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Poetic language and subalternity in Yvonne Vera's butterfly burning and the stone virgins.

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ABSTRACT

The primary aim of this dissertation is to trace the ways in which Yvonne Vera's final two novels, *Butterfly Burning* and *The Stone Virgins,* provide a discursive space for the enunciation of subaltern histories, which have been silenced in dominant socio-political discourse. I argue that it is through the deployment of 'poetic language' that Vera's prose is able to negotiate the voicing of these suppressed narratives. In exploring these questions, I endeavour to locate Vera's texts within the theoretical debates in postcolonial scholarship which question the ethical limitations of representing oppressed subjects in the Third World, as articulated by Gayatri Spivak, in particular. Following Spivak's claim that subalternity is effaced in hegemonic discourse, I focus on the ways in which Vera's inventive prose works to bring the figure of the subaltern back into signification. In order to elucidate how this dynamic operates in both novels, I employ Julia Kristeva's psycholinguistic theory of 'poetic language'. I argue that Kristeva's understanding of literary practice as a transgressive modality, which is able to unsettle the silencing mechanisms of dominant monologic discourse, critically illuminates the subversive value of Vera's fictional style for marginalised subaltern narratives.