

Travelling the "World Round as Your Navel": Subjectivity in Nadine Gordimer's "Burger's Daughter"

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A SINGLE PHRASE by Claude Lévi-Strauss prefaces Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*. Like a three-way ideological signpost, the epigraph identifies the textual territory to be crossed by the reader/traveller, for the statement "I am the place in which something has occurred" names and correlates the three major terms that comprise the female protagonist's search for identity: self, place, and history. As the epigraph indicates, Rosa Burger, daughter of Afrikaner communist revolutionary Lionel Burger, travels from South Africa to France and back again in her exploration of selfhood, geography, and politics. She discovers that, unlike the Cartesian, ahistorical "I," her subjectivity is a relational one, shaped by time, place, and politics, and akin to the "I" of the epigraph. She is a "place" in which something has occurred and, like the "I" of the epigraph that "speaks" the processes of its creation, a speaker of this text, a place from which subjectivity is examined and constructed.

Rosa travels "the world round as your navel" (192) to understand her body's paradoxical relationship to discourse, to explore the subject/other division, and to examine the conflict between the identity one claims and the subject position to which one is relegated (Meese 52). Between the polarities of personal claim and political relegation there exists much territory for Rosa to explore. She is a place where much has occurred; she is shaped by South Africa's numerous political factions and situated in the multiple intersections of race, gender, and class. As a multiple-positioned subject, Rosa dismantles the concept of a Cartesian, stable subject whose "universality" is a cover for what Gayatri Spivak calls the white straight Christian man of property. By

refashioning Foucault's theories, critics such as Elizabeth Grosz have argued against the privilege of this ossified universality and claimed that subjectivity is a fluid cultural text, a site where political practices inscribe their ideologies. But while subjectivity is a composite of competing discourses, it is not merely a surface text, not merely a *tabula rasa* upon which political discourses inscribe their agendas. For Grosz, the body is understood as a "surface of social inscription *and* as the locus of lived experience" and as an interface between interior and exterior experiences of reality (188; emphasis added). This locus of lived experience creates a sense of unique self and a personal speaking voice which enables the subject not only to mimic but also to revise dominant discourses. Which is not to imply that the subject can speak in an essential, authentic voice; rather, the subject speaks in a partial, fragmented voice, which is a creation of personal discourses as well as political ones. According to her, the very complexity of social discursive processes enables the subject to inhabit contradiction, to be at once a text of culture and a culturally textualizing agent, to be both a personal and a political subject. In other words, freed from the fixity of absolute essences, the concept of the discursive subject enables resistance by asserting the subject's textual mobility through oppositional discourses, thereby dismantling the authority of dominant discourses and demonstrating that subjectivity is not a thing but a shifting process in time, space, and ideology.

Rosa's subjectivity as a shifting process is represented by her mobility through space, by her circular journey from centre to margin, from political to personal realms. Rosa only "becomes" a revolutionary subject at the end of her journey, however, when she realizes her potential as both a cultural product and a personal agent. Her journey is an arduous one, for she must establish her textual flexibility not only between the oppositions of personal and political discourses, but also between the complex network of political discourses which construct her. As an African woman she must explore race and gender; she must travel the world "round as a navel" to learn to be at "home" in her body as a private woman and to find her "home" as a political subject in South Africa. In doing so, she disrupts Western societies'

configurations of women's "places." Women traditionally have been relegated to silence, the private sphere, and their bodies; men, on the other hand, have had the privilege of inhabiting the public realm, wielding political power, and claiming absolute right to reason and the mind. These polarities are challenged and their intersections explored when Rosa takes on the traditional male quest: it is she who becomes the traveller-hero, goes abroad, enjoys sexual trysts, tells stories, and explores the public world. She reclaims her body and her desire, steps out of the spaces of silence, and finds her voice. However, she redefines the parameters of her "place" not only in terms of gender but of race as well, for the same dividing line that can be drawn in Western ideology between men and women can also be drawn between whites and blacks.¹ Rosa must learn where and how to cross this "line," how to empower herself as a woman in a male-dominated society, but also how to relinquish her privilege as an Afrikaner in South Africa's white supremacist society. To revise Gordimer's citation of Mongane Serote in "Living in the Interregnum"—"blacks must learn to talk; whites must learn to listen" (267)—Rosa must learn to talk as a woman but also to listen as a white person. Unlike her father, she cannot assume her role, much less her leadership, in the revolution against apartheid. The Black Consciousness Movement, which espoused black leadership and unity in contrast to the ANC's cry for multiracialism, changed the politics of South African revolution in the middle and late 1970s, as was signalled by the Soweto Uprising in 1976. As Daphne Read points out, Rosa's role in the revolution when she returns to South Africa is secondary, for, as a physiotherapist, Rosa provides "palliative" care for the survivors of the Uprising in contrast to the primary, "healing" care her father provided as both doctor and revolutionary (4).

By moving through the discursive practices of race, gender, class, and personhood, then, Rosa exposes the highly textualized nature of subjectivity and dismantles the binary oppositions used by hegemonic discourses to legitimize their currency. As a woman, she is "colonized" by her father's and the National Party's patriarchal discourses; as an Afrikaner, she is part of the privileged, colonizing order; as Burger's daughter, she is

created by her family's communist ideology; and as an individual, she is shaped by her own decision-making processes. Although Rosa blurs the boundaries between colonizer/colonized, self/other, private/public, however, she must constantly be on guard against discursive dominance: she must resist the impetus of each discursive position to overwhelm her subjectivity by "fixing" its own dominance and naturalizing its ideology. In the first section of the novel, Rosa is a static, public subject overpowered by Lionel Burger's communism and the National Party's white supremacist politics. In the second section, she reacts against this political determinism, travels to France, and reconstructs herself as a private, sensual woman. This ahistorical subject position quickly becomes hegemonic, however, and Rosa must "move" once again. Only in the third section, upon her return to South Africa, does she learn mobility by combining her engendered and her racial, her personal and her political, experiences. No one subject position is sufficient to define her subjectivity, but each is important to the processes that form the whole. In this paper, I argue that Rosa's journey is important for its depiction of textual flux itself, for its figurative representation of the unstable, fluid nature of her subjectivity. For, indeed, Rosa's subjectivity is much like her journey: it is a process in time and contradiction, a constant revision by and revising of sociopolitical discourses; it is a movement through polarities and heterogeneity, an inability to be one thing without the other. In her role as traveller, Rosa enacts the performative, conflictual nature of identity formation and learns the value of movement itself; she learns that there must be, to use the words of Julia Kristeva, a "constant alternation between time and its 'truth,' identity and its loss, history and that which produces it . . . An impossible dialectic of two terms, a permanent alternation: never one without the other" ("About Chinese Women" 156).

As a young girl, conscripted by her father's ideology, Rosa is a static subject who has not yet learned to travel. She is an absolutely political subject who has no private life, whose locus of lived experience is consumed by dominant discourses: her childhood is not defined by scraped knees and church outings, but by the Sharpeville massacre and prison visits. Even her most inti-

mate of bodily experiences, her menarche, defines itself by and within a political crisis. Her entrance into menstruation takes place "in place, outside the prison" where her mother has been imprisoned. As she puts it,

the internal landscape of my mysterious body turns me inside out, so that in that public place on that public occasion . . . I am within that monthly crisis of destruction, the purging, tearing, draining of my own structure. (15-16)

Rosa cannot keep intact any notion of personal interiority or private space and thereby loses access to her body and her agency. Her first act of menstruation, an experience normally constructing personal history and a shift into biological womanhood, is overshadowed by the social co-ordinates of the moment. Not only is her mother's body incarcerated, Rosa's body is made public territory. She is transformed into a place where South African politics are mapped and can be traced.² As Elizabeth Meese argues, Rosa's body is not her own but acts as a figure for the South African landscape insofar as the "purging, tearing, draining" of her menstruation signals the destructive machinery of apartheid (76).³

The Burger mother-daughter bond is physically interrupted by the prison walls; however, the disruption of Rosa's domestic sphere and female lineage is not only a result of Afrikaner colonizing strategies, but her family's communist ideals as well. Lionel and Cathy Burger may be committed to overthrowing apartheid's oppressive regime, but in their single-minded dedication to their anti-individualist ideology, they co-opt their daughter's private life. As a result, Rosa is "prostituted" for, or exploited by, a revolutionary cause that reinforces the very effacement of personal liberty that it opposes. When the communist revolutionary Noel de Witt, a man with whom Rosa is secretly in love, is imprisoned, she is made to pose as his "fiancee" to gain visiting privileges. "[C]ontracted" by her parents, who are the "guarantor(s)" of her performance (67), she dutifully enacts an ironic version of an arranged (political) marriage. She herself is guaranteed nothing. There is no place for Rosa's desire in her father's political economy. In this symbolic order, her father's word is law and Rosa has no word, no voice; she has no access to

language except through another's ideology.¹ Defined by her absence within language, she is subsumed by the competing discourses of the symbolic order, and her desire is either repressed or ignored for the public good.

As a subject constituted by her father's and the National Party's laws, Rosa's sexuality is marginalized. To know and fulfil her own desires, she must remove herself to other rooms, houses, and countries. She first begins to reclaim her body at her father's trial: she enacts a counter-discursive rebellion against the Law of the Father in a court of law where her father is sentenced to life imprisonment. Ironically, she enacts her resistance at a moment when the dominant discourse asserts itself most absolutely. Discourse is not a "thing," but a shifting formation full of gaps, holes, and contradictions. Thus when Lionel's private life is conscripted, Rosa asserts her claim to her own. She reacts against the National Party's dominance and her father's fate by forming a sexual liaison with Conrad, a white student whom she meets at the trial. In Conrad's cottage, which is "let without official tenure at an address that no longer existed" (21), she attempts to live "outside" the bureaucracy of city planning and to evade dominant discursive jurisdiction and "sentencing." In this "non-existent" place, Rosa first begins to know herself as a speaking subject. Conrad says to her, "I have the impression you've grown up entirely through other people. What they *told* you was appropriate to feel and do. How did you begin to know yourself?" (46; emphasis added). The "telling" that directs Rosa's inner and outer life is not solely made up of Lionel's words or apartheid's sentences, however, and Conrad speaks more truthfully than he can ever be aware of. Kristeva argues in "Semiotics: A Critical Science" that social practices (economics, mores, art) are signifying practices modelled on the laws of language, and, consequently, structured like language (75). She observes that the "models elaborated by semiotics, like those of the exact sciences, are representations and, as such, are produced within spatio-temporal coordinates" (77). In other words, Rosa is spoken by the varied "languages" of apartheid, revolution, communism, patriarchy, race, class division, home, and geography. She hopes to evade public claims on her body and to revise her private life;

but ironically she can only do so by identifying the multiple practices that have shaped the boundaries of her life. Only then, by recognizing herself as the product of oppositional and often confusing discourses, can she begin to locate her ability to signify and change these discourses.

In Conrad's cottage, Rosa begins first to enter into the semiotic realm where rebellion is possible. In this place, she learns a new language that, like Kristeva's semiotic discourse, is disruptive and hearkens back to the pre-Oedipal realm. In the cottage that is nowhere, Rosa reconfigures the politics of her private life by re-creating the co-ordinates of her body's history and place. When she inhabits an "original" space (her home) for a "second" time, she challenges the normative constructions of her identity and the paternal transfiguration of her desire into a status of lack. In the cottage, where rooms are sunken in foliage like a "hidden pool" (21), Rosa's desire experiences a sea-change and acts as a catalyst for personal transformation. Her friendship with Conrad may begin as a sexual tryst, but they soon stop making love, "aware that it had become incest" (70). Enabled by her unorthodox sexual/familial relationship with Conrad, she explores the socialization of her body through her varied relationships to men: to lover, to brother, to father. When her lover doubles as her surrogate sibling and the cottage becomes as "safe and cosy as a child's playhouse," Lionel's home and ideology are displaced as static focal points in the creation of her subjectivity (21). In this place like a semiotic pool, Rosa learns to reclaim her subjectivity and her body by going back to the "beginning" and exposing the hegemonic discourses that inscribed her "origins" and her childhood.

Through his constant repetition of "that house" as a phrase of estrangement (51), Conrad "frames" Rosa's home in his own words and reveals Lionel's ideology to be a discursive construct. Although he defamiliarizes the "commonplace" assumptions of her childhood, Conrad only replaces one male discourse with another, for he articulates yet another "original" space where subjectivity can be safely essential and ahistorical.⁵ But there is no safety in his navel-gazing version of reality: his own petty brand of humanism, with his self-indulgent emphasis on sex and

death, takes him on a journey in a ship destined for failure, since his ship is built and landlocked in an enclosed yard (49). He may travel the world, but he is paralysed by his ideological stasis and his complete identification with one extreme subject positioning. That he drowns counterpoints the death of Rosa's biological brother Tony, who drowns in the pool of their childhood home. Both "brothers" are characterized by their absolute adherence to either public or private worlds: Conrad adheres to an ideology that privileges his own desires and domestic world. He tells Rosa of his adolescent Freudian obsession his mother's body—an obsession that translates into his present-day disregard for a political reality outside himself. Rosa's younger brother, on the other hand, is co-opted by his father's privileging of political reality. It seems ironically appropriate that Tony drowns, for it is Lionel who has taught him to swim. Neither of the brothers' orientations is a viable possibility, and the text enacts the dangers of positing a politics of exclusion in the formation of subjectivity: to situate the self *either* outside of time *or* inside the private body is literally to step outside of life, to lose time and the body.

Unlike her male siblings, Rosa moves through rather than stays within extreme positionalities and is thus able to predicate her self-knowledge upon her body and the discourses it inhabits. When Conrad calls into question the foundations of her childhood and very appropriately cuts the hair from her face and nape, she still has not learned to see. She may hold "up almost aggressively a jagged piece of mirror to see what he was taking off her nape hair" (51), but because her psychological *coiffeur* is male and enacts a male revising of her sexual body, she needs to travel so that she may learn where home is (186), to journey so that she may find a new female aesthetic. In France, she is "made over" by Katya Bagnelli, Lionel's ex-wife, a woman vitally aware of herself. In this female community, Rosa is re-invented as a "girl, a creature whose sense of existence would be in her nose buried in flowers, peach juice running down her chin, face tended at mirrors, mind dreamily diverted, body seeking pleasure" (229-30). She becomes a woman who is more interested in peaches than in prisons; the mirror she holds is transformed from a political instrument to an instrument of vanity and self-

obsession. While this predominantly private place may not be so different from Conrad's version of ahistorical reality, it does provide Rosa with an opportunity to reconstruct her own displaced femininity and desires. She enters the pre-Oedipal realm and re-creates her broken bond with a mother-figure—in this case, Katya, who articulates Rosa in terms and as a celebration of the female body. Katya says to her: "You look like him [Lionel]. In spite of the eyes . . . my dear Rosa, I would say you are more your mother . . . Your mother was simply—at once—my idea of a revolutionary" (223-24). The shift in Katya's terms of comparison, seemingly artlessly and unconsciously articulated, displaces the perceived body of the father and repositions Rosa within discursive modes of knowledge that enable her to "see" with her mother's eyes, to represent her body through her female lineage. The shift in Katya's comparison enacts the movement from father to mother, from symbolic to semiotic discourses.

As Rosa journeys from South Africa to France, she moves from the public to the private, from sexual passivity to sexual initiation or, to put it in Kristeva's terms, from the symbolic to the semiotic.⁶ As she leaves behind Lionel's and the National Party's laws, she enters into a private world where she not only explores her sexuality but where her body takes on the oceanic quality of the semiotic. She "dissolves" in the wine and pleasure of scents; the sea throbs "blood in her hands," and "all lapped tidelessly without distinction of within or around her" (222). Her identity is redefined by its malleable subject borders and its lack of fixity in relation to an Other. While Kristeva's semiotic is not feminized, both femininity and the semiotic have in common their position in relation to the dominant order, their marginality (Moi 166). Similarly, Rosa visits Katya Bagnelli, not merely to elude surveillance, but to position herself outside of Lionel's ideology, to create an alternate universe to the exclusion of patriarchal law. She says that Katya "managed to be able to write to me that he [Lionel] was a great man, and yet decide 'there's a whole world' *outside* what he lived for" (264; emphasis added).

Rosa inhabits the semiotic not just to challenge the symbolic but also to "defect" (264) from the ordering principle of the Law of the Father. However, she cannot reject her emplacement in

history or politics—as indeed no one can. Spivak notes that one “cannot of course ‘choose’ to step out of ideology. The most responsible ‘choice’ seems to be to know it as best one can, recognize it as best one can, and, through one’s necessarily inadequate interpretation, to work to change it” (*In Other Worlds* 120). In France, Rosa may access the semiotic, but she completely ignores the symbolic realm; she attempts to deny time and political reality. While her initial movement away from her father’s law may be a transgressive act, she soon lapses into another kind of fixity. She rejects her past and her denomination as “Burger’s daughter,” indulges her sensual desires, and becomes the lover to the married Bernard Chabaliere. She fools herself into believing that she can exist outside of time and place: she claims that “Bernard Chabaliere’s mistress isn’t Lionel Burger’s daughter; she’s certainly not accountable to the Future, she can go off and do good works in Cameroun or contemplate the unicorn in the tapestry forest” (304). The tapestry forest is a reference to a series of Bonnard canvases depicting a utopian world. In the tapestry forest, a woman, who has no existence, who knows neither past nor future, sits with a unicorn in a “*paradis inventé*” (304). Rosa not only wants to locate a female aesthetics but to become the object of art as well—to become the woman in the painting. Her attempt to locate utopia is short-lived, however. While her movement to France is necessary to her development as a speaking subject, it is only one moment in the temporal unfolding of her self-knowledge. Neither time nor reality can be completely ignored by either Rosa or the painting. Even though the woman does not know time, the reflection in her hand-held mirror is painted in accordance to an aesthetic realism. In this mirror, the unicorn “sees a tiny image of himself. But the oval of the mirror cuts off the image just at the level at which the horn rises from his head” (340). Time intrudes into both the canvas’s and Rosa’s contained worlds and severs the fantasy of the unicorn’s horn: the many “mirrors of reality” represented in this novel shift Rosa’s perception away from the fantasy of herself as a coherent, stable subject.

In the same way that the unicorn is forced to see itself as any other “real” four-footed beast, Rosa is forced to see the “artifice”

of her atemporal identity after she meets yet another surrogate brother in Europe.⁷ At a party in England, she unexpectedly recognizes Zwelinzima Vulindlela (her black "brother," once known as "Baasie"); he later telephones her and makes her realize that she cannot defect from political reality and that she has merely substituted one kind of ideological fixity for another. Zwelinzima's words revise Rosa's pat meaning-making processes (328) and force her to carry around her statements one by one in the daylight and to turn them over in her hands while she sits in class or talks to Bernard (329). Encouraged to perceive reality anew, to reposition herself within language as a white South African, Rosa comes to the realization that Chabali's mistress is none other than Burger's daughter and that she cannot deny her Afrikaner heritage. When she looks into the bathroom mirror, she sees in brutally realistic terms that she has been defining herself only in terms of her gender and not her race, that she has "disfigured" herself and is "filthy and ugly, in the bathroom mirror. Debauched" (329).

Rosa may be "backwards" in that she enacts a reversed process of identity formation and moves *from* the symbolic *to* the semiotic, but she emerges as a remarkably well-adjusted and well-"rounded" person. She travels the "world round as your navel" (192), but unlike Conrad she recognizes the bi-valency of the relationship between her body and the world, between the personal and the political. She learns that to be a truly revolutionary subject, she must move through oppositional discourses and recognize that her subjectivity is a multiple determined and determining construct. She positions herself as a white person in South Africa, taking up a secondary role in the black revolution as a physiotherapist to the child survivors of the Soweto Uprising. But while Rosa negotiates her place as political white woman in South Africa, she does not relinquish her hold on the private semiotic body she has travelled so far to find. Upon her return to South Africa and her subsequent imprisonment, she paints pictures reminiscent of her stay in France and uses her aesthetic abilities for political subversion. As Gordimer puts it, Rosa paints a

naive imaginary landscape that could rouse no suspicions that she might be incorporating plans of the lay-out of the prison etc.—it

represented, in a number of versions, a village covering a hill with a castle on the apex, a wood in the foreground, the sea behind. (355)

Her ability to communicate with the outside world may be curtailed, but, through her production of these coded messages, she alternates between the symbolic realm (where articulation is possible) and the semiotic (where language is disruptive and cannot be contained). She retains her ability to speak and to create, to move within language and various speaking positions.

According to Kristeva, the absolute identification with either the symbolic or the semiotic must be avoided, for to associate with the former is to be imprisoned within a traditional stereotype, and to position oneself in the latter is to lose the maternal (the other's) body ("About Chinese Women" 156). Throughout her journey, Rosa learns that her sexualized body is never far from this incarceration, be it literal or poetic. Her subject positioning must be in constant motion between the symbolic and the semiotic and on constant guard against ideological hegemony. Ironically, whereas Rosa is defined by her proximity to prisons in the first two sections of the novel, she is incarcerated in a "real" prison only when she discovers the freedom of discursive movement. Growing up in South Africa, she is turned inside out on prison steps and loses both the maternal (Cathy's) body and her own. In France, she regains her own body, but she is caught in a metaphoric prison all the same: on the Riviera, she feels like "someone in prison . . . Locked. Landlocked" (222). Only at the novel's close, when she is placed inside the prison, does Rosa resist spiritual and discursive confinement. She takes part in a female semiotic plurality that cannot be repressed by prison walls or the symbolic order. In this prison, there are Coloured, Indian, and African women who are not allowed to occupy adjoining cells and cannot share the prison yard together; however, despite this segregation, "the prison was so old that actual physical barriers against internal communication were ramshackle and the vigilance of the female warders . . . could not prevent messages" (354). The inmates transgress physical barriers through the power of their words, voices, and singing. As Houston A. Baker, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and many other Black American theorists testify, song and word play vital roles in resisting domi-

nant ways of perceiving reality and constructing subjectivity. Rosa may be in solitary confinement, but she can hear Marisa Kgosana (a black revolutionary friend also in isolation), who announces her presence and creates a communal link and sense of camaraderie among the women prisoners. As Gordimer writes, Marisa sang hymns,

piously gliding in and out of the key of "Abide with me" to ANC freedom songs in Xhosa, and occasionally bursting into Miriam Makeba's click song—this last to placate and seduce the wardresses, for whom it was a recognizable pop number. The voices of other black women took up and harmonized whatever she sang, quickly following the changes in the repertoire. The black common law prisoners eternally polishing Matron's granolithic cloister, round the yard, picked up tiny scrolled messages dropped when Rosa and Clare were allowed to go out to empty their slops or do their washing, and in the same way the cleaning women delivered messages to them. (355)

The fluidity of the resistance and the sheer collective effort among political prisoners, communal prisoners, and cleaning women re-create for Rosa a politicized female community and the collapse of the subject/other division. By the many voices that add to its volume, by the variety of its musical genres, and by the women's spontaneous harmonizing, the song enacts a semiotic heterogeneity that challenges the symbolic order's effacement of difference.

Rosa may be incarcerated in South Africa, but she keeps in touch with both the personal and political dimensions of her being. She learns the value of "movement" itself and that she cannot privilege one discourse over another or one aspect of her identity over another. The last paragraph of the novel mentions a cryptic letter Katya Bagnelli receives from Rosa in prison; Rosa describes her cell as though it were a suite in a tourist hotel. As the narrator tells us, the last line of Rosa's note refers to a water-mark of light "that came into the cell at sundown every evening, reflected from some west-facing surface outside" (361). Although this line "had been deleted by the prison censor" and "Madame Bagnelli was never able to make it out" (361), we, as readers, are able to know Rosa's words through the narrator's intervention. Like the horn of the unicorn in the Bonnard painting, the water-mark line exists in an aesthetic world, in Rosa's

card and in Gordimer's depiction of that card. Whether the mirror of reality severs the unicorn horn, or the prison censor deletes the "reflected" water-mark line, the possibility for poetry, for beauty, for pleasure, is both located and limited by the narrative. By exercising her artistic sensibility within her political reality, by writing a few poetic lines to France from her prison in South Africa, Rosa manages to gesture backwards and forwards, to merge both the past and the present, to move between the semiotic and the symbolic. She thus enacts the very flux and flow by which her subjectivity is both politically created and personally revised. Her journey in space and time illustrates the contradictory nature of subject construction and the vexed relationship of the self to language. By her alternation between various political and personal languages, Rosa proves that subjectivity is a discursive process constructed by conflicting and often oppressive discourses which, through their very intersections, allow for the possibility of resistance.

NOTES

- 1 According to Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "The white man is convinced that the Negro is a beast; if it is not the length of the penis, then it is the sexual potency that impresses him. Face to face with this man who is 'different from himself,' he needs to defend himself. In other words, to personify The Other. The Other will become the mainstay of his preoccupations and his desires." (170)
- 2 Many feminists have argued that the use of women's bodies as metaphor is detrimental to the construction of female agency and contingency. For an overview of these arguments, see Friedman's "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse."
- 3 Both Read and Meese argue that Gordimer uses Rosa's body as a symbolic depiction of South Africa's political landscape. However, according to Read, Rosa's body acts not as a general symbol for apartheid's destructive forces (as Meese claims) but specifically for the feminized and secondary role the white South African revolutionaries must play in the fight against apartheid.
- 4 According to Julia Kristeva, the symbolic order is dominated by the Law of the Father and characterized by the individual's entrance into a paternal language that creates the subject/other division and separates the subject from the pre-Oedipal maternal body—a point enacted by the text when Rosa is denied access to both Cathy's and her own body.
- 5 Rosa provisionally embraces Conrad's utopian ideals in France, but also refutes this ideology upon her return to South Africa; unlike him, her search for self is only temporarily a navel-gazing exploration of absolute, essential privacy.
- 6 The semiotic pre-exists the symbolic, but both are needed for articulation. According to Toril Moi, once "the subject has entered into the Symbolic Order, the *chora* will be more or less successfully repressed and can be perceived only as pulsional *pressure* on symbolic language: as contradictions, meaninglessness, disruption.

silences and absences in the symbolic language. The *chora* is a rhythmic pulsion rather than a new language. It constitutes, in other words, the heterogeneous, disruptive element of language, that which can never be caught up in the closure of traditional linguistic theory." (162)

- 7 Read makes the point that Zwelinzima forces Rosa to see in the dark when he telephones her and orders her to turn on the lights: "Put on the light, Rosa. I'm talking to you" (319).

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