlessness and traditional female oppressions, such as abusive marriages or witch hunts, is strikingly similar to a list Atwood uses in her short story, 'The Female Body' (1993). In it, Atwood affirms that men feel they must possess women, their binary opposites, in order to be whole. Collen's Tarquin is driven to rape Sita by his desire to own her: '[c]ould he own her too? Like he owned [his wife] Noella? Take her, make her his own. Or take her, make her disappear' (66). Atwood's story ends with the following paragraph, the images in which suggest various fairy tales:

[c]atch [the female body]. Put it in a pumpkin, in a high tower, in a compound, in a chamber, in a house, in a room. Quick, stick a leash on it, a lock, a chain, some pain, settle it down, so it can never get away from you again. (1993:46)

Sita is only able to escape her powerlessness once Iqbal has woven her story.

Collen has said Iqbal is, relative to the mythology, 'an outsider. Which is one of the dynamics of the novel, in the sense that he is the most "insider" person in the novel, and yet an "outsider" to the central myth. He is also an outsider to the sex war' (*Triplopia* 2005).¹⁴ The figure of Iqbal was based on a man, an outsider and storyteller, that Collen knew and she states: '[t]he narrator came first Without Iqbal, the novel could not have existed, because the point is this mediation (*Triplopia*

¹⁴ Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005.

2005).¹⁵

Having told the story, Iqbal stops hearing the refrain '*Iqbal was a man who thought he was a woman*'¹⁶ and makes the following observation:

[p]rogress has therefore been made. I am a man now. And I am a woman. Like we all will be ... And in unison. We will all be man and we will all be woman. And we will love ourselves as we are.

And we will have wanted to be free. Freedom. And then we will be free. And we will have wanted to be equal. Equality. And then we will become equal.

Such are the hopes of Iqbal for another story. Another history. In the future. (197)

Stephen Heath (1987:28) notes that '[t]here *is* a female impersonation in a man reading as a feminist, whatever else there might be too' (emphasis in the original).

There is therefore a very distinct postmodern quality in the fact that Collen impersonates a man by using Iqbal as a narrator, who in turn impersonates a woman by giving a feminist account of the plot. In this way, the sexes of the different players are obfuscated and gender is overcome. Iqbal's narrative could also be considered *écriture féminine*: '[i]n Cixous' [*sic*] formulation this kind of writing is not produced by women only, but is characteristic of any person who is marginal to the western phallographic order' (Lockett 1989:9).

After Sita realizes that she is going to be raped, she recalls a line from Shakespeare's 'The Rape of Lucrece', '*I alone alone must sit and pine*' (152; emphasis in the original) and the 'minute this went through her head she realizes she was a raped woman. Already raped and still to be raped. Which part of this is the rape?' (152).

Gubar (1982:77) would attribute this to the 'horror [the woman] experiences at having been defined as [the man's] creation'. Sita recalls a line from a poem that is part of

¹⁵ Available at: <<http://www.triopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005.

¹⁶ This refrain recurs throughout the novel. It is discussed in greater detail in Section 2.4.

patriarchal discourse and realizes that she has already been ‘raped’ by this discourse, which allots women second-class citizenship. ‘Because’, as Collen has said in an interview,

every day women are already meted out a million insidious, invisible reminders of patriarchy. And the rapist is only acting on this. To know that he is only acting out the full logic of the everyday sex war that patriarchy lets loose on us. And I don’t mean just between men and women, but also between macho men who tap into patriarchy to dominate all women, all children and most men. (*Triplopia* 2005)¹⁷

The counter-discourse is all too apparent in the author’s determination to reappropriate her self, her being:

[b]ut she must survive.
She wasn’t scared anymore.
She was dogged.
Determined to survive. Stubborn. Hard as nails. Murderous. (152)

Sita’s fear is in this way converted to anger. Sita’s use, here, of verse is significant, firstly in that it is reminiscent of Shakespeare’s ‘The Rape of Lucrece’, but more importantly in that it is a more controlled format of writing and therefore indicates a certain level of empowerment.

Martin S. Greenberg and R. Barry Ruback (1992:228-229), in their study of the decision-making process of victims of crime, note that anger ‘empowers victims in a way that fear does not’, because it

is mobilizing, whereas fear, at least in its extreme form, is immobilizing. Moreover, anger both inspires and justifies an aggressive posture toward the perpetrator and thus may have positive implications for self-esteem and self-representation.

And, in fact, this anger does save Sita’s life. Rowan becomes scared of Sita and sees her as the ‘creator and the destroyer. Kali’ (151). Her anger causes him to lose his lust, and his psychological ascendancy. Rowan ‘won’t kill Sita now. She knows it. He

¹⁷ Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005.

has lost. On that she has won. It was out of the question. To this extent she had won. She knew it at once. All fear passed' (151). This abandonment of fear and the appropriation of anger align Sita with Kali, and the powers of transformation that she and Time imply.¹⁸

2.2 The *Ramayana*

As well as Kali, and her associations with time, Collen rewrites and transforms other characters from Hindu myth, including Rama and Sītā. The intertextual use of the myth of Rama and Sītā and Collen's reworking of it are examined in this chapter. Furthermore, how the myth strengthens the beliefs that rape victims are culpable and that death should be the natural corollary of rape is investigated. Rape is examined as a political act – a technique to maintain the status quo that holds men as the dominant aggressors and women as the passive victims. Finally, the body as the locus of this political agenda is explored further. In this regard, Foucault's theories that society seeks to produce submissive and docile bodies are used as the underlying thesis.

As Brockington makes clear in *The Sacred Thread* (1981), Hinduism has been subject to many changes over the course of its development. Barthes (1972:110) notes that this is one of the reasons that myth is effective: '[m]ythical speech is made of a material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication' (emphasis in the original) and that its 'recurrence' is its 'major power' (Barthes 1972:135). There are many different versions of the Rama and Sītā myth; while the text is said to have been written by Valmiki, a sage who appears in

¹⁸ Kali is sometimes called Kali Ma, literally Mother Time as 'Kali' is the feminine form of 'kala', which means 'time' (Danielou 1964:133). It is

the text, in reality it has been added to and altered over the course of time by a number of different people (Littleton 2002:352). Even once a core plot can be established, opinions of Sītā change quite dramatically. While some see her as a model wife, others see her as a paragon of independence and strength and still others see her as a victim, subjugated and silenced.

In the Indian myth of Sītā, the evil king Ravana abducts¹⁹ Sītā, the devoted wife of the avatar Rama. Rama kills Ravana, but because he subsequently doubts Sītā's virtue, he spurns her. She undergoes an ordeal by fire, called the *agni parishka*, after which the fire god, Agni, appears to Rama and exonerates Sītā from all guilt (Brockington 1993:77). The phrasing in the *Ramayana* is telling: '[f]uneral flame dispels suspicion, honour lives when woman dies' (Dutt [s.a.]:162).²⁰ Rama, for his part, once seeing that Sītā is willing to die to prove her innocence, feels no guilt for her death, but merely 'regret' (Littleton 2002:382) that he had not believed her. The fire episode is linked to the horrifying ritual of sati, or widow sacrifice, which was practised until 1839, when it was banned (Hinnells 1984, s.v. 'sati'). In sati, when a man dies, his wife is burned alive. It is said that the women want to do this but, of course, there are no actual testimonies from the victims. The goddess Sati is Durga in her aspect of the good wife.

Ania Loomba (1994:319) writes that 'there is something very distasteful – our desire to problematize the notion of a unified female subjectivity notwithstanding – to locate

¹⁹ It is generally accepted that the Hindu Sītā was kidnapped rather than raped. Had she been raped, she would have been considered guilty of adultery. Exactly whether she was raped or not, however, cannot absolutely be determined from the *Ramayana*. The *Dictionary of Literary Themes and Motifs*, discusses both physical rape and abduction of a woman under the entry for rape, stating that each 'implies the use of force against a woman's will' (Chien 1988:1021) and *Chambers's Etymological English Dictionary* (1961, s.v. 'rape') states that 'rape' probably comes from the Latin *rapĕre*, meaning to seize and carry off.

²⁰ In some versions it is not the real Sītā who is burned, so she is spared the ordeal.

female agency (entirely on conjecture) in a death-wish, simply (and also especially) because there is no other record of her voice'. In an article about how modern Hindu women perceive the Sītā myth, the following observation is made:

[s]ome describe the fire test as a type of abuse. Like rape survivors who are forced to prove the integrity of their character, one woman said, Sita is forced to prove herself when she was wrongfully abducted. (Murphy & Sippy 2000)²¹

But the purification by fire is not Sītā's final trial. Once exonerated, the people of the kingdom accuse Rama of breaking religious law by accepting his wife after she had been touched by another man. Rama, swayed by the opinions of the people, sends Sītā back into exile. Sītā is then taken in by Valmiki. The other sages condemn Valmiki, saying that if Sītā were pure, Rama would not have exiled her. The focus of the *Ramayana*, as the name implies, is on Rama. The climax of the story in the *Ramayana* is not Sītā's exoneration, but Rama's defeat of Ravana. On top of Sītā's fire ordeal she must, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, undergo another ordeal to be exonerated.

It is not only the physical act of violence which constitutes rape. Collen's novel includes a story about the rape of Véronique Soulier, who is raped by four policemen. There are similarities between this situation and a recent rape case in South Africa. A woman was raped by three policemen and fought for six years to have the state be held liable for the men's actions. The men were imprisoned and the state was fined. This success set a landmark for rape cases as it acknowledged the state's responsibility in sex crimes and upheld the rights of the victim (Templeton 2005:3). Hayley Galgut (2005:18), attorney for the appellant in the case, states '[t]he case

²¹ Available at: <<http://free.freepress.org/manushi/117/sita.html>>. Accessed: 20 September 2003.

raises important issues regarding state accountability for the meaningful protection of victims of gender-based violence and, more generally, gender rights’.

Véronique’s ‘court case in the Banbu Court was her second rape’ (166) and as ‘[b]ad as the first’ (167). On the first day of this case, the lawyers and magistrate are offensive and enormously disrespectful. This makes Véronique lapse into silence – the only available rebellion possible at the time.²² It is only on the second day of the court case, when Véronique is accompanied by a large number of women that the lawyers and magistrate ‘were on best behaviour’ (168). Iqbal is aware that ‘it was the women who did it. They all had notebooks and pens and hand-bags and sarees [*sic*] and dresses and scarves and fury written on their foreheads’ (168) and the men in the court who had previously humiliated Véronique ‘were shamed by the presence of a group of women. They felt individuals now, up against womankind’ (168).

Sue Lees (1996:102) states that the following three issues must be proved by the rape victim in a court case:

[f]irst, that sexual intercourse took place, second, that it was against her will and third, that the defendant did not believe she did not consent or could have cared less (was reckless as to whether or not she consented).

Brownmiller (1976:383) uses an interesting analogy to illustrate the absurdity of blaming the rape victim. She states that it is accepted

that robbery victims need not prove they resisted the robber, and it is never inferred that by handing over their money, they “consented” to the act and therefore the act was no crime. Indeed, police usually advise law-abiding citizens not to resist a robbery....

²² *The Star* (India Wants Women Judges to Hear Rape Cases. 2006:4) recently reported that there have been proposals by India’s cabinet to make it mandatory for rape cases to be heard by women judges so as to avoid the kind of treatment that Collen depicts at Véronique’s trial.

Furthermore, Thomas W. McCahill, Linda C. Meyer and Arthur M. Fischmann discuss the fact that if a woman consents and is therefore treated less violently, it is better for her healing in the end because, if

rape constitutes an invasion of the victim's territorial rights over her own body, a brutal rape must be a double invasion. A victim must now deal not only with the sexual and aggressive aspects of rape but also with a reinforced sense of her own mortality and vulnerability. (1979:62)

Moreover, even if the courts determine that, in fact, the rape act was not consented to, there are other factors taken into account. For example, the victim's past sexual history is taken into account so as to gauge whether the victim has a 'tendency to consent' (Brownmiller 1976:385) or to lie. 'All this plays into the mythology of rape and conveys the notion that although the defendant may be guilty, he was not altogether blameworthy' (Green 1999:144). Especially pertinent to the instance of Sita's rape is the fact that if the raped woman knows the man who raped her, as Sita did, her case is discredited. Collen making use of this kind a relation for Sita's rapist is indicative of the universality of rape and its insidiousness as it shows that rape can come from anyone at any time. In their study of the aftermath of rape, McCahill, Meyer and Fischmann (1979:68) found that this is the situation which causes the most severe adjustment problems: 'rape perpetrated by such an individual is likely to continue to intrude on one's perception a considerable length of time'.

Only in a rape trial is this level of information required to pass a moral judgement on the *victim*. As Rosemary Gray (1998:1) has pointed out, 'a controversial legal rule in which victims of rape were formerly regarded as guilty until proven innocent was revoked in South Africa on Human Rights Day 1998'. This shows the unusual amount

of culpability that is apportioned to rape victims, as opposed to victims of other crimes.

During the first day of Véronique's trial, while she and Sita are the only women, the men in the court try to fix the culpability on Véronique. This idea of a raped woman's culpability occurs throughout the novel. Iqbal frequently asks questions which test this theory of culpability:

what about the stairway? May she not meet a man alone there? Should a woman take a taxi? What should a woman do if she misses the last bus? Should a woman take the last bus? Or the second last? What time is trespass for a woman? What place? (133; emphasis in the original)

The fact that Iqbal frequently asks questions is telling. Pamela Fishman (1998:254-258) discusses the theory that one of the stylistics of women's speech is that they ask questions far more frequently than men. She states that men often refuse to take an active part in interaction and so, by asking questions, women force them to participate in the conversation. She concludes that this reflects the fact that women are socially inferior. Questions are therefore a tactic used by socially inferior people to gain some power over a conversation. Questions are, furthermore, 'stronger forms interactively than declaratives' (Fishman 1998:255). Iqbal's questions, then, are a powerful way of arguing his case against the guilt of a rape survivor. They are also stylistically similar to the ones Hughes asks in 'Harlem', which was touched upon in Section 2.1. Both Iqbal's questions and Hughes's poem are rhetorical and deal with states of oppression. M.H. Abrams (1971:149) states that rhetorical questions are used 'to achieve an emphasis stronger than a direct statement' and that they are intended to be persuasive. By questioning Sita's culpability, Iqbal is prompting the reader to do so too.

In Sita's letter to God, she gives an example of a court case in which the judge intimates that the victim of the rape is culpable: "What were you two doing on your own out at night?" "Our own." Would fifty women also be "on their own" at night?" (188). The autobiography of early feminist author Charlotte Perkins Gilman contains similar sentiments:

[o]ne new indulgence was to go out evenings alone. This I worked out carefully in my mind, as not only a right but a duty. Why should a woman be deprived of her only free time, the time allotted to recreation? Why must she be dependent on some man, and thus forced to please him if she wished to go anywhere at night?

A male friend of hers is appalled by her desire to go out alone:

"Any true man," he said with fervor [*sic*], "is always ready to go with a woman at night. He is her natural protector." "Against what?" I inquired. As a matter of fact, the thing a woman is most afraid to meet on a dark street is her natural protector. Singular. (In Dworkin 1989)²³

This also highlights the fact that women do not have the '[f]reedom of movement' (188) which men do, and Sita asks if 'houses [are] really jails run for the government by individual men' (188). Brownmiller (1976:398) discusses the case of Clinton Duffy, a warden at San Quentin, whose contention it is that women are responsible for their rapes if they do not follow 'common sense', that is, not to wear alluring clothing or venture out alone. Collen, in some of her non-fiction writing (1996),²⁴ discusses an imaginary werewolf-like creature called Minnwi Tuni ('naked at midnight'). This modern-day bogeyman uses a cellphone and drives a powerful vehicle. It was believed that he would make women feel a shining light between their legs. The women would then faint and fall pregnant. In order to protect the women from this fate, they were 'locked up at home'. This shows that 'the ultimate effect of rape upon

²³ Available at: <<http://www.nostatusquo.co.ACLU/dworkin/PornIntro2.html>>. Accessed: 16 July 2005.

²⁴ Available at: <<http://www.redpepper.org.uk/cularch/xali.html>>. Accessed: 15 August 2006.

the woman's mental and emotional health has been accomplished *even without the act*' (Brownmiller 1976:400; emphasis in the original) of rape.

The thinking behind the notions of the woman being a blameworthy accomplice is threefold. Firstly, society allots specific gendered roles to the sexes: men are active and aggressive, women are passive and submissive. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar assert that

it is just because woman are defined as wholly passive, completely void of generative power ... that they become numinous to male artists. For in the metaphysical emptiness their "purity" signifies they are, of course, *selfless*, with all the moral and psychological implications that word suggests. (1979:21; emphasis in the original)

This myth of a woman's 'natural' passivity is the legacy bestowed upon women by myths, such as that of the Hindu Sītā. The second reason that it is believed women are in some way guilty or responsible for the sexual assault which they are subjected to is that they secretly desire it. Women are assigned the position of object of desire, men, the desiring subjects; it is thus considered taboo for women to express sexual desire; this is the origin of the idea that 'no means yes'. Carter (2000:4), in her 'Polemical Preface' to *The Sadeian Woman*, argues that in erotic graffiti

the prick is always presented erect, in an alert attitude of enquiry or curiosity or affirmation; it points upwards, it asserts. The hole is open, an inert space, like a mouth waiting to be filled. From this elemental iconography may be derived the whole metaphysics of sexual differences – man aspires; woman has no other function but to exist, waiting. The male is positive, an exclamation mark. Woman is negative. Between her legs lies nothing but zero, the sign for nothing, that only becomes something when the male principle fills it with meaning.

If women are given the position of the pure and passive objects of desire, then assenting to sexual intercourse is a kind of deviation from 'nature'. The understanding, then, is that 'saying no' is a coy and feminine form of assent. This is

evidence of the fact that ‘women are frequently taken as emblems of cultural integrity, so that defending beleaguered cultures becomes equated with preserving traditional forms of femininity, especially as these are manifest in ... practices of marriage and sexuality’ (Jaggar 1998).²⁵

Devina, a friend of Sita’s, discusses this with Sita, calling rape a ‘parody’ (180) of the man/woman relationship:

the woman supposed to say “no”. At least never say “yes”, and most certainly never approach the man. The woman prisoner of her passivity. Is not rape excusable and possible in our society only because the woman is not free to move towards the man, to propose, to say “yes”. Until we can say “yes” in complete freedom, how can we convincingly say “no”? Our noes only mean a form of yes. Until the shackles on the word yes are broken. (180)

The third myth behind the idea of the women as culpable is the ‘historic masculine fear of false accusation’ (Brownmiller 1976:386), a fear that is largely groundless, given that the number of rape accusations that were discovered to be unfounded by a New York crimes analysis squad was just two per cent, ‘a figure that corresponded exactly to the rate of false reports for other violent crimes’ (Brownmiller 1976:387).

Collen’s Sita is aware of this:

[w]hy are there assumptions against us? Would I put a false charge of theft on someone? Maybe. No more nor less chance than a false charge of rape. Maybe more chance. Because to be stolen from is no shame.



And why, in this petition, I ask in the name of all women is the shame ours? (189)

Collen extends this idea in an interview (*Triplopia* 2005),²⁶ saying ‘it is weird for me as a woman to accept that a man would want to defile his own sexuality by rape; I’ve in real life got a credibility gap as to what it is in a man that confuses his own

²⁵ Available at: <<http://www.msu.edu/~hypatia/globalizing.htm>>. Accessed: 10 January 2006. Women’s role in the preservation of culture is common subject of discussion. See, for example, Driver 1988:6-13, Lacan 1977:261 and Leach 1989:45.

²⁶ Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005.

sexuality with assault'. The implication here is an important one – the shame that surrounds rape should by rights be experienced by men, as the act itself sullies the male gender.

The myths that women are passive subjects or corroborators are what Collen seeks to undermine. By rewriting the story behind the *Ramayana*, she rescues it from the patriarchal order and reclaims it. Gayle Greene (1998:319) observes, in her study of women's metafiction, that

what the protagonist finds in the culture's texts is reinforcement of the very stereotypes that entrap her, for if "the tradition" inspired woman's aspirations, it also frustrated her dreams by marginalizing and denigrating her.

That traditional cultural texts reinforce the feminine stereotype of the silent, suffering woman is apparent in the myth of Sītā. After, or, in some versions, instead of, undergoing an ordeal by fire, Sītā's innocence is established by an act of truth, 'an ancient belief that the one who has enacted his dharma, duty or role, without a single fault throughout the whole of his life can work magic by the simple act of calling that fact to witness' (Cotterell 1986:91). After Sītā is sent into exile, she lives with Valmiki and bears Rama two sons. Many years later the boys are recognized by their father, and Sītā, with whom Rama is still in love, is sent for. He again asks her to swear her innocence and it is here that the Earth Goddess rises from the earth and carries Sītā underground. After his abdication as king of Ayodha, Rama rises to heaven in the form of Vishnu and lives in everlasting happiness with Sītā, as Lakshmi (Littleton 2002:359).²⁷

²⁷ Vishnu and Lakshmi are sent to earth as avatars a number of times, in the form of, for example, Krishna and Radha, and Rama and Sita. Sita is considered the most virtuous of Lakshmi's incarnations.

The magical act is not, however, sufficient to save Sītā's life. The way she is exonerated is essentially to die; after the act of truth 'Mother Earth was her witness, by opening up and receiving her' (Cotterell 1986:91). The name 'Sītā' means 'furrow', and derives from the fact that she was born of the ploughed soil (Littleton 2002:353-354), and so she is explicitly connected with the earth. When 'buried', Collen's Sita is enshrined in the history of her name, her legacy. When reborn, her remembering is an act of rebirth, and therefore he could be seen to be innocent of her rape. Iqbal's questions of culpability could in this way be seen to be answered.

It is interesting to note that in the story of the Hindu Sītā in order for her to prove her innocence she must prove she has lived well according to her dharma. The implication for Collen's novel is that Sita's rape is not a betrayal of her husband Dharma, so he need not repudiate his wife, as the *Ramayana's* Rama does. While Sita is not engulfed entirely by the earth, as is her mythical predecessor, she is metaphorically permitted to delve beneath the earth, as she does while searching for her buried memories; this act implies her innocence. In a sense, she searches for her *self*; in the text she is described as seeing herself 'buried alive' (37) as though, while the rape cannot be remembered, she is dead. Sita is described as being 'absent. It was as though she switched herself off, or as though her mind took off into space, leaving her body like a sloughed skin' (17) and her search for her memory is described as 'diving for a body. For a corpse. Of someone unknown. Something dead' (31).

After Sītā is swallowed into the earth, Rama, distraught at the loss of his wife, kills himself by walking into the water of the Sarayu river. Both the *agni parishka* and Sītā's act of truth illustrate the belief that the natural corollary of rape is death. The

irony is that Sītā dies *because* she has acted out her duty without fault. An internet site succinctly explains exactly what that duty, in accordance with Hindu myth, is:

‘[d]evotion of body, speech and mind to her lord’s (husband’s) feet is the only duty, sacred vow and penance of a woman’ (*Understanding Hinduism* [s.a.], ‘wifely virtues’).²⁸ And this *penance* is necessary merely because a person is born a woman.

So Sītā has to resort to magic to prove her innocence. For her modern-day counterpart, the real ‘magic’ is in the writing of the transgressive text. And this transgression is more effective than death.

As Gray (1998:9) points out, according to Sartrean philosophy, death is an ineffective way of dealing with past trauma. Death, Jean-Paul Sartre (1956:537) asserts, ‘is not my possibility of no longer realizing a presence in the world but rather *an always possible nihilation [sic] of my possibles which is outside my possibilities*’ (emphases in the original). Death is considered, because the self has become the possession of the other. Sartre (1956:429) also declares that ‘one must either transcend the Other or allow oneself to be transcended by him’. By extension, colonization is an affirmation of the self, because the self cannot ‘exist’ without the other and is defined by the other.

As already mentioned, the locus for this battle for transcendence is the body made docile. Sartre notices this trait of power too:

[T]he Other’s look fashions my body in its nakedness, causes it to be born, sculpts it, produces it as it *is*, sees it as I shall never see it. The Other holds a secret—the secret of what I am. He makes me be and thereby he possess me [*sic*], and this possession is nothing other than the consciousness of possessing me. (Sartre 1956:364; emphasis in the original)

²⁸ Available at: <<http://www.hinduism.co.za>>. Accessed: 21 January 2003.

One cannot 'see' one's own body, because that requires one to be conscious of it, and one cannot be conscious of it because 'the body is what the consciousness *is*; it is not even anything except body. The rest is nothingness and silence' (Sartre 1956:330).

That it is the other's 'look' that is a form of possession recalls the subject/object dichotomy, which is when the perceiving subject, simultaneously the 'eye' and 'I', fixes a gaze upon the reified object of desire, seeking to assimilate it. J. Brooks Bouson (1993:20) notes that the male gaze seeks to 'assimilate, and thus erase, the female self'. In literary texts, women are usually the object and men the author, as Gilbert and Gubar (1979:8) assert. Mary Rose D'Angelo (1995:146) also mentions that the eye and phallus were linked in the minds of the ancient Greeks and Romans and provides as evidence the fact that many an Ancient image of a phallus has an eye at its centre. Doniger (1995) also discusses the connection between the eye and the phallus and connects the power of the male gaze with the power of patriarchy. The body, as Sartre has explained, is only an object when possessed, and in death, since the body ceases to be, the conscious ceases to be.

When Sita asks herself what a body is, her reply shows an awareness of this Sartrean notion of the body: '[w]hat is in a body, she thought. It is but a shell. "No, it is me. I am my body. But then shall I not heal?' (153). The connection between the body and the mind is also annunciated in Collen's *Mutiny*. The protagonist, Juna, is pregnant, but desires to feel unified with the other women prisoners, all of whom are menstruating in unison because of having lived together for a time. Juna wonder if she could will herself to abort:

I feel the strong desire to relax, join the general movement, and let my body prepare to expel the contents of my womb. As though I could

spontaneously abort. The body is linked to the mind, I know now with a forceful knowledge. (2001:310)

Moreover, menstruation and pregnancy are, of course, principal features of female bodies, which underscores the biological gender of the inmates. Their jailed bodies fit the Foucauldian and feminist conceptions of the body being the locus of the maintenance of power. Sita's questioning whether she will heal acknowledges the future, Dharma and her daughter Fiya, and this acknowledgement is what saves her.

The literary act requires, according to Lacan, 'a split within the self, between the I that perceives and the I that is perceived' (Singley 1993:4). Frye (1991:23), in discussing William Blake, asserts that

the conscious subject is not really perceiving until it recognizes itself as part of what it perceives. The whole world is humanized when such a perception takes place. There must be something human about the object, alien as it may at first seem, which the perceiver is relating to.

This too can be applied to Collen's novel. By removing herself from the objectifying male gaze Collen, through her characters, makes possible a re-vision of patriarchal discourse. So, by dismantling and transfiguring the Hindu story of Sītā's rape, Collen conjectures that death should not be the corollary of rape. Death by suicide is examined more closely in Section 2.3, in the discussion on Lucrece/Lucretia.

N.G. Diaz (1988:41) makes it clear where Sartre's characters find hope: 'Roquentin (*La Nausee*, 1938) realizes hope in life rather than in death: "in the human imagination, which can create works of art endowed with coherence and internal necessity, and in the human power and freedom to choose"' and this helps to account for *The Rape of Sita's* utopian ending. Frye's perception of utopias is useful here. He writes of

human beings continually trying to struggle out of the atavisms of tyranny and anarchy, knowing that they are better than these conditions, repeatedly forced back into them by all the perversities of their own will, yet never quite losing hope or the vision of an ideal. (1991:35-36)

In Iqbal's sentiments expressed in the paragraph quoted earlier in this dissertation,²⁹

Collen is invoking a utopia, but what is soberingly inherent within these hopeful sentiments, is the realization that, for now, the problems still exist, as is manifest in the perpetuation of patriarchal dominion in modern rape mythology. Abrams (1971:177) indicates that 'utopia' 'has come to signify the class of fiction which represents an ideal political state and way of life'. Foucault, as he believed power was inescapable – a view which is controversial for many feminists (Weedon 1999:118) – would see this as a false utopia. However, it is not necessarily false because

unless a feasible future *were* somehow discernable within the present, unless we can point to what current freedoms and fulfillments [*sic*] might give it shape, the idea of the future remains bloodlessly abstract, which is another kind of false utopia. (T. Eagleton 1996:64; emphasis in the original)

Terry Eagleton believes that sexuality itself is a kind of metanarrative (1996:110) and this leads to a discussion which centres on the idea of sexuality as it is currently regarded as being a kind of modern myth. Postmodernism aims to demystify discourse. As Raman Selden avers, '[Edward] Said follows the logic of Foucault's theories: no discourse is fixed for all time; it is both a cause and an effect. It not only wields power but also stimulates opposition' (Selden 1985:100-101).

²⁹ The quote is as follows:

[p]rogress has therefore been made. I am a man now. And I am a woman. Like we all will be ... And in unison. We will all be man and we will all be woman. And we will love ourselves as we are.

And we will have wanted to be free. Freedom. And then we will be free. And we will have wanted to be equal. Equality. And then we will become equal.

Such are the hopes of Iqbal for another story. Another history. In the future. (197)

John Carey, in his introduction to *The Faber Book of Utopias* points out that ‘utopia’ means ‘nowhere’ or ‘no place’; ‘[i]t has often been taken to mean *good place*, through confusion of its first syllable with the Greek *eu* as in *euphemism* or *eulogy*. As a result of this mix-up, another word *dystopia* has been invented, to mean *bad place*’ (1999:xi, emphases in the original). Myths themselves are utopias in that they occur in a time that is other from real time. This does not, however, mean that to count as a utopia a place must be simply imaginary. Rather, a utopia is an ‘expression of desire’ (Carey 1999:xi) and a dystopia, an ‘expression of fear’ (Carey 1999:xi). Frye (1991:41) conceives of ‘a will to survive of which the motor force is usually called desire’. The search for utopia, then, is the desire for survival and the ‘continuum of desire consists largely of avoiding the consciousness of death, and acting on the assumption that we are not going to die at once’ (Frye 1991:41). The case is further complicated by the fact that one particular person’s perspective may differ from another. There can be no doubt, to give an obvious and well-known example, that Hitler’s utopian ideals differed starkly from those of the Jews whom he wished to exterminate.

Ashleigh Harris (1998)³⁰ notes that utopian thinking in realism ‘serves to perpetuate the prevailing order, rather than provide relief from it’. Collen’s magical realism does not do this. Nevertheless, there would be many men, and perhaps even women, who would not consider Collen’s utopian ideals of equality desirable. Carter notes, ‘[m]y freedom makes you more unfree, if it does not acknowledge your freedom, also’ (2000:89). In order for Collen’s desired state to become a reality, the old world order would have to cease to be. Carey (1999:xi) notes that this problem is inherent in all utopian discourses: ‘[t]hey aim at a new world, but must destroy the old. Their

³⁰ Available at: <<http://www.uwc.ac.za/arts/english/interaction/97aharris.htm>>. Accessed: 23 February 2006.

imaginative excitement comes from the recognition that everything inside our heads, and much outside, are human constructs and can be changed’.

In utopian worlds, criminals are often eliminated from the scheme altogether. Writers, such as Foucault and the Marquis de Sade make much of the fact that certain types of behaviour, such as violence or lust, are natural to human beings and believe that, if this is the case, such a behavioural pretence ought not to be punished. Carey (1999:xv) discusses what he refers to as the ‘criminal gene’, which recalls the fact that Collen’s antagonist is a ‘congenital’ (Gray 1998:5) rapist.³¹ It is interesting that Carey says that the criminal gene defence ‘could save a convicted killer in some American states, because he would not be held responsible for his actions. But in other states the virtual certainty that he would kill again would ensure his execution’ (1999:xv). But, in fact, Rowan Tarquin is in a difficult place to analyse as, despite the fact that his violent temperament sets him aside from society, it is precisely from the society that his criminal instincts are born; his violent nature is therefore both inborn and learned.

In several of the texts in Carey’s (1999) anthology, such as Marge Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*, feminist utopias are the theme. In some of these texts, masculinity is undermined or omitted from the utopian world. Piercy’s men have breasts and are responsible for feeding the babies. In Gilman’s *Herland*, men are missing altogether; the herlanders give birth entirely without men. As a result, crime, violence and the like are simply not present. Collen’s Sita comes from a matrilineal lineage, but this is not seen as the utopian ideal. Rather, it is her daughter, a product of a woman and a ‘rewritten’ man, who is seen as the way

³¹ Rowan Tarquin could also be seen as ‘hereditarily’ violent as his father beats him when he is a child (192).

of the future. In relation to Frye's discussion of an ideal utopia above, he says furthermore that '[s]uch an ideal has to be present and realizable, as opposed to the dream of restoring a paradise lost in the past, or in what is symbolized by the past' (Frye 1991:36).

Rather than doing away with sex, Collen sees it as a natural act and the physical and symbolic union of the sexes. Patrilineage has had a lot to do with the oppression of women. In the article Sita writes, mentioned first in Chapter 1 of this dissertation, she speculates that rape was not possible until

males found out about their role in reproduction and then somehow got control over the process of reproduction, this symbolized by concepts like virginity and rape and a male god of a punitive nature, and then thought they could start to own children individually, control women one by one themselves.... (160)

Many early civilizations believed that women procreated on their own. In these societies, women were revered. As men came to be aware of their own role in reproduction that changed. Julia Stonehouse, in *Idols to Incubators* (1994), discusses how thinking then changed to a belief that men were the sole creative forces and women, merely the receptacles. Even once it was acknowledged that women and men each had a part in reproduction, men had difficulty determining if the children his partner bore were really his. This led to the control of women and women's sexuality. Brownmiller (1976:376) writes, '[m]an's historic desire to maintain sole, total and complete access to a woman's vagina ... sprang from his need to be the sole physical instrument governing impregnation, progeny and inheritance rights'.

There is mention in *The Rape of Sita* of a strike instituted by a group of women who want to go back to Diego Garcia, the Solomon Islands and Peros Banos. Their reason

for wanting to return to these islands, which have since been ‘[c]losed down’ (85) is because of the equality:

“Women worked same as men there. Same pay” It was matriarchy there, Sita knew. Not glorified matriarchy, but the matriarchy of slavery. *He, she* and *it* were all one word: *li*. ... Slavery reduced one to equality. Sita knew this. Therefore, as she said, we can be *elevated* to equality as well. (85; emphases in the original)

The word ‘*elevated*’ implies a kind of transcendence, the writing of the text thus becomes a kind of transgression. Also, rape is virtually unheard of on these islands as it is considered improper to even coerce women into sex, and moreover, the women are widely regarded as being more sexually aggressive and bawdy than the men, who are more prim (Oliver 1967:142-143). The closure of the islands of the Chagos Archipelago is discussed in *Mutiny* too. The British monarchy created the following statute:

As from the date [8 November 1965] of this Order in Council the Chagos Archipelago, being islands which immediately before the date of this Order were included in the Dependencies of Mauritius, shall together form a separate colony which shall be known as the British Indian Ocean Territory. (In Collen 2001:255)

People not on the islands at the time were forbidden to return. The islands were then sold to the United States for use as an air force base (Collen & Kistnasamy 2002³² and Baird 2002).³³

A utopian place is often proposed by French feminists, such as Cixous, who hold Lacanian principles. Cecily Lockett (1989:10), however, is correct in stating that Cixous’s notions reinforce ‘patriarchal definitions of women’s “essence”’ by emphasising the emotionality and intuitive aspects that have traditionally been thought of as feminine and playing down the traditionally masculine characteristics of

³² Available at: <<http://www.lalitmauritius.com/diegochagossian.htm>>. Accessed: 20 September 2004.

³³ Available at: <http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0JQP/is_2002_June/ai_88268009>. Accessed: 16 August 2006.

rationality and reason. Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:9) makes it clear that ‘to enquire about the feminine biological experience is not to posit that there is a feminine nature, immanent and recurrent, that can be used to identify all females and thus pigeon-hole them as has been done in history’. Osita C. Ezenwanebe (2006)³⁴ agrees, calling the concept of a female essence, ‘obnoxious’. For Cixous, the voice of the Mother is seen as being the source for all feminine writing and is further described as being semiotic, as opposed to symbolic. This Lacanian perspective assumes that

women have no position from which to speak in the symbolic order and that feminine potential is repressed in favour of a patriarchal version of femininity in which male desire and male interests define and control female sexuality and feminine subjecthood. (Weedon 1999:148)

It must be pointed out, however, at this point that the neither Cixous’s model of *écriture féminine* nor the Lacanian psychoanalytical approach take into account adequate feminist thoughts or consider the case of the post-colonial subject, which is why they are drawn on in conjunction with other theories.

Andrea Natrass (1995)³⁵ has discussed the fact that French feminism does have uses for African feminists, as it, especially in its psychoanalytical guise, ‘conceives of a text not as a unified whole, but as a site of conflict and contradiction’. She continues, that in her ‘opinion for a South African feminism to emerge it will be necessary to escape the binarism of Anglo/US versus French feminism, drawing on the most productive and progressive features of each’; hence the fusion of critical theories used in this dissertation. Weedon (2002)³⁶ quotes the following, written by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, in *This Bridge Called My Back*:

³⁴ Available at: <<http://www.aber.ac.uk/cla/current/osita.html>>. Accessed: 16 August 2006.

³⁵ Available at: <<http://www.uwc.ac.za/arts/english/interaction/94an.htm>>. Accessed: 17 July 2006.

³⁶ Available at: <<http://www.genderforum.uni-koeln.de/genderealizations/weedon.html>>. Accessed: 14 May 2006.

[a]s Third World women we clearly have a different relationship to racism than white women, but all of us are born into an environment where racism exists. Racism affects all of our lives, but it is only white women who can “afford” to remain oblivious to these effects. The rest of us have had it breathing or bleeding down our necks.

Along with psychoanalysis and deconstruction, this argument allies itself with those African feminist theories and with Weedon’s notion of feminist poststructuralism, which in turn, invokes a Foucauldian reading. Weedon (1999:150) explains the difference between feminist and purely Lacanian psychoanalytic criticism. Rather than using the phallus as the primary signifier of sexual difference, in

feminist poststructuralism, however, there can be no ultimate fixing of femininity, masculinity or unconscious structures. They are always historically produced through a range of discursive practices....

By examining and dissolving these discursive practices, Collen posits a better future. Ultimately, Collen’s invocation of utopia does not state that there will be a time of perfect equality *per se*, but in fact, that such an ending could indeed never occur. Her poem “Time”, which functions as an elucidating epigraph in the novel (see the appendix) states as much explicitly:

*I being time
Move on.
I am time.
I do not stop. (3; emphasis in the original)*

So the poem itself belies the utopian vision, which is set up instead as an idealized goal. There is, however, the hint of an attainable utopia, which is discussed later, in Section 2.4 of this study.

If Sita is representative of all women, then Dharma, it can be assumed, is emblematic of all men. Iqbal calls Dharma a ‘hero’ of the story (70) and he is more godlike than many of the other male characters. Dharma, Iqbal informs his audience, is in charge

of remembering each story exactly as it occurred,³⁷ whereas he, Iqbal, ‘has to retell it anew, and never the same’ (8), as is traditional for storytelling in Mauritius.³⁸

Dharma’s role suits the Hindu understanding of the word ‘dharma’, in its sense of moral order. The inference is that, in time, the wrongs of the past will be righted. Consequently, while Rowan Tarquin as such remains unpunished, the balance of good and bad in the world will be restored in another way. When the colonized people rise up and resist their oppressors, Sita feels vindicated, because they have opposed the master narrative which has done her harm: the patriarchal centre. This makes her what Hutcheon calls an ‘ex-centric’ (1988:134), as quoted in the introduction. This term connotes the fact that such a person is, firstly, marginalized and, secondly, viewed as eccentrically deviating from the norm, as Foucault defined it. Even her behaviour on hearing the news is eccentric:

[s]he was as if in a trance. She was vindicated. But then, I [Iqbal] am too. Are all of us socialists not vindicated by such a thing? And yet we didn’t all look like that. Just she did. Again it was sudden. She went odd. For her, it was more of a vindication than for anyone else. She began to dance a strange dance. Sing a strange song. In front of everyone there and then. In a round, an imaginary circle drawn in the middle of the room. Legs and arms flying. (20)

One of Shiva’s names is Nataraja, ‘Lord of the Dance’. When Shiva performs his Cosmic Dance, he holds a drum, the beat of which symbolizes Time, and a flame, representative of transformation through destruction. One foot tramples the demon of ignorance and the other is lifted to signify salvation. His is encircled by flames connoting nature. Shiva wears a masculine earring in one ear and a feminine one in the other, to represent the combined feminine and masculine energies,

³⁷ Ton Tipyer is also responsible for keeping a true record of stories. He knows the whole of the *Mahabharata*, which, as well as the *Ramayana*, is one of the two great Hindu epics (92, 118).

³⁸ In fact, Collen mentions in an interview that she fulfils Iqbal’s role of telling a story anew each time and her friend, Anne-Marie Sophie, fulfils Dharma’s when they relate anecdotes to an audience, usually comprised of members from the Women’s Movement (*Triplopia* 2005. Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005)

ardhanarishvara, a concept discussed further in Section 2.4 (Littleton 2002:342 and Brockington 1993:81). Sita's dance resembles Shiva's in that it is a call for the non-dualism of the sexes, and a celebration of Time's ability to transform. Sita feels vindicated because dharma has been restored.³⁹

Dharma is Rowan Tarquin's opposite, exemplified by the fact that he personifies the four fundamental virtues of dharma: non-violence, purity, truth and self-control (*Understanding Hinduism* [s.a.], s.v. 'dharma',⁴⁰ and see the *Bhagavad Gita*, 1994:67). Of these, non-violence, or *ahimsa*, is the most important and is considered the 'highest type of heroism' (*Understanding Hinduism* [s.a.], s.v. 'dharma').⁴¹ *The Rape of Sita* states, '[t]o every action, a counter-reaction' (20), hence Sita's sense of vindication when the colonial subjects revolt. Rama is dharma personified (Hinnells 1984, s.v. 'Ramayana'), and so Dharma in Collen's novel could be seen as the revisioning of the *Ramayana's* Rama. Dharma and Rowan Tarquin thus personify *dharma* and *adharma*, that is, good and evil.

2.3 The Rape of Lucretia/Lucrece

The third significant intertextual source is the myth of Lucretia, also appropriated by Shakespeare in his epic length poem, 'The Rape of Lucrece'. The story of Lucretia, as portrayed by Ovid and Livy, Shakespeare's reworking of it in his 'The Rape of Lucrece' and Lindsey Collen's intertextual use of the narratives are examined in this section. In this myth, Lucretia is raped by a political opponent of her husband and she

³⁹ In addition to being reminiscent of Shiva's cosmic movement, Sita's triumphant and gleeful circular dance is reminiscent of the dances performed by witches and fairies. This accentuates the theme of magic in the novel.

⁴⁰ Available at: <<http://www.hinduism.co.za>>. Accessed: 21 January 2003.

⁴¹ Available at: <<http://www.hinduism.co.za>>. Accessed: 21 January 2003.

is so shamed by the act that she commits suicide. As in Section 2.2 of this study, the political overtones of rape are considered and the eastern myth of Sītā and the western myth of Lucretia/Lucrece are compared and discussed as forming the basis for Collen's remythologization in *The Rape of Sita*. Finally, this chapter examines Collen's rejection of suicide as the necessary outcome of rape. Sartre's views on suicide, introduced earlier, are used as the conceptual background for the argument.

Throughout the novel, the names given to the characters are very important, as this is one of the most significant ways that Collen establishes and points out the texts against which she is writing. The use of symbolic names is moreover a common feature of magic realist texts, where it helps subvert realism (Concilio 1999:37), and M.J. Cloete and R.N. Madadzhe (2004:37) note that naming is important too in African oral literature where the names should be meaningful. Perhaps one of the most significant names is that given to Sita's rapacious antagonist, Rowan Tarquin. It is within his name that the reader gets his or her clearest indication of the synchronicity between Hindu and Roman mythology. Rowan, 'or *Rawan, the ravisher*' (134; emphasis in the original) is an allusion to the Hindu Ravana. Rowan's surname recalls the Roman Lucretia's rapist, Tarquin. In fact, Rowan Tarquin recites lines from the Shakespearean version of the story before he rapes Sita (139) and, like Tarquin, is in two minds about raping Sita and wonders whether his actions will damn him. He reasons, finally, that he will commit the rape as 'He, He, He will forgive me. God is a man. Adam was right. Eve tempted him' (141). This indicates that even the rapist ascribes the culpability to the victim and illustrates the influence on patriarchy of Christian myth and dogma, where Eve is made to carry the burden of guilt for humankind's expulsion from Paradise.

In the myth, Tarquin Sextus, prince of Rome, wants to sleep with Lucretia. When she refuses, he threatens to kill both her and one of her slaves and lay them next to one another so that it would look as if Lucretia is guilty of infidelity. Out of fear of shame, for herself and for her husband, Lucretia consents to the rape, and then, because she has internalized the guilt of what would at the time have been considered adultery, she kills herself. That she gave consent is where the problem lies; patriarchal dogma would have her die trying to fend off her attacker, rather than giving consent under duress and live. Mary Eagleton cites a traditional Indian proverb which illustrates the extent to which ideology determines that women should be silent and passive: '[v]irtuous is the girl who suffers and dies without a sound' (1996:19). Brownmiller (1976:327-328) asserts somewhat cynically that 'a good heroine is a dead heroine', because the 'sacrifice of life, we learn, is the most perfect testament to a woman's integrity and honor [*sic*]'. Lucretia fulfils this stereotype and kills herself. In Shakespeare's version of the myth, Lucrece's family rises up to defend her and Tarquin flees. The monarchy falls and a Republic replaces it. In *Titus Andronicus* (2001), Shakespeare again deals with the theme of rape. In this play, Lavinia, daughter of the Roman nobleman Titus Andronicus, is raped by Demetrius and Chiron, the sons of Tamora, Queen of the Goths. What is interesting about this play, is that Shakespeare uses the story of Philomela from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* within the text.

The Rape of Sita draws on storytelling and therefore the tradition of oral literature, an art form that is especially important in African literature, and a powerful format for social protest (Cloete & Madadzhe 2004:42). Isidore Okpewho (1983:69) says that

‘we are free to call any narrative of the oral tradition *a* myth, so long as it gives due emphasis to fanciful play’ (emphasis in the original). Ada U. Azodo (1999)⁴² says that oral sources are ‘at the heart’ of the African literary tradition. This makes oral literature a useful ‘postcolonial weapon used to reject the claim of universalism made on behalf of canonical Western literature’ (Kehinde 2003:375) and fits Barthes’s ‘death of the Author’ concept (Barthes 1977:148).

The storytelling/weaving image is reminiscent of the myth of Philomela, a Classical example of the belief that death should follow rape, which makes an appearance, as mentioned above, in *Titus Andronicus*. In this myth, Philomela is raped by Tereus, after which he cuts her tongue out, which leads Philomela to let the rape be known another way: through weaving. Geyer-Ryan observes that

Tereus falls victim to his own ideology. He forgets that the woman he thinks he has reduced to nothing more than a sign, a sign of *his* sexuality, is herself a creator of signs, an author. Tereus’s view of reality is inadequate because it is distorted by his own self-centred will-to-power. (1994:73; emphasis in the original)

‘Castrated’ by Tereus, Philomela is forced to find an alternative medium for her voice. She weaves the story of her violation into a robe and sends to her sister, Tereus’s wife, Procne. After the rape, Philomela says to her rapist:

[B]ut to th’intent, O perjurde wretch, no mischief may remaine
Unwrought by thee, why doest thou from murdring me refraine?
Would God thou had it done before this wicked rape. (*Met.* VI.686-688)

But, importantly, having been raped and not killed, Philomela refuses to be silent, saying

[y]ea I my selfe *rejecting shame* thy doings will bewray.
And if I may have power to come abrode, them blase I will
In open face of all the world. Or if thou keepe me still
As prisoner in these woods, my voyce the verie woods shall fill,

⁴² Available at: <<http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/MotsPluriels/MP999aau>>. Accessed: 13 August 2006.

And make the stones to understand. Let Heaven to this give eare
And all the Gods and powers therein if any God be there. (*Met.* VI.694-
699; my emphasis)

In fact, so fervently does Philomela wish to make the crime against her known that once her tongue is cut out '[t]he stumpe whereon it hung/ Did patter still' (*Met.* VI.710-711). Procne, in revenge for Tereus's crime, kills their son and feeds him to his father. This is a direct blow to his masculinity and to patriarchy, as shown clearly in the following lines: 'King Tereus sitting in the throne of his forefathers, fed/ And swallowed downe the selfsame flesh that of his bowels bred' (*Met.* VI.824-825).

These events lead to a new Prince taking over and it therefore becomes clear that, like the fall of Troy, the rape of Lucretia and the rape of Sītā, the outcome of the story is a political one. The raped women are again symbols of changing political times.

Titus Andronicus's Lavinia, like Philomela, has her tongue torn out, but in order to stop her from weaving her story as Philomela had done, the rapists also cut off her hands. By holding up Ovid's text, Lavinia is able to communicate that she has been raped, and she then writes the names of her rapists in sand using a staff, a phallic symbol indicative of authority, between her feet. As Eagleton notes, '[t]he body which lays me open to exploitation is also the ground of all possible communication' (1998a:159). As in the myth of Philomela, a text of sorts speaks for the victim where she cannot speak. As in 'The Rape of Lucrece', death is seen to be the natural corollary of rape, but Lavinia dies by Titus's hand, rather than her own. Lavinia, like Lucrece and Philomela, would rather die than be raped. She implores Tamora for 'present death' (*TA*, II.iii.173) and that she be kept 'from [Demetrius and Chiron's] worse than killing lust' (*TA*, II.iii.175). But death is denied her. Titus kills his

daughter, saying: '[d]ie, die, Lavinia, and thy shame with thee;/ And with thy shame thy father's sorrow die!' (*TA*, V.iii.46-47). Titus, by plunging a knife into his daughter, wrests from her the phallic power she had taken up in her use of the staff. The loss of her 'spotless chastity' (*TA*, V.ii.177) is considered 'more dear/ Than hands or tongue' (*TA*, V.ii.176-177), and Titus considers her shame and his sorrow enough reason to kill his own daughter. Warner notes that silence is often not sufficient to overcome shame; 'more is required: self-obliteration, dissolution' (1994:398). It is this destruction and eradication of the self that patriarchy wants from raped women. In a similar vein to Procne feeding her son to her husband, Titus feeds the rapists to their mother. Warner (2000:56) observes, in reference to anthropophagy, that the 'act of eating represents an inverted birthing: biological ownership through incorporation'. Warner goes on to declare that what this act does, is remove any possibility of futurity for that line, and therefore both the power and the identity of the enemy is erased (Warner 2000:63).

Not only are the myths of Lavinia, Lucrece/Lucretia and Ravana political, they are about the politics of men. Greer (2001)⁴³ notes that

Tarquin's is an offence against the body politic. By [the rape] he undoes not Lucretia but kingship itself. No feminist should be surprised to learn that what happens to Lucretia is not the issue; damage done to the victim is never the point in the masculine account of rape.

Philippa Berry (1991:33) discusses the fact that recent feminist criticism 'has typically interpreted Lucrece herself as a sign used to mediate and define men's

⁴³ Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/friday_review/story/0%2C3605%2C499106%2C00>. Accessed: 6 November 2003).

relationship to men'. However, she points out that, by Lucrece taking her own life,⁴⁴ she is able to subvert her position as a mediating sign. She becomes an 'aporia' (Berry 1991:33) by seizing what little control is available to her under the circumstances.

Berry notes that Lucrece's speech constitutes about a third of the poem (1991:33) and concludes that this is indicative that Lucrece has found her voice. Eisaman Maus agrees, noting:

[o]n the one hand, grief and fear interrupt discourse, which inevitably seems an inadequate vehicle for feeling. On the other hand, grief and fear motivate discourse; Lucrece acquires her own voice in the poem only in the moment when she is faced with violence. (1986:73)

In contrast, in Ovid's version of the myth, Lucretia is very much denied a voice. When first confronted by Tarquin the Proud, Lucretia 'answered never a word. Voice and power of speech and thought itself fled from her breast' (*Fas.* II.798-800). Even after the rape, she struggles to find her voice:

[s]he was long silent, and for shame hid her face in her robe: her tears flowed like a running stream. On this side and on that her father and her spouse did soothe her grief and pray her to tell, and in blind fear they wept and quaked. Thrice she essayed to speak, and thrice gave o'er, and when the fourth time she summoned up courage she did not for that lift up her eyes.⁴⁵ "Must I owe this too to Tarquin? Must I utter, woe's me, with my own lips my own disgrace?" And what she can she tells. (*Fas.* II.819-830)

Once Brutus vows to punish Tarquin for his crime, Lucretia can do no more than '[move] her sightless eyes' (2004:53) and 'witness the speech by a stirring of her hair',⁴⁶ (2004:53), the implication being that she is content for the male figures in the poem to take control of the situation.

⁴⁴ The wording in the phrase 'to take one's life' is worth a brief examination. It could be understood as a kind of assumption of power, a kind of taking control. Read like this, that Lucrece takes her own life could be understood as her taking it from the hands of her father and husband. However, that she takes her life into her own hands only to annihilate herself is at odds with the thesis of this study, in alignment with Sartre's notion of the illogicality of suicide.

⁴⁵ That Lucretia will not lift her eyes and that her father and brother are in 'blind fear' is indicative of their loss of the empowering gaze; here, they are made subject to Tarquin.

⁴⁶ Warner discusses the iconography connected with women's hair extensively in *From the Beast to the Blonde* (1994). She examines it as an essentially female image and asserts that it 'bears the freight of Judaeo-Christian ambivalence about the place of instinct and nature, fertility and sexuality' (1994:359).

Rather than punishing Tarquin, Shakespeare's Lucrece appeals to Time to do it:

O Time, thou tutor both to good and bad,
Teach me to curse him that thou taught'st this ill!
At his own shadow let the thief run mad,
Himself himself seek every hour to kill! (RL, ll. 995-998)

Notably, Lucrece's conception of Time, like that of Collen's poem 'Time', which, as already mentioned, functions as the proem in Collen's *The Rape of Sita*, 'knows no good nor bad' (1; emphasis in the original). Also, it was Time that taught both Lucrece and Sita's Tarquin 'his ill'.

Thus, rape is used as a weapon to further political interests. Jenny Sharpe (1994:225) gives the following (extreme) example of rape being used as a weapon:

[d]uring the 1857 uprisings, a crisis in colonial⁴⁷ authority was managed through the circulation of "the English Lady" as a sign for the moral influence of colonialism. A colonial discourse on rebellious Sepoys raping, torturing and mutilating English women inscribed the native's savagery onto the objectified body of English women, even as it screened the colonizer's brutal suppression of the uprisings.

In this instance, the intent is to inspire feelings of anger and vengeance against the rapists. In fact, no evidence of such brutalities has ever been found. The concept of rape is appropriated for public, propagandist use. This fits neatly with the Barthesian idea of myth, where 'mythicness amounts to appropriation itself' (Gould 1981:128).

In Collen's novel, Sita is portrayed as a political activist and, as such, her activities as a colonized individual are inextricably linked to her being a woman; Gray (1998:8) writes that Sita finds herself 'defined, ordered and silenced by the colonizer – be this in the form of patriarchy or of western civilization'. The act of rape, then, is

⁴⁷ The word colonial is somewhat problematic as the word 'colonized' was not coined until after the Second World War, a hundred years later. The most suitable term used for 'colonialism' at the time would probably be 'imperialism'.

associated with the act of colonization – in both, force is used by the strong upon the weak, the intention being to subjugate and claim ownership. Collen thus adopts a post-colonial strategy. Dorothy Driver's observations are pertinent: 'the symbolic signifying system, in its dichotomising of culture/nature, masculine/feminine, white/black, reason/sentiment, and so on, places (white) women and black people within the same categories' (1988:13).

Shakespeare too was aware of the connection between violated woman and besieged citizen; and he describes Tarquin's violation of Lucrece in fitting terms:

[h]is hand, that yet remains upon her breast—
Rude ram to batter such an ivory wall—
May feel her heart—poor citizen!—distress'd,
Wounding itself to death, rise up and fall,
Beating her bulk, that his hand shakes withal.
This moves in him more rage and lesser pity,
To make the breach and enter this sweet city. (RL, ll. 463-469)

Lucrece is herself presented as aware of the political overtones of the rape: after the act, she contemplates a painting that depicts the Fall of Troy that was the consequence of the rape of Helen. Katharine Eisaman Maus (1986:81) observes that 'the sack of Troy is a culturally primal event; not only the birth of Western literature, but the founding of both Rome and Britain follow, according to legend, upon the Trojan diaspora'. Lucrece notices how the artist depicts Hecuba, Priam's wife as a 'sad shadow' (RL, l.1457), but with no words and 'therefore Lucrece swears he did her wrong/ To give her so much grief and not a tongue' (RL, ll.1462-1463). Ovid's text portrays Hecuba thus: 'Priams [*sic*] wretched wife/ Lost (after all) her womans [*sic*] shape, and barked all her lyfe/ In forreine countrye' (*Met.* XIII.488-490). That Hecuba, in the painting viewed by Lucrece in Shakespeare's poem, has been so

mutilated drives Lucrece to lament and it is this lamentation, this vocal outpouring of grief, which metaphorically eases the pain of the people who suffer in the painting:

I'll tune thy woes with my lamenting tongue,
And drop sweet balm in Priam's painted wound,
And rail on Pyrrhus that hath done him wrong.
And with my tears quench Troy that burns so long.... (RL, ll.1465-1468)

The story of Troy involves, of course, Helen. Pradip Battacharya (2001),⁴⁸ in a review of Doniger's book *Splitting the Difference. Gender and Difference in Ancient Greece and India* (1999), discusses Helen. Doniger is seen to suggest that Sītā, the ideal wife and Helen, the wife guilty of adultery, can be amalgamated and conflated with the Rig-Veda's Saranyu, who is sexually ambivalent. In the *Ramayana*, Ravana '[p]raised the woman's peerless beauty to subdue the woman's heart' (Dutt [s.a.]:97) and to engage her in conversation. That Sītā succumbs to this form of seduction could be viewed as indicating a latent or concealed sexuality, which in the figure of Helen is not as restrained. Connections between Sītā and Helen can be found, so these texts are interrelated. The premises behind both myths are similar: both stories are about a king who must search and fight for his abducted wife. Helen and Sītā personify the virgin/whore binary opposition found in modern myth. Atwood (2003:79) discusses the recurrence of this dichotomy, especially as it relates to the female writer, but notes that the situation is changing over time:

[n]ow it is more possible for a woman writer to be seen as, well, just that: neither nun nor orgiastic priestess, neither more nor less than human. Nevertheless, the mythology still has power, because such mythologies about women still have power.

Collen writes of these stereotypes, '[w]omen are two. Mothers, wives, virgins, nuns, and sisters. Whores, prostitutes, bad women, mistresses. Why are woman two? Until women are one, there will be rape, because some rape is supposed to be less culpable

⁴⁸ Available at: <<http://www.boloji.com/bookreviews/012.htm>>. Accessed: 3 March 2006.

than other' (193-194). Lucrece's rape, because she is the paradigm of fidelity, implies she is relatively less culpable than would be, for example, lascivious Helen.

In the end, Lucrece's expression of grief, both her weeping and her soliloquy, is insufficient to override the shame that she has internalized. She must find her voice in another way. By taking her own life, she is taking control of her being, her self. Ovid explains that Lucretius and Collatine 'pardoned the deed enforced' (*Fas.* II.832), but that she would not accept their forgiveness. Her use of the knife to kill herself is symbolic of her claiming the phallic power associated with that weapon and the act of plunging the knife into herself could be read as representative of rape. Sita, before her rape and upon seeing three knives hanging on Rowan's wall, considers using them to defend herself. But, unlike Lucrece, she ends up not employing the phallic power indicated by the weapons. Sita realizes that if she were to use the knives and manage to get away from Rowan, she would be in danger of rape outside of the protection of his house. She further considers the possibility that she could face charges of murder despite her need to defend herself.⁴⁹ Additionally, if she were to merely injure Rowan it could incite him to kill her. Sita thus shows an awareness of the extent to which patriarchy has disempowered and endangered her and her situation illustrates the extent of women's oppression. Sita chooses, instead of appropriation of phallic power represented by the knives, to align herself with *shakti*, as discussed earlier.

But Lucrece chooses to take up the knife and its associated masculine power, prompting Brutus to describe her as a 'woman with a man's courage' (2004:53).

Livy's (*EHR* 1.59) version differs somewhat. Lucretia, when telling of her rape, says, 'My body only has been violated. My heart is innocent, and death will be my

⁴⁹ She recalls the case of Dessie Woods, a woman who received the death sentence for killing her rapist (147).

witness'. So Livy suggests that Lucretia knew that the guilt of her rape rested solely with Sextus Tarquinius, although, after extracting a promise that her father and husband will avenge her rape by killing her rapist, she commits suicide nevertheless. Livy's Lucretia is therefore similar to Sītā, in that death acts as a witness to her innocence.

Lucrece's husband and Brutus try to convince her that she is free of guilt, stating that 'without intention there could never be guilt' (*EHR* 1.59). Her own father, however, avows that 'the cause of her death was an even bitterer and more dreadful thing than the death itself' (*EHR* 1.59). Lucretia states, 'I am innocent of fault, but I will take my punishment. Never shall Lucretia provide a precedent for unchaste women to escape what they deserve' (*EHR* 1.59). Her inflexible, and self-abnegating, chastity is what has made Lucretia the paragon of the 'good' woman throughout history.

Significantly, Lucrece/Lucretia will not consent to sex with Tarquin even when he threatens to kill her as, if she were to submit to sex with Tarquin even on pain of death, she would be considered guilty of adultery by the law of the day and she could not live with that shame. It is only when Tarquin threatens to kill her and a servant and lay them next to one another as though they had been caught in the act of adultery that Lucretia submits to Tarquin, considering the shame in either case to be almost equal, but reasoning that submitting to the rape will at least allow her to tell Collatine about Tarquin's crime. Tarquin for his part probably assumes that he will go unpunished as he counts on Lucrece's shame being too great to tell anyone what had transpired. Lucrece takes what meagre power is afforded to her to allay her shame, deciding she will die by her own hand once her father and husband know her story.

Shakespeare describes the emulative argument Lucrece's father and husband have, each asserting he is the more aggrieved for the heroine's death, and, in fact, they sound as if they are the same person:

“O!” quoth Lucretius,” I did give that life,
Which she too early and too late hath spill’d.”
“Woe, woe,” quoth Collatine, “she was my wife,
I ow’d her, and ‘tis mine that she hath kill’d.”
“My daughter” and “My wife” with clamours fill’d
The dispers’d air, who, holding Lucrece’ life,
Answer’d their cries, “My daughter” and “My wife.” (RL, ll.1800-1806)

Lucrece's suicide can therefore be seen as a way of releasing herself from male ownership and control because, in her death, 'neither may possess the claim they lay' (RL, l. 1794). Corey Werner (2003),⁵⁰ using Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, interprets this scenario as follows,

Shakespeare's "The Rape of Lucrece" presents the dialectical struggle for dominance between the genders. Through metaphor, the complaint mediates the aggressive and ultimately narcissistic bond of heterosexual masculinity and femininity. In the course of the lament, masculine figures employ the phallic rhetoric of metaphor to assert themselves as dominant only to experience self-consumption at the end of the poem. This occurs when femininity removes itself from the masculine-feminine symbiotic relationship.

Lucrece's suicide is therefore a way of castrating the masculine characters and thereby silencing them. To Werner, that Lucrece kills herself with a knife, a phallic symbol, is seen to be representative of her taking up a masculine sort of power. This argument, however, more readily sees this as her symbolically being killed by patriarchy. Also, after her death, Brutus removes the knife from her chest, thus reclaiming its phallic power, and brandishes it in the air, vowing to kill the king, Tarquinius Superbus (*EHR* 1.59), and his family.

⁵⁰ Available at: <<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipso/2003/IPSAarticle.html>>. Accessed: 4 February 2006.

That it is the king Brutus mentions foremost is in itself remarkable, given that it is his son that is the rapist. This accords with Greer's statement, quoted earlier, that the damage done to the rape victim is not the focus of the myth. Any power that Lucrece may have assumed by her death can therefore be seen to have been wrested from her in Brutus's wielding of the knife. *Disgrace* contains similarly paternalistic images, as Georgina Horrell (2002:28) notes, with David Lurie's fatherly feelings towards Melanie – he even has sex with her in his daughter's bed (*Dis.*: 29) – and his frequent attestations of Lucy as 'his child'. Lucy, however, attempts to negate the paternalistic hold of her father by calling him David. Ariella Azoulay (2002:33) also discusses Lurie's acknowledgement that Soraya, a prostitute he visits, is young enough to be his daughter and attributes it to his grappling with the generation gap he feels acutely, aligning himself as he does with the past in his Byronic allusions and lack of any connection with his own daughter, Lucy. Coetzee's *Disgrace* is discussed in greater detail later in this dissertation.

To an extent, Werner relies on Lucrece being a virgin figure for her suicide to be an effective transgression, using the fact that Lucrece is frequently referred to as a 'maiden' to suggest that 'Lucrece's and Collatine's marriage has not been consummated'. This seems unlikely and Werner even admits that the word maiden often 'connoted marital fidelity' (2003).⁵¹ According to Werner, for Lucrece's suicide to be truly an assumption of the female voice, she should, of necessity, be wholly unconnected to a male figure, in other words, not have to rely on the male figures in

⁵¹ Available at: <<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipasa/2003/IPSAarticle.html>>. Accessed: 4 February 2006.

her family to avenge her rape. Collen provides a counter-approach: she calls for a unification of the sexes to bring about equality.

Yet Lucrece appeals to the male characters to avenge the wrong done to her: they therefore retain a certain level of tenure over her. It is interesting to note that Brownmiller (1976:388) asserts that there should be more females in the armed forces, because ‘the nation’s entire lawful *power* structure ... must be stripped of male dominance and control – if women are to cease being a colonized protectorate of men’ (emphasis in the original). When the colonial subjects in Collen’s novel first begin to oppose their subjection, they begin by ‘lamenting’ (19), but turn eventually to the more effective emotion of anger.

Ultimately, however, Lucrece’s assumption of the female voice through suicide is an ineffective way of resisting her oppression and avenging the rape – once dead, her power to transform is truly castrated. Sartre avows that suicide removes meaning from life, because life’s meaning is contingent on a future that, after death, ceases to be (see Gray 1998:6-7). Richard Tarnas (1996:389), in discussing the existentialist mindset, declares that ‘[a]ll was contingent. To be authentic one had to admit, and choose freely to encounter, the stark reality of life’s meaninglessness. Struggle alone gave meaning’. Lucrece’s suicide is an abdication from this struggle. Ovid’s description of Lucrece portrays her as the epitome of feminine decency and emblematic of the eternal feminine even in her death, during which she ‘took care to sink down decently’ (*Fas.* II.837). Ironically, it is the fact that Lucrece is so virtuous that makes Tarquin decide to rape her in the first place. Early in the story, Collatine and his officers are discussing their wives and, in order to prove how honorable Lucretia is, Collatine decides that he and his officers ride to Rome to see what their wives are

doing. Most of the women are discovered revelling with young men, but Lucretia is found at home spinning with her maids. Collatine, overjoyed, invites the men to dinner, during which Tarquin decides to rape Lucretia (Grant 1994:362).

Sharisse and Geoffrey McCafferty (1998:227) in their study of Mexico, note that ‘female power during the Post-Classic period was expressed through the metaphor of spinning and weaving’. This has been touched on already, but is expanded on here. Stories of female power and weaving – such as that of the Greek Fates and Arachne, the Japanese Amaterasu, and Arabic Scheherazade who weaves the stories known as the *Arabian Nights*⁵² – abound, which shows how widespread the metaphor is.⁵³

Warner calls female storytellers ‘tale-spinners’ (1994:17) and elaborates:

[s]pinning a tale, weaving a plot: the metaphors illuminate the relation; while the structure of fairy stories, with their repetitions, elaboration and minutiae, replicates the thread and fabric of one of women’s principal labours – the making of textiles from the wool or the flax to the finished bolt of cloth. (1994:23)

Warner is discussing fairy tales, but they are structurally and otherwise similar to myths.

Carter (2000:81) discusses the Marquis de Sade’s *The Hundred and Twenty Days at Sodom in The Sadeian Woman*. In Sade’s narrative, four of Paris’s most celebrated prostitutes, as well as a number of wives, victims and servants are taken to the Castle

⁵² Scheherazade escapes death by her husband by telling the stories that comprise *The Arabian Nights*. Each night she stops the story at an interesting point so that the listeners must wait for the next night to discover what happens. Pertinently, her husband’s previous wives are decapitated. The symbolism of this method of murder is discussed in Section 2.1 of this study.

⁵³ Heilbrun (1990:103) notes the connection between women’s speech and language and weaving, pointing out that of ‘all human accomplishment, Freud granted woman only the invention of weaving: an art, he conjectured, they had devised to conceal their genital deficiencies’. According to the hypothesis of this dissertation, the deficiency is more probably that of a female voice, suppressed by patriarchy. Helen too was said to have woven a tapestry depicting the events at Troy (Heilbrun 1990:104).

of Silling. Unlike many of the other participants in the orgy, the four prostitutes will survive the ordeal by telling stories: the women ‘tell the stories of their lives. Their sexual anecdotes determine the form of the orgies in the castle and so they can ensure they themselves will not be sacrificed during any of them’ (Carter 2000:81). Collen’s *Mutiny* contains similar imagery of the voice being used as a weapon. The three women who are imprisoned find a needle in one of the mattresses in their cell, presumably left there by an earlier inmate, and Juna writes ‘[w]e are the inheritors of a vast fortune. First, the ideas get passed down to us, the messages, the *language*, as I put it. Now the tools, including one needle. We are overjoyed’ (2001:265; emphasis in the original). A sewing instrument and language are clearly cited as weapons for freedom. The women also tell one another stories to pass the time and these stories aid their survival.

Perhaps one of the best-known myths dealing with the weaving image is that of Penelope. Her husband, Odysseus, is away for twenty years, during which it is assumed that he has died. A number of suitors vie for her to marry them, but Penelope delays them by saying she will marry someone only once she has finished weaving a shroud for Laertes, Odysseus’s father. She weaves all day but by night she and her maids unravel what has been done. After three years her ploy is discovered and she agrees to whichever of the suitors can string Odysseus’s bow. At this point Odysseus returns to his still-faithful wife and performs the feat.⁵⁴ Alma S. Freeman (1988:52) posits that the *Odyssey* is pervaded by the feminine principle and that at the end the ‘masculine and feminine opposites are reunited in peace and harmony’. So here too, as in *The Rape of Sita*, there are hints of a desire to reconstruct androgyny, ‘which

⁵⁴ This is similar to the story of Sītā. When young, she loses a ball under the Great Bow of Shiva and is able to lift the bow to retrieve it. Her father then vows to allow only the man who can string this same bow to marry Sītā. Rama succeeds and wins her hand (Sivananda 1961:145).

seems to be more and more proposed as the reconstructive model for our deconstructed world' (Jones 2000:448). This is discussed more fully later in this dissertation.

Simon Price and Emily Kearns (2003, s.v. 'Penelope') state that Homer and other tellers of the tale portray Penelope as the ultimate image of fidelity, but also mention that Arcadian myth has Odysseus either send her into exile or kill her for infidelity. A modern rendering of the myth is Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, alluded to earlier in this dissertation.⁵⁵ This novel is told from the point of view of Penelope and her maids. Heilbrun (1990:108) notes that the mythic Penelope is in fact not a storyteller, is actually weary of the stories of Odysseus's death relayed to her by travellers and 'is the mistress of one fiction – that to preserve her 'true' self for Odysseus – one 'story' which she tells again and again and never finishes, weaving and unweaving the fabric of Laertes' [sic] shroud'. Benjamin aligns this story with Proust's idea of *mémoire involontaire*, mentioned in Section 2.1 of this study. He writes, 'the important thing for the remembering author is not what he experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection' (1973a:204). In contrast to the situation in the *Odyssey*, in Atwood's novel, the female figures are given a voice, are in this way re-membered, whereas they had previously been 'castrated' in what is essentially the story of Odysseus, not his wife.

Singley (1993:3-4) points out that much of male discourse views women as castrated, and therefore as impotent and flawed men:

Aristotle, for example, defines the category "female" by virtue of its absence of male qualities; Thomas Aquinas in early times and Sigmund

⁵⁵ A South African reworking of the myth of Penelope can be found in Njabulo S. Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003).

Freud in modern ones follow suit, proclaiming woman an imperfect or incomplete man.

Lacanian theory holds that both males and females are castrated,⁵⁶ and, in addition, it is through this castration that each child becomes a speaking subject. Carter believes that female castration 'is an imaginary fact that pervades the whole of men's attitudes to women and our attitude to ourselves, that transforms women from human beings into wounded creatures who were born to bleed' (2000:23).

To Lucrece's husband and father remains the task of publicizing Tarquin's violent deed. Her husband and his soldiers parade her through the streets to, in Shakespeare's wording of the myth, 'show her bleeding body thorough Rome,/ And so to *publish* Tarquin's foul offence' (RL, ll. 1851-1852; my emphasis). That it is her *body* that is conveyed through Rome is significant because, as has been discussed, it is the body that is the site of control. Eisaman Maus (1986:70) explores the use of the body, identifying that Lucrece thinks of her body in 'terms of metaphors: house, fortress, mansion, temple, tree bark. Essentially these metaphors emphasize the protective and enclosing function of the body'. Rape, then, is the annihilation of the protective nature of the body, and the 'inhabitant suffers, regardless of her guilt or innocence' (Eisaman Maus 1986:70).

Parading the dead Lucrece through the street is not just a way of avenging the rape; it is a political move. Similarly, the abduction of Sītā which takes place in the *Ramayana* has for its context the fight between Rama and Bharata for the throne of

⁵⁶ Freud (1973:360) posited that females experience penis envy: 'we can say of [little girls] that they feel greatly at a disadvantage owing to their lack of a big, visible penis, that they envy boys for possessing one and that, in the main for this reason, they develop a wish to be a man'. Lacan held, rather, that both sexes felt a type of penis envy, symbolic of Lack, in that they both desire the Phallus – that is, the centre of the Symbolic order (see Klages 2001. Available at: <<http://www.colorado.edu/English/ENGL2012Klages/lacan.html>>. Accessed: 14 August 2006).

Ayodha, and so is also a founding myth. These two founding myths form the basis of Collen's rewording and transformation in *The Rape of Sita*. Lucrece commits suicide because she has internalized the idea that she is culpable for the assault. Shakespeare does not simply reproduce but explores this myth in his 'The Rape of Lucrece'. In it, Tarquin is given the same motive as Collen's Tarquin: he is jealous of the rape victim's partner. Shakespeare calls it 'envy of so rich a thing' (RL, l. 39), whereas Rowan Tarquin is similarly envious of

Dharma: 'how come she accepts⁵⁷ sex from Dharma, then. What's so special about him?' (67). In this context, Nicholson's (1999:12) observation is pertinent: 'rape is understood, traditionally, not as an assault on women but on the males to whom the woman "belongs"'. That women are the principal casualties of the war between men, is also evident in the case of the Hindu Sītā: 'Sita acts as the battleground upon which Rama and Ravana, good and evil, fight' (Murphy & Sippy 2000).⁵⁸

By writing Sita's story, Collen, through Iqbal, makes Sita's story known and it is a way for her legacy to be continued, and for Tarquin's violent deed to be made known.

Shakespeare (RL, ll. 813-819) applies similar treatment to Lucrece, who states:

"The nurse, to still her child, will tell my story
And fright her crying babe with Tarquin's name;
The orator, to deck his oratory,
Will couple my reproach to Tarquin's shame;
Feast-finding minstrels, tuning my defame,
Will tie the hearers to attend each line,
How Tarquin wronged me, I Collatine.

Lucretia's story has thus continued as an archetype of narrative; and its legacy is all too evident in Sita's rape. Collen suggests, in *The Rape of Sita*, that guilt and suicide should not be the consequences for rape and it has been shown that Sartre would

⁵⁷ That Collen has Rowan use this verb indicates that he is unaccustomed to women being desirous of sex with him under any circumstances, but, at best, they 'accept' it.

⁵⁸ Available at: <<http://free.freespeech.org/manushi/117/sita.html>>. Accessed: 20 September 2003.

agree. It could be said that it is the lack of utopian drive that allows suicide to be feasible.

This notion is connected with Sartre's concept of nausea, which is the "taste" of the facticity and contingency of existence' (1956:631). It is interesting that Sita experiences this nausea; she feels her anger 'rise inside her like a wave of nausea' (83). Rather than death or suicide, the dominant discourse giving rise to rape should be rewritten: posed, exposed and so deposed. The result, then, would be a narrative that is transcendent. Not only is the treatment of rape itself transcendent because, here, it appropriates feminist discourse, but the retelling of the story is able to transcend Time, as in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which is now discussed.

2.4 *The Waste Land*, Iqbal and androgyny

T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which is used as intertext in Collen's *The Rape of Sita*, is the poem that Sita is reading when she is struck by Rowan Tarquin just prior to his raping her. Eliot's poem is used as an example of a modernist text against which postmodernist elements of Collen's narrative are examined. Collen's positing of the need for a unification of the sexes is evaluated as a possible way to counter patriarchal mythology.

Iqbal, and in fact much of *The Rape of Sita*, personifies border theory, as defined in Farred's 2002 article on Coetzee's *Disgrace*, 'Back to the Borderlines: Thinking Race *Disgracefully*'. So clearly does Farred's opening paragraph coincidentally explain Collen's novel that it is quoted in its entirety:

[c]ontemporary border theory, deeply indebted as it is to the work of Gloria Anzaldúa on *la frontera*, configures the border as the meeting of difference. It is the site where different nations, different cultures, traditions, politics and ideologies come into contact with one another, frequently conflictually, often brutally and violently so. It is also, in keeping with other contemporary theory, the locale of hybridity, the event that marks conjuncture: where the Orient and the Occident collide, where the colonizer and the colonized first encounter each other, where metropolis is exported to, and from which the periphery insinuates itself into Euro-American consciousness; it is where colonialism is enforced, undone, slyly resisted and imaginatively transformed. (2002:16)

The conflation of the west and east in Collen's novel serves to emphasize that 'such locales, regions, geographical sectors as "Orient" and "Occident" are man-made' (Said 1995:89), in the same way that fixed gender identities of masculinity and femininity are. In the character of Iqbal, there is hybridity and a blurring of this boundary. There are correlations between Iqbal and the blind, hermaphroditic Tiresias, who appears in Eliot's *The Waste Land* and who also appears in earlier myth.

Collen's Iqbal is, as a conflation of the Occident and Orient, akin to a *rewritten* Tiresias. There are a number of versions of the myth of Tiresias. In one, he is rendered blind when Athene splashes water on his face after he accidentally sees her bathing. She later repents and, because she is unable to restore his sight, makes him a soothsayer, lets him understand the language of birds and gives him a walking stick that allows him to walk safely despite his blindness.

In a second myth, Tiresias is temporarily changed into a woman for seven years. Because of his experience as both a man and woman, Jupiter and Juno ask him to settle an argument. They want to know which of the sexes gains more pleasure from married life. Tiresias answers that a woman receives more pleasure; and he is struck blind by Juno for his honesty. Freeman (1988:53) notes that the loss of his sight

disables his masculine gaze, and that it is replaced instead with inner sight or intuition – a traditional feminine quality. It is Tiresias who acts as oracle to Oedipus, but only when blinded does Oedipus ‘see’ the facts of his situation. This prophetic nature of Tiresias is very important, because it points to the seer’s forward-looking nature and it is, after all, to the future that Collen’s utopian vision at the end of the novel directs itself. Tiresias is notable because he, uniquely, is not subject to the annihilation that usually follows death. In Greek myth, the dead must cross the river Lethe, ‘forgetfulness’; they therefore, unlike Tiresias, do not preserve their memory after death. ‘Lethe blots out the memory of the celestial world in the soul returning to earth to be reincarnated. “Forgetting” no longer symbolizes death, but returning to life’ (Eliade 1964:121).

Like Iqbal, Tiresias is both a man and a woman, and is thus viewed as impartial in the battle of the sexes. Eliot uses Tiresias as symbolic of sight, despite his blindness: ‘I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,/ Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see’ (*WL* ll. 218-219). However, Gilbert (1982:207) opines that upon Tiresias, ‘the worst of both sexes has been inflicted as if to suggest that any departure from the fixity of gender implies disorder and disease’ or abnormality, as Foucault defines the term. Collen uses *The Waste Land* as a modern myth which she subverts, seduces and transforms in much the same way that she subverts the myths of Sītā and Lucretia/Lucrece. When asked how Iqbal’s sexual ambiguity functions in the novel, Collen replied:

I was throughout the writing of the novel haunted by something like the silence of the irreducibility of the sex war at the point of rape. I don’t know if that sentence makes sense, or more particularly, if it conveys what I feel – that’s why I have to tell stories. Iqbal’s ambiguous gender, and his

moving into and out of Sita, helped me bridge this frightening silence.
(*Triplopia* 2005)⁵⁹

The notion of indeterminate gender is a particularly powerful image to use in South Africa, as Cheryl Stobie (2004:36) notes:

[i]n South Africa, attempting to transcend its history of binarist practice, which culminated in the system of apartheid, now a notorious byword for discrimination worldwide, the acknowledgement of bisexuality would offer a useful test of tolerance as well as a productive metaphor for a [multicultural] society.

That Sita finds a copy of *The Waste Land* in Rowan's home shows that it is one of the discourses which seemingly supports his becoming a rapist. Collen has stated that she uses the text to show 'insidious forms of patriarchy, its invisibleness' (*Triplopia* 2005).⁶⁰ Gilbert (1982:205) claims that *The Waste Land* is 'precisely the *Walpurgisnacht* of misplaced sexuality that a conservative male modernist like Eliot would define as the fever dream of the hermaphrodite, the nightmare of gender disorder'. Gilbert goes on to explain that only those oppressed by patriarchy would crave what she calls the 'primordial chaos of transvestism or genderlessness' (1982:218). As Frye (1963:67) states, in his discussion of *The Waste Land*, 'the production of children is beyond [Tiresias], and all the sexual unions in the poem are as sterile as the waste land itself'.

Roy Willis discusses an origin of sexuality which occurs in various versions throughout Africa. People were originally made without sexual organs. But, not content with this situation, they asked the High God for a different kind of people. The High God sent them the male and female sexual organs which originally were kinds of people in their own right. The androgynes then decided to split themselves

⁵⁹ Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005.

⁶⁰ Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: on 29 December 2005.

into two camps in order to divide their daily chores. The male sexual organs joined one camp and the female organs the other. 'From that time the two lots of people became men and women saw that they were different and there has been division and conflict between them ever since' (Willis 1993a:269). Eliade (1982:401) also records an image of the androgyne, this one from the Bible: 'by baptism one obtains the reconciliation of contraries: "there are no more distinctions between ... slave and freeman, male and female"' (Gal. 3:28). In other words, the baptized person recovers the primordial condition of the androgyne'. He further gives an account of the Gospel of Thomas as stating that entrance to the Kingdom of Heaven will rely on the realization of this androgynous state and writes that '[t]here is no need to insist on the archaism and the universal dissemination of the symbol of the androgyne as the exemplary expression of human perfection' (Eliade 1982:401).

In fact, Eliade has shown that androgyny is a 'religious universal' (Jones 2000:449). One of the more well-known examples comes from Plato. According to Plato's Aristophanes, human beings were originally divided into three sexes: male, female and male-female – each comprised of two heads, two arms and two legs. As punishment for their trying to reach heaven, Zeus has them cleaved in two so that each male becomes two males, each female, two females and each hermaphrodite or androgyne a male and female. This is considered to be the origin of desire as each half yearns for the one from which it was separated (Bowlby 1992:26). But what is interesting about Plato's story, is that it implicitly tolerates both homosexuality and heterosexuality and shows each to be natural. But, as Gilbert (1982:218) and Rachel Bowlby (1992:27) note, the androgyne has been viewed as a chaotic perversity, as it is in Eliot's *The Wasteland*. Rowan, afraid of this 'chaos', rapes Sita to reaffirm what he

sees to be the correct gender roles: himself as aggressive male and Sita as dominated, inferior female.

Iqbal's androgyny could be aligned with Virginia Woolf's conception of that term, as discussed by Toril Moi. Woolf, writes Moi (1985:13),

rejects [fixed gender identities] because she has seen them for what they are. She has understood that the goal of the feminist struggle must precisely be to deconstruct the death-dealing binary oppositions of masculinity and femininity.⁶¹

Woolf (2004:113-114) was especially interested in the *writer* being an androgyne, and a similar impetus could have prompted Collen's use of a bisexual narrator. It could also be connected to Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity – a mixing of colonial and postcolonial characteristics which challenges Western discourse. By their non-essential nature they challenge monolithic structures and grand narratives. This is a feature of magical-realist texts, in that they 'overturn history by turning it into myth' (Scarano 1999:27). Androgyny is also linked to bisexuality. Stobie's (2004:37) findings seem pertinent and point to the transformative nature of androgyny and bisexuality, in which the

assumed instability of bisexuality provokes anxiety, leading to the policing of binarist borders. Bisexuality represents a challenge to identities which are less certain and stable than many would like to believe, and it represents a challenge to narratives which repress alternatives Viewed from a sympathetic – some might say, utopian – perspective, it represents a potential for change, a loosening of boundaries, a possibility for multiplicity, all of which signify a fruitful cultural and national pathway beyond the rigid binaries of the past.

Stobie, however, is discussing the actual bisexuality of South African people and so 'as a lived reality ... it is contingent, only one signifier of subjectivity amongst others and fleetingly glimpsed' (2004:49).

⁶¹ Heilbrun (1990:245) defines androgyny simply as the opposite of gender stereotypes.

But, once patriarchy and binary oppositions have been deconstructed, reconstruction can take place. As *The Rape of Sita* is about a woman and highlights a predominantly female dilemma, a female narrator, perhaps Sita herself, seems the obvious choice. Collen takes pains, however, to show that rape is not only a female concern, but a concern for everyone, and that individual men are not the problem, but rather patriarchy itself. There are male characters in the narrative who are viewed in a positive light: Dharma, Ton Tipyer (a father figure to Sita) and Iqbal, for example. This is one of the characteristics that differentiates African feminism from, for example, American feminism. Ogundipe (Lewis 2003:7) has said in an interview she is not

about adversarial relations with men or about men hating. We give birth to men, we raise them too (sometimes and unfortunately to become oppressive to other women), we marry them and are related by blood to them, and so it would be pointless or sick to hate them. I am saying that we are indissolubly linked with men; therefore we have to work out ways of co-existing harmoniously and effectively with them, if not joyously.

So, African feminists are interested in men being re-educated, in much the same way that Ton Tipyer and Iqbal are transformed by the end of the novel. Ton Tipyer is the one of the novel's strongest examples of transformation, and he could be viewed as representative of the 'average man' or typical Mauritian. His wife evicts him for drinking too much and for not giving the children money for food (46). Towards the end of the novel, he appears 'playing a simple flute. He was blue in the night light. He was transformed. He had given up drink, so they tell me, and become sweet and kind' (196).

The flute and his blue colour are allusions to Krishna;⁶² and he is actually directly compared to Krishna in the text (39). Krishna is of all the avatars of Vishnu the most human and the least violent. He ‘displays a number of very human weaknesses’ (Cotterell 1986:92), making him a more approachable and attainable goal of transformation. Iqbal describes Ton Tipyer as his ‘god’ (41), because he ‘was a man like a woman: he could do with his own hands what women can do with their bodies: produce, reproduce, create, make, invent. He was magic’ (41). This image of an overtly masculine man – he wears leather, rides a Harley Davidson motorbike – who is nevertheless ‘like a woman’, breaks down the usual male-female dichotomy and reinforces the theme of androgyny in the novel. Ton Tipyer’s job, as a stone mason, is to make gravel; he ‘turned huge granite rocks into gravel. Into chippings. By hand’ (46), which illustrates his great, godlike, physical strength. This gravel-making process could be compared to Collen’s process of breaking up the dominant grand narrative to create a collection of micro-narratives and has the same imagery as the grapes of micronarratorial storytelling.

Ton Tipyer also performs the role of ‘chorus’ (41) in Collen’s story. It is he who evokes a utopian vision for a transformed and transforming future:

[t]here was slavery. Now there is not. There was indenture. Now there is not. There was colonization. Now there is independence

And now, there is no equality between humans, some of whom sell their labour, others of whom buy labour. This also will not be.

Study what moves in the good direction. Feel it. Know it. And then lean on it, Sita. Help it along. (64)

Ton Tipyer has a premonition about Sita’s trip to the Seychelles, but Sita does not heed his warning: ‘[h]e associated the trip to Seychelles with a stopover in Reunion.

He said “Beware the end of April. He said April is the cruellest month” (55);

⁶² Krishna is the preserver in the Hindu trinity of creator, preserver and dissolver. He is associated with love and music and plays the flute.

emphasis in the original). This is the first line from *The Waste Land*, itself an echo of Shakespeare's 'Beware the Ides of March', a foreboding of ill. The sentence, complete, is as follows:

April is the cruellest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (*WL* ll. 1-4)

These words establish many of the themes of *The Rape of Sita*: memory, desire and rebirth from death. April is cruel, because growth, transformation and change are arduous and painful, though necessary. The first line of *The Waste Land* is a revisioning of Geoffrey Chaucer's first line of his Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*, regarded as the first poem extant written in what would become modern English:

Whan that April with his showres soote
The droughte of March hath perced to the roote,
And bathed every veine in swich licour,
Of which vertu engendred is the flowr.... (ll. 1-4)

Eliot's use of the line hints that his poem was the most recent in the long line or tradition that makes up English Literature. Collen's use of Eliot's line could be viewed in the same way but, in this case, the emphasis falls not on the literary tradition but on the mythical tradition. By drawing on Eliot's poem of sexual perversions, she situates *The Rape of Sita* at the end of a line of rape mythology. Ton Tipyer's warning, then, is a premonition in the sense that Sita's rape is a kind of archetypal narrative and mythical inevitability.

If the idea of transformation is evident in the character of Ton Tipyer, it is even more so in Collen's transsexual narrator, Iqbal. Iqbal is Collen's attempt to have a neutral but wise narrator. He also fits Barthes's (1972:41) conception of the archetype of the spectator: 'an average human being, fallible but likeable'. Iqbal hears a line from a

song in his head: ‘*Jojo was a man who thought he was a woman*’ (8; emphasis in the original). He replaces ‘Jojo’⁶³ with ‘Iqbal’ and as the novel progresses the lyrics change to suit. In various places Iqbal ‘[w]ished’ (42) and would ‘*rather be*’ (86) a woman, until he ‘*knew*’ (88) he was one. The narration thus benefits from both the objectivity made possible by having a male narrator and the empathy that would be inherent in a female narrator. His alignment with women is clear in his comment about Véronique Soulier’s court case: ‘I take sides with Véronique’s and become a woman’ (168). So Iqbal chooses to ally with the marginalized, rather than assume a role as part of the patriarchal centre. Later, Iqbal again hears the refrain about his thinking he is a woman and asks, ‘[i]s this not the song that all men should sing. Until men can be men’ (171). Iqbal, as simultaneously neither sex and both sexes, is, as is Ton Tipyer, symbolic of the changing feminized man who has been re-educated by womanist principles.

As well as his becoming an androgyne, Iqbal’s assumption of ‘femaleness’ is a similar kind of castration to that which Eagleton recognizes in the figure of the Prince in Tennyson’s *The Princess*. The Prince in this case is truly castrated and he acts this out by dressing as a woman. His maleness, however, is ‘faricically obvious’, and his pretensions of femininity therefore have the effect of ‘reinforc[ing] his maleness in the very act of dissembling and displacing it’ (Eagleton 1998b:118). But if Iqbal is

⁶³ This line appears first in the song ‘Get Back’ by the Beatles, although it is actually ‘Jojo is a man who thought he was a loner’. A number of websites, for example *Am I Right* (<http://www.amiright.com>), say that it is one of the most frequently misheard lyrics.

In Collen’s novel, Jojo Treebohun is the man from whom Iqbal has learnt some of his stories, he is described as ‘the greatest storyteller in all of Mauritius’ (70). The motif of spinning is used in connection with him. His stories begin with the refrain, ‘It was a dark and stormy night and the skipper said to his mate, spin us a yarn, Jojo, spin us a yarn’ (70). As a seaman he fits one of the traditional forms of the storyteller identified by Benjamin. The other is the ‘resident tiller of the soil’ (Benjamin 1973b:84-85).

symbolically castrated, he is not silenced as a result of this, and it is a definite denial of his masculinity and a taking up of a more double-sexed state.

At times, Iqbal is conflated with Sita herself. He explains this early in the novel: ‘I, the teller of the tale, must almost become the heroine. Like it’s a mask, or a character, take it on. And it’s difficult, this metamorphosis. This reincarnation’ (8). Iqbal’s use of the word ‘reincarnation’ brings up the theme of rebirth in the novel. It is worth noting that this could be read as discourse on the act of writing itself, where the author must imagine what it is like to be one of the characters, must, in effect, become the characters. Throughout the novel, Iqbal is shown as being extremely close to Sita. Their great-grandfathers were boat-brothers, men who had come from India to Mauritius and had not died during the voyage, and are therefore ‘closer than blood relatives’ (17). Like Sita, Iqbal comes from a family of strong people. During a conflict among Iqbal’s mother, some men in her family and a policeman, Iqbal describes the situation thus:

[s]he flies off again, keeps him standing there gaping along with her two brothers and her nephew neighbour, the pathetic still life of patriarchy against the primal mother. And I, Iqbal, the primal child, admiring the mother. My sisters stand there upright like heroines now, glaring at the enemy. (25)

That Iqbal’s sympathies are with the females, aligns him with them, against patriarchy: ‘I took my mother’s side. More sinned against than sinning, I thought of her’ (29). Also, the ‘father-figure’ in his life is not nearly as strong, especially given that the man he calls his father and the man who begot him are two different characters. This tactic diffuses and destabilizes the Law, or Name, of the Father – that is, the symbolic father who possesses the phallus (Lacan 1988:259).

One of the places where this idea of a unification of the sexes is described best is the following. For clarity's sake it is quoted at length:

he or she sita for there is no he nor she but only both sita all alone lying on sand-dune between sea and land in hidden hollow under sole *badam* tree hiding sun no cloud she sita lying naked half asleep shade from leaves caressing his or her body letting heat and cool dance on his or her tummy and hand of one side touches nipple of the other which stand up and hand of other side turns lips of yoni inside out for sun to see for sea air to breathe thereinto and to cause rivers to flow thereoutof and to wet the sand and like time ever to be born from the universal woman round and round the clitoris round and round and eyes closed she or he loves oneself fully and comes

he or she dharma for there is no he nor she but only both dharma all alone lying on sea itself floating feeling unseen with the woman sea caressing buttocks and back of neck and thighs and small wavelets over the top arouse his or her nipples and lingam which swells and stands out of the water proud and is the oval egg of creation and hand of one side on nipple and hand of other side on lingam eyes closed she or he loves himself fully and comes



and as sita all alone comes down to bathe and as dharma all alone comes out to dry they meet and make love (78-9)

This is an excellent example of what Frye calls the “one flesh” metaphor’ (1971:143). The stream of consciousness style highlights the idea of the unity of the sexes and shows how starkly different this sex act is from the rape. The technique, because of its unwrought, informal style implies that this act is natural, not made as it would be if it bent to the dictates of an ideological discourse, or grammatical conventions.

What Collen underlines in the love-making scene, highlighted as it is by its difference in style from the rest of the novel, is the fact that each sex contains both male and female characteristics; each is both ‘he and she’, ‘both’, despite being ‘all alone’. Furthermore, both sexes are implicated in the idea of creation: the ‘yoni’ is that of ‘universal woman’ out of which rivers ‘flow’. This last image of a flowing river

would more traditionally be applied to the man. Conversely, the lingam, the male icon, is described as the ‘oval egg of creation’, which is a distinctly female image. It could also be a reference to the creation myth of the Bambara people of West Africa, ‘according to which the cosmic egg emitted a voice which then produced its own opposite-sex double, thus bringing into being the primordial twins and divine parents of the world’ (Willis 1993b:19). The image of the cosmic egg is a common one throughout Africa (Willis 1993a:266).

Collen’s stream-of-consciousness paragraph could also be said to be related to the Barthesian *jouissance*, which

combines connotations of sexual orgasm and polysemic speech; the pleasure of the text, abolishing all repressions, reaches an intense crisis (the death of meaning). This transgression of the laws of phallogocentric discourse is the woman writer’s special task. (Selden 1985:145)

For Foucault, ‘[r]epression is represented as the imposition of an interdiction coming from the outside, an imposition of power external to the discourse of sexuality’ (Lemert & Gillan 1982:77). It is not just phallogocentric language but also the phallogocentric idea of Time that is transgressed, Time – in its linear, more masculine guise, related to Father Time or Kronos. Kronos could be said to be put in opposition to Kali. The tense of the extract, the fact that this is the ‘second time they first meet’ (78) and the phrase ‘like time ever to be born from the universal woman’ (78) gives their lovemaking a sense of being outside of time, of being in no place, and in this way could be seen as a kind of utopia.⁶⁴ It could be equated with Eliot’s idea of the

⁶⁴ In that it takes place outside of time, their lovemaking could be said to be in mythic time. Eliade (1961:57) asserts ‘a myth is an account of events which took place *in principio*, that is, “in the beginning” in a primordial and non-temporal instant, a moment of *sacred time*’ (emphasis in the original).

‘still point’ that is outside of time, as used in the Burnt Norton section of *Four Quartets*:⁶⁵

[a]t the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor
towards,
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance. (*FQ* ll. 64-69)

This ‘still point’ is the place from which we can conceive of the pattern (Gardner 1949:161). Benjamin saw the ability to waver between linear and circular time as a characteristic of memory, as Amresh Sinha (1998)⁶⁶ makes clear:

What one experiences in memory is hardly time, but the timelessness, or the lack of it – the death of time. Neither past nor future is remembered in memory, but the self in its absence is now re-presented as a forgetting through images. Memory sees itself fleetingly as eternally present in the instant of forgetting and aging.

In *Mutiny*, Collen shows the disintegration of linear time too. This masculine time is aligned with technology. As the cyclone’s appearance becomes eminent, time begins to disintegrate. ‘Real’ time is that circular time which ‘*changes so much that it was an insolence ever to try to measure it*’ (2001:289; emphasis in the original). Magic is a useful vehicle for introducing circular time: ‘miracles and magic can also influence the natural course of events and thus modify history by introducing the eternal, or timeless, into the temporal’ (Boldrini 1999:86). Collen sees this circular time as being feminine, and the cyclone that arrives to allow the prisoners in *Mutiny*, the inmates’ chance for escape, almost seems summoned by the women. When all the inmates of the prison are menstruating at the same time, Collen notes the smell in the air of the cafeteria: ‘[t]he smell of the recurrence of time, that’s all. Back around to the same

⁶⁵ As a testament to the interrelatedness of texts, *Four Quartets* also draws on Hindu myth. The *Mahabharata*’s Arjuna makes an appearance in ‘Dry Salvages’.

⁶⁶ Available at: <<http://www.wbenjamin.org/remembling.html>>. Accessed: 3 August 2006.

spot. A spot of blood. An ooze. A tidal movement. The birth moment of each moment' (2001:308). This, furthermore, is Kali's time (2001:309) and it is emblematic of female power, *shakti*. This is strengthened when the cyclone finally arrives: '[t]ime has been unleashed now. It will start to move to the rhythms of nature. It doesn't matter how long anyone says any second is any more' (2001:198). In the end, however, the mutiny fails and it is only Juna's writing that is successful in bringing the story to the reader.

Atwood (2003:49-50) sees the act of writing as moving in and out of time too, using Lewis Carol's *Alice Through the Looking Glass* as a metaphor:

[t]he act of writing takes place at the moment when Alice passes through the mirror. At this one instant, the glass barrier between the doubles dissolves, and Alice is neither here nor there, neither art nor life, neither the one thing nor the other, though at the same time she is all of these things at once. At that moment time itself stops, and also stretches out, and both writer and reader have all the time not in the world.

Also implicit in Collen's stream-of-consciousness section is Lacan's concept of the real. Lacan's mirror stage refers to the phase in a child's development where he or she experiences a psychic split from their mother, with whom they had previously thought they were connected, and therefore becomes aware of a him- or herself as a separate identity. The child experiences this as sense of loss. The child's conception of *its self* is fragmented because it sees only those parts of *itself* that are in its field of vision. Once it sees itself in a mirror, however, it begins to identify with the image it sees there. The self seen in the mirror, however, is not the child's true self, but merely an image and the child then forms an idea of the self, the ego, which does not in reality exist. This is the realm of the imaginary, which is 'a state in which there is no clear distinction between subject and object: no central self exists to set object apart from subject' (Selden 1985:81).

Before the child reaches the mirror stage, it is driven by needs, which are met as they arise. Language is therefore not needed. This is Lacan's realm of the real. Once the child reaches the mirror stage, however, and what it wants is not being immediately gratified, the child must learn to use language to get what it wants. The child enters the realm of the symbolic – that, is, the world of language and culture – by becoming aware of its difference. Once this shift into the realm of the symbolic occurs, Lacan postulates that the realm of the real has been irretrievably lost. In the world of the symbolic, the phallus is the ultimate Other – written with a capital to distinguish it from the other in the self/other dichotomy. From the realm of the symbolic, people living in this stage are under the Law, or Name, of the Father. However, Collen's episode which revolves around the sole *badam* tree seems to point to the realm of the pre-symbolic stage, the realm of the real. Or, rather, she implies that the stage of the imaginary is possible. According to Cixous, diving into water, as Sita does when searching for the memory of her lost day, could also be seen as an entry into the imaginary, as Moi (1985:117) makes clear:

the closure of the mythical world contains and reflects the comforting security of the mother's womb. It is within this space that Cixous's speaking subject is free to move from one subject position to another, or to merge oceanically with the world. Her vision of female writing is in this sense firmly located within the closure of the Lacanian Imaginary...

The diving is connected with recall and recall, as will be expanded on below, is connected with writing.

Moreover, that the semantics of language have eroded takes the paragraph describing Sita and Dharma's lovemaking, metaphorically, to a pre-linguistic stage in which there is no Law of The Father to act as a stabilizing force. 'By entering into the

symbolic order (with its laws, conventions, and images for perfection), the human subject effectively divorces him/herself from the materiality of his/her bodily drives, which Lacan tends to distinguish with the term "jouissance" (Felluga [s.a.]).⁶⁷ In Collen's utopia, unity between the self and the other, and the realisation of *jouissance* are possible, desirable. When comparing Lacan's ideas about the mirror and those of Atwood relating to Alice, the reader begins to glimpse what Collen conceives; in Collen's novel the subject and its mirror image can merge, in the act of writing.

So unity comes for Collen from a combination of the sexes, though for it to be entirely fulfilling each of the sexes must be complete in his or her own right and, of course, his or her love cannot be taken but must be freely given. This recalls the legal meaning of the term *jouissance*, 'in latin [sic] *usufructus*—referring to the right to enjoy the use of a thing, as opposed to owning it' (Feher Guervich 1999).⁶⁸ Collen does not therefore denigrate men. Rather, she sees the union of the sexes as the way forward. It is not a child, but the text itself, which is the product of this union, of this commingling and amalgamation of the sexes.

Within Tibetan Buddhism, to which Hinduism is connected, is the concept of *Yab-Yum*. Not unlike the Chinese yin-yang, *Yab-Yum* is the 'mystical marriage of opposites, the male and the female principles, antagonistic yet cooperative' (Cotterell 1986:63). In erotic art, this mystical marriage is portrayed with images of couples

⁶⁷ Available at: <<http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/lacandesire.htm>>. Accessed: 16 June 2005)

⁶⁸ Available at: <<http://www.othervoices.org/1.3/jfg/other.html>>. Accessed: 13 June 2005.

who enjoy *mithuna*, 'the state of being a couple' (Cotterell 1986:63).⁶⁹ Collen's depiction of the lovemaking of Sita and Dharma is the textual version of the erotic sculpture of the Hindus. Hindu devotees would worship these statues as a way of communing with and understanding the divine. It was believed that the connection and oneness that the sex act afforded was a way to unite two dualities and, in this way, to remove distinctions and divisions.

It was mentioned in Footnote 3 of Section 2.1 that Shiva is sometimes represented in art and sculpture as Ardhanarishvara, an androgynous god/goddess. The depiction shows a single body with each half representing one of the sexes. This is representative of the perfect and complete Godhead being a fusion of male, corresponding to Shiva, and female, corresponding to *shakti*, Parvati or Devi; that is, to the active feminine principle, Shiva's consort or the idea of Goddess. Like the Chinese yin-yang and Hindu *Yab Yum*, masculinity and femininity in Ardhanarishvara are non-dualistic, that is, opposite but not in opposition (Gunther c2002).⁷⁰ More commonly in discourse, as has been shown, the sexes are shown as binary oppositions essentially at war with one another; hence the popular phrase, 'battle of the sexes'.

As it is fundamentally a violent and unequal distinction between the sexes which gives rise to rape it can be seen that, ironically, sex in the form of rape, as a violent perversion or distortion of this merging sex act, is the direct defiance of the oneness, the unity implied in Ardhanarishvara. Rape is thus a physical tool to destroy equality.

⁶⁹ Foucault (1980a:57) names *ars erotica*, of which the erotic art depicting *mithuna* is an example, as one of the historical procedures for getting at the truth of sex. In erotic art, 'truth is drawn from pleasure itself, understood as a practice and accumulated as experience; pleasure is not considered in relation to an absolute law of the permitted and forbidden, nor by reference to a criterion of utility, but first and foremost in relation to itself'. Collen's depiction of Dharma and Sita's sexual act could be viewed in this way: as relating only to itself. Foucault's second procedure for arriving at the truth about sex he terms *scientia sexualis*, and it involves confession (see Foucault 1980a:53-73).

⁷⁰ Available at: <<http://www.art-and-archaeology.com>>. Accessed: 18 September 2006.

Sita and Dharma's sex act reflects both the inherent utopian vision and the merging of the sexes in the figure of Iqbal. Within Hindu iconography, the male is represented by the phallic *lingam*⁷¹ and the woman by the *yoni* or the *garbhagrha* ('womb house').

The most sacred image in the Hindu temple is the lingam within the yoni,⁷² often symbolized by a phallus within a temple, in which an 'individual may be spiritually reborn through realization of the unconditioned character of the primeval substance' (Cotterell 1986:63). Incidentally, this sacred union was also indicative of the return of Devi, the mother goddess. This, in turn, recalls the desire for the women to return to Diego Garcia, the Solomon Islands and Peros Banos, ruled as these islands were by a system of matriarchy, but not 'glorified matriarchy' (85), in other words, no Paradise Lost or Garden of Eden. It is important to note that in the description of the lovemaking of Sita and Dharma, neither the yoni nor the lingam are given precedence. Phallocentrism and Freud's concept of penis envy (Freud 1973:360) are in this way avoided. As Moi (1985:133), notes, fear of castration and penis-envy are male fears which are projected onto women. Heilbrun (1990:143) observes that it is male autonomy and not the penis that some women envy.

⁷¹ In *The Ramayana*, before going to battle with Ravana, Rama prays for favour before Shiva's *lingam* (Littleton 2002:357). It is interesting how Collen rejects this war aspect of the motif and takes up, instead, its positive attributes. See next note.

⁷² The combination of the *lingam* and *yoni* is, properly, the symbol of Shiva in his half-male/half-female guise.

Chapter 3

***The Rape of Sita* as transformation of modern myth**

As Michel Foucault has argued, modern societies have created a massive discourse of sexuality that produces sexuality as that which is hidden, secret and therefore most desirable to know. In this sense, discourse of the sexual body has replaced theological discourses of the arcane and the sacred for a desecralized era. (Brooks 1993:15)

Although the myths and notions of sexuality Collen uses as her sources are of European and Asian origin, the novel is set in Mauritius and Reunion, post-colonial signifiers for the raped. This recontextualisation allows the reader to evaluate familiar mythologies anew. Collen does not, however, tell the known and recorded stories. Iqbal begins his narrative by discussing Sita's father and when asked who he 'was', Iqbal replies, '[i]s.' (8) Collen's use of the present tense of the verb 'to be' points to both the currency and topicality of her treatment of sexual abuse and post-rape trauma. Although the story of rape is goes back for thousands of years, Collen is writing her own, new mythology. The story happens now. Greer (2001)¹ asserts that '[r]ape has no duration and no narrative content. It is a catastrophe, and as such can only function as the end of one story and the beginning of another'. What Collen is positing, is that rape was a problem in the past and continues to be a problem now, as evidenced by rape's enduring popularity as a literary theme, and in persistently high rape levels, especially in South Africa. It is the '*eternal dilemma*' (2) mentioned in the poem 'Time'.

It is possible to 'move from fact to fiction and back again to fact with alarming ease, for men have created the mythology and men continue to act it out' (Brownmiller 1976:308). The canonical texts of patriarchy thus form the status quo and it is only by rewriting that discourse that anything can change. Eliot, in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1962), imagined a pattern of literature, but one that could be added

¹ Available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/friday_review/story/0%2C3605%2C499106%2C00.html>. Accessed: 6 November 2003.

to. In *Four Quartets*, while postulating that Time, in its circular, still, divine sense, was largely unknowable and unchangeable, he acceded that movement and change are nonetheless possible:

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
Into the silence. (*FQ* ll. 139-144)

This pattern is similar to the ‘webs’ of textuality (Weedon 1999:163)² and patriarchy (Green 1999:1),³ reminiscent of Philomela’s embroidery and Penelope’s weaving,⁴ discussed in earlier chapters of this study. So in order to write against this pattern, Collen must begin within the existing pattern of patriarchy. When Iqbal begins his narrative, he is asked to talk about Sita’s father and he asks the reader why rape makes one think of the father (8). The ‘father’ here is not Sita’s father, Mohun Jab, but patriarchy itself, and, specifically, could be Lacan’s Name, or Law, of the Father. Only in a patriarchal society where women are viewed as inferior to men, as their property, can rape take place. As the novel puts it, ‘patriarchy was what made [woman] the victim. Only in patriarchy is rape a weapon’ (150).

Rowan Tarquin, Sita’s rapist, could be viewed as a congenital rapist, as already noted, in that he rapes not only Sita, but also his own wife and two girls who were put in his care. Rowan reads on a bubble gum paper that ‘if you, repeatedly and of your own free will, do something you do not agree with, you can become a schizophrenic’ (65). From this, he deduces that if ‘he did [rape someone], the prophecy said, his head

² Benjamin (1973a:204) has stated, ‘[t]he Latin word *textum* means “web”’.

³ For a discussion of the universe being a web woven by the thread of time, see Eliade 1961:114-119.

⁴ Penelope actually refers to the shroud she weaves as a web (Homer 2.107, for example).

would split in two....⁵ Therefore he could not. Therefore he did not rape Sita. So much for mythology' (65). Collen undermines the seriousness usually associated with omens in mythology by making her portent a bubblegum wrapper.

Frye (1971:139) would identify the use of a portent as a being consistent with myth:

[t]he introduction of an omen or portent, or the device of making a whole story the fulfilment of a prophecy given at the beginning, is an example. Such a device suggests in its existential projection, a conception of ineluctable fate or hidden omnipotent will.

Collen makes a mockery of the concept of an 'ineluctable' fate by trivialising Rowan's omen. In doing so she dismisses the kind of large-scale claims that have been made by metanarratives such as Apartheid and patriarchy and the like, which have used the concept of an inarguable divine will or fate to oppress people.

Of course, the prophecy Rowan reads of the wrapper is not the only prophecy of the novel. Iqbal also warns Sita not to go to Reunion or she will come to harm, a foreboding that is realized and contributes to the feeling of inevitability that surrounds the rape, as mentioned in Section 2.4 of this study. Sita's legacy as a raped woman means she too could be viewed as a congenital rape victim. In a way, her victim status is inherent or congenital, as is Rowan's rapist status. The bubble gum paper prophecy does not, however, end up coming true, which is Collen's way of weakening the mythic structure.

⁵ 'Schizophrenia' literally means 'split mind' (*Chambers's Etymological Dictionary* 1961, s.v. 'schizophrenia'). Rowan's mother defines it for him as 'split personality' (65), a phrase which was once used for schizophrenia but which is now used mainly in reference to multiple personality disorder, a very rare dissociative disorder (Royal Society of Medicine 1995, s.v. 'split personality'). It seems in her use of schizophrenia for Rowan, Collen wants to illustrate the two sides of maleness, point to violent aggression as a defect, and update and modernise the Hindu story of Ravana's many heads.

It is interesting to note that Ravana too was a congenital rapist. During his tyrannical reign, he rapes and otherwise sexually assaults or humiliates many women. In fact, at one point, he tries to humiliate a daughter of Brahma, the Hindu god who created humankind, so Brahma puts a curse on Ravana: that his many heads would be broken if he ever forced himself on an unwilling woman. The similarity between Ravana's broken heads and Rowan Tarquin's migraine is manifest. That Sita's rapist is the product of patriarchy is illustrated by the fact, already discussed, that his full name is an amalgamation of the Ravana (meaning 'ravisher') who rapes Sītā in the *Ramayana*, and the Tarquin who rapes Lucretia in the Roman myth.

Rowan Tarquin rapes his wife, Noella, though he does not consider this rape, saying, 'you can't rape your own wife. She's yours' (66). This is part of patriarchal discourse, that a wife is the property of her husband and therefore her consent is assumed (Brownmiller 1976:29). Green writes that 'wife rape is rationalized [*sic*] as a man taking what is his, punishing his wife for her failure to obey and her duty to serve' (1999:34). In a society that deems women to be 'naturally' subservient, deviation from this 'norm' is punished. This is why Tarquin rapes Sita; he adores her and to rape her is to '[t]ake her, make her his own' (66). His sense of entitlement and violent nature create a dangerous combination. Rowan Tarquin wants to exert his power over Sita, his maleness over her, and calls himself a 'he-man' (67). As already noted, Sita considers suicide, but decides there is '[n]o point' (191). This recalls the Sartrean notion of suicide as absurd (1956:540) as discussed in Section 2.2; moreover, it could be tied in with the Foucauldian insistence that death is the 'ultimate limit of knowledge' and power (Lemert & Gillan 1982:129).

That knowledge and power are inextricably linked, means that suicide, because it limits power, cannot be considered a transgression. Sita then decides instead to kill Rowan. When she thinks this over, however, she sees that this too is futile as killing Rowan will not stop rape. And at this point in the novel Rowan is seen for what he really is. He is not evil personified, nothing so grandiose. Sita notices his 'patheticness' (152); he is simply a metonymic device used to illustrate the consequence of a society that treats women as second-class citizens.

Rape is thus an action which produces, or hopes to produce, women who are docile subjects. Rape itself is a kind of myth, and Brownmiller shows some of the myths associated with rape:

ALL WOMEN WANT TO BE RAPED
NO WOMAN CAN BE RAPED AGAINST HER WILL
SHE WAS ASKING FOR IT
IF YOU'RE GOING TO BE RAPED YOU MIGHT AS WELL RELAX
AND ENJOY IT (1976:312; emphasis in the original)

It is therefore apparent that modern myths perpetuate the belief (present in the myths of the Hindu Sītā, Roman Lucretia and Renaissance Lucrece) that women are responsible for their own rapes. Aggression is considered to be natural to men; when facing her aggressor, Sita 'thinks of Y chromosomes. [Rowan's] violence looks pathological. Is he sick? He is transmogrified into demented lunatic' (142). What is remarkable about this section of text, is that Sita puts the concept of Y chromosomes – which are physiologically common to all men – next to that of pathology, lunacy or dementia – with the notions of abnormality and disease that those words call to mind. Rowan's aggression is not seen as natural in any sense, but as a form of mental illness. The other side of the myth that masculinity equals aggression is that if a woman is sufficiently virtuous she would never put herself into a situation that could

lead to her rape (Brownmiller 1976:386) and this is related to the idea that a disobedient wife ought to be punished with rape. Iqbal's rhetorical questions which investigate how much of the culpability attendant upon Sita's rape is hers point to this unjust dichotomy.

In Collen's novel, the rape of Sita, as it says in the blurb of the book, 'comes to symbolize all rapes, all violations, all colonisations [*sic*]'. Sita washes herself after her rape, but cannot remove the 'smell of fear. The smell of slavery. The smell of the fear of rape' (112). She wonders if her feelings towards Rowan on the part of the two girls whom he had raped while they were under his care 'was not against a rapist, but against colonization.... They are the same thing' (149). Collen, through Iqbal, explores the counter-discourse and asks where rape comes from:

[f]rom Rowan Tarquin himself? The one bad man, you can tell by his name, preordained, individually bad? Or is it the nature of the body politic? Is Reunion rapist and raped? The colonizer and the colonized? Is the cure to cure the place? (193)

However, Collen seems to warn against taking this idea to the extreme; she warns against accepting the rapes in the novel simply as tropes for colonization and thereby losing sight of the fact that the rapes themselves are an epidemic, a result of a diseased society. She asks: 'is it not also in the general balance of forces in the sex war that rape lies?' (193).

This 'gender war' is staged in *The Rape of Sita* by Collen's characters, many of whom become representative types. It has been mentioned that Dharma and Sita stand as emblems of each of their genders. Iqbal makes it clear that 'Sita came from a family of women only' (90). Despite this assertion, the name of Sita's father is supplied: Mohun Jab Brakonye Janaka. His surname matches that of the Hindu Sītā's adoptive

father. That Collen's Sita hails from a family of women only is a transformation of the Hindu Sītā who is born of the earth, and is thus *ayonija*, 'not womb-born' (Stutley & Stutley 1922:278).⁶ A short story, 'Ayoni', by Volga tells of a girl who longs to be *ayonija*, as she has suffered repeated rape and molestation. She states, 'Then I was not a little girl. Not a human. Not even a living creature. Just a *yoni*. That's all ... I only knew it as "shame, shame"' (2001:10).

Furthermore, Sita's 'perfect mother' (93), Doorga, is connected with Durga, the Hindu warrior goddess, described as being 'inaccessible' (Brockington 1993:80). Tellingly, the creeds passed from Doorga to her daughter are '*know no fear*' (94; emphasis in the original) and '[n]ever give in' (94). Doorga, says Iqbal, 'was a warrior' (95), 'Mother Courage, herself' (94). Durga's name means 'hard to approach' (Brockington 1993:82) and it is a reference to her being unassailable to both enemies and suitors. Also, Durga was an aspect of Devi, which means 'goddess'. Sita is thus the daughter, the human incarnation, of this goddess. In the novel, Sita is described as having for her ancestors famous women from Mauritius's past. Iqbal at first guesses Sita's oldest relative to be Eve, but Sita corrects him and states that Time preceded Eve (96). Sita explores her genealogy (95-99) mentioning Anjalay Coopen, Ana de Bengal and Olga Olande as forebears. These real historical women – all protestors and freedom fighters – are described, fictionally, to be in direct descent of one another, as is Sita, descending originally from Time.

⁶ The Greek Helen was born from an egg produced by Leda after being raped by Zeus (Goldhill 1993:135) and could therefore also be said to be *ayonija* (Battacharya 2001: <http://www.boloji.com/bookreviews/012.htm>). This is another of the similarities between Sītā and Helen, as discussed in Section 2.3. of this essay.

Towards the end of the novel, Sita is visited by Mowsi, a woman who has been beaten. Sita designates Mowsi as ‘Everywoman’ (194), a designation which points to the use of a type to represent the pole of women in the sex war. Sita discovers that it is Mowsi’s neighbours who have beaten her, because they suspect she is a witch. Sita has up until this point kept her rape a secret from most people, but Mowsi coming to visit her makes her realize the need to speak out, to discover her own voice. She asks ‘without past women and their courage...what would become of the future?’ and prompts Iqbal to write down her story (196-197). In fact, Collen herself experienced a patriarchal attempt to silence her: the Prime Minister of Mauritius, ‘hostage to the threat of fundamentalist pressure, banned *The Rape of Sita ...* after Hindu fundamentalists objected to the title’ (Cummins 1995).⁷ Collen, of course, continues to protest and to write.

Gilbert and Gubar (1979:3) ask: ‘[i]s a pen a metaphor for a penis?’ This illustrates the connection between authorship and rape. Sexual assault and writing – producing discourse – are ways that men are able to exert power over women.⁸ Gillian Gane insists that rape

is in fact an act that ruptures the boundaries between the private and the public, that violates the privacy of a woman’s most secret bodily parts and appropriates them for public use. (2002:104)

This appropriation of women’s bodies for political or ‘public’ use has been discussed earlier and is expanded on here. Gilbert and Gubar (1979:20) show that writing, too, is a kind of aggression when they quote Joan Didion as saying “writing is an aggression” precisely because it is “an imposition...an invasion of someone else’s

⁷ Available at: <<http://waf.gn.apc.org/journal6p53.htm>>. Accessed: 20 September 2003.

⁸ This concept is linked to Lucrece’s use of, and Sita’s desired use of, knives. See Section 2.3 of this study.

most private space”’. But Sita, in her letter to God, indicates that this aggression is necessary:

[w]hy the rule not to hit below the belt? Who made it up and why do we keep it? Perhaps new rules could be promulgated. Thou, woman, in self defense [*sic*], shall hit below the belt. Would you/You agree? (189)

Philomela too asks God for intervention in punishing her rapist in the event that no one else will hear her plight in the following lines, quoted earlier: ‘[l]et Heaven to this give eare/ And all the Gods and powers therein if any God be there’ (*Met.* VI.698-699). Like Philomela, Sita does not trust in God to reply. At the end of her open letter she writes

[w]ait for the silence, girls.



For the gods if they ever spaketh in the past, hath stopped in the present. (190)

In this prayerful letter, Sita is addressing God, the theoretical original author of the myths.

Melinda Ferguson’s rape scene, in *Smacked* (2005:9), a recent South African publication, shows evidence of this same theme of God’s silence:

“Please don’t rape me.” My voice is small. My lips mercury-cold. I’m a broken bird – no crying, just a cackled whimper. Oh god, this can’t be happening to me. The terror, the fear gets the better of me. Hysteria rises. “Shoot me, don’t rape me, shootmedon’t rapemeshootme.” The words are a desperate mantra. God’s not listening.

Significantly, this rape victim also wishes for death rather than rape. The thematic similarities between the rape narratives discussed in this study are indicative that rape victims experience similar incidents and that they are frequently expressed in literature in comparable ways, despite the fact that the times, locations and even the genre of the texts differ. For example, as in *The Rape of Sita*, *Disgrace* and *Once*

Were Warriors, discussed later, Ferguson also suspects that her rapists rape her out of hate, although, here, unlike in *Disgrace*, that the races of her rapists differ from her own is not stated as a reason for this hate, just her gender: ‘I am on an altar, a sacrifice, and they are penetrating me in some kind of symbolic hatred against women. Maybe they just want to get laid. Who knows’ (2005:9).

And like Collen’s, Ferguson’s text, which is a memoir of the author’s drug addiction and how her life is destroyed by it, has the rape victim take a steaming hot bath afterwards ‘to burn [her], to clean it all away’ (2005:11) and then does not deal with the rape until years later. While drug abuse is the major theme of the text, the rape is used as a structural device. Ferguson (2005:191) writes:

[i]t seems everything is seen in my life BR (before rape) and AR (after rape). I guess that’s what happens with events that traumatise the human soul. You see everything according to a new frame of reference, a new time line.

Ferguson uses quotations from Eliot’s *Four Quartets* to frame the novel.⁹ The novel begins:

What we call the beginning is often the end
and to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from. (2005:3; emphasis in the original)

The postscript contains the following quotation:

*We shall not cease from exploration
and the end of our exploring
will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.* (2005:312, emphasis in the original)¹⁰

⁹ As well as using Eliot, Ferguson also makes mention of *Disgrace*. The quote is not especially relevant to this discussion, though it does deal with guilt. Ferguson equates Melanie’s father’s desire that Lurie expresses more heartfelt guilt and remorse with her own need to apologize properly for her wrongdoings. The use of both Eliot and Coetzee shows the predominance of these two canonical writers.

¹⁰ There are echoes here of William Blake’s *Jerusalem* (see Blake 1927:164-286).

Both quotations point to the idea of time being a healer and having a cyclical nature.¹¹ That the rape scene is used to open the book, especially given that chronologically it occurs much later, points both to the magnitude of this traumatic event and to its being a kind of start of a new life: ‘the steam [of the post-rape bath] is washing everything I knew about me away. I know I am never, ever, ever going to be the same again’ (2005:11). The rape is the culmination of her addict behaviour, as it is her search for crack cocaine that leads her to the home of her rapists. Her rape is, as was Sita’s, a kind of death – ‘I am a zombie, dead. I am cut off, truncated¹² to the core’ (2005:11) – but her recovery, however tentative, comes to her in the writing of her story. Extraordinarily, the manuscript she had been writing as an addict, but which had been lost, and which recorded the details of her rape, prostitution and neglect of her children, is returned to her by the manager of the dingy Hillbrow hotel where she had been residing. She writes:

[m]y truth and core were coming home, delivered in a truly unexpected and miraculous fashion. My writing was the only proof I had that I had died, but somehow, like lady Lazarus, had survived death. ... Much like Holocaust survivors who testified in Nuremberg and found some solace in their recording of what had happened to them in camps like Auschwitz and Dachau, the feeling of tightly holding my returned file of thoughts helped me believe that perhaps my catastrophic journey had been vindicated. ... My writing was coming home to me! I was being returned to me! (2005:253, emphasis in the original)

The telling of her story is a kind of therapy for her. Azoulay (2002:34-35) discusses the Freudian conception of trauma. According to Freud, trauma ‘is given meaning

¹¹ The women in Ndebele’s *The Cry of Winnie Mandela*, mentioned in Footnote 54, all await the return of their men, as the mythical Penelope did. The novel shows an awareness of the cyclic nature of time and the universality of women’s oppression under patriarchy. Winnie Mandela, who appears as a character in the novel, notes the following:

[n]ot only do I see myself in the past and the present all at once, but I am in the past and in the present all at once, not knowing what the future will be, yet seeing it take shape in front of me as I watch, and inside of me as I live the drama of its becoming, while watching it becoming. All at once. (2003:86-87)

Heilbrun (1990:105) too has noted Penelope’s applicability to the situation of contemporary women, calling her a ‘single parent’.

¹² The word ‘truncated’ implies dismemberment or castration.

only when it is experienced a second time, only in retroactive fashion, from the moment it is articulated and told to an addressee'. Psychological treatment for a person who has experienced a trauma, then, is 'a framework in which the subject of trauma constitutes himself/herself through speaking, while remembering/ forgetting the trauma and sharing it with the therapist' (Azoulay 2002:35). This is true of Lacan's views of psychotherapy too; he termed it the 'talking cure' (Sharpe 2006).¹³ Deborah Posel (2005:45), in her study of rape in South Africa, makes the following observation:

[t]he idea that *speaking is healing* – the new common sense in the contemporary politics of sexual violence – then puts a somewhat different gloss on the sense of stigma and shame associated with sexual violation. Once confession is recast as therapeutic (rather than sullyng), then it becomes an antidote to the stigma of exposure. (emphasis in the original)¹⁴

This is not only true in modern psychology, but in Indian thought as well:

suffering is originated and indefinitely prolonged in the world by *karma*, by temporality; it is the law of *karma* that imposes the countless series of transmigrations,¹⁵ the eternal return to existence and hence to suffering. Liberation from the karmic law is equivalent to "cure". (Eliade 1964:85 and see Eliade 1961:89-90)

The key, then, to healing is to retrace and relive an experience and thus destroy karmic residue. In this way, *krta yuga*, the First Age and perfect beginning, is achieved (Eliade 1964:85-86). Eliade notes that the equivalent to the return to the beginning in Taoist thought is to return to the primordial egg (1964:87) and this in turn recalls Collen's positing of the cosmic egg as androgynous perfection. In his discussion of androgyny being the pagan sexual ideal, Jones (2000:468) writes, '[i]n

¹³ Available at: <<http://www.iep.utm.edu/lacweb.htm>>. Accessed: 14 April 2006.

¹⁴ Foucault had a somewhat differing view of this kind of therapy, which he would align with confession, mentioned in a previous footnote. The present study does not examine this however. His discussion can be found in his *The History of Sexuality* (1980a, especially 58-70).

¹⁵ The theory of transmigration is much like that of reincarnation. While neither transmigration nor reincarnation is strictly synonymous with resurrection or rebirth, metempsychosis and rebirth often go hand in hand.

the place of sexual differentiation, we are offered monistic, egalitarian androgyny as physical, social and spiritual ideal'. Freeman (1988:50) asserts that the 'distant goal of humankind's development is to find again the primal wholeness that was lost with the separation of the opposites and the increasing clarity of consciousness'.

The characters in Collen's novel are thus connected with gods and goddesses, but are nevertheless human; Collen states as much outright: 'They were, it felt like it, all gods and goddesses. Of modern times. Not immortal. No. Not all-powerful. Not at all' (48). Sita and Véronique Soulier are ordinary women, unlike Lucretia/Lucrece and the original Sītā. This shows rape to be both 'an historical dilemma and a common occurrence' (Gray 1998:1). Therefore, Rowan's migraine is more ordinary (and, tragically, realistic) a punishment than Tarquin's banishment or Ravana's death. The characters are real; the reader can relate to them. This explains why Collen's prose is so plain and unadorned. Her language is interesting for other reasons too.

The first is her frequent use of vernacular words which points to the nature of the characters as colonial subjects, whose primary language is neither English nor French, but Creole. Examples include '*dahajbay*' (17) meaning boat brothers, a relation 'closer than blood relatives' (17) and '*savat*' (61), which are sponge sandals. The second reason Collen's language is striking is her tendency to break up and deconstruct phrases from the narratives she uses as intertexts (she also breaks up the chronology of the text. Postmodern texts often reject linear narratives). This breaking up of the text becomes the equivalent of a new language and this is indicative of the fact that '[w]omen, like post-colonial peoples, have had to construct a language of their own when their only available "tools" are those of the "colonizer"' (Ashcroft *et*

al. 1989:175). Greene (1993:323) agrees: '[s]ince the available forms do not accommodate something new, feminist novelists forge new forms that render the process of change'. When wondering how it is possible to avenge all rapes the following text appears in *The Rape of Sita*: 'like Hamlet said how, to venge [sic] a deed and by the vengeance put an end to the something rotten in the state of' [sic] (192). The omission of the final word of this quotation reinforces the idea of rape as a universal occurrence and concurrently breaks down patriarchal discourse. Sita's recollection of the rape, and Collen's recollection, renunciation and rewriting of patriarchal discourse can thus be seen to be, for Sita, an erasure of the act of rape and, for Collen, an act against oppression by phallogentric thought.

Therefore Collen's narrative is an aggression that subverts the patriarchal discourse that places women in a position of subjection and which removes women's ability to be authors of their own lives. The word 'author' has the same root (L. *auctoritas*) as the word 'authority' (*Chambers's Etymological Dictionary* 1961, s.v. 'author') – writers of texts are viewed as authorities. For Hutcheon, 'narratorial (and authorial) freedom is, in terms of characters (and readers), really another name for power' (1988:206-7). In order to subvert patriarchal texts, women must write from within those texts. This is why Collen uses myth as a basis for her narrative. Her narrative is 'an invasion of someone else's most private space', a counter-narrative. Tiffin calls this kind of discourse a 'canonical counter-discourse' (1995:97), and defines it as a text in which 'a post-colonial writer takes up a character or characters, or the basic assumptions of a [colonial] canonical text, and unveils those assumptions, subverting the text for post-colonial purposes' (1995:97).

Women have long been denied a creative voice. The ‘representation of the body is part of representing “external” reality as a whole’ (Brooks 1993:3), so the body becomes symbolic of the body politic (Samuelson 2002:88). Therefore, various manifestations of violence are enacted upon the body to further the maintenance of the patriarchal status quo. Women’s bodies are reified and seen as the objects of the male gaze. Man, as subject, is seen as the norm whereas woman, as object, is seen as the other and ‘because it is the norm, the male body is veiled from enquiry, taken as the agent and not the object of knowing: the gaze is “phallic”, its object is not’ (Brooks 1993:15).

Violent actions are enacted upon this *objectified* body. This objectification of the female body robs women of their independence and makes them subject to the power of men. The enacting of these violent deeds is the re-enactment of myth and

insofar as a myth describes the origin of a given institution or phenomenon it thereby supports it. The “accidents” of one’s personal life are orientated within a given extended matrix of significations and thus “justified”. (Rennie 1996)¹⁶

3.1 J.M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*

Seeing the body as ‘subject’, corresponds to Foucault’s understanding of that word as meaning both

subject to someone else by control and dependence, and also as tied to their own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. In this dual conception, the term subject suggests a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to. (Sheridan 1980:177)

The body is recreated as a ‘narrative signifier’ (Brooks 1993:22). Sartre too equates

¹⁶ Available at: <<http://www.scils.rutgers.edu/~mjoseph/rennie>>. Accessed: 12 May 2005.

consciousness of the body with the consciousness of a sign and points out that

the sign is that which is *surpassed toward meaning*, that which is neglected for the sake of the meaning, that which is never apprehended for itself, that beyond which the look is perpetually directed. (1956:330; emphasis in the original)

Consequently, the raped body has come to be used as a sign. In many South African novels about rape, it is interracial rape that is examined and the product is often, such as in Arthur Maimane's *Hate No More* (2000) and André Brink's *Imaginations of Sand* (1997), a mixed-race child. In Ferguson's *Smacked* and in *The Rape of Sita* the rapists use a condom – in the case of *Smacked*, at the victim's insistence. In Meg Samuelson's article 'The Rainbow Womb: Rape and Race in South African Fiction of the Transition', she warns that:

the metaphorical slippage between body and body politic that is exploited in representations of rape conceals and submerges a far more urgent narrative of an ascendant violence against women... (2002:88)

Coetzee's *Disgrace* is guilty of just this. In it, white Lucy is raped by three black men and falls pregnant. The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation found that about one-third of reported rapes were gang rapes (Vetten 2004).¹⁷ Lucy observes that her rapists 'spur each other on. That's probably why they do it together. Like dogs in a pack' (*Dis.*:159). The dog simile is applied to Lucy too. She is willing to sign over her land to Petrus – bar the house, the domestic sphere – and become known as his third wife or concubine, and begin with nothing, 'like a dog' (*Dis.*:205). Her father, David Lurie, a former university lecturer and the main protagonist of the novel, comments that this is 'humiliating' but it is more than this, it is out of all proportion. Lucy accepts Petrus's marriage proposal because she will then be under his protection from further violation. But one of the rapists, who is a relation of Petrus's, is found

¹⁷ Available at: <<http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artvet15.htm>>. Accessed: 15 July 2005.

peeping through Lucy's bathroom window (*Dis.*:206). The reader might wonder how effective Petrus's protection would be. Horrell (2002:32) appears to agree, stating that the novel does not suggest that if 'Lucy (and her kind) pay the dues demanded all will be well'. Lucy's 'kind', however, are for Horrell whites, rather than women.

Post-colonial concerns in *Disgrace* take precedence over feminist concerns and Lucy accepts the rape and vows to keep the child; this last being symbolic, a sign, of hope for a united South Africa. The accepted pregnancy implies a biological acceptance of the rape. David is staying with his daughter so that he may get away from the university he worked at for a while as he has been implicated in a sexual harassment case with one of his students, Melanie. Lucy advises David that Melanie will eventually not think too ill of him, as '[w]omen can be surprisingly forgiving' (*Dis.*:69). David's unwanted sexual advances on Melanie, a coloured¹⁸ woman, are juxtaposed with the rape of Lucy. Her comment on the forgiving nature of women could be related to her later decision to keep the child – the product of her rape.¹⁹ But as Gane (2002:105) rightly points out,

to feminists her acceptance of rape and her choice to bear the child conceived as a result of rape are dangerous, not least in their implications for all women in a county where violence against women is epidemic.

Disgrace is often (for example, Marais 2000, Poyner 2000 and, according to Carol Iannone, the Nobel Prize Committee, see below) defended as an allegory, but Louise Bethlehem's (2002:22) notions are pertinent in this regard when she states that

Disgrace is

arguably the most realistic of all Coetzee's works of fiction – so committed, indeed, to the prescriptive perspective of character (Lurie's

¹⁸ Melanie's race is not actually mentioned, but it is implied that she is a member of the coloured community.

¹⁹ That it cannot, and will not, be determined who actually impregnated Lucy, removes the individuality from the men; Lucy is impregnated by a race, rather than a person.

character) – that it can be thought of as allegorical only to the extent that it deliberately encodes a narrative gap or aporia which is, strictly speaking, irresolvable in terms of its realist scaffolding.

Also, Coetzee has in his past novels blurred his place of action so that the reader is not sure if the context is South Africa or elsewhere. This is not the case in *Disgrace*. In fact, it is the Eastern Cape border, a site of struggle in the country. Even if *Disgrace* is read as allegory, it is a very disturbing one, because of its use and abuse of the female body as a reified object.

Iannone (2005)²⁰ opines that the reader, ‘or at least any reader not terminally immersed in white guilt, is liable to be horrified’ and states that the ‘Nobel establishment managed to package the troubling racial theme of the novel as some anodyne parable of spiritual renewal’. It is this silencing of the female voice in favour of a spiritual or racial allegory that is so troubling. For Brad Tabas (2001),²¹ ‘Coetzee’s critique lies exactly within the text—within the texts’ [*sic*] insistence on its own fictionality, within it [*sic*] pre-deconstructed nature, and most importantly in the text’s dramatization of its inability to know and speak for the other’. Coetzee is, in other words, *unwilling* to speak for the other and wants to write ‘without authority’ (Coetzee 1992:392). Susan Gallagher (1991:81) insists that this is because he has not ‘come to terms with the problem of how the Other might speak, how Africans can write themselves and their own histories’. As a product of colonial discourse, he is unable to speak as or for the other. This is the reason that the reader cannot absolutely determine Lucy’s motivations for her actions, although her ‘otherness’ is defined by her gender, not her race. Gane (2002:104) agrees, noting Lucy’s experience ‘remains unspoken and unknown – an absence within the text’.

²⁰ Available at: <http://www.amconmag.com/2005_02_14/article2.html>. Accessed: 10 January 2006.

²¹ Available at: <<http://www.safundi.com/iessues/04/tabas.asp>>. Accessed: 20 September 2003.

Lucy bears the violence done to her and keeps silent about it. She will neither report the crime nor go into detail with her father about what had happened. The reader is therefore not entirely sure of what had occurred during the rape or specifically why she will not report it, abort the child or move from the farm. Michael Marais (1996:74) believes that in Coetzee's 'representations of the silent other, Coetzee invests silence with power: silence is cast as the means by which the other preserves its alterior status against assimilation by the West'. Moreover, Lucy Graham (2002:6) points out that Coetzee has posited the use of the body, if not the voice, as a means of communication,²² in which case Lucy's swelling body certainly speaks of acceptance (Parry 1996:44). But, in the end, Coetzee's refusal to speak for Lucy actually silences her. Kenneth Parker (1996:91) asks, '[i]f one assessment of colonial discourse is that it silences alternative versions of historic encounters, to what extent is Coetzee's project itself a colonizing act in its imposition of elaborate layers of silencing?'

So Lucy's refusal to denounce her rapist or even make known her rape is exactly what successfully silences her. In fact, Coetzee seems unwilling to allow his maligned female characters any effective voice, for example, the silencing and misreading of Susan by Foe in *Foe* (1986) and the disempowered girl with dead eyes, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982). In the case of *Disgrace*, Marais (2003:283) states that '[i]t is only through failing to comprehend Lucy that the reader may come to intuit and respect her singularity, and so refrain from completing her violation on the level of reading'. Thus David, the reader figure, who assumes Lucy's actions are derived from white guilt, is said to produce a misreading. Azoulay (2002:34) notes that the

²² As has been shown in this dissertation, the body can 'speak' more effectively than it does for Lucy Lurie. Lavinia's use of the staff to tell her story and the cases where weaving relays a story, such as in the myth of Philomela, are examples.

relations created by Melanie and Lucy between speech and silence are complicated ones that do not allow the establishment of the customary hierarchy with regards to women: “His violence, your silence”, as if the silence was part of the assault. The voice of Melanie Isaacs, who does file a report against Lurie, remains unheard while the voice of Lucy, who chooses not to file a complaint and even downplays her story does get heard and serves as the thread that unwinds and rips apart the hegemonic speech of the narrator.

Melanie’s complaint is viewed as having had no effect and Lucy’s reluctance to speak is viewed as effectively destabilizing the male narrator’s discourse. Lucy’s silence could be likened to Lucrece committing suicide, in that it is an attempt to remove herself from the dominant discourse (see Marais 2001:37). However, as has already been shown, Lucrece’s death fits her into the traditional mould of the passive woman. In the same way, for Lucy to be silent, is for her to be passive. As Marais has stated (2003:275), ‘history’s conditioning force is exposed when Lucy is reduced, despite her intentions, to a term in a power relationship’.²³ At bottom, Lucy and Lucrece’s actions are ineffective techniques of transgression.

At the end of *Disgrace*, there is

a moment of utter stillness which [Lucy’s father] would wish prolonged for ever: the gentle sun, the stillness of mid-afternoon, bees busy in a field of flowers; and at the centre of the picture a young woman, *das ewige Weibliche*, lightly pregnant, in a straw sunhat. (*Dis.*:218)

Lucy becomes the fulfilment of Goethe’s eternal feminine, passive, fertile and silent female, and loses her autonomy because of it. Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:6) calls this stereotype the ‘figure of the “sweet mother”, the all-accepting creature of fecundity and self-sacrifice’. Her raped body is thus given a meaning that supersedes the

²³ At least in Melanie’s case, her complaint leads to David leaving his job and losing his credibility.

violation; that is, as ‘a narrative signifier’, as mentioned above (Brooks 1993:22). In essence, it is word made flesh. Farred (2002:19) states that with Lucy’s pregnancy,

[f]emale articulation is reduced to its pre-feminist form. Lucy cannot speak her violation but she can bear manifest testimony to it: the future mixed-race child which the white lesbian mother will bear enunciates her recently violated past.

Farred sees this as an annunciation and Attwell would see this as intentional on Coetzee’s part, but the present study aligns itself with Bethlehem’s contention that the novel does not support this (2002:23). Lucy herself seems to want to have the voice of the marginalized speak; she prompts David not to antagonize Petrus until he has ‘heard [his] side of the story’ (*Dis.*:133).

Lucy gives grounds for her unwillingness to tell the authorities about the rape:

as far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. (*Dis.*:112)

Marais (2001:33) posits that to read this section as white guilt is a misreading, but the implications of this statement are that, because the rape takes place in post-Apartheid South Africa between a black man and a white woman, the act of rape must take a backseat to the issue of race. Jane Poyner (2003:6) writes of Lucy,

[w]ishing to keep the matter private, she rationalises the rape as reparation for apartheid, while the text goes further, implicitly suggesting that the rape signifies atonement for Lurie's maltreatment of women by mirroring his daughter's rape with his “undesired” intercourse with Melanie....

As Gane (2002:105) notes, ‘[i]f someone must take on the sins of white South Africa, why should it be Lucy?’ Graham (2002:5) proposes that this

draw[s] attention to the very real and concrete ways in which certain rape narratives in South African history have justified oppressive laws that dispossessed, disenfranchised and violently acted upon those defined as racially other.

The present argument suggests that novels, such as *Disgrace*, could be accused of the same crime in reverse: they justify sublimating rape as a political issue.

As Vetten (2004)²⁴ writes,

[v]irulent sexual inequality, which knows neither racial nor cultural boundaries, plays the most significant role in causing rape in South Africa, as is the case around the world. But not once in [the debates under discussion in her article] have the words “gender inequality” appeared in the president’s writings or utterances.

Rather, the president attributes these crimes to ‘poverty and community degradation’ (Vetten 2004).²⁵ Vetten elucidates: ‘in repeatedly and exclusively confining the debate to African men, [President Thabo] Mbeki is deflecting attention away from the sexual predatoriness of men generally, regardless of colour’. Posel (2005:40) agrees. In Coetzee’s novel, Lucy’s feelings of shame regarding the rape are bound up with white guilt; Farred (2002:18) provides an explanation by referring to the ‘lesbian, late-hippies, farm girl’²⁶ adjusting to the realities of the new times with a pragmatism approaching *realpolitik*, motivated, we imagine by a psychic force approximating white guilt’; which shows the extent to which racial politics supersede sexual ones. Coetzee has written about white guilt and has said ‘[t]he whites of South Africa participated, in various degrees, actively or passively, in an audacious and well-planned crime against Africa’ (1992:342).

The case of Collen’s *The Rape of Sita* is the opposite of Coetzee’s in the sense that it extols the merits of not being silent. Iqbal attests that, ‘[o]nce upon a time talk was in all directions’ (7). It is a reiteration of the biblical declaration that ‘[i]n the beginning was the Word’ (John, 1.1). The ‘word’ – patriarchal discourse – is what breeds the

²⁴ Available at: <<http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artvet15.htm>>. Accessed: 15 July 2005.

²⁵ Available at: <<http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artvet15.htm>>. Accessed: 15 July 2005.

²⁶ Both Lucy Lurie and Collen’s Sita sell farm produce to make a living.

evil in Tarquin and causes him to rape Sita. The word becomes flesh, as was the case with Lucy. But, while Christianity may have God create language, Stonehouse (1994:119) points out that it has many times been attributed to women; ‘Queen Isis was said to have given the alphabet to the Egyptians; the Hindu goddess of knowledge, Sarasvati, was thought to have invented the original alphabet; while Kali was said to have invented Sanskrit’. This link, however, between the feminine and writing has been quashed by patriarchy. Sita intended to say the following words to Dharma when she saw him after the rape: ‘[s]omething terrible happened in Reunion’ (158). She did not say these words however, and the memory of the rape lay dormant for over eight years, until her rage allows her to recall them:

[t]hen came the word.

She spoke it.

She never thought it. She just found it, lying there like the rage and like the chains.

“The Word” just like an object. It came to the surface. Not the content of the words, no.

They were words she had intended to say. Once long ago. Words already composed and then, for some reason, instead of having been said, they had been abandoned. Deferred. *What happens to a sentence deferred? Put into limbo?*²⁷ The whole composition was there now. She came across it. Reified before her. (37; emphasis in the original)

It is not ‘the content of the words’ but truth that surfaces. Foucault (in Weedon 1999:117-118) asserts that ‘truth, lodged in our most secret nature, “demands” only to *surface*; that if it fails to do so, this is because a constraint holds it in place, the violence of power weighs it down’ (my emphasis). These ‘reified’ words, however, are retranslated back into discourse, because Iqbal writes down the story. Unlike the dead heroines of the ancient myths, who are reified and silenced by death, or the modern heroines, who are reified and silenced by patriarchy, Sita recovers her voice –

²⁷ Limbo, in Catholicism, refers to the intermediary state a soul experiences between death and heaven. It could be compared with the Classical idea of a waiting place where a soul drinks from the river Lethe in that it is a place between life and death. Sita’s surfacing memory is, in a sense, experiencing rebirth.

saying ‘the words’ removes the feeling of ‘being buried alive’ (37). Lucy is never allowed to recover her voice. And she, too, is described as dead; she tells David, ‘I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life’ (*Dis.*:161).

During her sexual encounter with David, Melanie too ‘die[s] within herself for the duration’ (*Dis.*:25).²⁸ Collen’s use of the voice is a denial of death and silence, portrayed so frequently in relation to women in patriarchal texts.

That the intertexts of Collen’s work are written mainly by men, illustrates the fact that women have, to a large degree, been absent from the canon. Margaret Atwood is also aware of the importance of the phrase ‘once upon a time’, as she makes clear in *Negotiating with the Dead* (a book about storytelling):

[a]ll writers must go from *now* to *once upon a time*; all must go from here to there; all must descend to where the stories are kept; all must take care not to be captured and held immobile by the past. And all must commit acts of larceny, or else of reclamation, depending how you look at it. The dead may guard the treasure, but it’s useless treasure unless it can be brought back into the land of the living and allowed to enter time once more – which means to enter the realm of the audience, the realm of the readers, the realm of change. (2003:160; emphasis in the original)²⁹

This paragraph is quoted at some length because of its pertinence to the argument and the extent to which it is sympathetic with the intentions of *The Rape of Sita*.

Coetzee, too, critiques change, but he is preeminently concerned with race. *The Rape of Sita* differs from *Disgrace* in that, in the former, the rapist’s race is of little consequence, although he is described as a colonizer (134). *Disgrace*’s concern with race is foregrounded in the names of the female protagonists. ‘Lucy’ is derived from

²⁸ For the Elizabethans, ‘to die’ meant to orgasm. Coetzee’s treatment of dying could thus be read as a parody of orgasmic bliss. As mentioned in Section 2.2, a friend of Sita’s calls rape a ‘parody of the man-woman relationship’ (180).

²⁹ Storytelling, like myth, therefore takes place outside of time; [f]rom the mere fact of the narration of a myth, profane time is – at least symbolically – abolished: the narrator and his hearers are rapt into sacred and mythical time (Eliade 1961:58).

Latin and means light (BabyNamesWorld.com)³⁰ and light is of course associated with innocence and goodness, and in this case ‘whiteness’, and bears a similarity to Lucrece and Lucretia, also known for the innocence and chasteness that light and whiteness imply. Melanie is the opposite. David shifts the emphasis in her name and arrives at ‘Meláni: the dark one’ (*Dis.*:18). This foregrounds the novel’s core interest in race. Green asserts that when ‘rape is attributed to ethnic hatred, women are given no specificity’ (1999:95). This is certainly the case in Jo-Anne Richards’s *The Innocence of Roast Chicken* (1996), where the rape is given merely a cursory description and the subsequent self-castration of the rapist is described in great detail. The idea of white guilt definitely appears here, when the protagonist’s older brother informs her that he and she should bear the guilt of racist atrocities (Richards 1996:132), despite their being only children and ones who do not like the racism they experience on the farm. Of the scant description of the rape, Samuelson (2002:95) notes, ‘the rape is narrated solely by male characters’ and it is they who commit the retribution of forcing the rapist to castrate himself.

This lack of specificity of the victim is not the case in Collen’s novel and Sita does not fall pregnant. For Collen, in contrast to Coetzee, the symbol of hope is the narrative itself. It too is a form of creation. Collen’s narrative is part of a legacy that begins with the Indian Sītā. Each new narrative builds on the previous one. The narrative takes place now, but it looks to the future. Also inherent within the concept of colonization is Foucault’s conception of power as being, not a top-down structure, but rather present in every level of society. The oppressed woman is just as

³⁰ ‘Lucrece’ means ‘bringer of light’ and Lucretia means ‘riches’. Available at: <<http://www.babynamesworld.com>>. Accessed 18 September 2006.

empowered as the oppressed colonial subject, and from this level of oppression, resistance is possible:

The oppressed cry out.
They rise up.
They oppose.
Speak out. (21)

This resistance is a kind of counter-discourse.

As a lesbian, Lucy rejects the traditional male/female roles and her sexual orientation could be viewed as symbolic of a refusal to be incorporated into the patriarchal centre, living rather on the margins, on the border of the Eastern Cape (Parry 1996:45). But, while removing Lucy partly from this hegemony, Coetzee nevertheless inserts a female stereotype into the text: Lucy states, 'I am a woman, David. Do you think I hate children?' (*Dis.*:198). Her sexuality could be viewed as being similar to the sterile unions in *The Waste Land*, until she is fertilized with the seed of her rapists. Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:6) states that 'the way African writers enthuse about motherhood, one wonders if there are no women who hate childbirth or have undeveloped maternal instincts'. However, this is a fairly unusual view for an African feminist. As Signe Arnfred (2003)³¹ notes, 'Western feminists with roots in the Second Wave of the women's movement have generally defined themselves in opposition to mother-identified women of previous generations', while African feminists have not seen the concept of motherhood as problematic. Collen shows a conflation of the two viewpoints in that Sita has a child, but her role as mother is not seen in isolation; she is not viewed *only* as a mother. Lucy's pregnancy casts her in this role. She becomes de Lauretis's (1989:233-234) woman that 'remains outside of history.... mother and nature, matrix and matter'. She will, by the end of the novel, be

³¹ Available at: <<http://www.jendajournal.com/issue4/arnfred.html>>. Accessed: 7 June 2006.

seen as little more than a maternal emblem. Driver (1988:15) notes that a frontierswoman contains ‘potential masculinity’. Lucy’s homosexuality and her adoption of the phallus in her taking up of a masculine role represent her autonomy from men, but the rape and her pregnancy negate this autonomy.

Furthermore, while Lucy’s homosexuality is alluded to in the novel, any pleasurable sexual feelings she may experience are not:

[t]he independent, and let us not be afraid to say, clitoral, desires of the actively sexual women characters, silenced one after another by this novel, are routinely subordinated to the Law of the Father(s) for whom social stability – even in the bizarrely messianic mixing of blood in the gene pool of Lucy’s bastard child – depends on the appropriation of the womb and of its fruit. (Bethlehem 2002:23)

Horrell (2002:26) rightly views Lucy’s rape as the ‘inscription of guilt on a *gendered* body’ (emphasis in the original) and asserts that *Disgrace* ‘wrestles with the implications of culpability and the consequences of violent colonization and, without flinching, asks how white South Africa may be compelled to “remember”’ (2002:25). Horrell contends that women’s bodies, as ‘pages upon which the narrative of guilt may be written, should not remain unspoken – or uncritiqued’, hence the argument in this study. In these terms, Lucy’s raped and impregnated body becomes a physical reminder to white South Africans of the racial crimes perpetuated by the apartheid authorities in the past. It is the landscape upon which a political movement is enacted. Similar usage of the female body can be found in the poetry of Dennis Brutus. Brutus associates the female body with South Africa. This attitude is clearly expressed in the following poem, entitled, ‘Under Me’ (1973:31):

Under me
your living face endures
pools stare blindly
muddied by ageless misery:

descending to you
in a rage of tenderness
you bear me
patiently.

The title points to the sublimated position of Brutus's feminized country and the images in the poem are of outright violence and rape. Chidi Amuta (1989:180) asserts, 'Brutus is intensely aware that given the distortions of apartheid, a certain therapeutic violence is required to cleanse it of the scourge of injustice and oppression'. Perhaps Coetzee's novel too wants a therapeutic violence. Ogundipe-Leslie (1987:6) observes that '[m]uch African poetry concerns itself with the eroticism of the African Woman to the extent that it can be argued that many male writers conceive of women only as phallic receptacles'. And so it is with Lucy.

3.2 Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors*

Another post-colonial novel dealing with rape, Alan Duff's *Once Were Warriors* (1995), set in post-colonial New Zealand, also illustrates the denial of female sexuality and the dire effects of oppression. The book was adapted for the screen by Riwia Brown and this discussion includes brief comparisons between the film and the novel. Anneke Smelik (1999)³² points out that issues 'of representation and spectatorship are central to feminist film theory and criticism' just as they are in literary criticism. In the same reference, she states that '[c]inema is taken by feminists to be a cultural practice representing myths about women and femininity, as well as about men and masculinity'. In *Once Were Warriors*, Beth and Jake Heke have a tempestuous marriage and Beth is frequently beaten and raped. In the course of the novel, their eldest daughter, Grace, is raped and later commits suicide.

³² Available at: <http://www.let.uu.nl/womens_studies/anneke/filmtheory.html>. Accessed: 26 April 2005.

While Collen's novel may give a positive view of sex, and present rape as the perversion of that act, Duff's novel has no real positive view of it at all, as can be seen in the following paragraph:

Jake winking at her. Beth hoping it meant what she thought it did. Careful not to wink back because he didn't like the woman to be the instigator of that particular activity, nosiree he didn't. Sex was a man's choice first and foremost; in fact, a woman was careful she didn't show she enjoyed it too much or it made Jake wild, he'd start asking questions, or sulk, not touch her for another month. But she had her ways of reaching her objective without Jake knowing she'd reached such a height. (OWW:20)

The difference between the Heke's relationship and that of Sita and Dharma is stark. Beth's sexuality is seen by Jake to be a threat, as Sita's is to Rowan. In order for Jake to transform, he needs to accept Beth's, and all women's sexuality, equality and independence.

Another passage clearly demonstrates the level at which female sexuality is denied. *Jouissance*, as it was depicted in *The Rape of Sita* is almost entirely absent in Duff's depiction. Nig Heke, Beth and Jake's seventeen year old son, and his lover are having a discussion:

[y]ou have, you know, orgasms? Or-what? Orgasms. The hell are they? It, Tania. It's an it. So tell me. Well, it's coming – Don't be disgusting. I'm not. Ya are. And girls, women, don't come. Who told you that? I know. (OWW:154)

Nick treats his lover, Tania, well, but, in the end, she is so tangled in the violent hegemony surrounding her that she loses all respect for Nig once he has been unsuccessful in a gang fight. He asks her to examine his injured leg and she refuses: '[t]hat night Tania announced: I'm on the block tonight, boys. Slurring, with a sway on, and giving Nig Heke this terrible look as if he was ta blame her putting herself on

the block for all the fullas to fucker' (OWW:193). So Tania offers herself up sexually to the entire gang in a sad and distorted way of showing her independence from Nig.

Only once Beth has thrown Jake out of their house, and claimed her own independence, is Jake able to recognize that he relies on her. Her independence comes from the knowledge that she has her community and her traditions to support her.

Jake is simply left alone. At Grace's funeral, Beth listens to the traditional lamentation and dancing of the Maori people, she affirms:

(I feel as my ancestors must've felt.) Skin alive with power, stomach on fire with jolts of electric excitement. At the sight. This sight of what (she) they all must have been. Her mind no longer able to think – not in words. Filled that she was with this, this sense of ...STRENGTH. (Strong. I am made strong again.) (OWW:128)

In the novel, Beth and her children find out about Grace's rape in a suicide letter. In the letter Grace expresses her shame and feelings of guilt: '*Mum, I was raped. I feel so, I don't know, dirty or something. As if I did something to deserve it. I feel so bad, Mum, I just want to die*' (OWW:160; emphasis in the original). The film has Beth make the discovery by reading a notebook that Grace uses for creative writing. The film overstates Grace's love for literature and portrays her as a very gentle, submissive girl – a motherly storyteller – drawing very much from the tradition of the eternal feminine. Her characterization in the novel is less idealized and sentimental, though Grace is nevertheless 'a good girl' (OWW:24).

The novel is to a large degree concerned with the lack of voice of the main characters. Early in the novel, Beth Heke attributes the situation of subjugation and marginalization of the Maoris to the fact that they do not read: 'she began to think that it was because a bookless society didn't stand a show in this modern world'

(*OWW*:10). As in Collen's novel, language is fragmented to show the character's lack of voice, and therefore of power. In Duff's novel, each of the main characters speaks in a distinct way, but each has a broken or ineffective manner of communication. This reflects their situation as people who are born to their own land but who are nevertheless powerless in it; the characters speak in the language of their oppressors. Frantz Fanon (1967:41) notes that at 'the very moment when the native intellectual is anxiously trying to create a cultural work he fails to realize that he is utilizing techniques and language that are borrowed from the stranger in his country'. This struggle is illustrated in Duff's novel.

Having lost touch with their Maori roots (they are unable even to speak the language) Maoris as they are represented by Duff are forced to speak in the language of the *Pakeha*, the white colonists. The film shows Beth Heke able to speak at least enough Maori to be able to converse with her family, though this is not so in the novel. The novel therefore shows a more pronounced acknowledgement of the extent to which the Maoris have been divorced from their culture. In both versions, Jake has been completely divorced from his past. The following paragraph illustrates the point:

Oh, kia ora! Jake being greeted in Maori, the language of his physical appearance, his actual ethnic existence, and yet they could be speaking Chink-language for what it mattered. Course a man understood kia ora, who doesn't even the honkies do, but as for the rest. Made him uncomfortable if they spoke it to him, so Jake always replied in emphatic English, and sometimes a speaker might exclaim, Aee, the Pakeha took away our language and soon it'll be gone. (*OWW*:64)

The novel expresses a need for the characters to rediscover their ancestry and history. While the novel shows Beth Heke reclaiming her life and establishing herself as a respected person in the Maori community, the film ends directly after the discovery by Jake that Beth had been raped. While the filmic Grace is raped just once, and is

aware of the identity of her rapist – an older family friend – the Grace in the novel is raped repeatedly and she cannot identify her aggressor; this puts the focus not on an individual but on patriarchy. The novel shows a greater awareness of the violence of patriarchy. Importantly, Grace supposes the rapist to be her father, Jake. In fact, Jake is driven to reevaluate himself and his life by the feelings of guilt he has over his daughter's rape, as *he* is not even sure of his innocence and wonders if he did not rape his daughter while drunk. In the novel, the Law of the Father and the act of rape are so tied into one another that they overlap. The film has obscured this and concentrated more on the power of colonialism than on the power of patriarchy.

Jake is violent for similar reasons to Rowan Tarquin and the rapists from *Disgrace* and *Smacked*: hatred. Jake takes out his hatred not only on Beth but on many of the men he comes into contact with. This is his way of showcasing his masculinity, although it stems from his feelings of powerlessness and dispossession:

the crowd were pressed tight against each other with hardly room to fuckin breathe. And Jake at the front there'd built to his HATE state: a steady, mad burning inside of hatred – *hatred* – HATRED! and this funny, deep-down hurt. It boiled inim. It even had these regular sounds like the crash of thunder. (*OWW*:76)

But Jake's violence is, in the end, an ineffective way of dealing with his rage. He must deny this overwrought and misguided masculinity to find peace. Once abandoned by his family, Jake wanders as a vagrant until meeting a young boy with whom he begins to commune. The novel ends with Jake and this child viewing from a hiding place, the funeral of Jake's eldest son Nig, who dies during a gang war incident.

Nig has gone to the opposite extreme from his father and has joined a gang that lauds the Maori heritage, but only insofar as the violent side is concerned. Beth, on hearing friends of her husband's discussing their being warriors, makes the difference clear:

[s]he told them the Maori of old had a culture, and he had pride, and he had warriorhood, not this bullying, man-hitting-woman shet, you call that manhood? It's not manhood, and it sure as hell ain't Maori warriorhood. (OWW:28)

Despite trying to negate his father's legacy, Nig nevertheless adopts violence as a way of life. The novel shows that without sexual equality, it would be impossible to escape oppression, as evidenced in the following paragraph:

some wives screaming, or taking their beatings in pain-grunting silence. Or the sexual without feeling. Or hatingim for it. And thinking about life too: you know, how it was never gonna change, never gonna get better, it *can't* get better. Ya have to *want* it to get better first. You and your husband. Together. Maybe even your entire race. (OWW:82; emphases in the original)

In *Once Were Warriors*, the oppression of women is very much tied up with the concept of slavery. Beth Heke is described as being descended from people of higher standing than Jake, who is descended from slaves (OWW:102-103). Jake's dreams show the extent to which his slavery, violent nature and warped and overt masculinity are wrapped up in one another:

[m]e and all that blood and guts and stuff and people runnin around with arms half torn off and pulverized faces (usually done by me) and cocks and twats on one person, one minute a man, next a woman, and sometimes both, and me tryin to grab at em both at the same time and stuff em in my mouth – but I don't *think* like that in the *daytime*? (OWW:169; emphases in the original)

The unconscious desire that pervades Jake's dream is the Lacanian desire for the Other. For Lacan, the desire for the Other is the desire to *be* the Other, that is, the centre of the world, and, of course, this is ultimately unattainable. Selden (1985:141) explains:

[m]ales and females, in different ways, lack the wholeness of sexuality symbolized in the phallus. Social and cultural factors, such as gender stereotypes, may accentuate or diminish the impact of this unconscious “lack”, but the phallus, being a signifier of full presence and not a physical organ, remains a universal source of “castration complex”.

Jake’s desire to assimilate and destroy the other, symbolized by his stuffing people into his mouth, would fit Cixous’s idea of death: ‘[f]or one of the terms [of a binary opposition] to acquire meaning, [Cixous] claims, it must destroy the other. The “couple” cannot be left intact... under patriarchy, the male is always the victor’ (Moi 1985:105).

Jake’s dream also evokes the androgyne. As has already been shown, Collen posits that unity can be achieved through the symbol of androgyny. Freeman (1988:49) declares that androgyny ‘means the experience of wholeness or perfection symbolized by the fusion of male and female or masculine and feminine traits and attitudes within the individual and within the culture or society’. But further, it is an ontological goal which seeks to unite, not just men and women, but all binary opposites, such as the self and the other (Freeman 1988:51). This is certainly what Collen’s stream-of-consciousness depiction of sexual intercourse conveys: equality, unity and a harmonious synthesis of the sexes. Jake Heke’s dream is disturbing, to both him and the reader, precisely because he is unable to reconcile the sexes within himself. His conception of his self is so contaminated by the violence in his social setting that he finds himself polluted by it. This escalates when he suspects he may be guilty of his daughter’s rape. It is only once he meets the young boy, with whom he is conflated, and is therefore brought to a more natural state – not yet poisoned by the discourse of aggressive masculinity – that he is able to be at peace with himself. As touched on above, in viewing Nig’s funeral, Jake’s transformation begins:

[a]nd this fulla with this equally bedraggled boy, over in the pines, concealed, peeping out like thieves, or shamed children of slaves.

And tears trickled from him – Him. He who they used to say was toughest in all Two Lakes. Bad. Mean as. Jake Heke. Now just child weeping for another child. (*OWW*:198)

Jake beats Beth because in his society that is the usual, and permissible, way for a man to treat his wife. In the film, after one beating, a friend, Mavis, sees Grace's heavily bruised face, but so accustomed is she to this sort of violence that she is nonchalant about it. Asking why Jake beat Beth gets the response that it was because she couldn't keep her mouth shut. Similarly, while being violated, Grace is told by the rapist to 'keep her mouth shut'. These examples, of course, point to the silencing of women. After Mavis and Beth's conversation, the scene cuts to an image of dogs eating garbage. In this novel, as in *Disgrace*, dogs and people are conflated. The image is supported by the fact that many of the cast wear animal print and leather. And, as with *Disgrace's* Lucy, Beth, after being raped, is reduced to being a dog: 'his way of making up is sticking himself inside me – thrusting at me, like I'm some damn dog bitch down the street. Think he gets a buzz, a you know, a kick from doing it so soon after he's beat a woman up' (*OWW*:40). Similarly, just before the rape, Sita compares her body to a piece of meat and Rowan to a dog (153).³³

When Jake and the family are on their way to visit their incarcerated son, Jake stops at a tavern. The family waits in the car but Jake never comes out and the visit is abandoned. In the film, when Grace gets angry and insists to her mother that they see her brother, Beth replies that it is 'just a woman's lot, that's all. One day you'll

³³ For a discussion of the comparison between dogs and people in Coetzee's work, see Graham 2002.

understand'. This section is lent extra weight by the fact that, of course, through the rape, Grace does learn the full meaning of a woman's lot under patriarchy.

3.3 Anne Schuster's *Foolish Delusions*

Anne Schuster's recent novel, *Foolish Delusions* (2005), is described as 'a novel auto/biography'. It is included in this study to highlight the generic preoccupation with rape, silencing and counter-discourse. The novel, like *The Rape of Sita*, is preoccupied with textuality. Among the different types of text that appear in the novel are prose, poetry, newspaper clippings, medical records, newsletters and minutes. *Foolish Delusions*, like *The Rape of Sita*, also begins with a poem that sums up the novel's underlying thesis. The poem, included in the appendix of this study, says stories 'move in circles' and that there are 'stories inside stories/ and stories between stories' (FD:9). The similarities between this novel's conceptions of circular time and intertextuality and those in *The Rape of Sita* are manifest. In *Foolish Delusions*, two stories are interwoven. They are Anna Bertrand's researching in 2004 of her great-grandmother's life history, and her great-grandmother, Maria Jacoba Schultz's, story, set in 1894.

Maria Schultz lies incommunicado (here again is the image of the silenced woman) in Valkenberg Asylum and her side of the story is in the form of her thoughts. Anna reads Maria's asylum register and discovers that she was diagnosed as paralysed and demented (FD:41). Maria was institutionalized after her husband Trangott Schultz's death, for which she was found guilty. The cause of her insanity is recorded as being grief (FD:41), but what caused her grief is not mentioned. As Maria's medical records

are missing, Anna examines those of a patient who lived in the asylum at the same time as Maria, Dorothy Feather. While Maria is mute and paralysed, Dorothy is excitable and talks incessantly. She was put in the asylum by her father, and the indications of her insanity are given as being her emaciated appearance and ‘erotic hallucinations’ (*FD:60*).

As the story unfolds, it becomes apparent that Maria was having an affair with Rebecca – a woman Maria meets through their mutual involvement with the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. Anna too, like Sita, is involved in the fight for women’s rights; she works as a researcher in gender issues (*FD:27*). Rebecca is strangled and it is suspected that Trangott killed her. But, in fact, the murderer of Rebecca and Trangott was James Feather, Dorothy’s father. He is known as ‘The Strangler’³⁴ and has killed a number of women, mainly prostitutes. Maria removes the knife from Trangott’s back and is thus, as she is discovered holding the murder weapon, assumed to be the killer. She recalls neither killing him, nor seeing him killed.

Feather had raped his daughters and, to silence them, had had them institutionalized. Dorothy’s ‘foolish delusions’ about her father raping her were construed by the authorities to be false (*FD:190*), though they were, in fact, not. There are also hints that she witnessed her father raping and murdering a local prostitute, Emily Booth, who is later found washed up on the beach. Her ramblings include phrases such as the following: ‘...water...she’s gone...too much water...rocks ...blood on the rocks...’ (*FD:197*). Her mutterings also evince her rape and her father’s warnings to her to be silent about them: ‘...cloth...wipe...torn...bleeding ...wash cloth...died...good

³⁴ It is interesting to note the method of murder here, as there are similarities between strangulation and beheading. As discussed in Section 2.2 of this study, according to Doniger (1995), beheading is a symbol for the silencing of women.

girl...clean...quiet ...can't tell...lock up...bad...' (*FD:68*). The good girl/bad girl dichotomy is clear here, as is the 'death' of the self that accompanies rape and the need to try and wash oneself of the attendant shame. Anna theorises that Trangott had gone to confront Rebecca about her relationship with his wife and had witnessed Feather killing her. Feather had then killed him. Maria's grief, then, is grief over the death of her lover.

Once again, punishment for the crime of rape is delayed and comes about in another way. Like Sita's feelings of vindication for her rape arising from resistance to another oppression, the imprisonment for a murderer, Ralph Sebastian, living in Anna's time is viewed as vindication for James Feather's murders and rapes. In talking to the lawyer for the rape victim, Anna says, 'this might sound strange – I think that today, in court, you helped put [Feather] away' (*FD:201*). She experiences 'a strange sense, as they took [Sebastian] away, that something more than just this case was over, that something bigger and older had finally been settled' (*FD:196*). She realizes that she is connected with her great-grandmother. She writes to Maria: '[y]ou suddenly seem very real to me, as if you were breathing beside me, inside me. Perhaps these letters I write to you are an umbilical cord, connecting me to you' (*FD:41*). They are connected through the writing. She and her female ancestors are linked: '[b]link your eyes and see me, blink your eyes and see my mother, blink your eyes and see her mother' (*FD:50*).

Feather, like Sebastian, hates females; he has 'a reputation for pestering young women' (*FD:69*). In addition, Feather is involved in a hospital which tests prostitutes for sexually-transmitted diseases. Maria is sent by the Women's Union to confront

Feather about complaints lodged against him by some of the patients, who say that Feather is unnecessarily rough during the examinations and that the instruments he uses cause them pain. He responds, “Well, it should hurt. Make them think twice next time they try to spread their filth among decent people” (FD:155). The race of the victims is irrelevant: Emily Booth was ‘a proper European lady’, whereas the previous victim had been a ‘Hottentot meid’³⁵ (FD:100; emphasis in the original). This highlights the universality of women victimized by gender-crimes. Anna imagines the nurses prompting Dorothy and the other patients to be ‘hard-working and clean and docile’ (FD:62). This recalls Foucault’s notion of docile bodies.

Time, in *Foolish Delusions*, also has an important part to play:

[i]n Father’s house I could hear the clocks ticking. The tall grandfather clock in the hall, the small silver one on the dresser in the dining room, and the grandmother clock in Father’s study. If you stood quite still in the passage, in the dead centre of the house, all you could hear were clocks, ticking and chiming. (FD:65)

The description given of her father brings Kronos to mind: ‘an old man. Tall and thin, his hair already grey at the sides’ (FD:64). This place of linear time is oppressive and, as her mother is dead, the female dimension is missing. In contrast, her grandmother’s house is full of the noises of happy domesticity. The only clock at Ouma’s house moves its hands irregularly and no ticking can be heard. Feminine time is viewed as being less oppressive and as being circular in form; the chapters are called ‘circles’. Circular time is also connected with the idea of utopia, as the concept of ‘eutopia’ makes explicit: that utopias exist in a realm outside of time and without place (Rijsdijk 1998).³⁶

³⁵ ‘Hottentot meid’ – coloured servant (derogatory)

³⁶ Available at: <<http://www.uwc.ac.za/arts/english/interaction/97ir.htm>>. Accessed: 2 July 2005.

Time is also alluded to in the following section, in relation to Maria's sudden

anamnesis:

I fold my story around myself. I fold my story to protect what I had, what I lost, as a caterpillar binds a cocoon around itself, appearing to be dead. But it waits, waits till the time comes for it to transform itself – for the story to unfold. (FD:98).

Here again is the theme of transformation. The cocoon is connected with silk and therefore of the weaving of textiles. The motif of the connection, introduced first in Section 2.1 of this study, between writing, remembering and weaving is used, as in the following, which also mentions the pattern that Eliot was so fascinated by: 'to give our stories shape, we need to look for the patterns, the threads that run through them' (FD:156). The image of the cocoon also appears in Collen's poem, 'Time', where it used to show that men and women are cocooned in time.

Connected with the idea of time is that of memory, and of re-remembering as a kind of reversal of women's castration. In the chapter entitled 'Re-remembering' (FD:169-190), Anna goes down to the beach, the site of the murder of Isobel by Sebastian, and is attacked by a man, possibly Sebastian himself. At first, she is 'paralysed by fear. A familiar feeling of inertia' (FD:174) and passivity but, as in Sita's case, she is quickly empowered by anger: '[s]uddenly I seem to connect with myself, find my energy. This time I find my angry shout. Furiously, I push him off' (FD:175). The 'energy'; she finds is analogous with *shakti*, the Hindu feminine power. Like Sita, her anger and aggression, and her voice, save her.

When next witnessing the murder case she notices that Sebastian smells the same as the man who had attacked her. She thinks it may be him but considers that '[m]aybe all rapists smell the same' (FD:180). Maria also associates James Feather with a smell

(*FD*:189). As discussed in Section 3, Sita too had recognized the smell, washed herself clean of the ‘smell of fear. The smell of slavery. The smell of the fear of rape’ (112). This is the same smell Iqbal detects during Véronique’s court case (166). Grace, from *Once Were Warriors*, also notices the smell of her rape: ‘that smell stronger. And kind of knowing what it was...that it was somehow self-familiar, something sexual, an off-giving, except this sensed as somehow corrupted’ (*OWW*:91). Sita and Grace smell the oppressed, Anna the oppressor.

Sebastian had thrown Isobel into the sea, although his defence is that she was about to jump and he had tried to save her. This is unlikely given his insistence that ‘[s]y was net ‘*n hoer*’ and that all women are just ‘*hoere*’ en ‘*vuilgoed*’ (*FD*:179; emphases in the original).³⁷ His use of the word ‘vuilgoed’ to describe the sex-workers is similar to Feather’s use of the word ‘filth’. These words are indicative of his misogyny and they evoke the nurses prompting of the asylum inmates to be ‘clean’. The implication is that women, especially those that deviate from ‘traditional’ femininity, are impure and sullied. The sea image also recurs in this novel, as it does in relation to Sita, as an image of forgetting.³⁸ Dorothy tried to kill herself, to forget the harms perpetrated against her and others by her father, by jumping into the ocean (*FD*:60).

Anna wonders if Rebecca had been murdered in similar circumstances to Isobel, by a woman-hating man on the beach. Maria, in the next section of the book, confirms that Rebecca’s body had been found on the sand by the sea. Maria’s memory and the sea are connected, as they are for Sita. She hears the roaring of the sea in her mind and

³⁷ ‘Sy was net a hoer’ – she was just a whore

‘hoere’ – whores

‘vuilgoed’ – filth

³⁸ *Disgrace*’s David also uses the image (*Dis*:192).

finds that a ‘memory breaks through – like the cry of a gull, defiant against the dark. A memory of the day my voice died, the morning Neville came to the hotel to tell me that Rebecca’s body had been found on Queen’s Beach’ (*FD*:182). So Maria’s recollection of the day she was ‘castrated’ occurs and Anna finds her voice – her ‘angry shout’ – in this chapter about re-remembering. Maria only begins to remember her past once she is close to death. She opines ‘[o]nly now am I starting to remember, starting to allow myself to think back, only now. Perhaps it is because I am ready to die. Or perhaps I am ready to die because I am starting to remember’ (*FD*:23).

Another motif that this novel has in common with Collen’s, is of the past being buried. Anna writes: ‘[w]riting about my life has been like digging through a layer of hard crust. I plunge with the blunt edge of my memory, feeling it clang on the hard surface. As I keep digging and scraping, excavating my hidden self, I break through in places, into the moist soil, and reach the fertile compost of my life’ (*FD*:157). Part of Anna’s sections of the novel take the form of lessons in creative writing that come from a book called *Writing the Stories of Your Life* that Anna finds in the Women’s Resource Centre. It is the lessons in this book that prompt her to research her ancestor’s life and by writing the novel, a record of Maria’s story is produced. This guide states:

[a]utobiography is more than a record of events from past to present. In writing autobiography as “moments of being”, we make a vertical plunge – down into the roots of our individual being, and bring into consciousness the experiences, the moments, that have shaped us.
(*FD*:43)

This brings to mind the need to excavate the alternate history below that which appears in patriarchal discourse. Deconstruction deals, after all, with multiple layers (Lynn 1989:79). Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément avow that

it has become rather urgent to question this solidarity between logocentrism and phallogocentrism – bringing to light the fate dealt to women, her *burial* – to threaten the stability of the masculine structure that passed itself off as eternal-natural, by conjuring up from femininity the reflections and hypotheses that are necessarily ruinous for the stronghold still in possession of authority. (1986:65; my emphasis)

‘Conventional’ heterosexuality is also dismantled in this novel. Both Maria and Anna are homosexual, and Rebecca, Maria’s lover, frequently visits her prostitute friends dressed as a man: ‘Rebecca was intrigued and excited at the idea of wearing men’s clothes – at the freedom this gave a woman in a world that belonged to men’ (FD:142). This is the envy mentioned at the end of Section 2.4, not penis envy, but envy of male autonomy.

As part of the novel’s interest in intertextuality, fiction and fact are combined. Some of Schuster’s characters, such as Dorothy Feather and the prostitute Isobel, are based on real people. Similarly, many of the patient reports, newspaper clippings and quotations are real (FD:202-203). Other characters, such as Rebecca and Trangott, are inventions of the author’s mind and their plot details are fictional. While the novel is not written in a magical realist style, it nevertheless mixes truth and fiction. Like Iqbal’s insistence that the story he has to tell is ‘more true’, Schuster’s novel has to do with the relativity of truth, and how truth changes through time and depending upon whose version of the story is being given. Circle Four begins with the following quotation from Toni Morrison, quoted by Tristine Rainer in *Your Life as a Story*: ‘making things up and fact are two different things, but you may need some of both to get to the truth’ (FD:85). And *Foolish Delusions* certainly crosses thresholds, like those mentioned in the following paragraph on magical realism:

[o]ne of the typical elements of magical realism is, in fact, the constant crossing of thresholds and frontiers: from the conscious to the

unconscious, from wakefulness to dream, from the familiar to the *unheimlich*, from the explicable to the inexplicable, from the natural to the miraculous, from the rational to the irrational, and from normality to madness. (Oliva 1999:177)

This paragraph applies to both *Foolish Delusions* and *The Rape of Sita*. And, to the list of types of border-crossing that can be done, could be added the one done by Collen's novel from separate and unequal sexes to uncensored androgyny. Through Iqbal's androgyny can come the story of Sita's rape, the type of story that has in the past been silenced. Chapter or 'Circle' One of *Foolish Delusions* begins with a quotation by Susan Griffiths from *A Chorus of Stones*, and it sums up the overriding mood of both Schuster and Collen's novels:

[p]erhaps we are like stones; our own history
and the history of the world embedded in us,
we hold a story deep within and cannot weep
until that history is sung. (FD:13; emphasis in the original)

Chapter 4

Conclusion

This brief conclusion considers the main argument in relation to the issues explored and insights gained in the main body of the argument. This dissertation has shown how Collen's story transfigures the mythology of rape and transgresses the master narrative of the male hegemonic centre. Doorga, at least, had known that Sita, as representative of all women, was capable of this when she said to her four-year-old daughter, '[y]ou will make history move forwards' (61). This same idea has been used by Collen and Ragini Kistnasamy in their promotion of revolution (Collen & Kistnasamy 2002).¹ In this discussion they remark about one of the more successful uprisings of Lalit,² that it was 'a day that was born of the previous days, and of the years before'. It is this spirit of rebellion Sita hopes her daughter will, in turn, carry forward. It has been mentioned that 'Fiya' sounds like 'fire' and Frye (1971:152) calls fire 'a purifying symbol', as already alluded to. It is useful to note that 'among members of the Indo-Caribbean community, Sita is often called *shakti*' (Murphy & Sippy 2000).³ So Collen posits counter-discourse and the recovery of the female voice as a way forward for *all* women.

Sita states outright on whose behalf she is writing in her letter to God: '[f]or women, I ask. I petition. I write. For all the daughters of the earth' (188). In *The Rape of Sita*, the author subverts some of the discourses that give rise to the widespread oppression of, and subsequent violence enacted upon, women. Collen highlights the need for men and women to come together to oppose patriarchal hegemony and sees the need for transformation.

She rejects the idea that death is the natural corollary of rape and advocates, instead,

¹ Available at: <<http://www.lalitmauritius.com/diegochagossian.htm>>. Accessed: 20 September 2004.

² The activism group of which Collen is a member.

³ Available at: <<http://free.freespeech.org/manushi/117/sita.html>>. Accessed: 20 September 2003.

the more effective transgression made possible by the reclamation of the previously silenced voice through the written text. Incidentally, Frye would disagree. He writes, literature ‘does everything that can be done for people except transform them’ (1991:16). He believes that only spiritual mythology, such as that from the Bible can be ‘myths to live by’ (1991:17) and says that their ‘transforming power is sometimes called kerygma or proclamation’ (1991:18). The argument in this dissertation, however, is that this is precisely why Collen has made use of current Hindu religious figures as well as figures from mythology which have now become more literary than religious, such as Tiresias. She is relying on their spiritual dimension for transformation.

The novel exposes the cant which exists within patriarchal discourse and which creates the mythology defining women as the silent, passive subjects of men. *The Rape of Sita* reaches beyond the oppression of women to encompass the oppression of all people, in all cultures. The hope lies in the idea that this re-created text will encourage further discourses that recover the voice of the ‘othered’ subject. At the end of the novel, Iqbal imagines a utopian vision of a coming together of the sexes in which tyrannical power relations will have come to an end:

[s]uch are the hopes of Iqbal for another story. Another history. In the future.

Maybe Sita will write that one down. Who knows? And leave it as inheritance to Fiya. To balance all she inherited from Doorga. (197)

Barthes (1977:146) defines a text as,

not a line of words releasing a single “theological” meaning ... but a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centres of culture.

Feminist and post-colonial critics have reread the canon, and have demonstrated that it 'is produced by the intersection of a number of readings and reading assumptions legitimized in the privileging hierarchy of a "patriarchal" or "metropolitan" concept of "literature"' (Ashcroft *et al.* 1989:176).

This dissertation takes as its validation a need, especially in South Africa at this time, to re-evaluate dominant discourse. In a letter to the president, published in a local newspaper, Sisonke Msimang (2004:36) – gender advisor for the UNAids regional support team, but writing in her personal capacity – after lamenting the lack of work done to bring about an end to gender-based violence, states the following: '[w]ithout a serious, sustained and thoughtful critique of the ways in which our cultures permit us to be violated, women will continue to be harassed on the streets and raped in their homes'. It is this call that this thesis hopes to go a small way in answering, by examining those patriarchal myths which Lindsey Collen has alluded to in *The Rape of Sita* and examining how a number of contemporary authors have depicted rape in their narratives.

As has been discussed in the body of this dissertation, the primary critical approach used here is feminism. However, given Collen's (and Iqbal's) derision for metanarratives and her (and his) parallel emphasis on the bounty to be gained by employing the 'bunch of grapes' motif, this study borrows from a quite extensive range of theorists, from Margaret Atwood and Angela Carter to Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault. As Collen has borrowed from a large range of sources, so too does this dissertation. In addition, as mentioned in Section 2.2 of this study, Natrass

(1995)⁴ stressed the need for South African feminism to embrace the best and most useful facets of French, Anglo and American feminisms. This is what this study has tried to do, as well as exploiting and employing various facets of a number of theorists. So, for example, in this study, Lacanian analysis is limited to his ideas of the real, imaginary and symbolic and the phallic Other while other facets of his work and ideas are largely ignored. In a similar vein, this argument has merged a number of different definitions of myth, making use of the theories of, amongst others, Frye, Warner, Graves and Barthes.

There are a number of different readings that could be done of *The Rape of Sita*, some of which have been mentioned in the preceding chapters.⁵ This study has looked at the underlying socio-political ideology that informs the novel, but not solely. Marxism, according to, for example, Eagleton or Benjamin, or in its African form, according to Amuta, would be helpful in explicating the economic structure underlying the novel and its context, although Marxism does not usually deal with magical realism. It was mentioned in Chapter 1 that deconstruction does not suit all feminist needs, but a more purely deconstructive reading might be done of *The Rape of Sita*. As quoted in Section 2.3, Okpewho (1983:69) noted the ‘emphasis’ on ‘fanciful play’ in myth. Deconstruction, too, is interested in fanciful play and so would make a good study, especially given its interest in the multiple layers behind a text and its demythologizing tendency. As a final example, a more sustained Lacanian psychoanalysis than is used in this study, especially the feminist psychoanalysis used by the likes of Weedon or Kristeva, would be useful.

⁴ Available at: <<http://www.uwc.ac.za/arts/english/interaction/94an.htm>>. Accessed: 17 July 2006.

⁵ Gray’s study of *The Rape of Sita*, for example, uses the theories of Sartre as a basis.

This dissertation does not pretend to be a comprehensive study of rape literature, but is limited to an examination of *The Rape of Sita*. Discussions about Hindu and Classical myths, other intertexts and the three novels that make up Chapter 3 are intended to serve to elucidate the primary text under examination. Finally, this thesis is literary criticism, rather than a sociological study of rape. While it hopes to engender a better understanding of rape, its causes and effects, it does so from research of rape as a literary motif and thus is no comprehensive investigation into statistics and the like.

As mentioned earlier, Collen (*Triplopia* 2005)⁶ has explained that the point of *The Rape of Sita* was the mediation provided in the figure of Iqbal. The philosophy behind this mediation can be represented by the motif of androgyny, that is, the metaphysical non-dualistic, non-oppressive, non-violent coming together of the feminine and masculine, both within an individual and within society. This desire for equality has arisen out of a deep-seated dissatisfaction with current patriarchal ideology which harms, in the end, men *and* women.

⁶ Available at: <<http://www.triplopia.org/inside.cfm/ct/377>>. Accessed: 29 December 2005.

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Appendix

I am Time

Ever being born

Being thus incessantly born

Torn from the world's womb

Being ever born

Born out of the eternal

The Universal

Yoni.

Om.

I am Time

Who knows no good nor bad

Nor right from wrong

I move forward

Ever forward,

Onward, upward, downward,

Never backward.

Om.

I am time

I allow high, wide, and long

To be;

Without me

Where would they be?

And for that matter

Without me

Where would you be?

You oh human,

You plural,

I put form in you

And

You put form in me.

You are the meaning.

Watch out what you do

Watch out what you don't do.

You oh human.

For you plural

For you

There is past, there is present, there is future.

For you

There is better or worse.

For you, woman,

For you, man,

Cocooned in time,

Are poised in eternal dilemma.

*What action for you
Would be moral
Would be true
Would be good
Would be right?
What action for you
Would be wrong,
Lies, bad,
Immoral?
Know, oh know,
See, yes see,
Feel, now feel,
Hear and speak,
Be,
Always be aware
Of each dilemma
And thus act,
Or refrain from acting,
In knowing
There exists
Just there
A dilemma.
Will this act
Make history progress
Or allow us
To slip back
Into the mud of the past?
Which act?
Which omission?
Om.
I am time,
I am Kali.
Creator and Destroyer.
For I,
I being time
Move on.
I am time.
I do not stop.*

Time

(Collen 2001:1-3; emphasis in the original)

Harlem

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore –
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over –
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

(Hughes 1996:1324; emphasis in the original)

A Travelling Jewish Theatre, Coming from a Great Distance

Stories move in circles.
They don't move in straight lines.
So it helps if you listen in circles.
There are stories inside stories
and stories between stories,
and finding your way through them
is as easy and as hard
as finding your way home.
And part of the finding
is the getting lost. And when you're lost,
you start to look around
and to listen.

(Corey Fischer, Albert Greenberg and Naomi Newman. In *FD*:9)