

J. M. COETZEE: ETHICS, SUBALTERNITY, AND THE CRITIQUE OF HUMANISM

by

Deepa Jani

B. A. in English, University of Pune, India, 1993

M. A. in English, Carnegie Mellon University, 2003

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This dissertation was presented

by

Deepa Jani

It was defended on

April 10, 2013

and approved by

Jonathan Arac, Andrew W. Mellon Professor, English

John Beverley, Distinguished Professor, Hispanic Languages & Literatures

Ronald Judy, Professor, English

Marcia Landy, Distinguished Professor, English

Dissertation Advisor: Paul A. Bové, Distinguished Professor, English

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Dedicated to the memory of
my father.

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HUMANISM**

Deepa Jani, PhD

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In the era of globalization, postcolonial studies is again confronted with the question of Western humanism and its attendant project of universalizing Eurocentric assumptions about the human. My dissertation argues that J. M. Coetzee's postmodern novels deliberately reconstruct a literary genealogy of this project from the colonial through the postcolonial periods in order to disrupt it. My thesis addresses four novels of Coetzee that cover his entire oeuvre: the early novel Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), the novel of the middle phase Foe (1986), and the later novels— Disgrace (1999) and Diary of a Bad Year (2007). Each chapter elaborates on the intertextual nature of Coetzee's novels and explores the rich dialogue between him and the canonical Western writers—Daniel Defoe, Franz Kafka, and Michel de Montaigne. I argue that through metafictional literary forms such as allegory, parody, and the essay, Coetzee's postmodern novels simultaneously construct and interrupt the Eurocentric humanist universals of progress, reason, rights, the sovereign subject, democracy, and universal history. The totalizing and humanizing impulses of these metanarratives have shaped much of the history of apartheid and colonialism, and continue to do so in our era of neo-imperial globalism. Coetzee's fiction, with the exception of Dusklands (1974), exclusively stages the relationship between the figure of the liberal humanist and the subaltern, a self-other dynamic based on hegemony rather than pure domination. My analysis demonstrates that, in the figure of the representative humanist,

Coetzee's oeuvre stages the tendency of the humanizing discourses to produce gendered and racialized subaltern bodies. The novels also dramatize the resistance of the subalterns to the epistemic violence of these narratives, resulting in the eventual failure of the intellectual to grant voice to them. Thus, I propose that Coetzee's work gestures towards an ethics of the other, in which the Eurocentric self is called into question by the other of history. In the tradition of postmodernism, the relationship between fiction and history is unstable and insecure. His fiction does not stand witness to or represent history, but ceaselessly re-presents the relationship between fiction and fiction, fiction and history, and fiction and the self-of-writing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	VIII
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.0 EMPIRE, ALLEGORICAL IMPULSE, AND GAMES OF TRUTH: J. M. COETZEE'S <u>WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS</u>	30
2.0 WRITING A COUNTER-MEMORY OF EMPIRE: J. M. COETZEE'S <u>FOE</u>	73
3.0 JUSTICE, ETHICS, AND PRACTICES OF FREEDOM: J. M. COETZEE'S <u>DISGRACE</u>	128
4.0 ESSAYING AGAINST EMPIRE: J. M. COETZEE'S <u>DIARY OF A BAD YEAR</u>	173
BIBLIOGRAPHY	221

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I want to dedicate this dissertation to my father, whose sudden departure from this earth has left me unmoored.

INTRODUCTION

I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work.

—Frantz Fanon¹

In a society of masters and slaves, no one is free. The slave is not free, because he is not his own master; the master is not free, because he cannot do without the slave. . . . How do the masters of South Africa experience their unfreedom today?

—J. M. Coetzee²

The deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonialism and exacerbated under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life . . . South African literature is a literature in bondage. . . . It is less than fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them. It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from a prison.

—J. M. Coetzee³

Tragedy, J. M. Coetzee reminds us, was the dominant mode of liberal white South African writing under apartheid.⁴ In his essay on the neglected coloured South African writer Alex la Guma,⁵ Coetzee bemoans the dominance of the apolitical and the ahistorical mode of tragedy, both in its naturalistic and religious forms, in white writing in English.⁶ These tragedies often stage the tragic suffering of interracial lovers, who commit *hamartia* in the white supremacist apartheid system when they love across “the color line.” The tragic plot often ends with the death or exile of the hero. The function of art is to stand *witness* to the suffering and the triumph of love that runs afoul of the apartheid laws against miscegenation. Coetzee elaborates on the apolitical nature of these tragic fables in the following quote: “The overt content of the fable here is that love conquers evil through tragic suffering when such suffering is borne *witness* to in art [emphasis mine]; its covert content is the apolitical doctrine that defeat can turn itself, by the twist of tragedy, into victory.”⁷ The defeat of the tragic hero, who has become a sacrificial lamb, is also his victory. For this to happen, the tragic suffering needs to have the character of universality that is governed by the laws of probability or necessity, rather than the character of particularity that is governed by chance or coincidence, which is the domain of history, so that the audience can empathize with the hero’s suffering and feel pity, but also fear, because they can see themselves as running afoul of the Law.⁸ Since the Law, both God’s law and man’s law (apartheid), is inscrutable and unshakeable (and thus cannot be challenged or questioned), our emotions of pity and fear for the hero’s tragic suffering can be purged in the representation, or imitation, of that suffering in art: “Nevertheless . . . that

the dispensation under which man suffers is unshakeable, but that our pity for the hero-victim and our terror at his fate can be purged by the ritual of reenactment.”⁹ For Coetzee, this fatalism in the face of the unshakeable Law is a characteristic feature of both forms of tragedy, religious tragedy and naturalistic tragedy, which have been widely employed by Western writers and white South African writers. Religious tragedy “reconciles us to the inscrutable dispensation by giving meaning to suffering and defeat”¹⁰; naturalistic tragedy, influenced by the fatalistic determinism of Emile Zola’s literary naturalism which believed that the laws of environment and hereditary can scientifically determine one’s character, also evokes pity and terror in the representation of the “inscrutable dispensation” of society and genes. In Coetzee’s essay, Alan Paton’s novel Cry, the Beloved Country (1948) is an example of the former, and Theodore Dreiser’s novel An American Tragedy (1925) is an example of the latter.

I have begun my dissertation in negation, expounding upon a genre favored by South African writers that Coetzee categorically rejects.¹¹ What Coetzee, who I will argue writes postmodernist metafiction rather than tragedies, is rejecting is the apolitical and the ahistorical conception of art as propounded in the classical Aristotelean formulations of tragedy. In the essay on La Guma, where Coetzee only briefly elaborates on his criticisms of tragedy, what he is attacking is the function of art as bearing *witness* to the fatalistic determinism of the Law, both divine and social, which gives rise to the suffering of the tragic hero. Moreover, the spectators bear witness too to the tragic actions as they unfold before their eyes. Towards the end of the tragic plot, these witnessing spectators experience *katharsis*, that is, the purgation (or purification) of the feelings of terror and pity. The feeling of terror arises both from a fatalistic view of the laws of God, Nature, and man as

being inscrutable, inexorable, and impenetrable, and from the recognition that such a fate could befall them. The feeling of pity arises from sympathy for the suffering of the interracial lovers. Art's imitative quality, *mimesis*, allows it to bear witness to the suffering of the hero under the inexorable laws of apartheid. Thus, it is in the act of witnessing that the two qualities of tragedy are combined—*mimesis* and *katharsis*. In his own fiction, Coetzee characteristically rejects the mimetic and the cathartic art of tragedy, and replaces it with the non-mimetic and the non-cathartic aesthetics of postmodernist metafiction, a term I will explain in due time.

It is important to note here that Coetzee's abandonment of the popular form of tragedy is also a rebuff of the type of literature, often called, "witness literature," or "literature of (as) witness." In South African literary cultures, much literary writing, especially under apartheid but not exclusive to that period, can be characterized as literature of witness, as writing that bears witness to, and narrates, the truth about South Africa. Given the traumatic legacy of the twentieth century world history, the predominance of witness writing is not exclusive to South Africa. In the reconstructions of the twentieth century history from the Nuremberg Trials to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Trials, we have witnessed the emergence and the development of the genre of testimony at various historical sites of trauma—the World Wars and the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, South African apartheid, the struggles for decolonization, and the numerous dictatorships in Latin America. Hayden White suggests that witness literature is "generated by those experiences of 'extreme situations' peculiar to our time, of which the Holocaust . . . is of course emblematic."¹² Witness literature lays claim to direct access to the traumatic events; it speaks with the voice of authority and authenticity, representing facts not muddled by

rhetoric. Thomas Vogler defines witness literature as, “most bound up with notions of authenticity and referentiality, a poetry that puts us in touch with raw facts of existence rather than effects produced by rhetorical technique.”¹³ Acknowledging the important function of the role of witness in diverse reconstructions of the traumatic history of twentieth century, the Swedish Academy organized a symposium in Stockholm in December 2001 in celebration of the centennial year of the Nobel Prize in Literature on the theme of “witness literature.” The objective of the symposium was to examine the nature, history, and practice of such a literature, which, the Academy claimed, has not been thoroughly studied by literary criticism and scholarship. Several Nobel Laureates in Literature from Asia, Africa, and Europe were invited, including Nadine Gordimer, Imre Kertész, Kenzaburō Ōe, and Gao Xingjian, to speak on two aspects of witness literature: its claims to the truth and the liberating transformation of the victim into a writer.¹⁴

In the politically charged milieu of South Africa, the essential role of the writer has been to bear witness to, and to narrate, the crimes of apartheid and colonialism, and those who have failed to fulfill their social responsibility of bearing witness have often been accused of being politically and historically deaf. Witness writing does not end with the fall of the apartheid regime in South Africa, but only resurges in the context of the reenactments of the confessional mode of witness accounts during the post-apartheid Truth and Reconciliation Commission trials. Speaking of South Africa’s most prominent writer of “witness literature,” Nadine Gordimer, David Attwell summarizes the dominant view of the role of a writer in South Africa (as propounded by Gordimer and others): “For Gordimer, the essence of the writer’s role lies in her social responsibility, and responsibility is treated primarily as a form of *witness*. Fiction will ultimately be tested by its accountability to the

truth of its society. . . .”¹⁵ Gordimer, in her recent essay “Literary Witness in a World of Terror: The Inward Testimony,” which is largely derived from her talk at the Nobel Centennial Symposium on witness literature, reflects on the role she has performed of the writer-as-witness to the crimes of apartheid:

I grew up in the Union that came out of wars for possession between the British and descendants of the Dutch, the Boers. The African had already been dispossessed by both. I was the child of the white minority, blinkered in privilege as conditioning education, basic as ABC. But because I was a writer – for it’s an early state of being, before a word has been written, not an attribute of being published – I became *witness* to the unspoken in my society [emphasis mine]. Very young I entered a dialogue with myself about what was around me; and this took the form of trying for the meaning in what I saw by transforming this into stories based on what were everyday incidents of ordinary life for everyone around me. . . . As time and published books confirmed that I was a writer, and witness literature, if it is a particular genre of circumstance of my time and place, was mine, I had to find how to keep my integrity to the Word, the sacred charge of the writer. I realized . . . [that] the existential condition of witness was enlarging, inspiring aesthetic liberty breaching the previous limitations of my sense of form and use of language through necessity; to create form and use anew.¹⁶

Gordimer describes witness writing as her calling, as an ethical response that emerges from the particular circumstance and history of her time and place. For Gordimer, this ethical injunction that fiction stand as witness to history only gets louder at the turn of the twenty-first century when the world witnessed the terrifying events of September 11, 2001 and their

aftermath in the global war on terror. Gordimer concludes her essay insisting on the continued importance of the “inward testimony” of witness literature for “post-9/11” writers writing under the shadow of the war on terror.

I started my introduction expounding upon a popular form of witness writing in South Africa—tragedy. There is another popular aesthetic form of witness writing, that has generated far more debate and conflict among members of the South African literary intelligentsia—realism. South African literary writers have borne witness to, and narrated, the truth about South African society largely through two aesthetics forms of fiction—tragedy and realism. Documentaries, autobiographies, and journalistic writings are other popular nonfictional forms of “witness writing.” Coetzee has not only rejected the form of tragedy to narrate the truths of apartheid and colonialism, but also the form of the realist novel, along with other popular modalities of nonfictional witness writing. Till date, he remains a controversial figure, although an esteemed one, in South Africa. Coetzee’s apartheid-era and post-apartheid fiction rejects this essential function of the writer-as-witness. In an interview conducted by Alan Thorold and Richard Wicksteed, “Grubbing for the Ideological Implications: A Clash (More or Less) with J. M. Coetzee,” Coetzee insists that “making sense of life inside a book is different from making sense of real life—not more difficult or less difficult, just different” (as quoted in David Attwell).¹⁷ Such pronouncements against witness writing had often landed him in hot water. While much has been said by critics and scholars about the postmodernist Coetzee’s criticism of one of the aesthetic forms of literature of witness, i.e. realism, an important issue that I will shortly discuss, there is absolutely no discussion of his rejection of the form of tragedy. Coetzee’s rejection of the apolitical and the ahistorical genre of tragedy is ironic given that his

metafictional novels have often been accused of being ethically and politically evasive. Due to the political and ethical stresses of life in South Africa, more so under apartheid, such criticisms of his metafictional work forced Coetzee to defend his writing in several critical essays, interviews, and lectures. This study will read Coetzee's refusal to incorporate the popular aesthetic forms of literature of witness, both tragedy and realism, as a deeply political *and* ethical gesture.

The form of tragedy has remained important in South African writing, both during and after apartheid.¹⁸ But it is the fate of realism that has generated intense debate among members of the South African intelligentsia, involving such august figures as J. M. Coetzee, Nadine Gordimer, Njabulo Ndebele, and Lewis Nkosi. During the political exigencies of apartheid the dominant view was that fiction should “realistically” document the horrors of apartheid. Attwell says, “Both the white liberal tradition since Olive Schreiner, continuing down to the radicalism of Nadine Gordimer today, and contemporary black prose narrative since the era of *Drum* magazine in the 1950s have adopted the various forms of realism as the unquestioned means of bearing witness to, and telling the truth about, South Africa.”¹⁹ Various forms of realism—naturalism, critical and social realism—have been adopted by black and white writers to bear witness to the historical truth in fiction. In his essay, “The Novel Today,” Coetzee narrates in caustic tone the tendency among South African writers to adopt the realist aesthetic mode of witness writing: “Instead I would like to narrow my focus considerably and talk about the novel and history in South Africa today, and in particular about what I see as a tendency, a powerful tendency, perhaps even dominant tendency, to subsume the novel under history. . . .”²⁰ This formulaic opinion that apartheid demands a realistic report or documentation of oppression generated intense debate in the country,

especially from the 1960s through the 1980s. Lewis Nkosi, prominent writer and essayist, has been the loudest critic of this demand for realism made of writers in South Africa: he notes, “whether written by white or blacks the literature of Southern Africa is committed to the notion that certain ‘tasks’ are the legitimate function of socially responsible writers. Protest, commitment, explanation: South African readers and critics expect these qualities of their authors. . . . From its writers the nation, including the organs of state oppression, has always expected not so much art as confidential reports about the condition of society. . . .”²¹ Here and elsewhere, Nkosi offers his scathing criticism of the literature of witness, of, what Vogler calls, “literature of facts” not subservient to the shaping spirit of the imagination. Although in the above quote Nkosi asserts that witness writing is demanded by readers and critics of both white and black writers, in several essays Nkosi is particularly critical, and at times in a dogmatic manner, of the dominant tendency in black writing to parade journalistic fact as imaginative writing. In his famous essay “Fiction by Black South Africans,” he characterizes black fiction as such: “What we do get from South Africa . . . is the journalistic fact parading outrageously as imaginative literature. We find here a type of fiction which exploits the ready-made plots of racial violence, social apartheid, interracial love affairs which are doomed from the beginning, without any attempt to transcend or transmute these given ‘social facts’ into artistically persuasive works of fiction.”²² In another famous essay “Turkish Tales and Some Thoughts on South African Fiction” by the critic, writer, and chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, Njabulo Ndebele, we hear echoes of Nkosi’s criticism of literature of fact. Ndebele asserts, “The truth is that the average African writer . . . produces an art of anticipated surfaces rather than one of processes: processes in character development or in social evolution. He produces an art . . . where scenes of social violence

and a host of examples of general social oppression become ends in themselves. As a result . . . the only reader faculty engaged is the faculty of recognition. Recognition does not necessarily lead to social transformation: it simply confirms.”²³ Realist art confirms rather than interrupts reality. Nkosi further elaborates on his criticism of realism in his later essay on postmodernism, suggesting that black writing has resisted experimental fiction due to the deprivation and the isolation of the black writer from universities, where such writing is taught, thus concluding that experimental writing among black South African writers can only emerge from their own conditions and contexts, rather than as merely a derivative of such writing from the European metropolises.²⁴

Coetzee too entered this debate on realism early on through his essays on La Guma in the 1970s, while partly agreeing with Nkosi’s criticism of realism, he opens a more philosophical line of questioning—“What value does the experimental line in modern Western literature hold for Africa?”²⁵ Throughout his career he tries to grapple with this question in his own experimental fiction (more so as a white writer writing under apartheid). Meanwhile, the essay on La Guma, where he poses the key question of the value of experimentalism for Africa, Coetzee defends La Guma’s fiction against Nkosi’s attack on his “naturalistic tendencies” by reading La Guma’s novels through György Lukács’ theory of critical realism, suggesting that his characters are not determined by a fixed social reality but are caught in the flux of that reality, thus unwittingly discovering lines of social forces unknown to them.²⁶

Despite these criticisms of the demand for realism from stalwart writers—Nkosi, Ndebele, and Coetzee—, it was a dominant tendency under apartheid, defended by such world-renowned realist writers as Gordimer. Realism remained an important medium for

protest writing. Thus, Coetzee's experimentalism was often criticized for its oblique rather than direct engagement with the injustices of South African reality. Referring to Coetzee's choice of writing experimental fiction in the context of apartheid South Africa, Attwell states, "If we are to speak of a lonely poetics in South Africa, Coetzee's of the 1970s and 80s was perhaps the loneliest of all."²⁷ After the Sharpeville massacre of blacks protesting pass laws (1960), and after the banning of African National Congress (1960) and Pan Africanist Congress (1960), and the Rivonia Trials (1963-64) resulting in the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela on the infamous Robben Island, South Africa witnessed, from mid-1960s to mid-1970s, the emergence of radical anti-apartheid ideas, movements, and organizations. Influenced by the American civil rights and Black Power movements, South Africa's Black Consciousness movement, under the charismatic leadership of the medical student, Steve Biko, who was influenced by such intellectuals as W. E. B. Du Bois and Frantz Fanon and whose slogan "Black man, you are on your own" became the rallying cry, emphasized the restoration of African consciousness through psychological and physical liberation from racism. The members of the movement also engaged in direct conflict with the apartheid security state, which resulted in the confrontation with the police on 16 June 1976 during the Soweto Uprising, when students protested the use of Afrikaans language in schools. This led to the banning of the movement and the murder of Biko during police custody in 1977. The massacre of approximately 200 students led to numerous school boycotts in the early 1980s. After the Soweto Uprising, the banned ANC aimed to make black townships ungovernable. As political violence grew and anti-apartheid struggles intensified, the South African government imposed a State of Emergency in the mid-1980s (1985-86). This brief history of South Africa of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s highlights the

political contexts in which Coetzee's major works were produced that brought him to world attention. In the above quote, Attwell is reminding us that Coetzee's novels of the 1970s and 1980s—Dusklands (1974), In the Heart of the Country (1977), Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), Life & Times of Michael K (1983), and Foe (1986)—, written during the periods when the South African political landscape was undergoing great upheavals, were some of his most abstruse, self-reflexive metafictional novels. Two of these novels Waiting for the Barbarians and Foe, which I will analyze in my dissertation, brought him world-renown.

Coetzee of the 1970s and 1980s was the loneliest writer in South Africa, whose experimental fiction was mocked by writers like Gordimer. Gordimer, a die-hard social realist, criticizes Coetzee's use of allegory in her review of Life & Times of Michael K, which for her, is necessarily an apolitical form. I quote the passage in full:

J. M. Coetzee, a writer with an imagination that soars like a lark and sees from up there like an eagle, chose allegory for his first few novels. It seemed he did so out of a kind of opposing desire to hold himself clear of events and their daily, grubby, tragic consequences in which, like everyone else living in South Africa, he is up to the neck, and about which he had an inner compulsion to write. So here was allegory as a stately fastidiousness; or a state of shock. He seemed able to deal with the horror he saw written on the sun only—if brilliantly—if this were to be projected into another time and plane. His *Waiting for the Barbarians* was the North Pole to which the agitprop of agonized black writers (and some white ones hitching a lift to the bookmart on the armored car) was the South Pole; a world to be dealt with lies in between. It is the life and times of Michael K, and Coetzee has taken it up now.²⁸

As if it were, Coetzee's novels escape to the Northern most point so as to cope with the horrifying ground realities of the Southern most point of Africa, where his imagination can soar in the timeless and placeless allegories. My dissertation argues against such readings. In my analysis of the novels of Coetzee, I show that Coetzee's self-reflexive and intertextual metafictional works are deeply political and ethical.

I have been calling Coetzee's fiction postmodern, a term that needs some examination. Postmodernism is often associated with, what Richard Rorty famously called, the "linguistic turn" in the humanities, emphasizing the centrality of language in the reconstructions of reality.²⁹ Our knowledge of the world is mediated through language. In the field of literature, the practice of writing called metafiction, writing about writing, a style that proliferated since the 1960s, emphasizes the linguistic and the narrative character of fiction. The term metafiction originated, as Patricia Waugh reminds us, in an essay by the American novelist William H. Gass, and, according to Waugh, is "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality."³⁰ In such a fiction, the relationship between fiction and reality is uncertain and insecure. Metafiction emerges as a style of fiction during the cultural, political, and social turmoil of the 1960s, leading to questions about how human beings construct and mediate their experience of the world: Waugh asserts, "Metafiction pursues such questions [about reality as a construct] through its formal self-exploration, drawing on the traditional metaphor of the world as book, but often recasting it in terms of contemporary philosophical, linguistic or literary theory. . . . If our knowledge of this world is now seen to be mediated through language, then literary fiction (worlds constructed entirely of language) becomes a useful model of

learning about the construction of ‘reality’ itself.”³¹ Similar to other postmodernist writers and philosophers, Coetzee has been greatly influenced by the various movements in the twentieth-century modern linguistics and philosophy—semiotics, structuralism, poststructuralism, and deconstruction. His academic training was in linguistics and mathematics; after working as a computer programmer for three years in United Kingdom from 1962-65, where he briefly worked for IBM, he migrated to U. S. and earned his Ph.D. in linguistics on the stylistics analysis of the works of Samuel Beckett from the University of Texas at Austin in 1969. Coetzee’s metafictional novels self-consciously stage the process of the construction and mediation of reality through language in their dramatization of the figures, themes, and, realities of apartheid and colonialism. The linguistic orientation of Coetzee’s works challenge the mimetic and the testimonial nature of the aesthetic forms of realism and tragedy. The relationship between fiction and the unjust South African reality is uncertain and insecure in Coetzee’s novels. Due to this lack of direct relationship between fiction and reality, members of the South African intelligentsia, as in the example of Gordimer, bemoaned the uncertainty of his political leanings. They went so far as to suggest that several of his key works—Life and Times of Michael K and Waiting for the Barbarians—were not censored due to this uncertainty, and in fact praised by the censors because they could not see any direct parallels with the South African reality.³² Instead of writing realist novels or tragedies, Coetzee often writes allegories, parodies, and essayistic novels. Although I will show that Disgrace is perhaps his most realist novel, it is also partly allegorical. Postmodernist writers, along with Coetzee, have often employed each of these forms to disrupt the verisimilitude of realist fiction, and dramatize the fictionality of fiction,

the uncertainty of the relationship between fiction and history, and challenge the authorial voice.

In “The Novel Today” Coetzee frustratingly asks, “Why should a novelist—myself—be speaking here . . . in terms of enmity with the discourse of history? Because, as I suggested earlier, in South Africa the colonisation of the novel by the discourse of history is proceeding with alarming rapidity.”³³ It is tempting to say here that in his fiction Coetzee tries to decolonize the novel from the discourse of history. But I will refrain from such schematic readings. In the above essay Coetzee goes on to suggest that the novel occupies an autonomous place, by which he means a novel “that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process . . . perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history— . . . demythologizing history.”³⁴ While the central argument of my dissertation agrees with and elaborates on Coetzee’s argument here, mine goes further than his: in demythologizing history, Coetzee’s novels interrupt it. In this regard, Coetzee clearly severs himself from the dominant tradition of the literature of witness. My argument is that in Coetzee’s writing fiction does not confirm (or conform to) reality, but disrupts it; fiction does not stand as witness to history but stands in an ethical relation to it, calling it into question. In other words, fiction interrupts rather than imitates reality. Furthermore, I show that his fiction calls itself into question; in his novels, fiction interrupts not only reality but also itself, ceaselessly putting the writing and the self-of-writing into question. To put it in different words, his metafictional fiction does not *represent* the silent, subaltern voices of those wronged by the history of apartheid and colonialism, but ceaselessly *re-presents*, *re-writes*, *re-constructs*, and *re-interrogates* the relationship between fiction and fiction, fiction and history, and fiction and the self-of-writing. This has led to (mis)readings that vehemently

criticize Coetzee for silencing the subalterns in his novels. One such is by Benita Parry, who reads the silences of the subaltern figures not in terms of the resistance to appropriations by the dominant discourses but, echoing Gordimer's reading of Coetzee's use of allegory, in terms of the author's renunciation of and escape from worldly matters. Parry's reading of the silent subaltern figures is as follows: "I will suggest that the various registers in which silence is scored in the novels speak of things other than the structural relationship of oppressor/oppressed, or the power of an unuttered alterity to undermine a dominant discourse, and that these other things are signs of the fiction's urge to cast off worldly attachments, even as the world is signified and estranged."³⁵ In contrast to Parry, I maintain that in Coetzee's novels the figure of the subaltern is not constructed either as a subject-of-revolt or an object-of-oppression. To do so is to reinscribe and to rehearse neo-imperial, Eurocentric impulses of political and ideological domination, economic exploitation, and cultural erasure.³⁶ Instead, I suggest that in Coetzee's novels the figure of the subaltern is the figure of the radical other, of alterity, who calls into question history and the subjects writing that history, either through facts or myths. His novels employ such literary forms as allegory, parody, and the essay, each of which occupies an important place in the tradition of postmodern metafiction, in order to simultaneously question the authority of the historical discourse and the narrative discourse. In this I suggest lies the ethical gesture of his work. My reading of Coetzee's ethics is informed by Emmanuel Levinas' understanding of ethics. Levinas' notion of ethics is markedly different from the traditional conception of ethics as a branch of moral philosophy; for him, ethics is an event, the relation between the same and the radically other that cannot be reduced to the same, what he calls "an ethical event." For Levinas ethics is the putting into question of the knowing subject,

the ego, self-consciousness, by the other. Levinas defines ethics as “a calling into question of the same—which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same—is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics.”³⁷ The domain of the same maintains a relation with otherness, but it is a relation in which the ego reveals its totalizing tendencies and struggles to reduce the distance between the same and the other and absorb all otherness into itself. Coetzee’s writing performs such an “ethical event,” in which the universalist propensity of the sovereign subject of knowledge is called into question by the other of history.³⁸

Thus, my dissertation’s main argument is that Coetzee’s fiction calls into question history and its own constructions of that history. The metafictional novels of Coetzee, through literary forms such as allegory, parody and the essay, simultaneously construct and disrupt history. More specifically, I will show that Coetzee self-consciously employs these literary forms in order to disrupt the universalist metanarratives of the history of modernity: narratives of progress, reason, rights, the sovereign subject, democracy, and universal history. The totalizing and humanizing impulses of these universal narratives have shaped much of the history of apartheid and colonialism, and continue to do so in our era of neo-imperial globalism. In my analysis of the four novels of Coetzee—Waiting for the Barbarians, Foe, Disgrace (1999), and Diary of a Bad Year (2007)—, I argue that Coetzee’s novels deliberately reconstruct a discursive genealogy of the history of apartheid and colonialism, from eighteenth-century European colonialism to the emergent forms of neo-imperialism, in order to interrupt that history. Each chapter of the dissertation elaborates on the intertextual nature of Coetzee’s novels and explores the rich dialogue between him and the canonical Western writers—Daniel Defoe, Franz Kafka, and Michel de Montaigne.

My dissertation begins with a quote from Frantz Fanon's Black Skin, White Masks that appears in the chapter titled, "The Negro and Recognition." In this chapter, Fanon criticizes the Hegelian master-slave dialectic for formulating the disparate, unequal, and antithetical relationship between the master and the slave on the basis of reciprocity, recognition, and mutual dependence. Fanon's book is an attempt to reformulate the Hegelian master-slave dialectic in terms of absolute domination and power in the postcolonial context. In the above chapter that appears towards the near end of the book, Fanon says, "I hope I have shown that here the master differs basically from the master described by Hegel. For Hegel there is reciprocity; here the master laughs at the consciousness of the slave. What he wants from the slave is not recognition but work"³⁹ This Fanonian reformulation of the master/slave dialectic in terms of absolute domination, rather than hegemony, haunts Coetzee's oeuvre. Readers of both these writers can immediately recognize Fanon's influence on Coetzee's novels, which often depict the master/slave dynamic in terms of pure domination. In his first novel Dusklands (1974) Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee are bloodthirsty servants of the Empire, the mid-20th century American Empire in the case of the former and the early 18th century Dutch Empire in the case of the latter.⁴⁰ In Waiting for the Barbarians, Colonel Joll, a handsome servant of the Empire, is a "seeker of truth" and a "doctor of interrogation," who rules with torture.⁴¹ In his novel Foe, a parody of Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, Coetzee's Crusoe rules over Friday with pure domination. On a barren terrain where he expends labor without value, he has imposed near total silence on the island, interrupted only by functional speech. He communicates with Friday exclusively in command words, who, like a dog, responds only to the words taught, having no knowledge of the complexity of human language.⁴² While

Coetzee depicts the master/slave relation in Fanonian terms, this relationship based on pure domination remains in the background in all the novels, with the first novel Dusklands being the only exception. The context of pure domination is the condition of possibility for another kind of relationship, which the novels foreground. After the first novel, Coetzee's fiction almost exclusively stages the relationship between the figure of the liberal humanist and the subaltern, a self-other dynamic based on hegemony rather than domination. In these novels the discursive struggle does not directly play out between the colonizer and the colonized, or the master and the slave, but between the liberal humanist figure and the subaltern. If in its classical conception, as theorized within postcolonial studies, the colonial discourse analysis centers on the power/knowledge relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, Coetzee refocuses this classical colonial discourse, and its neo-imperial versions, as a power/knowledge nexus between the figure of the liberal humanist and the subaltern. My dissertation foregrounds this discursive struggle. It grapples with the modality of ethics that can call into question the pieties of the humanist discourses and meditates on the ways in which literature can simultaneously construct and interrupt such a discursive regime. While secondary literature on Coetzee is rapidly growing, more so after he won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003, my dissertation is the first study to examine Coetzee's works in relation to the question of humanism in postcoloniality.

In foregrounding the humanist-subaltern dynamic, I suggest that Coetzee is drawing our attention to the Western legacy of humanism in the context of colonialism, and its continued effects in the postcolonial world. Gayatri Spivak captures this legacy quite succinctly in her assertion that "there is an affinity between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism."⁴³ Coetzee's novels ceaselessly try to put into question this alliance

between the imperialist subject and the subject of humanism. My analysis of the face-to-face encounter between the figure of the liberal humanist and the subaltern in the novels demonstrates that Coetzee's oeuvre stages the tendency of the humanizing discourses of the civilizing and the democratizing missions to produce gendered and racialized subaltern bodies. The figure of the liberal humanist, basking in the warm light of metropolitan benevolence, is perpetually engaged in the task of granting voice-consciousness to the subaltern. These guardians of humanism eventually fail in speaking for the oppressed. What Benita Parry fails to see is that the novels are not allegorizing the drama of the binaries of speech and of silence, of subject and of object, but are allegorizing an impasse at the moment of speaking. For, to speak is to not hear. The novels painstakingly establish distance between the self and the other, not for reflection, but to produce a gap of difference between the humanist and the subaltern. They constitute a face-to-face encounter with the radical alterity of the other of history, whose absolute otherness cannot be collapsed into the law of the same. In staging the failure of the liberal humanist discourse, Coetzee is also staging the failure of his own writing. His self-reflexive metafictional novels dramatize the failure of authorial authority. Coetzee, the author, does not stand as witness to history, representing the voices of the victims of apartheid and colonialism (more so as a white South African). But in fiction, he interrupts history and his own discursive constructions of that history.

In the context of the geopolitics of the past decade, postcolonial studies is once again confronted with the project of humanism and its universalization of the Eurocentric assumptions about the other. If the humanizing hegemonic discourse of civilization justified colonialism, then the humanizing hegemonic discourse of democracy justifies imperialism

today. In the latter half of the twentieth-century scholars and writers have tried to grapple with this legacy, at least since the American invasion of Vietnam. Noam Chomsky calls the neo-imperialist ventures “military humanism,” military invasions justified on the basis of spreading democracy and defending human rights, especially of “third-world” women.⁴⁴ One may ask here, why has the field of postcolonial studies not adequately responded to the rise of humanitarian imperialism in the post-9/11 era? A bibliographic search reveals that although there have been several conferences and books on the question of the rise of neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism in the past decade, none of them, with only a few exceptions, in any seriousness examines the humanistic discursive regime, and its legacy, that increasingly justifies neo-imperialistic acts. This could be partly because of the field’s own agonistic and ambivalent relationship to this legacy. Anthony Alessandrini, in his recent essay, “Humanism Effect: Fanon, Foucault, and Ethics without Subjects,” suggests that since its inception the field has been torn between the anti-humanist theorizing of Michel Foucault and the call for a new humanism of Frantz Fanon. He goes on to argue that both Foucault and Fanon, in their different ways, are vehemently critical of the sovereign subject of humanism.⁴⁵ Coetzee’s oeuvre has been critical of the sovereign subject of humanism in no uncertain terms and has relentlessly examined the legacy of Western humanism in the postcolonial world. His novels show that if the historical process of decolonization deterritorialized the universalist Enlightenment metanarratives of progress and reason, which were the basis of colonialism, then in our global age the new forms of imperialism reterritorialize the universalist metanarratives of liberty and democracy. I suggest that his works gesture towards the possible futures of the field of postcolonial studies that currently lives in an ambiguous and agonistic relationship to this legacy.

In my first chapter “Empire, Allegorical Impulse, and Games of Truth: J. M. Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians,” I argue that Coetzee’s novel dramatizes the allegorical mode of Empire’s knowledge-production and its regime of truth. Arguing against critics such as Nadine Gordimer and David Attwell who read Coetzee’s fiction as either “moral allegories” (Gordimer) or “national allegories” (Attwell), I demonstrate that Coetzee self-consciously employs the form of allegory only to undermine its interpretative determinacy. The liberal humanist magistrate eventually fails to translate the torture marks on the barbarian girl’s body into the imperial master codes. In the magistrate’s crisis of interpretation, which is also the crisis of the allegorical mode, Coetzee’s novel highlights the fact that the liberal humanist discourse fails to recognize its discourse *as* discourse.

In the second chapter “Writing a Counter-Memory of Empire: J. M. Coetzee’s Foe,” I argue that Coetzee’s parodic novel rewrites a general history of Empire, in opposition to the humanist project of universal history, by transforming the documents of the past into monuments, reality into parody, and memory into counter-memory. I show that if Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe is a story of *origin*, then Coetzee rewrites this original English novel, which is also a novel about Empire, as a story of *beginnings*. Unlike Defoe’s novel, the story of the racialized subaltern Friday is not a story of centralizing through recollection. It is a story of establishing distance, not for reflection, but to produce a gap of difference between the self and the other. In the novel, the figure of the liberal humanist, Susan Barton, fails to civilize and humanize the mute Friday through the master discourses of civilization and progress. Thus, I conclude that in Coetzee to write is not to represent the other, but to wrench the self from itself through dehumanizing effects of counter-memory.

In my third chapter “Justice, Ethics, and Practices of Freedom: J. M. Coetzee’s Disgrace,” I argue that the novel while staging the limits of the interpretative violence of justice as law, presents the irreducible idea of justice that addresses itself to the absolute singularity of the other, not only to the racially gendered human-other but also to the animal-other. This idea of justice, as an ethical relation to the other, exceeds the universalist discourses of law and rights. It also escapes the gaze of the witness and the allegorist. The novel stages the monumental fall of the liberal humanist professor David Lurie, from a state of grace to that of dis-grace, precipitated by the face-to-face encounter with the raped bodies of the racially gendered subaltern other—Lucy and Melanie—in the allegorized context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Trials in post-apartheid and postcolonial South Africa.

In my last chapter “Essaying against Empire: J. M. Coetzee’s Diary of a Bad Year,” I show that the novel dramatizes the angst of the aging liberal humanist character-author J. C., who confronts the specter of torturing democracy (and his own mortality) in the neo-imperial context of the global war on terror. Coetzee’s novel meditates on the supra-political Machiavellian principle of necessity of self-preservation that justifies the practice of torture within a democracy today. Analyzing several essays in the novel on torture, terrorism, imperialism, and democracy, I demonstrate that through the essay form Coetzee attempts to disrupt the terror of torturing democracy. In this context of the global war on terror, the liberal humanist discourse speaks the language of democracy and rights, which have replaced the language of civilization and progress. With the phenomenal rise of “military humanism” in the past decade, Coetzee shows us that today the ethical function of

criticism in general, and postcolonial criticism in particular, is to democratize democracy
itself.

Notes

¹ Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1967) 220.

² J. M. Coetzee, Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992) 96.

³ Coetzee, Doubling the Point 98.

⁴ Here and elsewhere, I do not use the term “white writing” in terms of the macabre logic of apartheid, as a type of writing in binary oppositional relation to “black writing.” I follow Coetzee’s lead here, who in his book, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) understands white writing as “white only insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African” (11).

⁵ A little after the election of the National Party in 1948, its leaders argued for the racial segregation of the population into four distinct groups—Asian, Black, Coloured, and White—and began to pave the way for “grand apartheid.” The Population Registration Act of 1950 formalized racial classification and introduced identity cards that specified the person’s racial group. Needless to say that apartheid-era racial nomenclature is controversial today and reproducing those terms may appear like granting legitimacy to the system. My occasional use of those terms in this dissertation should in no way be considered as granting political legitimacy to the apartheid system. By using the official terms I want to draw attention to the fact that they continue to be integral to the way South African society operates today. Also, for reasons of simplicity, I will employ the term “Black,” as in “black writing,” to refer to writing by Asians, Blacks, and Coloureds.

⁶ In the same passage, Coetzee differentiates white writers in English and in Afrikaans, asserting that Afrikaans writers, unlike English writers, have been more interested in “the mythographic revision of history” (346).

⁷ Coetzee, Doubling the Point 346.

⁸ See Aristotle, Poetics, trans. Stephen Halliwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), especially chapters VI and VII.

⁹ Coetzee, Doubling the Point 348.

¹⁰ Coetzee, Doubling the Point 346.

¹¹ While, in the essay on Alex la Guma, Coetzee refers to the predominance of tragedy among liberal white writers, the form is not exclusively used by white writers. Black writers often employ tragedy to depict the tragic and the abominable conditions of life in rural areas and in townships under the apartheid regime. R. R. R. Dhlomo's religious tragedy, An African Tragedy (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1930) is an early example of the depiction of tragic conditions of life in Prospect Township of Johannesburg leading to the moral decline of its protagonist, Robert Zulu. Although the similarities and/or differences in the use of tragedy by black and white writers is an important topic to examine, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation which examines the works of Coetzee who rejects this form. In this regard, I see similarities between the postmodernist writer, Coetzee and the realist writer, La Guma: they both reject the apolitical form of tragedy, and in the case of La Guma the abandonment of the form occurs in the later novels. Coetzee's essay elaborates on La Guma's eventual rejection of the favored form.

¹² Hayden White, "Figural Realism in Witness Literature," Parallax 10.1 (2004): 114.

¹³ Thomas A. Vogler, "Poetic Witness: Writing the Real," Witness and Memory: The Discourse of Trauma, eds. Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler (New York: Routledge, 2003) 174.

¹⁴ While the bibliography on witness literature is long, here is a very selective list of books published on the topic in the past decade: for an account of the testimonies of Holocaust experiences and how they change the theory and practice of literary writing after that traumatic event, see Michael G. Levine, The Belated Witness: Literature, Testimony, and the Question of Holocaust Survival (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2006); for an elaboration on the form of the *testimonio* in the Latin American tradition of witness writing, see John Beverley, Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004); for proceedings on the Nobel symposium on witness literature, see Witness Literature: Proceedings of the Nobel Centennial Symposium, ed. Horace Engdahl (New Jersey: World Scientific, 2002).

¹⁵ David Attwell, J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1993) 13.

¹⁶ Nadine Gordimer, "Literary Witness in a World of Terror: The Inward Testimony," New Perspectives Quarterly Winter 2009, 6th March 2013 <http://www.digitalnpq.org/archive/2009_winter/24_gordimer.html>.

¹⁷ Attwell, J. M. Coetzee 11.

¹⁸ As hope for redemption recedes in much post-apartheid South African writing, writers stage a tragic and bleak vision of the new South Africa. One of the most important novels published in the last decade on the dashed hopes of the new South Africa is Damon Galgut, The Good Doctor (New York: Grove Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Attwell, J. M. Coetzee 11.

²⁰ J. M. Coetzee, "The Novel Today," Upstream 6.1 (1988): 2.

²¹ Lewis Nkosi, Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles of African Literature (Essex, U. K.: Longman Group Ltd., 1981) 76.

²² Lewis Nkosi, "Fiction by Black South Africans: Richard Rive, Bloke Modisane, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma," Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing, ed. Ulli Beier (London: Longman, 1979) 222.

²³ Njabulo S. Ndebele, South African Literature and Culture: Rediscovery of the Ordinary (Manchester, U. K.: Manchester University Press, 1994) 32.

²⁴ See Lewis Nkosi, "Postmodernism and Black Writing in South Africa," Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995, eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 75-90.

²⁵ J. M. Coetzee, "Alex La Guma and the Responsibilities of the South African Writer," New African Literature and the Arts, vol. 3, ed. Joseph Okpaku (New York: Third World, 1973) 6.

²⁶ See György Lukács, "Critical Realism and Socialist Realism," Realism in Our Time: Literature and the Class Struggle, trans. John and Necke Mander (New York: Harper & Row, 1971) 93-135.

²⁷ David Attwell, Rewriting Modernity: Studies in Black South African Literary History (Scottsville, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005) 172-73.

²⁸ Nadine Gordimer, "The Idea of Gardening: *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee [Review]." Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee, ed. Sue Kossew (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998) 139.

²⁹ See Richard Rorty, “Metaphilosophical Difficulties of Linguistic Philosophy,” The Linguistic Turn: Essays in Philosophical Method, ed. Richard M. Rorty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 1-40.

³⁰ Patricia Waugh, Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction” (London and New York: Routledge, 1984) 2.

³¹ Waugh, Metafiction 3.

³² For a detailed censorship history of Coetzee’s novels, see Peter D. McDonald, “The Writer, the Critic, and the Censor: J. M. Coetzee and the Question of Literature,” Book History Vol. 7 (2004): 285-302.

³³ Coetzee, “The Novel Today” 3.

³⁴ Coetzee, “The Novel Today” 3.

³⁵ Benita Parry, “Speech and Silence in the fictions of J. M. Coetzee,” Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid and Democracy, 1970-1995, eds. Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly (Cambridge, U. K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 153. In her much-anthologized essay, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse,” Parry offers a similar reading of Gayatri Spivak’s popular essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” She suggests that Spivak’s deconstructive theorization of the colonial relations has led to her silencing of the native’s role as a historical subject engaged in cultural resistance and disruption of colonial domination. See Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse,” Oxford Literary Review 9 (1987): 27-58.

³⁶ In this regard Coetzee’s analysis is closer to Spivak’s analysis of the subaltern in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1988) 271-313.

³⁷ Emanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 43.

³⁸ John E Drabinski elaborates on the importance of Levinas’ ethics of the other for postcolonial studies in Levinas and the Postcolonial: Race, Nation, Other (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011).

³⁹ See Note 1 for full citation.

⁴⁰ See J. M. Coetzee, Dusklands (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).

⁴¹ See J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

⁴² See J. M. Coetzee, Foe (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

⁴³ Gayatri Spivak, “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” Selected Subaltern Studies, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 10.

⁴⁴ See Noam Chomsky, The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2002). In this book, Chomsky famously talks about how the use of force by Western powers in the name of humanitarian intervention is increasingly becoming the norm.

⁴⁵ See Anthony C. Alessandrini, “The Humanism Effect: Fanon, Foucault, and Ethics without Subjects,” Foucault Studies 7 (2009): 64-80.

**1.0 EMPIRE, ALLEGORICAL IMPULSE, AND GAMES OF TRUTH: J. M.
COETZEE'S WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS**

All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*. . . .

—Fredric Jameson¹

There is a powerful tendency . . . to subsume the novel under history, to read novels as what I loosely call imaginative investigations of real historical forces and real historical circumstances; and conversely, to treat novels that do not perform this investigation of what are deemed to be real historical forces and circumstances as lacking in seriousness.

—J. M. Coetzee²

I have no idea what they stand for. Does each stand for a single thing, a circle for the sun, a triangle for a woman, a wave for a lake; or does a circle merely stand for “circle”, a triangle for “triangle”, a wave for “wave”?

—Magistrate in Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians³

Critical readings of J. M. Coetzee's fiction oscillate between offering either moral or national truths. Coetzee's novels, more often than not, are timeless and placeless, with minimalist plot structure, peopled with reticent characters engaging in highly abstract discourse. The allegorical nature of Coetzee's fiction has often led critics to dig beyond the surface to look for moral or political messages. Those who read his fiction as "moral allegories" translate the timeless and placeless narratives into universal truths; those who read it as "political allegories" translate the distant locales and periods into South Africa of the apartheid and the post-apartheid periods. Nadine Gordimer is an example of the former: she critiques Coetzee's use of allegory, which for her, is necessarily an apolitical form, "Allegory . . . clears the reader's lungs of the transient and fill them with a deep breath of transcendence. Man becomes Everyman (that bore)"⁴; David Attwell is an example of the latter: he reads Coetzee's fiction as exploring the tension between history and text, and this history "is made up of key discourses produced by colonialism and apartheid" in South Africa.⁵ Whether critics invoke the realm of morality or of politics, both these approaches suffer from a tendency to allegorize, that is, to uncover that pure nugget of truth which might be hidden behind the literal. They translate the literal level into in terms of a single, unifying, and totalizing meaning. In their reading strategies, the particular is always already the general. The novel preempts and disrupts the nostalgia his critics reveal for totalities. In this essay, I will show that in Waiting for the Barbarians Coetzee stages the dangers of allegorization, of translating the literal into pre-existing master codes. In this novel he self-consciously employs the form of allegory only to deconstruct its interpretive determinacy. Allegory is deeply embedded in the knowledge-production of Empire and its regime of truth. Through the act of allegorization, the liberal magistrate attempts to appropriate the

subaltern into the pre-existing master codes of the Empire. Furthermore, I will argue that even though he sees possibilities in the modern revisionist readings of the form, in echoes of Walter Benjamin and Paul de Man, his allegorical novels, only too aware of the dangers of allegorization, do not wish to recover and redeem the form.

Allegory, in Western cultural history, has had a bumpy ride. After its initial popularity in the Medieval period as a key method for extracting Christian meanings from Classical texts, it was denounced by the Romantics, most notably Samuel Coleridge, for whom it was merely a human-made, mechanical and ordinary relative of the sublime, organic, unifying symbol. During the first half of the twentieth century, Walter Benjamin in his book, The Origin of German Tragic Drama,⁶ and Paul de Man in his books, Allegories of Reading and Blindness and Insight,⁷ revived interest in allegory, albeit reading it against its traditional meanings. Before we examine how modern allegory differs from its traditional form, let us briefly look at the latter. In the simplest terms, allegory, from Greek *allos* (other) and *agoreuein* (to speak, in public) says one thing and means another. The word allegory not only implies the use of figures but a making public, revealing, of something that would otherwise remain hidden. It entails hidden meanings, great beyonds, or secret codes. It is a figurative mode of representation conveying a meaning other than and in addition to the literal: M. H. Abrams explains, “An allegory is a narrative fiction in which the agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived to make coherent sense on the ‘literal,’ or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of agents, concepts and events.”⁸ Allegory is metaphorical in character; it entails identification between the literal and the symbolic levels; the latter is not overtly remarked on by the former. It is a sustained and developed metaphor. In other words, an

allegorical sign says one thing and means another. It refers to a pre-existing set of signs. Allegorical activity relies upon recognition and translation; the effectiveness of allegory greatly depends upon the reader's ability to recognize and decode the signs, interpreting their meanings through a process of translation. It requires a discursive community that shares the values and can therefore decode a particular sign. It is a process of signification in which the literal level is interpreted against an existing set of master codes.

For several theorists of the form of allegory, interpretation itself is an allegorical act. Fredric Jameson asserts in his book The Political Unconscious, "Interpretation is here construed as an essentially allegorical act, which consists in rewriting a given text in terms of a particular interpretative master code."⁹ Jameson's book argues for the priority of Marxist interpretation above others—either psychoanalytic or stylistic or structural criticism—as "the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation."¹⁰ History and politics are the ultimate horizon of cultural analysis; and more specifically, "Marxism can give us an adequate account of the essential *mystery* of the cultural past, which, like Tiresias drinking the blood, is momentarily returned to life and warmth and allowed once more to speak, and to deliver its long forgotten message in surroundings utterly alien."¹¹ In his position that interpretation is necessarily an allegorical act, Jameson echoes Northrop Frye, who in his seminal work Anatomy of Criticism states, "It is not often realized that all commentary is allegorical interpretation, an attaching of ideas to the structure of poetic imagery. The instant any critic permits himself to make a genuine comment about a poem . . . he has begun to allegorize."¹² Thus, interpretation is an act of reading that "recognizes" events and characters to be analogous to specific points of reference in the master code. Interpretation is a quest for the transcendental signified in terms of which truth will be

revealed. The interpreter decodes the literal level to uncover those pure truths hidden in the symbolic level.

While the mode of allegory in its traditional form continues to remain dominant, which is how I will argue Coetzee's critics read his allegories, there have been several trenchant criticisms of it. Here are some of the mid-twentieth century criticisms of the form. Susan Sontag, in her famous essay "Against Interpretation," critiques this tendency to "interpret" or "decode" works of art in order to uncover what the text is "saying" rather than what it is "doing": "The task of interpretation is virtually one of translation. The interpreter says, Look, don't you see that X is really—or, really means—A? That Y is really B? That Z is really C?"¹³ In Western cultural history, since the mimetic theory proposed by Plato that art is merely an "imitation of an imitation" (as ordinary objects are imitations of transcendent structures), interpretation, has necessarily been an allegorical act—"A means B," "A stands for B," "A is not really A but B," "A is B." This process of translation is a project of transforming the text in relation to the existing set of master codes: one can call these codes either Marxism or feminism or postcolonialism or nationalism.

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, in their work Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, offer a damning critique of the unifying, reductive, interpretive operation of Freudian analysis as it attempts to rewrite the complexities of everyday life into the strategically contained terms of the master code—"the family narrative." For them, reading a text is never an act of decoding truths buried in the unconscious, as in Freudian analysis, but a productive activity: "For reading a text is never a scholarly exercise in search of what is signified, still less a highly textual exercise in search of a signifier."¹⁴ For Deleuze and Guattari, literature is not about expression but production, not about what it is "saying" but

about what it is “doing.” These above theorists are not against interpretation *per se*, but against interpretive or hermeneutic activity as a metaphysical enterprise that has persisted since Plato. Sontag asserts, “I don’t mean interpretation in the broadest sense, the sense in which Nietzsche (rightly) says, ‘There are no facts, only interpretations.’ By interpretation, I mean here a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, a certain ‘rules’ of interpretation.”¹⁵; similarly, for Deleuze and Guattari literary interpretation “is a productive use of the literary machine, a montage of desiring-machines, a schizoid exercise that extracts from the text its revolutionary force.”¹⁶ Interpretation is about revealing, not transcendent truths, but the productive activity of the desiring-machine. Desire, in their conceptualization, is always immanent to production, in that desiring-production and social production parallel each other. Consequently, literature is a process and not a goal, production and not expression. Deleuze, Guattari, and Sontag are criticizing the interpretative determinacy of the form and its totalizing and unifying tendency that preempts meaning. Coetzee echoes these similar concerns in his South African context when he says, “a story is not a message with a covering, a rhetorical or aesthetic covering.”¹⁷ A story does not contain a nugget of pure, transcendent truth (in Jameson’s case the Marxist message) hiding behind the literal text that the interpreter needs to excavate.

Despite criticisms of and discomfort with the traditional form of allegory, there are some powerful defenders of the form. For Jameson, the traditional form has remained important and is central to his thinking. This was more than evident in his infamous essay on what he called “third-world literature” in the era of multinational capitalism. In the wake of what is often called the “postcolonial turn” in theory, Jameson declares, “*All* third-world texts are *necessarily . . . allegorical* [emphasis mine].”¹⁸ Since the publication of the essay

it has received much attention, especially from scholars in the field of postcolonial studies. For Jameson these so-called third-world texts written predominantly in western forms of representation (i.e. the novel) are to be read “necessarily as national allegories.” That is, if the capitalist culture of the so-called first-world demonstrates a radical split between the private and the public, the third-world culture demonstrates blurring of the lines between the libidinal and the political; more specifically, the private energies of the third-world texts necessarily project a political dimension in the form of a national allegory: “*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society.*”¹⁹ If Freud and Marx are arch-enemies in the first-world, in the third-world Freud is subsumed under Marx. Such sovereign pronouncements from a first-world critic (albeit a Marxist one) that attempt to map a totality—“a theory of the cognitive aesthetics of third-world literature”²⁰ —, constituting such disparate regions: Asia, Africa, and Latin America, have not been without their share of trouble. For many critics Jameson’s “general theory of third-world literature” has become an epitome of the persistence of a deeply Eurocentric, imperialist impulse in the Western academy that universalizes, homogenizes, and constructs the Other of the West. The much-publicized criticism of Jameson along these lines is Aijaz Ahmad’s essay, “Rhetoric of Otherness and the National Allegory.” While Ahmad agrees with Jameson’s plea for syllabus reform in the U. S. academy to teach not just “Western literature” but “World literature,” which is his broader concern in the essay, he is greatly critical of Jameson’s ambitious undertaking that presumes to offer a “general theory of third-world literature” based on a reading of a few third-world writers, generally expatriate writers living in the West writing in English. Furthermore, Ahmad’s key objection, being a Marxist himself, is that Jameson defines the

first and the second worlds in terms of their production systems (i.e. capitalism and socialism), whereas the third-world is defined “purely in terms of an ‘experience’ of externally inserted phenomena [i.e. imperialism] . . . Ideologically, this classification divides the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it.”²¹ Thus, the primary ideological formation available to the left-wing third-world intellectual in Jameson’s framework, in Ahmad’s reading, is nationalism (and not socialism, which is a possibility Ahmad desires but has been denied by a fellow Marxist).

Similarly, in A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, Gayatri Spivak criticizes the “us and them” binary oppositional logic of Jameson’s essay: “It is an unacknowledged version of what is most problematic in Jameson’s ‘Third World Literature.’ Psychoanalysis (such as it is), for us. Anthropology (as, in Jameson, nationalism), for them.”²² Moreover, for her, there is another pitfall in Jameson’s argument. Spivak suggests that in Jameson’s nostalgia for totalities, for the single, uninterrupted unconscious narrative, he reveals one of the most dangerous tendencies of allegorization—rewriting a narrative in terms of the master codes. Drawing out the differences between Jameson’s position and hers, she says, “If for us the assurance of transference gives way to the possibility of haunting, it is also true that for us the only figure of the unconscious is that of a radical series of discontinuous interruptions.”²³ Spivak displaces Jameson’s uninterrupted unconscious narrative with a series of discontinuous interruptions.²⁴ Jeremy Tambling suggests that Spivak displaces Jamesonian allegory through the framework of Paul de Man’s theory of allegory, whose postmodernist reading of the form did much to revive interest in this outmoded form: “Spivak agrees with Paul de Man in defining the unconscious in terms of parabasis. For her, the repressed unconscious appears in allegorical forms, forms of ‘other’ speaking which

cannot be pre-known and therefore interpreted.”²⁵ Tambling’s reading of Spivak’s response to Jameson suggests that she employs the revisionist, postmodern view of allegory in order to disrupt the traditional one. Quoting Friedrich Schlegel’s definition of irony as “permanent parabasis,” de Man, in his essay “The Rhetoric of Temporality” states, “Parabasis is understood here as what is called in English criticism the ‘self-conscious narrator,’ the author’s intrusion that disrupts the fictional illusion.”²⁶ Parabasis is a disruption of the continuum, an interruption of the continuous. Postmodern fiction, more than any other style before it, employs parabasis through metafictional devices in order to break the illusion of reality and the authority of the speaking voice. For de Man there is structural affinity between irony and allegory in terms of parabasis: “This definition points to a structure shared by irony and allegory . . . the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous. . . . In both cases, the sign points to something that differs from its literal meaning and has for its function the thematization of this difference.”²⁷ In opposition to the traditional unifying view of the form, for de Man the relationship between sign and meaning is discontinuous and untranslatable.

De Man’s reconceptualization of allegory in his works, especially in his influential essay “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” and Benjamin’s recovery of the form in the *Trauerspiel* study have greatly influenced contemporary revisions of the form of allegory for postmodern sensibilities. As stated above, for de Man allegory is understood in terms of “permanent parabasis,” of the discontinuity between the literal sign and its meaning, of the interruptions of the unifying text and the continuous authorial voice. Benjamin’s study of the German baroque drama privileges allegory over the symbol, for the former points to the relentless unfolding and decay of life, while the latter refers to life in terms of a ahistorical

organic holism. For Benjamin ruins are the material counterparts of allegory: “Allegories are, in the realm of thoughts, what ruins are in the realm of things.”²⁸ Symbol embodies self-contained, concentrated meanings that capture totalities, and allegory consists of a series of discontinuous moments unfolding in time, resulting in failed attempts to capture meanings. Craig Owens reads Benjamin through deconstruction, reminding us that for Benjamin the allegorist is a grave-digger, working in ruined fragments, and disinterring sedimented layers of meaning: “For Benjamin, *interpretation* is *disinternment*.”²⁹ Thus, traditional allegory is understood in terms of continuities, metanarratives, and the transcendental truth; and postmodern allegory, Owen’s term, is understood in terms of discontinuities, fragmentary narratives, and immanent truths.

Jameson is clearly aware of the contemporary reevaluations of the form of allegory after the Romantics had dismissed it in favor of the unifying and organic symbol. He says, “If allegory has once again become somehow congenial for us today, as over against the massive and monumental unifications of an older modernist symbolism or even realism itself, it is because the allegorical spirit is profoundly discontinuous, a matter of breaks and heterogeneities, of the multiple polysemia of the dream rather than the homogeneous representation of the symbol.”³⁰ But, as Spivak shows in her response to the infamous essay, Jameson’s reading of all “third-world literature” as allegorical reveals a deep nostalgia for the disfavored and the devalued mode of allegorizing and for a recovery of its traditional form. In this chapter I will show that several critical readers of Coetzee’s use of allegory reveal this nostalgia for the traditional mode, for totalities. They interpret Coetzee’s allegories in terms of already existing master codes—of the national narrative or moral ones. In Coetzee, I argue that the interpretative determinacy of such modes of

allegorization are deeply embedded in the knowledge-production of the Empire and its regimes of truth.

Several of Coetzee's novels are set at a distance from the time and place in which they were written, with exiguous plot peopled with mysterious characters (magistrate, barbarian girl, Michael K, Friday) who, if they speak at all, perform elaborate philosophical gymnastics: these elements have encouraged several readers of Coetzee to look "beyond" the literal into the moral or the political realms to seek out meanings which the novels might imply. Even the two exceptions, Age of Iron and Disgrace, which specify South Africa as their setting, are generally read as allegories about South Africa: the former allegorizing the State of Emergency during the mid-1980s, and the latter allegorizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Trials of 1995. In echo of Jameson's nostalgia for totalities, critics have often translated Coetzee's allegorical fiction into the pre-existing master codes of morality or politics, conveying moral or national truths: those who read his allegories as "moral allegories" translate the timelessness and placelessness into transcendental truths; those who read them as "political allegories" translate apparently distant locales and periods into the South Africa of the time of writing.

Bernard Levin, in his review of WFB published on 23 November 1980 in the London Sunday Times, states, "Mr. Coetzee sees the heart of darkness in all societies, and gradually it becomes clear that he is not dealing in politics at all, but inquiring into the nature of the beast that lurks within each of us."³¹ (quoted in Barnett). Levin treats Coetzee's fiction as revealing to us the continuous universal unconscious of the human race. Nadine Gordimer, who reads the form of allegory in a manner similar to Levin, criticizes Coetzee's use of the apolitical form, more so in the politically charged context of South Africa: "Allegory . . .

clears the reader's lungs of the transient and fill them with a deep breath of transcendence. Man becomes Everyman (that bore)."³² For Gordimer, who privileges the realist mode of witness writing for its direct access to the national truths, the allegorical form can only translate into revealing truths about that bore—the everyman. Her frustration with the form of allegory arises from the fact that the particular truths of fiction cannot be interpreted in terms of the metanarrative of the nation, which is of course what she desires. Only realist fiction can do so, that is, document historical and political truths. Coetzee, according to Gordimer, uses allegory “out of a kind of opposing desire to hold himself clear of events and their daily, grubby, tragic consequences in which, like everybody else living in South Africa, he is up to the neck, and about which he had an inner compulsion to write. So here was an allegory as a stately fastidiousness, or a state of shock. He seemed able to deal with the horror he saw written on the sun only—if brilliantly—if this were to be projected into another time and place.”³³ For Gordimer, moral allegory is politically and ethically evasive because it is deaf to the here and now of history. Irving Howe reiterates Gordimer's concern in his review of WFB, asserting that Coetzee's use of allegorical narratives could suggest a form of ahistorical universalism:

One possible loss is the bite and pain, the urgency that a specified historical place and time may provide. To create a ‘universalized’ Empire is to court the risk—especially among sophisticated readers for whom the credos of modernism have become dull axioms—that a narrative with strong political and social references will be ‘elevated’ into sterile ruminations about the human condition.³⁴

Levin, Gordimer, and Howe despite their different opinions about ahistorical universalism, read Coetzee's fiction as concealing moral truths that can be revealed in the process of

interpretation, of decoding the literal level of meanings. In other words, they understand allegory in its traditional form of signification.

Several critics (Head,³⁵ Wenzel,³⁶ Eckstein,³⁷ Gallagher³⁸), in order to “rescue” Coetzee’s fiction from readers like Levin, Gordimer, and Howe propose that they are “national allegories” about South Africa, that they are directly engaged with the unjust political reality of South Africa. Dominic Head questions critics who read Coetzee’s allegories as revealing transcendental or moral truths, and asserts that they are rooted in the national reality of South Africa in particular, and imperialism in general:

This novel [WFB] about the destructiveness (and self-destructiveness) of an imperial regime—obstructed by one man of conscience—has obvious ramifications for the white opponent of apartheid South Africa. . . . At one level, this is an allegory of imperialism. . . . Yet . . . the novel still be shown to have its compositional roots in a set of specific responses to contemporary South African concerns . . . through broadening and questioning of its one-to-one significance, the novel reinvigorates the allegorizing principle.”³⁹

Whether critics read Coetzee’s allegories as moral or national, both these readings understand allegory in its traditional form. They treat Coetzee’s elusive novels as hiding a kernel of truth, either moral or political. Thus, they rush to either redeem him by reading his allegories as being politically responsible or denounce him as being politically and ethically evasive and irresponsible. Both these approaches show the dangers of allegorization, of interpreting the literal level in terms of the master codes, of constructing a unifying, continuous narrative—be it a national narrative or a moral one. In their reading strategies, the particular is always already the general. We have seen the pitfalls of such modes of

allegorization in Jameson's reading of all third-world literature in terms of the metanarrative discourse of the nation. In the following pages, I will show that Coetzee in WFB self-consciously employs the form of allegory to deconstruct its interpretive determinacy. What these critics fail to see is his critique of the form of allegory that most of his allegorical fables stage.

Derek Attridge, in his chapter "Against Allegory: *Waiting for Barbarians & Life and Times of Michael K*," speaks of this inclination to read Coetzee's works as allegories, and more often than not, as national allegories. In contrast to such readings he reads Coetzee's novels against the allegorical impulse. Moreover, he frustratingly alludes to a tendency in the West to read third-world writers exclusively in relation to their national backgrounds.

Attridge of course has Jameson in mind here:

Although the national backgrounds of Beckett and Kafka have played a part in some readings of their work, they are less subject to the preconception that their writing is 'really' about Ireland or about the Austro-Hungarian Empire. (Kazuo Ishiguro hits the nail on the head when, irritated by the frequent suggestion that *The Remains of the Day* is 'really' about Japan, he observes that if he had written *The Trial* he would have to put up with comments like 'What strange judicial system the Japanese have.'⁴⁰

Ishiguro's frustration, directed at Western readers of his text, voices the fate of several non-Western writers whose works are often straitjacketed as "national allegories" (the irony of course is that postcolonial critics acting as native informants often read non-Western literary texts in such reductionist ways, although today the master code "global" replaces "national"). Ishiguro's irritation can also be read as an attack on Western high-handed tone

characteristic of the theories of development—because it is Japanese it is necessarily strange and backward. In Jameson’s essay this tone is loudest in the following lines: “The third-world novel will not offer the satisfactions of Proust or Joyce; what is more damaging than that . . . is its tendency to remind us of outmoded stages of our own first-world cultural development and to cause us to conclude that ‘they are still writing novels like Dreiser or Sherwood Anderson.’”⁴¹ While Attridge remains suspicious of all allegorical readings in his essay on Coetzee, he basically ignores Benjamin and de Man’s revisionist attempts, making one conclude that he only views the form in traditional ways. With Jameson and the other critics of Coetzee I have expounded upon above, such a view of the form remains dominant. Coetzee I will show is only too aware of the dangers of such modes of allegorization. The novel centers on the dangers of the interpretative determinacy of the form.

WFB, published in 1980, brought Coetzee to world attention, and is considered one of his greatest works. As the novel is set in an unspecified time and place, it has lead most critics to focus on its status as an allegory: Teresa Dovey declares that the novel is an “allegory of allegories.”⁴² Referring to the uncanny power of Coetzee’s allegorical novels for contemporary times, Rob Nixon states, “The prize may be awarded for a lifetime’s achievement, but this Nobel feels as if it has been awarded for Coetzee’s great allegorical novels from the early 1980s, *Waiting for Barbarians* and *Life and Times of Michael K*, which are uncannily in keeping with the temper of our War-on-Terror times.”⁴³ Coetzee’s allegorical story is intertextual with several canonical writers; there are echoes of Franz Kafka’s “The Penal Colony,”⁴⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter,⁴⁵ and Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot.⁴⁶ As in Kafka’s elaborate torture machine that punishes by writing the law on the body of the condemned in a language incomprehensible to him, in

Coetzee's novel, the Empire's architectonic power is applied through systematic torture of the barbarian girl's body, which the liberal magistrate reads as secret writing demanding to be interpreted; Hawthorne's critique of prisons as the black flowers of civilization is echoed by the magistrate in the novel when the Empire orders construction of new prisons in preparation for the so-called external threat; and, Beckett's staging of action in perpetual present which conveys a state of stasis is reenacted in Coetzee's novel which not only echoes the play's title but is also written entirely in the present tense. The novel is more directly intertextual with the Italian novelist Dino Buzzati's The Tartar Steppe, who was greatly influenced by Kafka.⁴⁷ Coetzee rewrites Buzzati's famous novel about a group of soldiers waiting for the arrival of the enemy—the Tartars. Giovanni Drogo, a young lieutenant in a nameless country, is posted to Fort Bastiani located in a sleepy frontier beyond which lies the desert, the Tartar Steppe. Isolated from the hustle and bustle of city life amidst mountains and a dreadful vast expanse, the soldiers, who live monotonous, boring lives, secretly hope that their military training will be rewarded with a confrontation with the Tartars over the northern horizon across the empty steppe. Long ago there may have been Tartars but, as in Coetzee's novel, none have appeared in recent memory. Nevertheless, the soldiers hone their weapons and build defenses against the alleged attack. Although not intending to stay, Drogo finds that several years have passed by, without his noticing, as he waits with his fellow soldiers for the foreign invasion that has not happened. Over time the fort is downgraded and Drogo's ambitions fade after waiting thirty years for the enemy. As he lies on his deathbed, the invading enemy is spotted crossing the desert by one of the soldiers. To his chagrin, he is deemed unfit to fight at the very moment when glory beckons. Unlike Coetzee's novel, the enemy does eventually appear towards the end

of Buzzati's novel and the militarization of the fort appears less futile. Coetzee turns to the Egyptian poet Constantin Cavafy's poem "Waiting for Barbarians" for his title and for a different ending to Buzzati's story. In the poem the Emperor, Praetors and Consuls have been waiting splendidly appareled for the arrival of the barbarians, who never appear. Disheartened they return to their homes like jilted lovers who have lost their reason to live. The concluding lines show their despair:

Why this sudden restlessness, this confusion?

(How serious people's faces have become.)

Why are the streets and squares emptying so rapidly,

everyone going home so lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not come.

And some who have just returned from the border say

there are no barbarians any longer.

And now, what's going to happen to us without the barbarians?

They were, those people, a kind of solution.⁴⁸

Coetzee's novel repeats Cavafy's ending. The barbarians of course never appear.

The novel is set in a lazy, frontier town of a nameless Empire. The town's Magistrate is the story's protagonist and homodiegetic narrator. He is also liberal-minded. His peaceful existence comes to an end with the arrival of Colonel Joll, a member of the

Third Bureau, who is visiting the frontiers of the Empire on emergency orders from the center. There are rumors that the barbarians are preparing to invade the Empire. Joll has come to verify “the truth” about the external threat, whose cruel interrogation methods force the liberal magistrate to distance himself from the Empire of pain. The “idea” of the barbarians enables the Empire to array its forces, display its shiny swords and cannons, and even indulge in alleged conflict in the far desert with an invisible enemy, thus, producing new fears and desires among the people of the town. Empire’s bogeyman tactics employed once every generation holds together a fractured polity. The magistrate says:

Of this [the barbarian] unrest I myself saw nothing. In private I observed that once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians. There is no woman living along the frontier who has not dreamed of a dark barbarian hand coming from under the bed to grip her ankle, no man who has not frightened himself with visions of the barbarians carousing in his home, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters. These dreams are the consequence of too much ease. Show me a barbarian army and I will believe.⁴⁹

As in Cavafy’s poem, no barbarians ever appear in the novel, but only a few fisher folks and nomads, who are captured by Joll and tortured. Meanwhile, the magistrate gets involved with a barbarian girl, one of the captured nomads bearing marks of Joll’s interrogation techniques. Against the emergency orders, the magistrate undertakes a treacherous journey to return her to her people; after doing so, he is imprisoned, tortured, and declared enemy of the Empire. The novel ends with the defeat of the Empire to the alleged barbarians (rumors are that they are nomads), while the magistrate, now wearing rags and feeding on leftovers, returns to his official post in an almost deserted town in ruins.

The novel is published at a time of significant political upheavals in South Africa. David Attwell notes that the South African government had aggressively elaborated its already existing security apparatus, “The central emphases of policy at this time were therefore managerial, technocratic, anticommunist, and military. The umbrella concept linking all of these policies . . . was ‘total strategy.’”⁵⁰ Moreover, the government banned several political organizations, more specifically those advocating Black Consciousness. Steve Biko, a founder of the Black Consciousness movement, was a noted anti-apartheid activist in South Africa during 1960s and 1970s. He was brutally murdered in detention in 1977 by the South African police. Biko’s murder—and the subsequent cover up—was still a fresh memory for the nation as a whole. For Attwell, Coetzee’s novel highlights the role of torture in Biko’s death. In the novel, the magistrate has been denied direct access to Joll’s torture chamber, whose dark secrets exert great seductive power over him. He is merely given two formal activity reports written in a judicious, bureaucratic language of “accidental deaths” of two of the detainees. Coetzee, in his article “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa,” states that torture has exerted a dark fascination on many liberal South African writers, most notably Alex La Guma. During apartheid the South African government had banned visual representation of prisons, which increased exponentially over the face of the country. Furthermore, the government banned photographs or sketches of Vorster Square, which was the security police headquarters in Johannesburg, where numerous political prisoners were taken for interrogation and not all returned alive. As the torture chamber, a site of extreme human experience almost bordering on the pornographic, was inaccessible to the people, great many liberal writers of South Africa were drawn to this forbidden site: for Coetzee, in South Africa, “The dark forbidden chamber is the origin of

the novelistic fantasy per se; in creating an obscenity, in enveloping it in mystery, the state creates the preconditions for the novel to set about its work of representation.”⁵¹ Thus, the State makes its vile mysteries an occasion for novelistic fantasy. This could partly explain the demand by liberal humanist writers of South Africa to act as witness to the injustices of apartheid. The totalitarian state creates the preconditions for such a novel to emerge. For a writer, the ethical challenge is to not fall into the choices produced by the State: to either ignore torture or to represent it. Coetzee states, “The true challenge is how not to play the game by the rules of the state, how to establish one’s own authority, how to imagine torture and death on one’s own terms.”⁵² Coetzee, in this article, does not tell us how a writer should proceed on his or her own terms sans falling into the games produced by the state. What would such a writing look like? Would such writing produce realist or allegorical narratives, the two modes of styles that have divided the liberal South African intelligentsia? He only hopes for a future society in which the above two will not be choices, when all human actions will be returned to the ambit of moral judgment: “When the choice is no longer limited to either looking on in horrified fascination as the blows fall or turning one’s eyes away, then the novel can once again take as its province the whole of life, and even the torture chamber can be accorded a place in the design.”⁵³

He slyly dances around the question of his own writing, which, in its own way, has been preoccupied with torture and largely produced under the censorship gaze of the security state. I argue that we can find an answer to this question in Coetzee’s fiction, in which he confronts the horrors of history on his own terms. In this essay, Coetzee is indirectly responding to his liberal humanist critics such as Gordimer who contend that the postmodernist form of allegory, in which his works are largely written, is politically and

ethically evasive, and assert that fiction should stand as “witness,” that is, be a “representation” of history—“the novel must hold a mirror to history.” Attwell maintains, “The predominance of realism in South African literary culture has led Coetzee, when pressed, to adopt positions that waver between embattled defensiveness and incisive critique.”⁵⁴ In numerous interviews and journalistic articles, Coetzee has voiced his complaint that in South Africa there is a tendency to “subsume the novel under history” as imaginative witnesses of “real” historical events, and a novelist who resists such formulas is deemed irresponsible.⁵⁵ Challenging these notions, he asserts that to offer “Marxist or feminist interpretations” of novels is to have missed everything about it:

No matter what it may appear to be doing, the story may not really be playing the game you call Class Conflict or the game called Male Domination or any of the other games in the games handbook. While it may certainly be possible to read the book as playing one of those games, in reading it in that way you have missed something. You may have missed not just something, you may have missed everything.

Because (I parody the position somewhat) a story is not a message with a covering, a rhetorical or aesthetic covering.⁵⁶

In the above quote, Coetzee is ironically attacking two aesthetic forms of writing—realism and allegory. On the one hand, he is defending his use of allegory from criticisms from the realist camp that demands witness writing in order to represent the suffering of the victims of history. But he is also attacking the allegorical mode of cognition exemplified in Jameson’s reading of “third-world literature,” for whom the literal is always already the general.

Coetzee's allegorical fiction critiques the received wisdom that realist narrative is a transparent medium through which the light of historical truth passes unmediated by the writer-intellectual. In Coetzee, representation is always an act of interpretation and translation. Furthermore, Coetzee's metafictional novels also stage the signifying function of language; sign as "representation" denies the *productive* nature of language as it assumes that there is one-to-one relationship between the signifier and signified: "The linguistic-systemic orientation of his novels involves the recognition, rooted in all linguistic inquiry, that language is productive."⁵⁷ We have "real" world because we have language to signify it. Liberal humanist intellectuals, in their desire to give voice-consciousness to the other of history, disguise their position as "representing" intellectuals who "speak for the other." To disguise this "interpretive" function of representation is ethically problematic, more so when the writer, camped outside the closed doors of the dark chamber as witness to history, is also a voyeur.

Coetzee's oeuvre perpetually stages the figure of the liberal humanist indulging in the business of "representing" the subaltern: in WFB the magistrate is one such figure who attempts to speak for the suffering of the silent barbarian girl. Through the course of the narrative these "representing humanists" learn the painful lesson, which is echoed in Spivak's famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", that "their privilege is their loss":

When we come to the concomitant question of the consciousness of the subaltern, the notion of what the [intellectual's] work *cannot* say becomes important. . . . With no possibility of nostalgia for that lost origin, the historian must suspend . . . the clamor of his or her own consciousness . . . so that the elaboration of the insurgency, packaged with an insurgent-consciousness does not freeze into an "object of

investigation,” or, worse yet, a model for imitation. The postcolonial intellectuals learn that their privilege is their loss. In this they are a paradigm of the intellectuals.⁵⁸

Spivak is critical of liberal intellectuals of both the first and the third worlds who, in their desires to “speak for the other,” *construct* the subaltern either as a subject-of-revolt or object-of-oppression, in turn ironically rehearsing imperialist impulses. Intellectuals should begin with an admission of failure, that is, a recognition of the limits of their position, rather than rendering themselves transparent through witness writing. In Coetzee’s fiction, the figure of the liberal humanist comes to realize that to confront the subalterns is not to appropriate, assimilate or represent them but to learn to re-present him/herself. The subalterns in Coetzee’s fiction remain silent; they resist the author’s (and the protagonist’s) attempts to “represent” them. In WFB, the silence of the subaltern woman interrupts the magistrate’s dominant discourse. Concomitantly, the liberal author belonging to the dominant group, stages the limits of his own discourse, which is deeply rooted in the history of imperialism. In this regard, far from being an ethical black hole, Coetzee’s fiction is deeply ethical in the Levinasian sense. As suggested in my introduction, for Levinas ethics occurs when the liberty and the spontaneity of the knowing subject is called into question by the radically other. In Coetzee’s fiction, the radical other of Europe resists all attempts by the narrators and the author to appropriate and assimilate them.

In WFB Coetzee interrupts the objective illusion of the realist mode of representation by deliberately writing the novel in the allegorical mode that helps him stage the act of interpretation—an act of establishing of meanings in terms of the master code. This bare timeless, placeless narrative—an allegory of allegories—deliberately seduces interpretations

from the readers. Allegory, in the novel, is employed not only at a structural level, but also at a thematic level. Throughout the novel, the liberal magistrate is preoccupied with the attempt to decipher a hieroglyphic script, written on pieces of poplar wood which he has discovered among ancient desert ruins. When Colonel Joll questions him about the pieces, he says, “They form an allegory. They can be read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways,” expressing the idea that allegory requires an act of interpretation whereby its meanings can be decoded.⁵⁹ The literal wood pieces stand for something else. Needless to say Colonel Joll interprets the wood pieces as embodying a secret code that the barbarians have shared with the traitorous magistrate. Colonel Joll’s reading of the act of interpretation as translation of the literal into the symbolic realm finds its corollary in the magistrate’s attempts at decoding the marks and scars left by Joll’s interrogation techniques on the barbarian girl’s body. But over the course of the narrative plot, the magistrate becomes painfully aware that his attempts at interpreting the marks on the subaltern’s body bring him increasingly closer to Joll’s interrogation methods applied to the body to reveal its dark secrets. The act of interpretation inextricably links the State (Vorster Square), the author, the character, and the reader in a vicious hermeneutics circle. Critics, who unselfconsciously engage in the dangerous games of allegorization, of translating the text into pre-existing master codes of morality or politics, fail to see this trap laid out by the text. We do not have here a transparent intellectual mind transmitting the truth of history—fiction as witness is an impossibility in this hermeneutic circle. Coetzee’s novelistic strategy radically differs from the realist narratives of liberal writers (such as Gordimer) as it self-consciously presents itself “as an interpretation” (rather than disguising itself as representation), and thus as a necessarily problematic narrative. Dovey rightly suggests that

the “liberal humanist discourse does not recognize its status as discourse; it fails to account for the way in which the meanings it constructs are contingent upon a specific interpretive framework.”⁶⁰ This is evident in the demands for witness writing, in standing as witness to history. In contrast, Coetzee stages his ambiguous position as a “postcolonizer” in the neocolonial context of South Africa. He cannot simply choose to deny this (or worse still to render himself transparent); the history of his discourse is deeply rooted in the history of imperialism, which necessitates that he cannot unproblematically “speak for the other” of history. In Coetzee’s fiction, we have an account of the complicity between writing, reading, and the structures of desire and power. But the task of the intellectual-writer is not merely to repeat blindly the dominant modes in his writing, but to displace it. WFB not only places under scrutiny its own interpretive practice but also, in this repetition of the act of interpretation, deconstructs itself by displacing the very terms of its own dominant narrative. Such a deconstructive practice helps Coetzee displace the dominant from within.

The novel begins with the magistrate of a lazy outpost of the Empire declaring in the first-person (homodiegetic) singular, “I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire.”⁶¹ The glasses are dark and look opaque from the outside, which makes the magistrate initially conclude that they hide blind eyes; but he soon learns that Colonel Joll can see through them. Joll, who is visiting the frontiers of the unnamed Empire on emergency orders from the center, proudly announces that his spectacles are a new invention protecting the eyes from the harsh light of the desert sun and the skin from getting wrinkled: the magistrate, conscious of his outdatedness, excitedly states, “He tells me they are a new invention.”⁶² The nervous magistrate (and the reader) is uncomfortably aware of being seen by Joll’s eyes, but unable to see them. Joll is a

member of the Third Bureau, which has newly become the most important division of the Civil Guard whose members are “seekers of truth,” “doctors of interrogation.” The Empire has sent its representative to the border post to find out truth about the alleged attack by the barbarians. The dark glasses are meant to protect the eyes of the Empire from the sun (symbolically from the land and its people) and to keep it ageless: the magistrate observes the effects of the spectacles on the Colonel’s skin, “It is true. He has the skin of a younger man.”⁶³ The sun shall never set on the Empire. Here one is reminded of Coetzee’s analysis of white writing in the context of South Africa. In his book White Writing, he speaks of the resistance of the white settler writer to fully embrace Africa, being quick to love the land but not its people.⁶⁴ These new men of Empire, Joll and Mandel, are handsome (Mandel possesses “Aryan” beauty), neat, efficient, and machinic: “He [Mandel] is good-looking man, with regular white teeth and lovely blue eyes. . . . The kind of man who drives his body like a machine, I imagine, ignorant that it has its own rhythms. When he looks at me . . . he will look from behind that handsome immobile face and through those clear eyes as an actor looks from behind a mask.”⁶⁵ The eyes hidden behind the mask can see without being seen; the voyeuristic nature of this uneven visibility is a motif that repeats throughout the novel. Under the new emergency situation, the eyes of power are visible but unverifiable (even by its own members); in this new world, there is a dissociation of the see/being seen dyad. Empire’s panoptic gaze appears blind but can see; blindness and (in)sight, contradictions in the old world, are perfectly coherent in the new technology of power, contradictorily coherent.

WFB is written in homodiegetic present-tense narration. The structural use of unbroken present tense conveys a sense of immediacy, urgency and newness of the

emergency situation. In this State of emergency, time is suspended in an eternal present. Empire consolidates its presence by imposing a timeless stasis and obliterating the past and the future; the emergency powers have created an “irruption of history into the static time of the oasis.”⁶⁶ The community is caught in an ever-repeated present time of “waiting” for the putative enemy, which serves to reinforce the power structures by making knowledge of a different time and a different society inaccessible. The present tense of Magistrate’s narrative time is at odds with his anachronistic desires, suggesting a split between the experiencing self and the narrating self. Before Joll’s arrival on the scene he appears to be living a peaceful existence, carrying out his not too onerous duties, pursuing his hobbies that include hunting and archeological excavations, as well as enjoying multiple liaisons with the young women of the town. But in these new times, his quiet existence has come to an end: “So now it seems my easy years are coming to an end, when I could sleep with a tranquil heart knowing that with a nudge here and a touch there the world would stay on its course.”⁶⁷ A member of the old-style Empire, the magistrate increasingly desires to distance himself from the presentness of the Empire of pain by struggling on with the old story: “The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages; I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble.”⁶⁸ One of his hobbies is to excavate ancient desert ruins hoping to hear spirits from the byways of history: “I pamper my melancholy and try to find in the vacuousness of the desert a special historical poignancy.”⁶⁹ Significantly enough, this romantic nostalgia for a past time, uttered in the urgency of the present tense of narrative time, does not suggest a desire for destruction of Empire altogether but a destruction of the Empire of pain, of the new men of Empire, who have ruined his peaceful days: he wishes to

run an “Empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain.”⁷⁰ When Joll returns to the center, after his first visit, the magistrate orders his soldiers to thoroughly clean up the torture chamber declaring “I want everything as it was before.”⁷¹ By holding on to an old story he wishes to distance himself from the “bad” men of the Empire.

Confronted with the torture marks on the barbarian girl’s body the magistrate realizes that his attempt at temporally distancing himself from the torturers (the “bad” Empire) is futile.

In the figure of the barbarian girl the past and the present collapse into an eternal presence of the Empire, marked on her body by Joll’s forks and pincers.

Colonel Joll captures nomads and fisherfolk to supposedly investigate the truth about the alleged barbarian invasion. The magistrate takes one of the tortured nomads, a barbarian girl, to live with him; her father is killed and she is blinded by the Colonel. He undertakes nightly rituals of bathing and oiling her wounds, frequently interrupted by sleep: “But more often in the very act of caressing her I am overcome with sleep as if poleaxed, fall into oblivion. . . . These dreamless spells are like death to me, or enchantment, blank, outside time.”⁷² He is drawn to the dark, elusive symbols that the new Empire has left on her body: “Between thumb and forefinger I part her eyelids. The caterpillar comes to an end, decapitated, at the pink inner rim of the eyelid.”⁷³ This liberal servant of the Empire has a fascination for the dark chamber, where the doctors of interrogation work on their patients to “produce” truth, but has been denied access to it: “I sit in my rooms with the windows shut, in the stifling warmth of a windless evening, trying to read, straining my ears to hear or not hear sounds of violence.”⁷⁴ He is the figure of the liberal humanist writer, who stands outside the torture chamber begging to be let it in so as to act as witness to the crimes of the State. When denied access to document the crime, he begins to engage in hermeneutics,

interpreting the mysteries of the chamber. The choice, to document or represent, to write a realistic novel or an allegorical one, is created by the preconditions of (the bad men of) the Empire. Thus, daily ritualistic acts of healing function as acts of interpretation, of decipherment: “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl’s body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her.”⁷⁵ The magistrate’s healing activity is directed towards a goal of signification and is, therefore, teleological; she is the only “key to the labyrinth.”⁷⁶ This allegorical activity seeks that symbolic level of meaning through decoding the literal torture marks left on the body. He seeks to translate the literal into the pre-existing metanarrative of the Empire. The impulse for interpretation goes hand in hand with the desire to penetrate, to crack open the surface and reveal the truth. But the symbols invite a hermeneutic activity only to frustrate it. Similarly Coetzee’s novel invites allegorical readings only to frustrate such attempts by the reader. The magistrate, to his chagrin, fails to translate the surface of the barbarian girl’s body into the master codes of the Empire:

But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. For the first time I feel a dry pity for them [torturers]: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other! The girl lies in my bed, but there is no good reason why it should be a bed. I behave in some ways like a lover—I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her—but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate.”⁷⁷

The act of allegorization collapses the distance between Joll and him, between the “good” Empire of the past and the “bad” Empire of the present. Joll’s torture and his healing rituals

(described in the metaphor of hunting) are signifying activities that in their attempt at revealing the truth transform the Other of history into the dominant narrative of the Empire. To decipher/to torture is to obliterate/translate the singular alterity of the Other into Empire's regimes of truth. Foucault, in his influential book Discipline and Punish, states that the truth-power relation is central to torture: "If torture was so strongly embedded in legal practice, it was because it revealed truth and showed the operation of power. . . . It also made the body of the condemned man the place where the vengeance of the sovereign is applied, the anchoring point for a manifestation of power, an opportunity of affirming the dissymmetry of forces."⁷⁸ Through torture the Empire does not reveal truth but asserts its "will to truth" by exerting its power over the body of the Other; it rewrites the body into its pre-existing master code. It produces and circulates subjects and signs in accordance with a recognizable totality. In the magistrate's failure to decode Coetzee stages the dangers of allegorization, of the nostalgia for continuities and totalities. Empire, both in its old and new avatars, brings about a dissociation of the see/being seen dyad, as symbolized by the uneven visibility of Joll's dark glasses. Significantly enough, the liberal magistrate's voyeuristic gaze establishes a similar dissymmetry of forces between him and the blind barbarian girl: "I watch her as she undresses, hoping to capture in her movements a hint of an old free state. . . . Her face has the look of something that knows itself watched."⁷⁹ Yet again, the distance between Joll and him is negligible; they are merely two sides of the same coin: "For I was not, as I liked to think, the indulgent pleasure-loving opposite of the cold rigid Colonel. I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow."⁸⁰ Good imperialism (sometimes called the "civilizing mission") is the lie, while bad imperialism is the truth. The hegemony of liberal humanism

works in alliance with the domination of the imperial powers. Dovey suggests in the magistrate's crisis of interpretation we see the failure of liberal humanism to see itself as discourse: "One corollary to the failure of liberal humanism to see itself as discourse is its failure to see itself as located in history. . . . A second corollary is the failure of liberal humanist discourse to see itself as a speech act . . . engaged in a process of subject constitution."⁸¹

If the voyeuristic desire for signification collapses the illusory ethical and temporal distance between him and Joll, his failure to penetrate the surface of the barbarian girl, to interpret her body marks, initiates his radical transformation from being a servant to becoming the enemy of the Empire. The crisis of interpretation results in loss of the referential certainty of the Empire. Realizing that she is "a prisoner now as ever before," he decides to take her back to her people against the emergency orders.⁸² Outside the boundaries of the Empire, in a treacherous desert, he is able to consummate the relationship with the girl (who initiates the sexual act). After the intercourse, still doubtful of his relationship to the gendered Other, he asks, "Is it then the case that it is the whole woman I want, that my pleasure in her is spoiled until these marks on her are erased . . . [or] that it is the marks on her which drew me to her but, which to my disappointment do not go deep enough . . . is it she I want or the traces of history her body bears?"⁸³ Dovey reads the magistrate's crisis of interpretation as the failure of the liberal humanist discourse to see itself located in history. But, as this quote suggests, is this crisis not due to a sense of a lack rather than a failure? The question doubts if his inability to penetrate earlier was merely due to personal or historical reasons. Being an ordinary magistrate with no heroic desires of toppling the Empire but merely hoping to merit three lines of small print in the Imperial

Gazette, he doubts whether the marks were simply ugly and distasteful or they symbolized the brutal history of the Empire from which he cannot ethically distance himself. Although he struggles to understand his position, the Empire has no such difficulty: as soon as he returns from his journey he is arrested on charges of treason. He is now imprisoned in the same dark chamber, access to which he sought earlier. Ironically, facts and metaphors are literalized here. Either writing choices, based on documentation or interpretation, realism or allegory, would still have afforded him distance from that chamber. After being imprisoned in the same dark chamber, he continues to doubt his heroic capabilities, but is certain about one thing, “my alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over, I have set myself in opposition, the bond is broken, I am a free man. . . . And is there any principle behind my opposition?”⁸⁴ The interpretive determinacy of allegory is disrupted; the hermeneutic seal is broken. Consequently, justice no longer means good, painless imperialism—“to run an Empire in which there would be no more injustice, no more pain.”⁸⁵ The passage from being a legal subject to becoming an outlaw reveals to him that such oxymoronic fantasies, painless Empire, can only be entertained within the fixed system of meanings produced by the Empire. Joll, after his first expedition against the alleged barbarians, returns to the fort with a group of nomads, who walk in a file tied neck to neck with a loop of wire running through the flesh of each man’s hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks. The magistrate, who sneaks out of prison to witness the public torture of the nomads along with other members of the town, appeals to Joll, in a high humanist tradition, to halt the torture: “We are the great miracle of creation! But from blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself!”⁸⁶ Returning to his prison cell, after being beaten, he ponders, “Justice: once that word is uttered, where will it all end?. . . . For where can that argument lead but to laying

down our arms and opening the gates of the town to the people whose land we have raped?”⁸⁷ In the process of “othering,” of becoming the enemy of the State, the magistrate has learned some hard lessons. Justice demands a total destruction of the Empire’s regimes of truth rather than desiring access to and selectively appropriating those codes for liberal humanist reasons.

If earlier the magistrate fails to interpret the Other’s body, after becoming an outlaw, he plays with Joll the game of being a master interpreter. The pieces of poplar wood that he has been collecting from his archaeological excavations in ancient desert ruins are painted with characters in a script he cannot read. Joll believes the slips to be evidence of secret messages between the magistrate and the barbarians and demands that he translate them. In a seminal passage central to the novel’s preoccupation with interpretation and signification, the magistrate pretends to decipher the hieroglyphic script, critiquing, in each process of translation, the interpretive determinacy of the Empire:

Now let us see what the next one says. See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended. That is part of barbarian cunning. . . . They form an allegory. They can be read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire—the old Empire, I mean. There is no agreement among scholars about how to interpret these relics of the ancient barbarians. Allegorical sets like this one can be found buried all over the desert. I found this one not three

miles from here in the ruins of a public building. Graveyards are another good place to look.⁸⁸

The language games he plays highlight the indeterminacy and unreliability of signification. In his performance, the magistrate is aware that the script has already been translated by Joll into the pre-existing, fixed, totality of Empire's master code. Slemon points out that imperialism can be seen as an allegorical activity, in that colonial conquest rereads and translates the new upon the old: "Columbus's ritual of naming is essentially an extension of allegorical consciousness in that it 'reads' the territory of the 'other' by reference to an anterior set of signs already situated in a cultural thematics, and by this process the 'new' world is made contingent upon the old."⁸⁹ Colonel Joll wants to hear from the magistrate what, he believes, is already true—"X means war," "X stands for war," "X is war." Thus, he first pretends to play the game by the rules of the state by giving an allegorical reading—"It is the barbarian character *war*"—, repeating what Joll wants to hear, but soon displaces the teleological narrative by not offering a signified, a universal representation of the sign, but a chain of signifiers: it can mean war, vengeance or justice. The direct, fixed relationship between signifier and signified is disrupted, and instead we have an infinite shift in meaning relayed from one signifier to another. In an internal monologue he says, "I have no idea what they stand for. Does each stand for a single thing, a circle for the sun, a triangle for a woman, a wave for a lake; or does a circle merely stand for "circle", a triangle for "triangle", a wave for "wave"?"⁹⁰ There is no continuous, original, transcendental signified. Uncannily, the magistrate's antiteleological reading strategy is mirrored later in the nomads' war strategy employed against the Empire. The nomads, due to their familiarity with the land, lure Joll's army deeper and deeper into the harsh desert, where the soldiers nearly

freeze and starve to death, while they disappear. The magistrate's poignant, fictive story that similar allegorical sets are buried all over the desert becomes a reality as the soldiers' dead bodies are strewn all over the harsh desert. His reading consists a veiled warning that the inherent elusiveness of language, of the barbarians will bring about the destruction of the Empire. Joll ignores the magistrate's prediction by dismissing his language games as a sign of madness; he orders a second expedition against the barbarians but returns hungry and defeated. In the last encounter between them, Joll's dark glasses are missing and the magistrate whispers to him, "The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves. . . . Not on others."⁹¹ At this moment, the novel powerfully performs the historical "decolonization" of the allegorical imperative. The allegorical impulse of the Empire is necessarily a suicidal one; it entails its own destruction.

Empire has created the time of *chronos* (a time of history) in opposition to the time of *kairos* (a time of the seasons): "Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history."⁹² Empire imposes the time of history on its subjects, the catastrophic, jagged time of rise and fall. In resistance to the linear time of Empire, the magistrate sits down on his desk to write, in an almost deserted fort, a pastoral story: "No one who paid a visit to this oasis . . . failed to be struck but the charm of life here. We lived in the time of the seasons, of harvests, of the migrations of the waterbirds. We lived with nothing between us and the stars. We would have made any concession, had we only known what, to go on living here. This was a paradise on earth."⁹³ In his desire to leave a record of the last year of the settlement he takes recourse to the idyllic time of the

kairos, which is not the oppressive, static present time of his own narrative, but the time of the seasons, of change. Writing in and about a different temporal order demands a different form; thus, he writes not a testament but a literary work, not “History” but a story. The literary displaces the oppressive hermeneutic circle of the Empire as it harkens to the movement of the emergent.

In the figure of the magistrate, Coetzee’s novel stages the dangers of allegorization in order to deconstruct its referential certainty. Consequently, Coetzee’s use of allegory undermines and dismisses the interpretive teleology of his own allegorical fable. The novel seduces the reader to indulge in allegorical interpretations, which inevitably are subject to the same failures. Coetzee deconstructs the form of allegory from within allegory. He offers a critique of the discourse of imperialism from writing within that discourse and not as a transparent “witness” to history (whose hands are not bloodied). His critique of imperialism shows awareness of the traces of the discourse of imperialism in his *own* critique. Coetzee displaces the dominant from *within*.

But then, does not the form of allegory work in both ways for him—to stage imperial totalities and to disrupt these totalities? In other words, is Coetzee employing the form of postmodern allegory to interrupt traditional allegory? In the scene with Joll he dramatizes a clash of the two forms of allegory: Colonel Joll reads the literal wood pieces as referring to a secret, symbolic code whose revelation will save the Empire; the magistrate, now transformed into the figure of the Benjaminian grave-digger, disinters the ruined hieroglyphic fragments and points to Joll that the meaning generated is uncertain and discontinuous—the sign could mean justice or vengeance, who knows? Throughout this chapter, I have laid out the dangers of allegorization which Jameson, Coetzee’s critics, and

the magistrate fall into. But so does Coetzee's WFB. The novel is preoccupied with what now is called "traditional allegory." The above scene between Joll and the magistrate is the only moment in the text where we see Coetzee reiterate the possibilities in the form that Benjamin and de Man see. While the form of allegory has been central to his imaginative endeavors, and more so as a South African writer working under the injunctions of witness writing, I do not think Coetzee's novels wish to recover, recuperate, revise, and redeem the form, and his practice, from the dangers of allegorization. And, given the continued dominance of the "traditional" ways of reading his allegories, how could he? In other words, Coetzee's relationship to the form is agonistic; his allegorical novels simultaneously stage the dangers and the possibilities of the form, but are more cautious of its dangers.

Notes

¹ Fredric Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism," Social Text 15 (1986): 69.

² J. M. Coetzee, "The Novel Today," Upstream 6.1 (1988): 2.

³ J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) 108. Hereafter cited as WFB.

⁴ Nadine Gordimer, "The Idea of Gardening: *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee [Review]," Critical Essays on J. M. Coetzee, ed. Sue Kossew (New York: G. K. Hall & Co., 1998) 139.

⁵ David Attwell, J. M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 6.

⁶ See Walter Benjamin, The Origin of the German Tragic Drama, trans. John Osborne (London: New Left Books, 1977).

⁷ See Paul de Man, Blindness and Insight: Essay in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) and Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

⁸ M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms (Bangalore, India: Prism Books Pvt. Ltd., 1993) 4.

⁹ Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 10.

¹⁰ Jameson, The Political Unconscious 17.

¹¹ Jameson, The Political Unconscious 19.

¹² Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) 89.

¹³ Susan Sontag, "Against Interpretation," Against Interpretation and Other Essays (New York: Picador, 2001) 5.

¹⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983) 106.

¹⁵ Sontag, “Against Interpretation” 5.

¹⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus 106.

¹⁷ Coetzee, “The Novel Today” 4.

¹⁸ Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” 69.

¹⁹ Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” 69.

²⁰ Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism” 88.

²¹ Aijaz Ahmad, In Theory: Class, Nations, Literatures (London: Verso, 1992) 100.

²² Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1999) 109.

²³ Spivak, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason 208.

²⁴ Over the years Jameson’s essay has also drawn a good deal of support. Imre Szeman, in “Who’s Afraid of National Allegory?: Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization,” argues that totality, for which Jameson has been criticized throughout his career, is not so bad after all. Most theories of postcolonial literary production, he argues, lack a general theory of the structure of contemporary social and political life; thus, they get lost in sheer heterogeneity and random difference: “My argument here should also be taken as an implicit argument on behalf of totality—not the ‘bad’ totality that legitimates theories of modernization of development, but the totality constructed by an antitranscendental and antiteleological ‘insurgent science’ that is ‘open, as open as the world of possibility, the world of potential.” Imre Szeman, “Who’s Afraid of National Allegory?: Jameson, Literary Criticism, Globalization,” The South Atlantic Quarterly, 100.3 (2001): 2.

²⁵ Jeremy Tambling, Allegory (New York: Routledge, 2010) 156.

²⁶ Paul de Man, “The Rhetoric of Temporality,” Blindness and Insight: Essay in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971) 219.

²⁷ de Man, "The Rhetoric of Temporality" 209.

²⁸ Benjamin, The Origin of the German Tragic Drama 178.

²⁹ Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," October 12 (1980): 84.

³⁰ Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" 73.

³¹ Clive Barnett, "Constructions of Apartheid in the International Reception of the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," Journal of Southern African Studies. 25.2 (1999): 292.

³² Gordimer, "The Idea of Gardening: *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee [Review]" 139.

³³ Gordimer, "The Idea of Gardening: *Life and Times of Michael K* by J. M. Coetzee [Review]" 139.

³⁴ Irving Howe, "A Stark Political Fable of South Africa," The New York Times 18 April 1982, 8 March 2013 <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzee-barbarians.html>>.

³⁵ See Dominc Head, J. M. Coetzee (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

³⁶ Jennifer Wenzel, "Keys to the Labyrinth: Writing, Torture, and Coetzee's Barbarian Girl," Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature 15.1 (1996): 61-71.

³⁷ Barbara Eckstein, "The Body, the Word, and the State: J. M. Coetzee's 'Waiting for Barbarians,'" NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction 22. 2 (1989): 175-198.

³⁸ Susan Van Zanten Gallagher, "Torture and the Novel: J. M. Coetzee's 'Waiting for Barbarians,'" Contemporary Literature 29.2 (1988): 277-285.

³⁹ Head, J. M. Coetzee 72.

⁴⁰ Derek Attridge, J. M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 33.

⁴¹ Jameson, "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" 65.

⁴² Teresa Dovey, “*Waiting for the Barbarians: Allegory of Allegories*,” Critical Perspectives on J. M. Coetzee, eds. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson (New York: St Martin’s Press, 1996) 138.

⁴³ Rob Nixon, “J. M. Coetzee: South Africa’s reclusive Nobel Laureate,” Slate 5 Nov. 2003, 8 March 2013 <<http://www.slate.com/id/2090790/>>.

⁴⁴ Franz Kafka, “The Penal Colony,” Metamorphosis, Penal Colony, and Other Stories, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken, 1995) 191-230.

⁴⁵ Nathaniel Hawthorne, The Scarlet Letter (New York: Bantam Classic, 1986).

⁴⁶ Samuel Beckett, Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts (New York: Grove Press, 1982).

⁴⁷ Dino Buzzati, The Tartar Steppe, trans. Stuart C. Hood (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985).

⁴⁸ C. P. Cavafy, Collected Poems, trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, ed. George Savidis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992) 19.

⁴⁹ Coetzee, WFB 8.

⁵⁰ Attwell, J. M. Coetzee 74.

⁵¹ J. M. Coetzee, “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa,” The New York Times 12 Jan. 1986, 8 March 2013 <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzee-chamber.html>>.

⁵² Coetzee, “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa.”

⁵³ Coetzee, “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa.”

⁵⁴ Attwell, J. M. Coetzee 11.

⁵⁵ Coetzee, “The Novel Today” 2.

⁵⁶ Coetzee, “The Novel Today” 4.

⁵⁷ Attwell, J. M. Coetzee 11.

⁵⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1988) 287.

⁵⁹ Coetzee, WFB 109-110.

⁶⁰ Dovey, “*Waiting for Barbarians: Allegory of Allegories*” 142.

⁶¹ Coetzee, WFB 1.

⁶² Coetzee, WFB 1.

⁶³ Coetzee, WFB 1.

⁶⁴ See J. M. Coetzee, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 11.

⁶⁵ Coetzee, WFB 75.

⁶⁶ Coetzee, WFB 140.

⁶⁷ Coetzee, WFB 9.

⁶⁸ Coetzee, WFB 24.

⁶⁹ Coetzee, WFB 16.

⁷⁰ Coetzee, WFB 24.

⁷¹ Coetzee, WFB 23.

⁷² Coetzee, WFB 30.

⁷³ Coetzee, WFB 31.

⁷⁴ Coetzee, WFB 21.

⁷⁵ Coetzee, WFB 31.

⁷⁶ Coetzee, WFB 85.

⁷⁷ Coetzee, WFB 42.

⁷⁸ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1991) 55.

⁷⁹ Coetzee, WFB 33.

⁸⁰ Coetzee, WFB 133.

⁸¹ Dovey, “*Waiting for Barbarians: Allegory of Allegories*” 143.

⁸² Coetzee, WFB 54.

⁸³ Coetzee, WFB 63.

⁸⁴ Coetzee, WFB 76.

⁸⁵ Coetzee, WFB 24.

⁸⁶ Coetzee, WFB 105.

⁸⁷ Coetzee, WFB 106.

⁸⁸ Coetzee, WFB 109-110.

⁸⁹ Stephen Slemon, “Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History,” Journal of Commonwealth Literature 23.1 (1988): 161.

⁹⁰ Coetzee, WFB 108.

⁹¹ Coetzee, WFB 143.

⁹² Coetzee, WFB 131.

⁹³ Coetzee, WFB 151.

2.0 WRITING A COUNTER-MEMORY OF EMPIRE: J. M. COETZEE'S FOE

What matter who's speaking, someone said what matter who's speaking.

—Samuel Beckett.¹

I would really like to have slipped imperceptibly into this lecture. . . . I would have preferred to be enveloped in words, borne way beyond all possible beginnings. At the moment of speaking, I would like to have perceived a nameless voice, long preceding me, leaving me merely to enmesh myself in it, taking up its cadence, and to lodge myself, when no one was looking, in its interstices as if it had paused an instant, in suspense, to beckon to me. There would have been no beginnings: instead, speech would proceed from me, while I stood in its path—a slender path—the point of its possible disappearance.

—Michel Foucault.²

To write (active) is to carry out the action without reference to the self, perhaps, though not necessarily, on behalf of someone else. To write (middle) is to carry out the action (or better, to do-writing) with reference to the self.

—J. M. Coetzee.³

Coetzee's Foe,⁴ first published in 1986, is intertextual with three texts of Daniel Defoe: Robinson Crusoe,⁵ Roxana,⁶ and "True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal."⁷ Although Foe constitutes a complex interplay between all three texts, it predominantly rewrites Robinson Crusoe. In this chapter, I argue that if Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe is a story of *origin* (*Ursprung*), then Coetzee rewrites this original English novel, which is also a novel about Empire, as a story of *beginnings* (*Herkunft*). Drawing from Michel Foucault's idea of general history as a new kind of history that does not record the past but monumentalizes it, I argue that Coetzee's parodic novel rewrites a general history of Empire, in order to interrupt the totalizing humanist project of universal history, by transforming the documents of the past into monuments, reality into parody, and memory into counter-memory. Unlike Defoe's novel, the story of the racialized subaltern Friday is not a story of centralizing through recollection. It is a story of establishing distance, not for reflection, but to produce a gap of difference between the self and the other. In the tradition of Levinasian ethics, it constitutes a face-to-face encounter with the radical alterity of the other, whose absolute otherness cannot be collapsed into the law of the liberal humanist Susan Barton. Friday's story does not lend itself to an anthropological reduction. In Coetzee, to write is not to represent the other, but to wrench the self from itself through dehumanizing effects of counter-memory.

Defoe is one of the first practitioners of the English realist novel; in conventional accounts, he is considered to be the "father" of the "novel" (the term "novel" began to be used in its modern sense during the late eighteenth century). With the emergence of this new genre, there appears a new kind of writing, the realist novel: Ian Watt states, "realism . .

. [is] the defining characteristic which differentiates the work of the early eighteenth century novelists from previous fiction.”⁸ Novel form replaces myth with the truth of individual experience: “from the Renaissance onwards, there was a growing tendency for individual experience to replace collective tradition as the ultimate arbiter of reality.”⁹ In the social realm, democratizing tendency of industrial capital, combined with progressive division of labor, provides the best conditions for the arrival of the individualist independent of fellow human beings and of tradition. The social field is now organized around the ordinary individual rather than the family, church or guild. Memories, which provide the causal link between past and present, establish the continuous individual identity. The novel form emerges as the expression of the experience of the unified individual through duration in time. Defoe, a master of verisimilitude, stages the unified subject with a believable ruse: Watt argues, “Defoe initiated an important new tendency in fiction: his total subordination of the plot to the pattern of the autobiographical memoir is as defiant an assertion of the primacy of individual experience in the novel as Descartes’ *cogito ergo sum* was in philosophy.”¹⁰ The title page of RC announces itself as a confessional autobiography— The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Written By Himself. Confessional autobiography provides the ego absolute freedom of self-expression and self-examination. If the homogenizing forces of capitalism promise the individual absolute freedom in economic, social, and intellectual spheres based on division of labor, the egalitarian tendency of Puritanism promise all diligent souls a path to redemption based on dignity of labor and self-scrutiny. According to Watt, along with capitalist individualism and economic specialization, Puritan ethic of the self was seminal factor in the rise of the novel: “It is . . . likely that the Puritan conception of the dignity of labor helped to bring into

being the novel's general premise that the individual's daily life is of sufficient importance and interest to be the proper subject of literature."¹¹ The emergence of the English novel is a product of divergent forces: the Western ego's internal journey into the depths of its soul and external journey for surplus profits. Novel lies in the interstices between the soul-making and the profit-making interests of the English individualist. RC is a pioneering text, which stages the play of these divergent forces in the figure of its protagonist.

Robinson Crusoe has become a prototype of the economic individual: Watt asserts, "That Robinson Crusoe . . . is an embodiment of economic individualism hardly needs demonstration."¹² The economic individual, the *homo economicus*, forms basis of the political economy of Adam Smith whom he describes as a rational and self-interested human being. While arguing that division of labor is based on the propensity in human nature to exchange, he states, "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages."¹³ For Smith, exchange, an activity not found in animals, is based on a rational, calculating principle of self-interest. In Defoe's novel, Crusoe's actions are governed by the principle of economic self-interest. Crusoe forgoes his middle state "or what might be called the upper Station of *Low Life*," which his father deems to be the best state of life, to become a sailor.¹⁴ Despite feeling that "there seem'd to be something fatal in that Propension of Nature tending directly to the Life of Misery" he abandons his family, nation and God for sea and adventure.¹⁵ Affective ties function as impediments to his economic interests; hence, in his dealings as a sailor, slave trader, plantation owner, and a settler colonist, Crusoe only forms contractual relationships. Echoing the utilitarian

individualism of Smith's ideas, the autobiographical narrative dramatizes the rational choice theory: Crusoe, with meticulous rational scrutiny of his own economic interests, tries to maximize profits by extracting maximum labor-power for minimum wages (or zero wages as in Friday's case). One key example of this is his dealings in slave trade. Although he has a few qualms about selling Xury, a Moorish boy, to the Portuguese Captain, he has little doubt about the great economic benefits of directly expropriating, rather than exchanging for wages, the labor power of his slaves. With the arrival of Friday, a "faithful, loving, sincere Servant . . . without Passions, Sullenness or Designs, perfectly oblig'd and engag'ed,"¹⁶ Crusoe muses, "life [on the island] began to be so easy, that I began to say to my self, that could I but have been safe from more Savages, I cared not, if I was never to remove from the place while I lived."¹⁷ On the island, Crusoe experiences the absolute state of *laissez-faire*, where there is no taxman, no competitor, and complete harmony between labor and capital. Here, he is detached from all natural bonds and master of all he surveys: "I was lord of the whole Manor; or if I pleas'd, I might call my self King, or Emperor over the whole Country which I had Possession of. There were no Rivals. I had no Competitor, none to dispute Sovereignty or Command with me."¹⁸

In the eighteenth-century, for the first time, the social is confronted by the private individual. The idea of an economic utopian state constituting of isolated autonomous individuals detached from natural bonds engaging in independent production outside of society, which Karl Marx mockingly calls "Robinsonades," has held great sway since the first appearance of Defoe's novel. Karl Marx chides Ricardo and Smith for taking the naturally independent autonomous subject, which according to him belongs to "the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century Robinsonades,"¹⁹ as the starting point of

their economic theories. Critiquing the most enduring myth of capitalism, that of an isolated individual producing outside of society, he takes “material production,” individual production that is socially determined, as his point of departure. Gayatri Spivak argues that most critics have misread Marx’s analysis of Robinson Crusoe, in Capital: Volume I, as an example of capitalist mode of production: “Everyone reads it as being about capitalism, but it is exactly not so.”²⁰ Instead she asserts, “Marx chooses four examples, three precapitalist and one post-. One of the three precapitalist examples, Robinson is the first and the most interesting because the other two are situations of exchange, although not of generalized commodity exchange.”²¹ Thus, Crusoe is an example of the production of, not exchange-values, but use-values: Marx states, “All Robinson’s products were exclusively the result of his own personal labour and they were therefore directly objects of utility for him personally.”²² But for Marx, individual production is always already social, as a human being is necessarily a “political animal.” For him, isolated individual production, a mere fancy of Ricardo and Smith, is as absurd as the development of language in isolation. Although in RC we see an instance of isolated individual production, according to Marx, Crusoe is “a civilized person in whom the social forces are already dynamically present.”²³ Thus, even the private individual production contains the social processes; concrete labor is already abstract labor. Spivak is right to point out that, in Marx’s reading, Crusoe is an instance of precapitalist mode of production. But for Marx Crusoe’s story also shows the reigning myth of capitalism, its “aesthetic semblance,”²⁴ of isolated Robinsons engaging in independent production outside society. This aesthetic semblance is both anachronistic and ahistorical. Political economists have placed their *homo economicus* in a primordial natural state outside history:

Smith and Ricardo still stand with both feet on the shoulders of the eighteenth-century prophets, in whose imaginations this eighteenth-century individual—the product on the one side of the dissolution of feudal forms of society, on the other side of the new forces of production developed since the sixteenth-century—appears as an ideal, whose existence they project into the past. Not as a historic result but as history’s point of departure. As the Natural Individual appropriate to their notion of human nature, not arising historically, but posited by nature.²⁵

Thus, political economists treat the economic individual not as a product of history but its miraculous origin. Paradoxically, the origin of the rational self-interested individualist lies outside history, already present in a pure natural state. This society of “free” competition seems to be posited on naturalism as it considers isolated, autonomous individuals the most natural state of being. According to Marx, this is not merely a reaction against civilization and a “return to nature,” but a necessary illusion, “the aesthetic semblance,” of capitalism. The concept of *homo economicus* is based on this chimera of pure origin. Elaborating on the difference between *Ursprung* (origin) and *Herkunft* (descent) in Nietzsche’s thoughts, Michel Foucault asserts that as a genealogist Nietzsche critiques the search for origins because “it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities, because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession.”²⁶ Origin, that pure state outside history, is the condition of possibility of the *homo economicus*.

In his treatise on natural education of citizens, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who declares that he hates books because they have no utilitarian function, makes one exception to that rule: “Since we must have books, there is one book which, to my thinking, supplies the best

treatise on an education according to nature. This is the first book Émile will read. . . . Is it Aristotle? Pliny? Buffon? No; it is *Robinson Crusoe*.”²⁷ To produce ideal citizens who can participate in the collective will of *contrat social*, Rousseau, like Smith, proposes a return to an isolated, primordial, natural state not touched by the corruption of society and the accidents of history. For Rousseau, moral education of citizens requires “recognizing” direct relationship between things without recourse to signs, and hence language: “The surest way to raise him above prejudice and to base his judgments on the true relations of things, is to put him in the place of solitary man, and to judge all things as they would be judged by such a man in relation to their own utility.”²⁸ Rousseau’s *homo solitarius* can arrive at sound judgments only in isolation, a necessary condition to recognize the utility of things. Upon reflection on his life on the island, Crusoe realizes that he can enjoy only those things that have use-value: “In a Word, The Nature and Experience of Things dictated to me upon just Reflection, That all the good Things of this World, are no farther good to us than they are for our Use.”²⁹ Like Crusoe, Émile should be deprived of human companionship and mechanical tools, and even dress in coat of skins (and possibly carry an umbrella too). An ideal citizen can learn to respect others when s/he enjoys absolute freedom from social constraints. According to Marx, ideas of eighteenth century thinkers such as Smith and Rousseau are not so much based on naturalism but on anticipation of formation of social relations based on capitalist mode of production: “This is the semblance, the merely aesthetic semblance, of the Robinsonades, great or small. It is, rather, the anticipation of ‘civil society,’ in preparation since the sixteenth century and making giant strides towards maturity in the eighteenth.”³⁰ Rousseau’s treatise on natural education, rather than a reiteration of the concepts of metaphysical naturalism of the past, posits, like Smith, a

foundational myth of capitalism, that of the isolated, autonomous, rational, self-interested individualist engaging in independent production in an absolute state of *laissez faire*. In other words, in capitalist mode of production, the myth of empty lands, *terra nullius*, is the necessary condition for the moral and economic well being of the ideal European citizen of the *contrat social*.

With the rise of capitalism, eighteenth and nineteenth-century Britain experienced surplus production and surplus population leading to search for new markets. J. A. Hobson, one of the first economists to emphasize the economic basis of imperialism, maintains that capitalism is the “taproot of imperialism.” Hobson critiques the conventional wisdom that in capitalist system imperialism is a necessity, as surplus wealth that cannot be consumed at home is channeled into foreign markets. Instead, he argues that monopoly of the rich class leads to under-consumption (over-saving) which fails to keep pace with the power of production resulting in imperialist expansion: “The struggle for markets, the greater eagerness of producers to sell than of consumers to buy, is the crowning proof of a false economy of distribution. Imperialism is the fruit of this false economy.”³¹ Thus, excess savings of the bourgeoisie leads to annexation of foreign lands. After examining the cost-benefit analysis of imperialism, Hobson contends that it is bad business. This false economy is based on the semblance of *terra nullius*, of the idea of “empty” lands available for transfer of Europe’s surplus. The importance of this myth can hardly be underestimated in the history of colonialism, and more so in the settler colonial societies like North America, Australia, and South Africa. One of the central justifications for colonialism was based on the doctrine of, what Henry Reynolds calls, *terra nullius*, which referred to “empty land” or “no man’s land”:

The doctrine underlying the traditional view of settlement was that before 1788 Australia was *terra nullius*, a land belonging to no-one. . . . Confusion has abounded because *terra nullius* has two different meanings, usually conflated. It means both a country without a sovereign recognized by European authorities and a territory where nobody owns any land at all, where no tenure of any sort existed. ‘In things properly no ones,’ Grotius observed, ‘two things are occupable, the lordship and the ownership.’³²

Thus, “uninhabited” lands referred to lands occupied by “uncivilized” peoples without self-determining sovereignty and without the rights to private property. Lands belonging to indigenous peoples were considered “unsettled,” without any recognizable laws, and, what G. W. F. Hegel concludes in relation to Africa, outside history enveloped in the “natural spirit.”³³ Reynolds asserts that, as competition for colonies intensified, *terra nullius* became an internationally recognized legal principle in the nineteenth-century, which considered land not belonging to members of the family of nations as available for occupation. The myth of *terra nullius* is the necessary condition for the creation of the false economy and for the moral development of the European individualist. Imperialist expansion, thus, constituted establishment of the autonomous, property-owning European subject’s self-presence on territories without presence.

Defoe’s story is a prophetic one wherein the European imperial self comes into presence on a *terra nullius*. RC, the “origin” of the English novel, stages the formation of the *homo economicus* on an “uninhabited” land in an “uncivilized” natural state outside history. In this pure state of *laissez faire*, without natural bonds, outside the accidents of history, Crusoe’s “true” self, the economic self, emerges. Crusoe learns that the vast open

empty spaces, along with meticulous division of labor, help him tap into his latent capacity for innovation and progress. Furthermore, he realizes the endogenous growth potential of mathematization of time (as one of his first tasks on the island is to divide a post into measured instants) and division of space (as he divides the land according to its production capacity). Bookkeeping helps him track the annual growth rate of his production: “Defoe’s heroes . . . have no need to learn this [book-keeping] technique; whatever the circumstances of their birth and education, they have it in their blood, and keep us more fully informed of their present stocks of money and commodities than other characters in fiction.”³⁴ Along with bookkeeping, Crusoe also keeps a journal, in which he tracks the day-to-day movements of his soul. His misfortunes reveal to him the will of God in mundane affairs and instill in him a sense of fear and duty towards God (and his father): “I work’d my Mind up, not only to Resignation to the Will of God in the present Disposition of my circumstances; but even to a sincere Thankfulness for my Condition.”³⁵ In the tradition of Puritanism and its emphasis on introspection, Crusoe engages in careful reflection on his daily tasks, which reveal to him, not a transcendental God, but an immanent one, present in the day-to-day activities of the individualist. Thus, his use-value producing labor, rather than being alienating, is a spiritual quest, bringing him closer to recognition of the hand of God in the utility of things. Crusoe establishes his presence on the *terra nullius* through both soul-making and profit-making endeavors.

Defoe’s island story is a story of origin; it is a representation of the origin of the Puritanical imperialist bourgeois self. It is one of the “purest” examples of the representation of *terra nullius* in narrative fiction. It lies at the origin of the English novel, and tells the story of *Ursprung* rather than *Herkunft*. Coetzee’s Foe rewrites this story of

origin as a story of *Herkunft*, of descent. Foe does not lie at the origin of the novel but at its beginnings. In the figure of Friday, it shows the gaps, dispersions, and accidents that are found at every beginning. In this sense, Coetzee is a Nietzschean genealogist dispersing the chimera of origin with history. Foucault argues that Nietzschean genealogy is not a search for origin but a diagnosis of the events of history in their dispersion: “A genealogy of values, morality, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their ‘origins,’ will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history.”³⁶ Genealogy is not a revelation of the *Ursprung* but an examination of descent, of *Herkunft*. Foucault points to two different uses of the word “origin” in Nietzsche’s writings (differences that become more prominent in On the Genealogy of Morals): origin as *Ursprung* and origin as *Herkunft*. This difference is key to Foucault’s thought; in The Archaeology of Knowledge, he proposes a new way of doing history, which he calls general history, based on *Herkunft*. *Ursprung* seeks to reveal the already there, the primordial truth and the essential, unitary identity outside history. Smith and Rousseau’s concepts of the *homo economicus* and *homo solitarius* disclose the moment of their births as an origin. Defoe’s RC fictionalizes the story of a *homo economicus* in its origin. Crusoe’s island, a *terra nullius*, helps establish the continuous European identity uninterrupted by the other and history, the other of history. On the other hand, *Herkunft*, which Foucault understands to be the proper objective of genealogy, sets out to examine descent, where rather than an essential, continuous identity we find a dissociation of self: “What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things. It is disparity.”³⁷ An analysis of descent does not seek to construct inert structures, but to disrupt what was thought to be immobile and unified. Furthermore, it tries to confront historical events in

their dispersions: “it is to identify the accidents, the minute deviations . . . the complete reversals.”³⁸ *Herkunft* shows us that beginnings are contentious and lowly. A true genealogist needs history to laugh at the grandness of origins. Most importantly, *Herkunft*, as a practice of criticism, dispels faith: “This is undoubtedly why every origin of morality from the moment it stops being pious—and *Herkunft* can never be—has value as a critique.”³⁹ In *Foe*, I will show that Coetzee’s staging of the *Herkunft* of Friday interrupts the origin of the inviolable unified European individualist. The European bourgeois subject comes unmasked by the face of the other of history.

If Defoe’s RC is a story of capital, Coetzee’s Foe rewrites it as a story of Empire. With an acute historical eye, he unmask the faint traces on the *terra nullius*, which have been obscured and lost in RC. In this regard, Coetzee is not merely rewriting the story of RC but also the story of the novel. Watt’s pioneering analysis of the rise of the English novel tells us a story of “origin.” Novel and literary realism emerge as an expression of the bourgeois individualist. It is hardly surprising that the figure of Friday plays no function in his analysis of the emergence of the unified European subject. Nor does his analysis seriously consider, what Marx calls, the “aesthetic semblance” of capitalism, its myth of the *homo economicus* at the origins of history (and the novel). The intellectual world will have to wait for Edward Said’s Orientalism for an analysis of Empire as a discursive formation, and more important for our discussion, for Culture and Imperialism for an examination of the relationship between novel and imperialism. In this regard, Coetzee’s rewriting of the story of the novel is closer to Said’s analysis; he shows us that the myth of the *terra nullius* is the condition of possibility of the English novel, which emerges as a realistic documentation of the soul-making and profit-making interests of the individualist on

“empty” lands. According to Said, more than any other cultural form, the novel has played a crucial role in the history of imperialism:

Novel . . . I believe [was] immensely important in the formation of imperial attitudes, references and experiences. I do not believe that only the novel was important, but that I consider it *the* aesthetic object whose connection to the expanding societies of Britain and France is particularly interesting to study. The prototypical modern realistic novel is *Robinson Crusoe*, and certainly not accidentally it is about a European who creates a fiefdom for himself on a distant, non-European island.⁴⁰

The facts of Empire constituted the general structure of feeling in eighteenth and nineteenth-century European societies. Narrative fiction formed part of a systematic discipline by which the West produced myths of *terra nullius* to define, subjugate, and exterminate “unsettled” peoples. Imperialism is a battle for “empty” lands; this battle was concurrently fought on foreign territories and in narrative spaces. *Foe* stages the link between novel and Empire. Coetzee rewrites the story of the emergence of the novel, not as an expression of the European subject, but as part of a colonial discourse, which attempts to produce and manage the other of history. Thus, the story of the novel is not a story of the formation of unities, but a story of the contentious struggle, in which the dominant European self attempts to appropriate the wholly other. In so doing, he questions its “origin” as a *document* that expresses the sentiments of the unified individualist, a.k.a realism. Instead, he transforms the story of the novel from a “memorizing” of *documents* to a rewriting of silent *monuments*. He presents the novel not in its origins but in its occurrence as a beginning, constituting silences, discontinuities, and dissensions. In the figure of Friday, Coetzee challenges his

readers to confront the silent monuments of history. Let us turn to Foe for a demonstration of this.

RC is the story of the struggles of a white man on a *terra nullius*; Foe is the story of the struggles of a white woman, Susan Barton, already on the margins of patriarchal English society, to tell the story of the wholly other. Susan, born of an English mother and a French father, is the narrator of the story, and not Crusoe. Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, the colonizer, is a marginal figure in Coetzee's narrative; Cruso, who largely remains reticent, dies in the first part of the novel. By dropping the "e" from Defoe's Crusoe, Coetzee invokes a biographical reference to the historical author: the name Crusoe probably came from Defoe's classmate and friend Timothy Cruso, an English Puritan who had written guide books. Moreover, the title Foe, apart from invoking the common noun "enemy," is a reference to the proper name of the historical author Daniel Defoe, who added the prefix to his patronymic "Foe" in 1695 so as to appear aristocratic. Susan's daughter, who shares her name, is believed to be in the "New World" after being abducted by an Englishman. Susan travels to Bahia, Brazil in search of her. As the trail goes cold, she takes a ship to Lisbon, but on the way the sailors mutiny. They kill the captain and cast her adrift in a small boat. She lands on Cruso's island, and after spending a year there is rescued by an English ship. Cruso dies on the ship without leaving much record of his life on the island. Both Friday and Susan return to England; here, she meets with the writer Daniel Foe and persuades him to turn her account into a popular adventure book. The third part of the novel stages a tussle between the character and the author over authorial control of the story. Foe is not interested in her island story; he deems it boring as Cruso does not engage in any innovative activities nor fight with cannibals, who do not appear in Susan's account of the story. Foe,

who is hiding from the debtors and the bailiffs, is more interested in the mother-daughter story, which provides him with a unity of plot in the tradition of the classic Greek structure of beginning, middle and end: the loss of the daughter, the quest for the daughter in Brazil, abandonment of the quest and the adventure on Crusoe's island, and the final reunion. For Foe, books are made this way: "It is thus that we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end."⁴¹ Susan is interested in the middle part of Foe's version of the story, the island story. In the second part of the novel, Susan attempts to write her story, "The Female Castaway," but soon realizes that she lacks the imaginative power of an author, which is necessary to achieve fame and money. Meantime, it is here that Foe is intertextual with Roxana, Susan's daughter appears, or so she claims to be, looking for recognition and legitimacy from the mother. The marginal female individualist Roxana, whose first name is Susan in Defoe's story, seeks to centralize herself through marriage, while being pursued by her daughter she has abandoned.

Foe is a pre-text to RC: it is preoccupied with "origins" as it rewrites the "original" Defoe text, which is yet to come in the narrative space of Coetzee's novel. Needless to say, Foe is meticulously attentive to the process of writing that "original." Unlike Defoe's RC, Coetzee's Foe constitutes a complex narrative structure. Defoe's autobiographical past-tense narrative presents a first-person narrator reflecting from a distant position on his past experiences. Recollection of memories establishes a singular, unified consciousness through linear narrative time. On the other hand, Foe stages a complex frame narrative constituting multiple narrative voices and narrative times resulting in overlaps, dispersions and repetitions. The first two sections of the novel are in quotation marks, whose intended addressee is not the reader but the author Foe. The general reader in both these sections

merely stumbles upon Susan's dialogues with Foe concerning her attempts to write/tell her story. The first section constitutes Susan's memoirs describing the shipwreck, her stay on the island, and eventual rescue. Echoing the narrative structure of RC, she writes her autobiography in past tense using a first-person narrative voice. The intended reader of this written draft is Foe, which we learn in a parenthetical aside early in the section: "I sat on the bare earth with my sore foot between my hands and rocked back and forth and sobbed like a child, while the stranger (who was of course the Cruso I told you of) gazed at me more as if I were a fish cast up by the waves than an unfortunate fellow-creature."⁴² The general reader first learns the name of the stranger Susan encounters on the island in this parenthesis, which indicates that the first section is a private dialogue between Susan and Foe (who is introduced only in the next section). The second section employs the epistolary form, constituting of letters written in simple present by Susan to Foe, whom she has commissioned to write her story. Initially, the letters respond to questions asked by Foe about how best he can set down the story, but soon the letters lose their addressee, as Foe is in flight from the bailiffs and the debtors (this is the most direct reference to the biography of Defoe, who was haunted by debtors). Due to uncertainty regarding the intended reader of her letters, not all of which have reached their destination and disappearance of the commissioned author of her story, Susan slips into the author-position (almost literally by occupying Foe's deserted house) and begins to write her own story, "The Female Castaway. Being a True Account of a Year Spent on a Desert Island. With Many Strange Circumstances Never Hitherto Related." Given that the author/reader of her story has become a fugitive, Susan abandons chronometry; the letters in the last half of the section are not temporally marked. The third section of the novel utilizes traditional first-person

narration (without quotation marks) addressed to the general reader. Susan, the narrator of this section, describes in simple past the intense tussle between her and her “intended” author over authorial control of the story (and the sexual act). The physical and narrative distance between the author and the character collapses; for the first time in the novel, Susan and Foe inhabit the same narrative space and also have sexual intercourse (she addresses him as an “intended,” connoting, in clear reference to the female individualist Roxana, “free choice” in author and marital partner). The final section, the outermost frame, is written in first-person narration addressed to the general reader. The narrator, who remains unidentified, stumbles upon the bodies of all the main characters in this section. In vivid present tense, the narrator repeats two versions of the end. In the first version, after entering an unmarked house, the narrator encounters Susan and Foe lying together motionless on the bed, while Susan’s “daughter’s” body lies cold on the staircase. The narrator lies on the floor with Friday, who still has a faint pulse, and soon hears the sounds of the island issuing from his mouth. In the second version of the end, the narrator encounters the plaque marked “*Daniel Defoe, Author*” on the wall outside the house. Defoe and Foe do not inhabit the same narrative space. Inside, he stumbles upon the body of Susan’s “daughter” on the staircase and the embracing bodies of Foe and Susan in bed. Friday, who is lying on the floor facing the wall, now has a scar left by a rope on his neck. The narrator finds yellowed papers in a box next to the bed. As it reads the first line, “Dear Mr. Foe, At last I could row no further,” which blends the opening line of section one with the salutations of section two, the unidentified “I” slips overboard and dives into the ocean wreck, the home of Friday, where the “I” is enveloped by the slow stream that issues from Friday’s mouth, which runs “northward and southward to the ends of the earth.”⁴³ In this outermost frame, the narrative

commits itself to its dissipation: as the narrative abandons referential verisimilitude, the narrator's unified identity, which still remains intact in the previous sections, gets enmeshed in the voiceless stream issuing from Friday's mouth, which eventually disperses the narrator and Friday to the ends of earth.

If RC is preoccupied with time, Foe is preoccupied with space, and hence Empire. Emphasizing the geographical element of imperialism, Said states, "Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control."⁴⁴ Space is an important dimension in Coetzee's story. Defoe's autobiographical narrative strictly follows a linear time of narration; Coetzee's narrative chaotically shuttles between past and present tense. One of Crusoe's first inscriptions on the island is the representation of the infinite series of instants by measured notches on the post. This mathematization of time helps him keep track of, in journal entries, the labor time necessary for various productive activities, along with his increasing resignation to the will of God, which intensifies with greater production. Coetzee's Crusoe has no need for time: he has neither kept a calendar nor a journal of his life on the island. Susan, who is the narrator, expresses her dismay that Crusoe has not inscribed the island space with time: "I searched the poles that supported the roof, and the legs of the bed, but found no carvings, not even notches to indicate that he counted the years of his banishment or the cycles of the moon."⁴⁵ Measured and finite time is also an important factor in redemption and salvation from captivity on the island and from the original sin. Crusoe diligently records the number of years he has spent on the island; Coetzee's Crusoe is not interested in being rescued, nor does he remember the number of years he has spent on the island. Susan notes, "the desire to escape had dwindled within him."⁴⁶ On the other

hand, Susan meticulously marks time in her numerous narrative adventures. Like Crusoe's temporally marked journal entries, she gives specific dates to all the letters she writes to the author Foe in the second section of the novel and also resides for some time in Clock Lane. Throughout the year on the island, Susan keeps alive her desire to be rescued. Thus, mathematization of time is not totally absent in Foe; it rather occurs in the numerous actions of the bourgeois individualist white woman, Susan Barton, in whom the spirit of Defoe's *homo economicus* lives. Coetzee's reticent Cruso is preoccupied with space. Although Susan desires that he keep a temporal record of his stay on the island, Cruso is more interested in marking his presence spatially on the island for posterity. Unlike Crusoe's preoccupation with the precise labor time necessary for the production of use-value, Coetzee's Cruso engages in labor that has no use-value or exchange-value. He and Friday diligently work on clearing ground for terraces, even though they have no seeds to plant. Susan, the rational and self-interested individualist, mocks this non-utilitarian activity as "stupid labour," to which Cruso replies, "'The planting is not for us,' said he. 'We have nothing to plant –that is our misfortune.' . . . 'The planting is reserved for those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed. I only clear the ground for them.'"⁴⁷ In case of Cruso, we have an instance of labor without value, which marks his spatial presence on the island. But in Crusoe's use-value producing labor (not produced for exchange), Spivak states, "*Time*, not money, is then the general equivalent."⁴⁸ In Marx's labor theory of value, time is a necessary component in determining value, both in the production of use-value and exchange-value. Value is measured by the amount of labor time actively and necessarily spent in its creation: Marx states, "What exclusively determines the magnitude of the value of any article is therefore the amount of labour socially necessary, or the labour-time

socially necessary for its production.”⁴⁹ Value cannot be determined by the indefinite future of Crusoe’s non-utilitarian labor. One could argue that Defoe’s Crusoe is producing goods for personal consumption, which have no value, as his labor is not “socially necessary.” But in Marx only few things, such as “air, virgin soil, natural meadows, unplanted forests,” have use-value without value.⁵⁰ Crusoe’s goods, although not immediately socially necessary, have great personal utility for him. Thus, “nothing can be a value without being an object of utility.”⁵¹ Furthermore, Spivak argues that in Marx the binary opposition between use-value and exchange-value is often deconstructed, as the private is always already social: “This may be the cornerstone of the subterranean text of socialist ethics in Marx which is still to be theorized.”⁵² In case of Coetzee’s Crusoe, we have an example of labor which has no utilitarian value for the individual or the community, either in the present or the future. Although Crusoe believes that it might be of use in an indefinite future, Susan is aware of the sheer absurdity of such a proposition:

When I passed the terraces and saw this man, no longer young, labouring in the heat of the day to lift a great stone out of the earth or patiently chopping at the grass, while he waited year after year for some saviour castaway to arrive in a boat with a sack of corn at his feet, I found it a foolish kind of agriculture. It seemed to me he might occupy his time as well in digging for gold, or digging graves first for himself and Friday and then if he wished for all the castaways of the future history of the island, and for me too.⁵³

Crusoe’s specific labor is non-utilitarian, hence easily replaceable with any other activity. Instead of utilizing time, he is killing time. On Crusoe’s island, we have suspended time, rather than measured time. It is the spatial mark of his labor, and not the production of value

through necessary labor-time, that establishes Crusoe's presence on the island. Crusoe's labor has no determinable origin or goal; it is caught in an interminable repetitive loop; the terraces display a neat, repetitive, spatial pattern. When asked by Susan what specific memories he is leaving behind for posterity, Crusoe responds, "I will be leaving behind my terraces and walls."⁵⁴ What do we make of this shift in Coetzee's rewriting of Defoe's RC? Spivak thinks, "The theme of the transition from land to landed capital is, after all, only *one* important strand of the mission of imperialism."⁵⁵ Conversion of *terra nullius* from "no man's land" to landed property through the production of value is only one story of Empire. Coetzee's text shifts focus from time to space, from production of value to the production of docile bodies through application of uninterrupted power. The tortured body of Friday, rather than being memorized through time, is monumentalized through space.

Time is an important dimension of the novel form; Watt notes that the realist novel, instead of depicting "life by values," depicts "life by time": "The novel's plot is also distinguished from most previous fiction by its use of past experience as the cause of present action."⁵⁶ The realist novel vividly realizes past events in the present; the novel, rather than universalizing characters in mythic time, individualizes characters in measured time. Continuous individual identity depends on memory or *anamnesis* (recollection), which establishes the causal link between past and present. Watt asserts that John Locke's theory of unified identity based on a recollecting consciousness greatly influences representative realism: "Locke had defined personal identity as an identity of consciousness through duration in time; the individual was in touch with his own continuing identity through memory of his past thoughts and actions."⁵⁷ The realist novel is a recollection of "already-said." In RC, Crusoe's impeccable episodic memory functions to narrate the progressive

evolution of the unified subject in linear time. Crusoe has not forgotten any details of his past life, nor has isolation affected his memory. On the other hand, Coetzee's Crusoe has forgotten much; Susan notes, "But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another, that I was more and more driven to conclude age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory, and he no longer knew for sure what was truth, what fancy."⁵⁸ Crusoe, to Susan's chagrin, gives multiple accounts of his family background, the shipwreck, the number of years spent on the island, and Friday's history. Coetzee's island space has no time and no memories; Crusoe has no clear memory of his past life before his arrival on the island and Friday has no tongue to narrate his story. Time on the island is in perpetual suspension, where human labor, rather than being directed towards production of value, is caught in a repetitive loop. Unlike the rich abundance of Defoe's island which reveals to Crusoe the immanence of God, Coetzee's island is barren, where the brutal wind blows away everything in its way. The merciless wind makes production of value difficult and preservation of memories impossible. With no store of memories, language plays little function on the island: Crusoe merely has use for a few command words for his servant Friday, who is mute. Crusoe reminds Susan, "This is not England, we have no need of a great stock of words."⁵⁹ The loquacious Susan schools Crusoe that language not only has an instrumental function but a symbolic (civilizing) one too: "you might have brought home to him [Friday] some of the blessings of civilization and made him a better man. What benefit is there in a life of silence?"⁶⁰ On the other hand, Susan's episodic memory is akin to Crusoe; she has forgotten little. As soon as she lands on the island, she gives a detailed account of her past, even though Crusoe does not ask her for an introduction: "He [Crusoe] did not care how I came to be in Bahia or what I did there."⁶¹ In her memoirs, which constitute

the first section of the novel, she describes the island and its two inhabitants with great precision. For Susan stories are a storing-place of memories; she urges Crusoe to write his memoirs. Civilization has no use for castaways without memories: “Crusoe rescued will be a deep disappointment to the world; the idea of a Crusoe on his island is a better thing than the true Crusoe tight-lipped and sullen in an alien England.”⁶² England, an island too but without the brutal wind, is a storehouse of memories. It demands stories from its subjects; collective *anamnesis* weaves together a continuous national identity and destiny. Susan notes, “They say Britain is an island too, a great island. But that is a mere geographer’s notion. The earth under our feet is firm in Britain, as it never was on Crusoe’s island.”⁶³ Memories are sanctified foundations of the great nation Britain that establish its durability and fixed identity (even though geographer’s claim it is an island).

Susan’s identity is indelibly tied to her memories of the island. Like her namesake in Roxana, she seeks to centralize herself in a patriarchal society through the island story. She has faith that her impeccable memory of her sensational past as a female castaway will bring her substance in the present. She knows that the authority of print will grant her fortune and immortality. In early eighteenth-century England, a female individualist could only have proxy access to print. If Roxana centralizes herself through traditional marriages, Susan attempts to centralize herself through memorization of her past in print by a male author Foe, who is also her “intended.” Susan pleads Foe, known to be a very secret man who is in the business of listening to confessions:

Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr. Foe: that is my entreaty. For though my story gives the truth, it does not give the substance of the truth. . . . To tell the truth in all its substance you must have quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all

distraction, and a window to stare through; and then the knack of seeing waves when there are fields before your eyes, and of feeling the tropic sun when it is cold; and at your fingertips the words with which to capture the vision before it fades. I have none of these, while you have all.⁶⁴

While truth depends on memory, substance of truth can only be materialized through writing, which, as Virginia Woolf once famously said, requires a room of one's own and five hundred pounds a year. Susan exchanges for wages her body and her memories as labor power; Foe gives her a small allowance for her confessions and also has sexual intercourse with her. Only the male author Foe can be the begetter of the story and infuse it with substance through his imagination in the privacy of his room (and the comfort of his chair placed near a window). Stories are father-born; their parentage is exclusively patrilineal. Defoe is the "father" of the novel form; both Foe and its original, RC, are father-born. Origins have no place for women; in RC, the economic *man* lies at the origins of history as its *agent*. Crusoe describes the goods he has transported to his colony, "From thence I touch'd at the *Brasils*, from whence I sent a Bark, which I bought there, with more People to the Island, and in it, besides other Supplies, I sent seven Women, being such as I found proper for Service, or for Wives to such as would take them."⁶⁵ Sexual division of labor lies at the "origins of man." Crusoe expropriates women's bodies for reproduction of particular forms of labor power to populate his colony, which in turn will produce generalized commodity. Coetzee's revisionist account rearranges Defoe's *oeuvre* to interrogate the gendered construction of origins; the mother-daughter subplot, derived from Roxana, interrupts Foe. Susan believes that she can gain inviolable substance by "fathering" her story into history through Foe's imaginative powers. But when Foe becomes a fugitive in

the second section of the novel, the female individualist, who claims to possess “free choice,” slips into the father-position. She takes up residence in Foe’s house, sits in his comfortable chair beside the window and hopes that the “man-Muse,” who helps authoresses beget their stories in the night, will pay her a visit: “I was intended not to be the mother of my story, but to beget it.”⁶⁶ Stories have no mothers; Susan wants to be the father of her story. Although Susan slips into Foe’s chair, it is truly Defoe’s chair that she occupies, the true father figure of Coetzee’s novel. In the tussle over authorial control that follows upon meeting Foe, Susan urges him to only report the truth in writing her confessional story, thus alluding to Defoe’s “documentation” of Crusoe’s story: “Once you [Cruso] proposed to supply a middle by inventing cannibals and pirates. These I would not accept because they were not the truth. Now you propose to reduce the island to an episode in the history of a woman in search of a lost daughter. This too I reject.”⁶⁷ Defoe, the master of verisimilitude, announces in his preface to *RC*, “The Editor believes the thing to be a just History of Fact; neither is there any Appearance of Fiction in it.”⁶⁸ For Defoe and Susan, stories faithfully document the factual truths of past events. The marginal Susan is convinced that substance can be derived, not from the affective value of mothering, but from memorizing “facts” of the island story. For Foe, the island story is repetitive, hence lacks the teleological direction of the beginning-middle-end structure. It can only be an episode in a larger mother-daughter story: “The island story is not a story in itself. . . . The island lacks light and shade. It is too much the same throughout . . . who will prefer it when there are tastier confections and pastries to be had?”⁶⁹ On the other hand, Susan wants her story to begin and end with the island story. Like Defoe, she believes that there is no room for the mother-daughter story on the island. By selectively memorizing her past, she erases the

story of search for the daughter in Bahia before her shipwreck; after all, it is the father's prerogative to choose his history. The affective value of mothering distracts from the truth of the island story; it is an embellishment with no value. Spivak suggests that Susan's rejection of motherhood gestures "toward the impossibility of restoring the history of empire and recovering the lost text of mothering in the *same register of language*."⁷⁰ Consequently one can say, motherhood in the novel, echoing Roxana, functions as an impediment in the path of female individualism: the text of mothering cannot inhabit the same narrative space as the story of individualism. When a young woman appears claiming to be her daughter, Susan chides her for looking for recognition and legitimacy from the mother, "I repeat: what you know of your parentage comes to you in the form of stories, and the stories have but a single source. . . . You are father born. You have no mother. The pain you feel is the pain of lack, not a pain of loss."⁷¹ Within the limits of a patriarchal mode of cognition, the female story is defined, not by a loss, but a lack—Freud's "penis envy." Susan tries to convince the girl that she is a story fabricated by Foe, who is her real father. All stories have single origin; fathers are begetters of origins. The island story is not haunted by fictionalized daughters, but produced by substantive fathers, the guardians of primordial truth. Susan, the only witness to the island story (Friday being mute), wishes to recreate the chimeras of origins. The version she wishes to materialize in print is closest to Defoe's RC, the original text of Foe, which is yet to be written. In Coetzee's text, the spirit of the historical author Defoe survives in the character Susan; the true author-character struggle over authorial control of the island story is not between Foe and Susan, but between Defoe/Susan and Coetzee. While Susan (and Defoe) attempts to write a story of origin, Coetzee's text is simultaneously rewriting it as a story of descent. Coetzee is writing with

and against Defoe/Susan. Foe emerges as a product of the clash between *Ursprung* and *Herkunft*.

In the third section of the novel, the female individualist succeeds in reversing the relations of power; she usurps the father-position from Foe in a *coup d'état*: “It is not I who am the intended, but you. But why need I argue my case? When is it ever asked of a man who comes courting that he plead in syllogisms?”⁷² Fathers are begetters of origins; from the father-position, Susan attempts to restore the magic of lost origins. In her pursuit of substance, she attempts to memorize the exact facts of things, their essential identities, not distracted by the affective value of mothering. In the novel, the *coup d'état* occurs immediately before the second appearance of the imaginary daughter, whom Susan has abandoned earlier in the darkest part of the Epping Forest, after convincing her that she is father-born. Having expelled the girl, Susan wakes up in London hoping the bad dream is over and the momentary loss of authority is restored. As the girl, who is also called Susan Barton, appears again, this time with her nurse Amy, Susan starts to lose grip over the newly usurped father-position, as she begins to question her memory and her authority (in Roxana, Susan, Roxana’s namesake and daughter, symbolizes a past self, whom Roxana, with the help of her maid Amy, tries to abandon in the forest). Convinced that Foe has conjured up a ghost claiming to be her daughter, at first she protests that she is not a receptacle passively accepting Foe’s authority, “if I were like a bottle bobbing on the waves with a scrap of writing inside, that could as well be a message from an idle child fishing in the canal as from a mariner adrift on the high seas—if I were a mere receptacle ready to accommodate whatever story is stuffed in me . . . you would say to yourself, ‘This is no woman but a house of words, hollow, without substance’?”⁷³ Having occupied the father-position, she

claims to possess both choice and substance. As an expression of her voice-consciousness, she has expelled the ghosts created by Foe's imaginative powers. But with the second appearance of the daughter, Susan feels that her real self is slipping into a fictional self, her history transforming into a story: "In the beginning I thought I would tell you the story of the island and, being done with that, return to my former life. But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt."⁷⁴ Dreams and reality inhabit the same narrative order. The promise of demarginalization of the self through selective recollection of the island story is interrupted by the apparition of the daughter, which dissolves the boundaries between reality and fiction. The presence of the girl marks a blind spot in Susan's documentation of her past, which limits her visibility. In her attempts to form a continuous identity based on facts of the island, she is now confronted with a story rather than her memory, with a bad dream rather than reality, that unmask the farce of the unified self. The narrative structure corresponds to the narrator's dissociation of self. In the first two sections of the novel, which are in quotations, Susan documents reality, carefully reporting her past experiences in memoir and epistolary form. Both these forms have played a seminal function in the development of representative realism: Daniel Defoe being the master of the memoir form and Samuel Richardson being the master of the epistolary form. If the memoir form weaves together a continuous narrative self in chronological time, the epistolary form is a direct quotation of the stream of consciousness of the narrative subject in instantaneous time. Susan's memoir, constituting the first section of the novel, avoids all temptations of fictionality to document the events as they occurred on the island. The memoir functions as

source material for Foe's writing of the island story. Susan is aware that her memoir is dull because it is too much like the island: "It is not a dull story, though it is too much the same," said Foe." To which Susan replies, "It is not dull so long as we remind ourselves it is true. But as an adventure it is very dull indeed."⁷⁵ The dullness of the story tempts her to make up lies, to infuse desire in the activity of labor without value: "There was too little desire in Crusoe and Friday. . . . Without desire how is it possible to make a story?. . . . I ask myself what past historians of the castaway state have done—whether in despair they have not begun to make up lies."⁷⁶ Yet, she perseveres to report only the truth of her past experiences, on which depends her substance. The private letters directed to Foe, which constitute the second section of the novel, give a minute-by-minute account of Susan's new life in England and also contain her responses to Foe's questions about her memoir. Initially the letters are precisely dated, but with the loss of their addressee they also lose their dates. With the disappearance of the author, Susan occupies Foe's empty house to gain authority over the telling of her true story. But the first appearance, in this section, of the strange girl claiming to be her daughter, challenges the accuracy of her memories. As her past begins to resemble a bad dream, she quickly lures the girl into the deep forest and abandons her, thus reestablishing control over the truth of the past. Although confronted with challenges, Susan's identity remains intact in the first two sections of the novel. It is only in the third section, at the moment of her greatest triumph when she has imposed a *coup d'état*, Susan's narrative self begins to dissipate. With the reappearance of the girl, she is forced to confront that to write one's past is not to recognize it the way it really was but to conjure it: Foe notes, "You and I know, in our different ways, how rambling an occupation writing is; and conjuring is surely much the same."⁷⁷ To conjure is to construct the past for the present; it is

to converse with the ghosts of the past as they flash in the present. In an intertextual reference to Defoe's short story, "True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal," Susan in *Foe* recalls a story Foe has written of one Mrs. Barfield who spends an afternoon conversing with a friend, only to realize later that the friend had died the day before the meeting. Although this section, written in traditional first-person narration, is still organized around the continuous narrative identity of Susan, the narrative structure has abandoned the quotation marks of the memoir and the epistolary sections. Confronted with ghosts, rather than factual truths of the past, the narrator's episodic memory faces impediments, enmeshing her in a maze of doubt. The quotation marks establish proximity with the past, revealing the carefully preserved narrative self within its boundaries; thus, with the loss of quotation marks in the third section, the text establishes greater distance between the narrator and her memories. Susan, when schooling Cruso about the value of memorizing one's past, fears the effects distance can have on memory: "I do not wish to dispute, but you have forgotten much, and with every day that passes you forget more! . . . But seen from a vantage, life begins to lose its particularity. All shipwrecks become the same shipwreck."⁷⁸ The reappearance of the apparition of the daughter in the narrative space outside quotation marks establishes distance and uncertainties concerning the past, resulting in dissolution of Susan's narrative self. This is the last time we will encounter her as the narrator, as the fourth section of the novel abandons the proper name Susan and introduces an unidentified narrator. As the bad dream becomes substantial in the figure of the girl, the narrator's persona slides into insubstantiality. In the last section, Susan, having now lost the narrator-position, is discovered dead alongside of Foe by the unidentified narrator. In the fourth section of the novel, which is most dreamlike, fiction has triumphed

over reality; the narrative abandons attempts at establishing a causal link between past and present, characteristic of the memoir form. The events of the past appear as constellation dotting the here and now of the narrative space. If the novel begins with a representational image of thought depended on recollection and recognition, it ends with a non-representational image of thought, depended on fluidity and exteriority, where the “bodies are their own signs.”⁷⁹ The dissociation of self is complete: having abandoned the proper name Susan, the text only momentarily replaces her with an unidentified narrator, who is eventually dispersed into a general textuality, extending to the ends of earth. *Foe* opens in *media res* within the secured limits of the quotation marks, with the emphatic “I” of Susan narrating the singular experience of the shipwreck, “At last I could row no further,” and describing her attempt to land on the shore. Revealing the frame narrative, it ends outside the limits of the quotation marks, with the drowning of the unidentified “I” in the voiceless stream issuing from Friday’s mouth. This technique of the cinematic zoom-out induces forgetfulness, as with distance the particular memories blend into a general textuality, and facticity morphs into fictionality.

The apparition of Susan’s daughter interrupts the facticity of her episodic memory, resulting in disruption of authority and narrative identity. The mother-daughter subplot is a story of recognition and legitimacy, and its eventual failure: the daughter’s desire to centralize herself through recognition from the mother remains unrealized. The subplot also succeeds in disrupting Susan’s desire for recognition in print through fathering her text into existence by accurately documenting her past. By denying her access to the text of mothering, *Foe* also denies Susan access to the text of fathering; she and the girl end up dead in the end, still in the margins without recognition. Spivak states, “We could fault Coetzee

for not letting a woman have access to both authorship and motherhood. We could praise him for not presuming to speak a completed text on motherhood. I would rather . . . call it the mark of *aporia*.” In rewriting RC, Foe struggles with the absence of the figure of the mother in the original text by staging its construction as father-born. But at the same time, Foe resists against tactical reversal of relations of power that merely reinstate the status quo; the mother-daughter story interrupts precisely when Susan has imposed a *coup d'état* reversing the existing order. Foe guards against restoring the lost text of mothering in the original, or worst still, reconstructing it as mother-born. Coetzee refuses to reconcile motherhood with its essential identity, regain contact with its origin, and establish a full positive relationship with itself. Susan’s failure to “memorize” her past and “recognize” her daughter is a failure to lend speech to the traces of the past, articulating it in continuous, linear time. The mother-daughter subplot, although introduces the key element of fictionality in the text, is after all a story of demarginalization, of infusing the margins with voice-consciousness. Against this story of demarginalization depended on establishing facts through recollection, Coetzee presents us with a counter-factual—the story of Friday. The figure of Friday is aporetic that does not lend itself to an anthropological reduction. The story of Friday is not a story of centralizing through *anamnesis*; it is a story of establishing distance, not for reflection, but to produce a gap of difference between the same and the other. It constitutes a face-to-face encounter with the radical alterity of the other of history, whose absolute otherness cannot be collapsed into the law of the same. Friday is a non-allegorical figure, whose story doggedly keeps its silence. Speaking of the difference between the story of the mother-daughter relationship and of Friday, Spivak maintains that feminism and anticolonialism cannot inhabit the same narrative space; if feminism is

concerned with issues within the “same cultural inscription,” anticolonialism is concerned with an absolute racial other. According to Spivak, Western feminism tends to overlook a problem, “that a concern with women, *and* men, who have not been written in the *same* cultural inscription, cannot be mobilized *in the same way* as the investigation of gendering in our own. It is *not* impossible, but new ways have to be learned and taught, and attention to the wholly other must be constantly renewed.”⁸⁰ Chandra Talpade Mohanty has famously made a similar charge against liberal white Western feminist humanists who take their own benevolence for granted and produce monolithic and universalizing constructions of women, collapsing all cultural difference.⁸¹ In contrast to the relationship between Crusoe and Friday based on absolute colonial domination, the relationship between Susan and Friday is based on neocolonial hegemony. If in the original text the relationship between Crusoe and Friday is that of a colonizer and colonized, Coetzee rewrites that original relationship as an encounter between the figure of liberal humanist and a subaltern. Susan is the figure of the white, liberal feminist humanist who takes her own benevolence for granted and attempts to recuperate Friday’s voice-consciousness and history. Her demarginalization is depended upon representation of the racially other. But the figure of Friday is impassable; he has no tongue and cannot be captured in a representational image of thought. Friday’s history is inaccessible to Susan. The mother-daughter subplot and the story of Friday present two different uses of the past. If Susan and the girl, each in their own way, “memorize” their past, Coetzee’s text “monumentalizes” the past of Friday; in this regard, Coetzee’s *Foe* dramatizes a struggle between two different kinds of history: total history and general history. As Susan writes a total history of the island, the text simultaneously rewrites it in terms of a general history of the island.

In AK, Foucault differentiates total history from general history:

To be brief, then, let us say that history, in its traditional form, undertook to ‘memorize’ the monuments of the past, transform them into documents, and lend speech to those traces which, in themselves, are often not verbal, or which say in silence something other than what they actually say; in our time, history is that which transforms documents into monuments. In that area where, in the past, history deciphered the traces left by men, it now deploys a mass of elements that have to be grouped, made relevant, placed in relation to one another to form totalities. There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments . . . aspired to the condition of history . . . in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of monument.⁸²

Total history, the traditional form of history, engages in recuperating *Ursprung*. It attempts to memorize or document the past, reconstituting the teleological, evolutionary progress of events through chronological time. Such a history treats the documents of the past “as a language of a past since reduced to silence...but possible decipherable trace.”⁸³ The past is viewed as constituting not only the “already-said,” corporeal discourses already spoken or written, but also constituting the “never-said,” incorporeal discourses buried in silence that precede the voiced presence of the corporeal discourses. Thus, the task of a historian is to allegorize the past, to interpret the voiced presence so as to unearth the repressive presence of discourses: traditional history is “an interpretation of ‘hearing’ of an ‘already-said’ that is at the same time a ‘not-said.’”⁸⁴ Total history attempts to unmask the hidden traces of the past, infuse them with speech, and consequently reveal the eternal truths preserved in them through time. In her memoirs and letters, Susan meticulously documents her past on the

island. The ghastly presence of the girl claiming to be her daughter, whom she tries to abandon, challenges the facticity of her episodic memory. Like a traditional historian, Susan allegorizes the story of Friday, attempting to unearth the “never-said” of the history of mute Friday before his arrival on the island. This process is also a humanizing process, granting voice to the voiceless of history. Her survival and her substance depends on accessing the realm of the “never-said.” In contrast to total history, Foucault proposes general history, which transforms the documents of the past into monuments. Rather than interpret the documents to unravel the hidden eternal truths or reveal their expressive value, general history questions the sanctified unity of the document by examining the mass of discontinuities. If total history organizes the past around a single center—a principle or a spirit of the age—, general history deploys “a space of dispersion.”⁸⁵ That is, the latter organizes the document by dividing it up, arranging it in levels, establishing series and describing relations between them: Foucault notes, “The document is not the fortunate tool of history that is primarily and fundamentally *memory*; history is one way in which a society recognizes and develops a mass of documentation with which it is inextricably linked.”⁸⁶ For Foucault, history is not recollecting the past the way it was, but an active monumentalizing of the documents of the past by establishing relations between series, series of series. General history does not recuperate the origin but examines an event in its occurrence, its *Herkunft*. If total history is based on continuity and totalities, general history is based on series and events. In Foucault, historical documents, as Said notes, are “intended.”⁸⁷ Every society is indelibly linked to the construction of mass of documents, which constitute a certain order that is limited and historically specific. Foucault calls this order discourse: “The analysis of the discursive field . . . grasp[s] the statement in the exact

specificity of its occurrence; determines its conditions of existence, fix at least its limits, establish its correlations with other statements that may be connected with it, and show what other forms of statement it excludes.”⁸⁸ Discourse is made up of limited number of statements that constitute a historically specific order. In a discursive field everything cannot be said because every order constitutes limited statements that are formed on the basis of exclusion of other possible statements. The internal continuity of discourse is established on the basis of discontinuity, on exclusion of other statements and discourses. Exclusion, in Foucault, is not understood as repression. The past does not constitute the “never-said” that is hidden beneath and precedes the corporeal discourse, patiently waiting to be discovered by the recollecting consciousness. There is “no subtext. . . . Each statement occupies in it a place that belongs to it alone.”⁸⁹ In fact, discourse is “a distribution of gaps, voids, absences, limits, divisions.”⁹⁰ These gaps, absences and discontinuities do not hide a silent text waiting to be unraveled. They cannot be reduced to a lack or interiority, but constitute exteriority, the external conditions of existence. Gaps are opened up by dispersion, which indicate that the continuity of discourse is based, not a single principle, but on appropriation of difference. In short, every discourse entails a power struggle: Discourse “has its own rules of appearance, but also its conditions of appropriation and operation [that] . . . from the moment of its existence . . . poses the question of power.”⁹¹ Total history, in seeking uninterrupted continuities, has difficulty conceiving of gaps, discontinuities, and differences, which in Foucault, is the mark of the Other; it is afraid “to conceive of the Other in the time of our own thought.”⁹² On the other hand, general history, which he also calls archaeology, is not a recollection of memory but a making of difference. It is “making differentiations, it is a *diagnosis*.”⁹³ To make difference is to monumentalize

the past. Archaeology is a discipline “devoted to silent monuments.”⁹⁴ In Foe, the figure of Friday appears as a mute monument of the past, whose story cannot be documented by total history. Against Susan’s anthropological documentation of Friday, Coetzee’s text stages Friday as a silent monument of the past, who can only be described archaeologically.

General history constitutes monuments of thought; it transforms documents into monuments. Although Foucault does not describe the monument in AK, the concept generally appears to mean discursively constructed raw materials of history. Unlike documents, monuments do not exist causally for the recollecting consciousness of the historian to establish a continuous identity. If document is first and foremost memory, the monument is counter-memory that disrupts the formation of a unified identity. Monuments do not possess interiority that requires interpretation; rather, they exist in the dimension of exteriority, the external conditions of possibility. Monuments do not subsist as the “already-said” of discourse, which is also the realm of the “never-said,” that secret voice waiting to be heard. They do not conceal silent voices of the dead or the law of the father. They are not sources of information and are not empirically visible or verifiable. They document nothing. Said notes, “a document’s monumentality can only emerge when discourse is not elided with reality. . . . Monumentality is the general mode of presence of discourse.”⁹⁵ Discourses exist monumentally. Monuments do not emanate from a single origin, or organized around a single principle. They exist in series and are repeatable occurrences. In Foucault, repetition produces difference, an idea similar to Gilles Deleuze’s concept of repetition. Deleuze clarifies that Nietzsche’s concept of eternal return is not a recurrence of the same but of difference: “Returning is the becoming-identical of becoming itself. . . . Such an identity, produced by difference, is determined as ‘repetition.’ Repetition in the

eternal return, therefore, consists in conceiving the same on the basis of the different.”⁹⁶ Difference opens the space to the Other in the time of our thought. To differentiate is to monumentalize by establishing distance. Mark Poster calls Foucault’s monuments a strategy of *dehumanization* that makes the familiar strange.⁹⁷ Monuments exist impersonally, without a voice or an author. Let us turn to the figuration of the unvoiced Friday, the impassable monument of the history of Empire.

Coetzee reinscribes the figure of Friday in markedly different ways from Defoe. To begin with, his Friday is racially different from Defoe’s character. Crusoe observes that his new manservant, a rather handsome fellow, “had all the Sweetness and Softness of an *European*. . . . His hair was long and black, not curl’d like Wool. . . . The Colour of his Skin was not quite black, but very tawny.”⁹⁸ Crusoe portrays his Friday by negation, as not black. He goes on to describe, at great length, his facial features, as being not that of a “negro.” Susan encounters Friday immediately after reaching the shore, whom she describes as, “He was black: a Negro with a head of fuzzy wool, naked save for a pair of rough drawers. I lifted myself and studied the flat face, the small dull eyes, the broad nose, the thick lips, the skin not black but a dark grey, dry as if coated with dust.”⁹⁹ Coetzee’s text self-consciously repeats Crusoe’s description of Friday, without the negation, as his Friday *is* black. The signs of Friday’s blackness pervade the text, as Susan is not only obsessed with his hair, but also stereotypically addresses him largely through animal metaphors. The next crucial difference between the two Fridays is their relation to language. After Friday promises to abandon his cannibal ways, Crusoe proceeds to teach him to speak: “I began to speak to him, and teach him to speak to me; and first I made him know his Name should be Friday, which was the Day I sav’d his Life . . . so for the Memory of the Time.”¹⁰⁰ Needless

to say, as Crusoe cannot hear the barbarian speech, he concludes that Friday has no language. Spivak reminds us, “It is a longstanding topos that barbarians by definition do not speak language.”¹⁰¹ Crusoe’s speech-act, “I name thee Friday,” carries an illocutionary force beyond its content; it temporally and linguistically marks the beginning of Friday’s transformation from a soulless heathen to a souled being. Crusoe’s christening the manservant Friday marks the time of his redemption: Friday is saved from being cannibalized and from his own cannibalism, and more importantly, rescued from life of speechlessness. In RC, cannibalism and speech do not inhabit the same narrative space-time. To speak is to be civilized (and memorized), and to be civilized is to be human. Speech *itself* occurs in the master’s tongue and utters the law of the father. The cannibal past of Friday is exorcised through the tongue of the master/father. In contrast, Coetzee’s Friday is mute; his tongue has been cut off by the slavers. Due to absence of the tongue, his cannibalism cannot be accessed, contained, and transformed by the speech and law of the master/father. Friday’s soulless being cannot be marked by the language or time of Europe. In other words, he cannot be humanized by Europe. Direct signs of cannibalism, which are clearly present in Defoe’s story, are absent in Coetzee’s text. In a reference to the most famous line of RC, “It happen’d one Day about Noon going towards my Boat, I was exceedingly surpriz’d with the Print of a Man’s naked Foot on the Shore, which was very plain to be seen in the Sand,”¹⁰² Susan notes, “I saw no cannibals; and if they came after nightfall and fled before the dawn, they left no footprint behind.”¹⁰³ Although there are no verifiable signs, cannibalism has a ghastly presence in the novel. It lives in the realm of the “never-said,” of that silence beneath the island story that Susan attempts to memorize. Throughout the text, the fear of Friday’s cannibal past haunts Susan, which she verbalizes

only once in the text: “Did human flesh once pass those lips? . . . For surely human flesh is like falling into sin: having fallen once you discover in yourself a taste for it, and fall all the more readily thereafter. I shiver as I watch Friday . . . on the time before, when he was a savage among savages.”¹⁰⁴ In *Foe*, if the time before the contact with Europe was marked by cannibalism, the time after is marked by speechlessness, a condition imposed by the law-preserving violence of the civilizing mission. In the novel, the letter *h* indicates the condition of speechlessness. When Susan questions Crusoe’s claim that Friday is incapable of speech, he demonstrates to her the sound of muteness: “‘La-la-la,’ said Crusoe, and motioned to Friday to repeat. ‘Ha-ha-ha,’ said Friday from the back of his throat. ‘He has no tongue,’ said Crusoe. Gripping Friday by the hair, he brought his face close to mine. ‘Do you see?’ he said. ‘It is too dark,’ said I.”¹⁰⁵ If Crusoe grants speech to Friday, Susan wishes to grant voice to the speechless Friday: Spivak makes a seminal point, “the contrast here is also between the colonialist—who gives the native speech—and the metropolitan anti-imperialist—who wants to give the native voice.”¹⁰⁶ Coetzee complicates the simple equation of the original. To be civilized and humanized is to be voiced by the master discourse. Not by granting speech, but by voicing silence that Susan attempts to access the traces of Friday’s past. His speechlessness emanates from a dark, unverifiable place, where hidden traces of his past, and possibly present, cannibalism exist. The marks of speechlessness and cannibalism are inscribed on the tongue, where signs of violence before and after the encounter with Europe exist simultaneously. In his essay “On Cannibals,” Michel de Montaigne, discussing the habits of barbarians who eat their enemies out of vengeance and not nourishment,” says, “I am not so anxious that we should note the horrible savagery of these acts [cannibalism] as concerned that, whilst judging their faults so

correctly, we should be so blind to our own. I consider it more barbarous to eat a man alive than to eat him dead; to tear by rack and torture a body still full of feeling.”¹⁰⁷ A barbarian is defined by negation, the other that is not the same, the other that is inhuman, non-human. For Montaigne, the acts of violence disrupt this definition. To torture a living body is worse than to eat a dead one. Friday’s tongue holds memory of Africa, that place without speech and outside history, where one devours one’s enemies. As there are no verifiable footprints on Cruso’s island, Susan’s voicing, through *anamnesis*, the truth of the island story is haunted by the “never-said” of Friday’s cannibal past that is already articulated in that silence and stubbornly runs beneath the surface. To voice that silence is to access and humanize Friday’s cannibal past so as to not be eaten as the enemy. Like Scheherazade, Susan, the storyteller, attempts to voice Friday’s silence to forestall death. But, the event of torture of the Empire disrupts her access to Friday’s *Ursprung*. The *Herkunft* of Friday attaches itself to the body, with its gaps, faults and fissures, disrupting the continuity of origins.

Throughout the novel, Susan diligently engages in the rather arduous task of soul-making through voicing Friday’s past. Her writing the truth of the island story is also an act of undoing that story. Crusoe, the savior, rules with hegemony, passing on the torch of European Enlightenment to Friday. Coetzee’s Cruso rules with pure domination. He is the figure of the colonizer. Coetzee’s novels often depict the figure of the colonizer in terms of absolute violence. Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in Dusklands are examples of such colonizers.¹⁰⁸ On a barren terrain where he expends labor without value, he has imposed near total silence, interrupted only by functional speech. The symbolic function of language granting access to the thoughts of Europe has no value for him. He communicates with

Friday exclusively in command words, who, like a dog, responds only to the words taught, having no knowledge of the complexity of human language. His vocabulary is painfully limited, understanding the word “firewood” but not “wood.” On the other hand, Susan sees no benefit in the life of silence; and lectures Crusoe about the advantages of English language, that can bring pleasure and blessings of civilization: Susan notes, “Yet would it not have lightened your solitude had Friday been master of English? . . . You might have brought home to him some of the blessings of civilization.”¹⁰⁹ To speak is to memorize and civilize Friday’s past. In her memoir and letters, the benevolent white liberal feminist humanist fathers the island story by granting voice to Friday’s past, thus undoing the silence imposed by Crusoe’s pure domination. For the marginal female individualist, to voice the other’s story is also a process of centralizing the self. In short, Susan wishes to become Defoe, to occupy the father-position, from which she can write RC, that story of coming into presence of the imperial European self on a *terra nullius*. But Susan, as Spivak reminds us, is not a classic colonialist like Crusoe granting speech to the other of Europe. After all, Coetzee’s Friday has no tongue. Coetzee shifts focus from the colonizer-colonized relationship of RC. For Susan, the body of Friday exists as a *terra nullius*, an empty space without self-determining sovereignty, waiting to be spoken of/written in the master discourse. She is a benevolent metropolitan anti-imperialist, whose self-definition is depended upon granting voice-consciousness to the other of history. Coetzee is not only rewriting RC into apartheid South Africa, with the figure of the white liberal feminist humanist representing the voice of the segregated black, but also into the larger neocolonial world, characterized by the dominant economic, political, and cultural restructurings

emerging in the post-colonial world, with the figure of the liberal metropolitan scholar, whose self-definition depends upon representing the marginal subaltern.

In her memoir and letters to Foe, Susan attempts to recuperate the *Ursprung*, the true story of the origin of the loss of the tongue. By making “the air around him [Friday] thick with words,” she hopes “memories will be reborn in him which died under Cruso’s rule.”¹¹⁰ Through sketches, she tries to stir Friday’s memories, wishing to know if Cruso or some other slaver cut his tongue. Susan wants to “build a bridge of words over which, when one day it is grown sturdy enough, he [Friday] may cross to the time before Cruso, the time before he lost his tongue, when he lived immersed in the prattle of words as unthinkable as a fish in water.”¹¹¹ To evoke memories of the loss of the tongue is a strategy of return to a past before the encounter with Empire, when his body was un mutilated and whole, and words were abundant. Cruso has no memories of the loss; he does not remember who cut the tongue and for what reasons. Although there are no verifiable signs of cannibalism, Susan is convinced that the marks of mutilation exist allegorically, hiding a deeper, darker truth. In order to establish the facticity of Friday’s cannibalism, Susan attempts to articulate the loss, which she has not verified but regards with intense revulsion: “I have not looked into your mouth. When your master asked me to look, I would not. An aversion came over me that we feel for all the mutilated.”¹¹² For the benevolent feminist to give voice to the allegorical signs is a strategy for survival, for fear that the cannibal past lives unarticulated and unchanneled in the present. The line between benevolence and despotism is ever so thin: Susan confesses, “I tell myself I talk to Friday to educate him out of darkness and silence. But is that the truth? There are times when benevolence deserts me and I use words only as the shortest way to subject him to my will.”¹¹³ To unmask the truth of the origin of the loss

is to impose her will to truth. For Susan, like RC, stories are about cannibalism and its expulsion through the tongue and the law of the master/father. But as Crusoe's barren island has no visible footprints of cannibalism, she fears she might have to invent them: "How long before I am driven to invent new and stranger circumstances . . . a landing by cannibals on the island, followed by a skirmish and many bloody deaths."¹¹⁴ To succumb to temptations of fictionality in narrating her past is to lose her substance, which depends on the truth. Susan is at her wit's end, for "only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost!"¹¹⁵ She concludes that her story "seems stupid, that is only because it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday's tongue."¹¹⁶

In Foe, the silent figure of Friday exists monumentally; he has no voice and no origin. Origins lie at the locus of inevitable loss, where essential identities remain buried. Susan fails to unmask the story of the loss of the tongue, the *Ursprung* of Friday, thus failing to access, what she believes to be the truth of his nature, his cannibalism. Only the lost tongue can narrate the story of its loss. The mutilated body of Friday carries marks of its descent, its *Herkunft*, maintaining the traces of the events of history in their proper dispersion. In RC, the traces of the Friday's past are appropriated and transformed into the tongue of the master/father. For Susan the marks of mutilation hide an interiority (the truth about Friday's cannibalism), but the effects of torture make access to that interiority impossible. For Foucault *Herkunft* identifies "the accidents, the minute deviations . . . the errors, the false appraisals, and the faulty calculations that gave birth to those things that continue to exist."¹¹⁷ The body of Friday exists, not as an allegorical sign awaiting interpretation, but as an exteriority of accidents, gaps, and errors of history: the home of

Friday is a place where “bodies are their own signs.”¹¹⁸ The body of Friday is a parchment upon which Empire writes itself and displays its effects—the dominations, desires, and diseases. In Foe, unlike RC, Friday’s body bears marks of the insurmountable conflicts of Empire, which cannot be memorized by the narrator’s consciousness. The cinematic zoom-out of Coetzee’s text, revealing the outermost frame outside the quotation marks, establishes greater distance between the liberal consciousness and the marginal other. If the first two sections of the novel, written in memoir and epistolary form, attempt to document the past and to decipher the traces on the island to uncover their essential truth, the last two sections, staging the dissolution of the narrative self outside the quotation marks, transform these documents into monuments, memory into counter-memory.

Foucault’s concept of counter-memory is greatly influenced by Nietzsche’s idea of active forgetting, a necessary condition for living.¹¹⁹ The formation of a unified subject through temporal recollection is suspended through active forgetfulness, which is a condition of freedom. Forgetting disrupts essences, continuities and unities. General history severs its connection to memory, its anthropological model, and constructs a counter-memory, which is a process of forgetting. For Foucault, counter-memory constitutes three uses of the past, all of which are staged in Foe. The first use is parodic, directed against reality: Foucault states, “Genealogy is history in the form of a concerted carnival.”¹²⁰ Foe is a perverse repetition, and not a recollection, of the original text, unmasking, through the figure of Friday, the gaps, discontinuities, and differences, which it attempts to collapse into the law of the same. The second use is dissociative, directed against identity: Foucault asserts, “Genealogy is not to discover the roots of our identity but to commit itself to its dissipation.”¹²¹ The narrator’s desire to form a unified self through *anamnesis* of the loss of

the tongue is disrupted by the event of torture. The marks of torture fail to be translated into a representational image of thought. The third use is sacrificial, directed against truth: Foucault maintains, “Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of knowledge.”¹²² Coetzee’s text stages the malicious nature of the metropolitan liberal subject’s will to knowledge, and the eventual destruction of the subject who seeks to know/subject the other of history. The silent stream issuing from Friday’s mouth drowns the narrator, the characters and the author into a general textuality. RC, the original text of Foe, fails to be materialized in Coetzee’s novel.

If Susan tries to forestall death through memorizing the past, Coetzee’s text murders the author through monumentalizing the past. In the final section, outside the house where Foe lies dead, the plaque announces “*Daniel Defoe, Author.*” Foe and Defoe cannot inhabit the same narrative space. The death of the author releases the author-function in its discursive realm. In Coetzee, writing is an act of forgetting, of sacrifice of the author. Foucault describes the nature of writing in our times, “Writing is now linked to sacrifice and to the sacrifice of life itself. . . . Where a work had the duty of creating immortality, it now attains a right to kill, to become the murderer of the author.”¹²³ To write is to write the self, to transform the self into the victim of one’s own writing. Coetzee, following Ronald Barthes, asserts that writing occurs in the middle voice, with reference to the self: “To write (active) is to carry out the action without reference to the self, perhaps, though not necessarily, on behalf of someone else. To write (middle) is to carry out the action (or better, to do-writing) with reference to the self.”¹²⁴ To write is not to represent the other, but to wrench the self from itself through dehumanizing effects of counter-memory. Counter-

memory has value as critique; it is an act of dislodging the self from itself, opening a gap of difference. Paul A. Bové explains its value as critique: “It [criticism] can exploit the possibilities of that discourse to produce what Foucault calls a ‘counter-memory,’ but it needs to be careful not to assume the right of speaking for others in forming that memory.”¹²⁵ As a true genealogist, Coetzee writes in the middle voice, laughing at the grandness of origins through monumentalized history.

Notes

¹ Samuel Beckett, Stories and Texts for Nothing (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 85.

² Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972) 215. Hereafter cited as AK.

³ J. M. Coetzee, Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992) 94.

⁴ J. M. Coetzee, Foe (New York: Penguin Books, 1986).

⁵ Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1975). Hereafter cited as RC.

⁶ Daniel Defoe, Roxana (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996).

⁷ Daniel Defoe, "True Relation of the Apparition of One Mrs. Veal," Great Short Stories of the Masters, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002) 39-47.

⁸ Ian Watt, The Rise of the Novel (Berkeley: U of California P, 1957) 10. Hereafter cited as RON.

⁹ Watt, RON 14.

¹⁰ Watt, RON 15.

¹¹ Watt, RON 74.

¹² Watt, RON 63.

¹³ Adam Smith, An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations, vol. I, eds. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1981) 26-27.

¹⁴ Defoe, RC 6.

¹⁵ Defoe, RC 5.

¹⁶ Defoe RC 163.

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- ¹⁷ Defoe, RC 164.
- ¹⁸ Defoe, RC 101.
- ¹⁹ Karl Marx, Grundrisse, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Book, 1973) 83.
- ²⁰ Gayatri Spivak, "Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*," Consequences of Theory, eds. Jonathan Arac and Barbara Johnson (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1991) 159-160.
- ²¹ Spivak, "Coetzee's *Foe*" 160.
- ²² Karl Marx, Capital: Volume I, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 171.
- ²³ Marx, Grundrisse 84.
- ²⁴ Marx, Grundrisse 83.
- ²⁵ Marx, Grundrisse 83.
- ²⁶ Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 142.
- ²⁷ Jean Jacques Rousseau, Émile, trans. Barbara Foxley (London: Dent, 1963) 147.
- ²⁸ Rousseau, Émile 147.
- ²⁹ Defoe, RC 102.
- ³⁰ Marx, Grundrisse 83.
- ³¹ J. A. Hobson, Imperialism (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1972) 88.
- ³² Henry Reynolds, The Law of the Land (Victoria, Australia: Penguin Books, 1987) 12.
- ³³ See G. W. F. Hegel, The Philosophy of History, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Willey Book Co., 1944) 79-102.

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- ³⁴ Watt, RON 63.
- ³⁵ Defoe, RC 104.
- ³⁶ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 144.
- ³⁷ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 142.
- ³⁸ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 146.
- ³⁹ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 146.
- ⁴⁰ Edward Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) xii.
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- ⁴² Coetzee, Foe 9.
- ⁴³ Coetzee, Foe 157.
- ⁴⁴ Said, Culture and Imperialism 225.
- ⁴⁵ Coetzee, Foe 16.
- ⁴⁶ Coetzee, Foe 13.
- ⁴⁷ Coetzee, Foe 33.
- ⁴⁸ Spivak, “Coetzee’s *Foe*” 160.
- ⁴⁹ Marx, Capital: Volume I 129.
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- ⁵² Spivak, “Coetzee’s *Foe*” 160.
- ⁵³ Coetzee, Foe 34.

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- ⁵⁴ Coetzee, Foe 18.
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- ⁵⁸ Coetzee, Foe 11-12.
- ⁵⁹ Coetzee, Foe 21.
- ⁶⁰ Coetzee, Foe 22.
- ⁶¹ Coetzee, Foe 34.
- ⁶² Coetzee, Foe 34-35.
- ⁶³ Coetzee, Foe 26.
- ⁶⁴ Coetzee, Foe 51-52.
- ⁶⁵ Defoe, RC 237.
- ⁶⁶ Coetzee, Foe 126.
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- ⁶⁸ Defoe, RC 3.
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- ⁷⁴ Coetzee, Foe 133.

⁷⁵ Coetzee, Foe 127.

⁷⁶ Coetzee, Foe 88.

⁷⁷ Coetzee, Foe 135.

⁷⁸ Coetzee, Foe 18.

⁷⁹ Coetzee, Foe 157.

⁸⁰ Spivak, "Coetzee's *Foe*" 159.

⁸¹ See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse," boundary 2 12.3 (1984): 333-58.

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⁸⁴ Foucault, AK 25.

⁸⁵ Foucault, AK 10.

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⁸⁷ Edward Said, "An Ethics of Language," rev. of The Archaeology of Knowledge, by Michel Foucault, Diacritics 4.2 (1974): 29.

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⁹¹ Foucault, AK 120.

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⁹⁵ Said, “An Ethics of Language” 33.

⁹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia UP, 1994) 41.

⁹⁷ See Mark Poster, Cultural History and Postmodernity: Disciplinary Readings and Challenges (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) 134-152.

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¹⁰² Defoe, RC 121.

¹⁰³ Coetzee, Foe 54.

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¹⁰⁵ Coetzee, Foe 22.

¹⁰⁶ Spivak, “Coetzee’s *Foe*” 169.

¹⁰⁷ Michel de Montaigne, Essays, trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1958) 113.

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¹⁰⁹ Coetzee, Foe 22.

¹¹⁰ Coetzee, Foe 59.

¹¹¹ Coetzee, Foe 60.

¹¹² Coetzee, Foe 85.

¹¹³ Coetzee, Foe 60.

¹¹⁴ Coetzee, Foe 67.

¹¹⁵ Coetzee, Foe 67.

¹¹⁶ Coetzee, Foe 117.

¹¹⁷ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 146.

¹¹⁸ Coetzee, Foe 157.

¹¹⁹ See Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life, trans. Peter Preuss (Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1980).

¹²⁰ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 161.

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¹²² Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” 163.

¹²³ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 117.

¹²⁴ Coetzee, Doubling the Point 94.

¹²⁵ Paul A. Bové, Mastering Discourse: The Politics of Intellectual Culture (Durham: Duke UP, 1992) 18.

3.0 JUSTICE, ETHICS, AND PRACTICES OF FREEDOM: J. M. COETZEE'S

DISGRACE

Our cries
are drums heralding desire
in the tumultuous voices, music of nations,
our cries are hymns of love that hearts
might flourish on the earth like seeds in the sun
the cries of Africa
cries of mornings when the dead grew from the seas
chained
the blood and the seed.
—Agostinho Neto¹

We, the people of South Africa, feel fulfilled that humanity has taken us back into its bosom, that we, who were outlaws not so long ago, have today been given the rare privilege to be host to the nations of the world on our own soil. . . . We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges of building peace, prosperity, nonsexism, nonracialism and democracy. . . . Let there be justice for all. Let there be peace for all. Let there be work,

bread, water and salt for all. . . . Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another and suffer the indignity of being the skunk of the world. Let freedom reign.

—Nelson Mandela²

I am not a herald of community or anything else . . . I am someone who has intimations of freedom (as every chained prisoner has) and constructs representations—which are shadows themselves—of people slipping their chains and turning their faces to the light.

—J. M. Coetzee³

Perhaps more than any other of his novels, J. M. Coetzee's Disgrace⁴ has garnered intense domestic controversy and worldwide commentary, largely centered on the depiction of black-on-white rape in post-apartheid South Africa. The African National Congress (hereafter ANC) submitted a report to the South African Human Rights Commission on 5th April 2000 using Disgrace as an example of racism in the media due to the representation of black-on-white crime.⁵ I will address this charge of racism in the following pages. While the narrative event of interracial rape has gained much attention in critical readings of the novel, there are almost no readings on the question of justice, which the novel intensely grapples with, given its publication in 1999 just after the event of national catharsis—The Truth and Reconciliation Commission trials (hereafter TRC). The question that haunts the text is this—in face of such unspeakable horrors of the past, is justice possible in the present? If so, what is its form and nature? Moreover, can fiction speak to the possibility of justice? In this chapter, I will argue that Coetzee's Disgrace proposes the possibility of

justice, not as law, but as ethics. Recasting justice in post-apartheid and postcolonial South Africa, the novel stages the “idea” of justice as being heterogeneous to law. It exceeds the law of retributive, restorative, and distributive justice. In this regard, I will show that the novel allegorizes the TRC model of restorative justice through the mode of the confessional narrative only to interrupt it. Borrowing from Jacques Derrida’s reconceptualization of the idea of justice in relation to deconstruction, elaborated in numerous works, I will demonstrate that Disgrace, while staging the limits of the interpretative violence of justice as law (“force of law”), presents the irreducible idea of justice that addresses itself to the absolute singularity of the other, to the human-other *and* the animal-other. This idea of justice, as an ethical relation to the other, is a gift without exchange, without circulation and without debt. In the novel, the state of dis-grace (apart from the Law of the Father) is the condition of possibility of justice outside and beyond law. It exceeds the universalist discourses of law and rights, and also escapes the gaze of the witness and the allegorist. Furthermore, I will argue that writing itself, in Coetzee, is an act of justice beyond law; it is an ethical gesture towards the radical alterity of the wholly other.

Disgrace, published in 1999, almost five years after Nelson Mandela was elected president in a fully representative democratic election, brought Coetzee a record-breaking second Booker Prize that same year. The narrative events of Disgrace unfold in post-apartheid South Africa, just after the fall of the apartheid regime and the end of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings.⁶ Gerald Kaufman, a Member of Parliament and the chairman of the Booker judge’s panel noted that the book is “an allegory about what is happening to the human race in the post-colonial era.”⁷ He also declared it “a millennial book because it takes us through the 20th century into a new century in which the source of

power is shifting away from Western Europe.”⁸ Kaufman notably reads this novel, which several critics suggest is one of the rear instances of the use of the realist style by the author, as a global allegory (not a universal, transcendental one), symbolizing the occasion of the emergence of a new phase in geopolitics, when not only South Africa but the globe is experiencing the deterritorialization of the old (colonialism and apartheid) and reterritorialization of the new (the “rise” of the postcolonial nations, or the “Asian century”). After its publication the novel soon captured the world’s imagination, with, however skeptical one is of such “lists,” a 2006 poll of 150 literary luminaries conducted by the British newspaper The Observer of the best novels of the last 25 years electing Disgrace as the winner.⁹ In 2008 a motion picture adaptation directed by Steve Jacobs starring John Malkovich as the protagonist David Lurie was premiered at the Toronto Film Festival and won the International Critics’ Award.

Disgrace is among the few novels of Coetzee that identifies the time and place of the action; it is often read as a realist novel: Gareth Cornwell asserts, “Thus, although there is little trace in Coetzee’s novel of ‘smelly underwear’ or ‘people picking their noses,’ it is safe to say that *Disgrace* has every appearance of being a realist text.”¹⁰ While Disgrace is a realist novel, perhaps his most realist novel, I will demonstrate that it is a multi-generic novel. Along with apparently realist representation of places and events, it is also part allegory. The novel is written in third-person narration in free indirect discourse with David as the focalizer. Coetzee employs free indirect discourse through much of the novel, thus cautioning his readers that although the third-person narrator adheres as closely as possible to the thoughts of the character-focalizer, David, the narrative voice does not fully yield ground to David’s consciousness. In other words, the free indirect style of the novel

produces crucial distance between the two. But in many passages, we will see the distance between the two voices blurs, or appears to. Similar to other novels of Coetzee, it is also entirely written in the present tense. It narrates the story of David, a divorced middle-aged white liberal university professor specializing in British Romanticism, who solves the problem of sex in a programmatic fashion, meeting with Soraya, a Muslim sex-worker whom he has chosen from the “Exotic” section of the catalogue, every Thursday afternoons. When these liaisons come to an end, after he stalks her, Lurie seduces his student Melanie, who is coloured (the Greek root *melas* meaning dark), and is charged with sexual harassment by the university committee. At the meeting, he offers no defense and no apologies, rejecting the confessional mode of contrition that the committee members desire in order to “access and reform his soul.” The university committee hearing is often read as allegorizing the TRC hearings, which were framed within the Christian confessional mode. He leaves the university and Cape Town to live with his daughter Lucy who lives on a farm some miles away from Salem in Eastern Cape. Lucy, a young independent settler woman, who briefly shares the house with Helen before David’s arrival and is “possibly” a lesbian, has appointed Petrus as a new assistant and co-proprietor of the farm. One day she is raped and beaten by three black men, and David himself is beaten and burnt. Lucy refuses to file charges with the police despite David’s objection. When interrogated by David about her silence, Lucy explains, “The reason is that, 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.”¹¹ In response to Lurie’s question to clarify this place, she states, “This place being South Africa.”¹² One of the rapists appears at Petrus’ party and is apparently his relative. Lucy, who now is pregnant, decides to carry the

child to term. Petrus, who is already married, proposes to marry her in exchange for his protection, suggesting that without him she is “fair game.” Lucy agrees to the concubinage-style marriage. When Lurie objects to this humiliating arrangement, she responds, “Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity. . . . Yes, like a dog.”¹³ Meantime, David has been working for the not so attractive Bev Shaw who runs the clinic, Animal Welfare League, that puts unwanted dogs to sleep, and also has intercourse with her. David, who learns to love dogs and to let go of them, writes a sad operetta in his spare time.

In his reading of tense and aspect in Franz Kafka’s story “The Burrow,” Coetzee suggests that the story unfolds in the shifting now of the present: “[In Kafka’s story] now that the construct of narrative time has collapsed there is only the time of narration left, the shifting now within which the narrative takes place. . . .”¹⁴ Perhaps more than any other writer, Kafka’s influence on Coetzee’s fiction is the greatest. Disgrace is intertextual with numerous works of Kafka, and more specifically the novel, The Trial. In Coetzee’s style and themes there are several echoes of Kafka. Alluding to Kafka’s style, the novel, like several other novels of Coetzee, is written entirely in the present tense. The shifting aspect of the perpetual present tense heightens the sense that every moment is a moment of crisis. The beginning itself throws the characters and the readers into one such moment of crisis. The novel begins with David concluding, falsely, that he has solved the “problem of sex”: “For a man of his age, fifty-two, divorced, he has, to his mind, solved the problem of sex rather well.”¹⁵ The narrator’s aside “to his mind” distances itself from the focalizer and puts

in doubt David's interpretation of his situation, foreshadowing the future events of the plot—the events of the two rapes that will precipitate his fall from a state of grace to that of dis-grace. The opening line of the novel mirrors the iconic beginning of Kafka's The Trial: “Some one must have slandered Josef K., for one morning, without having done anything truly wrong, he was arrested.”¹⁶ Both the opening lines begin at the moment of crisis. In Coetzee's novel there is no teleological end point to this crisis as the shifting present tense of the narration is relentless. In the very first chapter we learn that David has been unsuccessful in solving the problem of sex as he shifts from one woman to another. We also learn that this sense of crisis is felt not merely at a personal level but also at the collective level. When David takes Dawn, the new secretary with whom he is having an affair, out for lunch she discusses her plans to emigrate to New Zealand saying: ““You people had it easier. I mean, whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, at least you knew where you were . . . I mean your generation. Now people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It's anarchy. How can you bring up children where there's anarchy all around.”¹⁷ The perpetual now of the present-tense narration renders every moment as a time of crisis for individuals and collectivities. The tropes of space recur throughout the novel. Although the word apartheid is never uttered, as in Dawn's nostalgic discourse, it is referred to subtly in spatial metaphors—“you knew where you were.” Each knew his or her place in the system. Moreover, we realize that the shifting tectonic plates of the now are not only rapidly moving but also doing so in the opposite directions. The novel is set in a South Africa that is undergoing seismic changes. The novelistic beginning stages, along with David's personal problem, the deterritorialization of the old structures (Dawn's sense of anarchy all around her) and the subsequent reterritorialization of the liberal democratic

structures in post-apartheid South Africa. These terms, borrowed from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's works, are useful to describe *Disgrace*'s beginning and the narration as they draw our attention to the geological movements and shifts. In Deleuze and Guattari, the movement of deterritorialization interrupts traditional structures, while reterritorialization restructures the place or territory that has experienced deterritorialization producing new regimes of power: "Derritorialization is the movement by which 'one' leaves the territory. It is the operation of the line of flight. . . . Derritorialization may be overlaid by a compensatory reterritorialization obstructing the line of flight."¹⁸ Dawn's flight precipitated by the dismantling of the apartheid structure is of course due to a sense of loss, of nostalgia for the certainties of "the color line." But the young students at David's liberal university appear to embrace "the operation of the line of flight," the "flight of the old" and the arrival of the "new" South Africa. Slyly sitting in the dark auditorium where his student Melanie is rehearsing for the play:

"Sunset at the Globe Salon," David drily notes, "a comedy of new South Africa set in a hairdressing salon in Hillbrow, Johannesburg. On stage a hairdresser, flamboyantly gay, attends to two clients, one black, one white. Patter passes among the three of them: jokes, insults. Catharsis seems to be the presiding principle: all the coarse old prejudices brought into the light of day and washed away in gales of laughter."¹⁹

As lines are being crossed and borders dismantled, there is a new sense of racial and sexual liberties, where the past is conjured at a comedic distance from the present only to be purged. The "new" South Africa experiences catharsis, purgation of the feelings of pity and fear, not as a result of the tragic suffering of the interracial lovers, but as a result of the gay

and joyful crossings of the old lines. The popular aesthetic form under the old regime, tragedy, is replaced by the new form, comedy. If the play within the novel perceives the present time as a moment of flight from the old, the novel's staging of the shifting now of the present-tense narration perceives every moment as a time of crisis. Although the novel opens with the disruption of the old, there is a deep sense of doubt that such a process is only relative and negative: Deleuze and Guattari state, deterritorialization, when relative, is always followed by reterritorialization: "Deterritorialization is negative or relative . . . when it . . . operates . . . by principle reterritorializations that obstruct the lines of flight."²⁰ The uncertainties and the gaps produced by deterritorialization of the old are being replaced by the certainties and structures of the new regimes of power and knowledge.

Describing David's job, the narrator says, "Once a professor of modern languages, he has been, since Classics and Modern Languages were closed down as part of the great rationalization, adjunct professor of communications. Like all rationalized personnel, he is allowed to offer one special-field course a year . . . because that is good for morale."²¹ A new wave of great rationalization is sweeping across the liberal democratic South Africa; David, a professor of British Romanticism, now has to teach courses in professional communications. A few paragraphs later, the narrator describes David's disinterest in teaching the Communications classes: "He has never been much of a teacher; in this transformed and, to his mind, emasculated institution of learning he is more out of place than ever. But then, so are other of his colleagues from the old days, burdened with upbringings inappropriate to the tasks they are set to perform; clerks in a post-religious age."²² The sedimented banalities of professionalized knowledges have replaced the old discourses of good and evil. In the university-as-global corporation, professionalized and

rationalized knowledges emerge victorious in the “marketplace of ideas.” The old processes of racialization of the population are being rapidly replaced by the new processes of rationalization of the population, through which the citizens are being transformed into homogenous, continuous subjects. If the regime of apartheid confiscated differences and assigned each to his/her place, the structures of neo-liberal democracy appropriate gaps, differences, and discontinuities into the plane of sameness. Kaufman’s reading of the novel as a global allegory can find strong support in these beginning pages when the narrator bemoans the commercialization of the universities in the era of globalization; the new reterritorialized geography of the neo-liberal democratic South Africa, like most nations around the globe, dances to the global flows of capital.²³ Although David bemoans the new commercialized terrain, I intend to argue in the following pages that his rape of his student, Melanie, who he is spying on in the auditorium scene mentioned above, parallels the instrumentalization and violent appropriation of the difference of the other. In Disgrace the tectonic shifts experienced at the personal level parallel those experiences at the collective plane.

Disgrace proceeds in parallels. Parallelism is the dominant rhetorical figure in the novel, both at the structural and the thematic levels. The text centers around two rapes: David’s rape of Melanie, his student and the three male intruders’ rape of Lucy, although only the latter case has generated much of the controversy and charges of racism against the author. Melanie’s rape has not generated much critical debate partly because it is not read as rape. Given that force and lack of consent are verifiable in Lucy’s case, as the men are total strangers, it is indubitably read as rape. Moreover, David is beaten and burnt by the intruders. In the case of Melanie, as there are no visible signs of force by David, despite the

sexual act being nonconsensual, most readings of the novel, especially those that accuse Coetzee of racism, exclusively analyze the black-on-white rape as the dominant metaphor for post-apartheid South Africa. Aggrey Klaaste, a South African journalist who was editor of Sowetan, finds David's sexual acts convincing, rather than posing problems of power and desire:

I read J. M. Coetzee's book *Disgrace*, some time ago and while its artistry is good enough to win the Booker prize, its substance is that of a typically disgruntled Afrikaner. The story of the fading grey university lecturer sleeping with his student and satisfying an unusual—for his age—sexual appetite is thoroughly convincing. It is the end of *Disgrace* that gives me serious problems. In sum the story of black men raping a white woman, who accepts this serious abuse as something like a badge of courage, is in my view quite offensive. At the political level it depicts a white male fear about black male sexual potency and the black males' inability to deal with power.²⁴

In this much-quoted passage, Klaaste correctly emphasizes the history of "black peril," white male fear concerning black male sexuality that justified racial discrimination. Sol Plaatje, a prominent political and literary figure who was one of the founders of the African National Congress, wrote in 1922, while living in United States, the history of this fear: "By 'Black Peril' the South African whites mean 'assaults by black men upon white women.'"²⁵ Plaatje goes on to say, "When Lord Harcourt, in the opinion of the South African Natives the weakest Colonial Secretary that ever succeeded Joseph Chamberlain at Downing Street, was questioned about the Natives' Land Act, he justified it as a means of stopping 'black peril' cases."²⁶ Natives' Land Act, enacted in 1913 by the British legislative body, aimed at

regulating the land acquisition by the “natives.” While Klaaste reads Lucy’s rape in light of the history of “black peril,” he ignores the history of, what Plaatje calls, the “white peril” that Coetzee’s *Disgrace* stages in the beginning as a structural parallel to the latter half of the novel.²⁷ Plaatje notes that although black and white unions in Transvaal were banned, white men could cohabit with black or coloured women as long as they did not marry them, which made it more difficult to prosecute white-on-black rape.²⁸ Klaaste reads Lurie’s sexual encounters with Melanie, not in terms of rape, but merely in terms of the natural expression of male desire, thus ignoring issues of power endemic to a student-teacher relationship and the history of “white peril.” (In the South African nomenclature, Melanie is coloured. Although the narrator does not specify this, it is suggested by her name—the Greek root *melas* meaning dark.)

The ANC’s submission to the Human Rights Commission’s Inquiry into Racism in the Media (April 2000) accusing Coetzee of racism repeats Klaaste’s omission. Public Enterprises Minister Jeff Radebe, who presented the ANC report, states, “In this novel J. M. Coetzee represents as brutally as he can the white people’s perception of the post-apartheid black man” (as quoted in Attwell).²⁹ Klaaste’s and ANC’s understanding of only Lucy’s sexual encounter as rape reiterate flaws of legal definitions of rape in numerous judicial systems that require the victim to establish both force and lack of consent. Feminists have long argued that such dual requirements of force and lack of consent are not only redundant, but provide legal protection to such acts as marital rape. While Klaaste and ANC are certain, *prima facie*, that Melanie has not been raped, the internal focalizer David is not so sure. One afternoon he barges into Melanie’s apartment and despite her performative utterance “no,” establishing nonconsent, he proceeds to rape her. The narrator notes, “Not

rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core.”³⁰ In this passage, the distance between the external narrator and the internal focalizer collapses—the narrative voice mirrors Lurie’s consciousness of his unreciprocated sexual desire. Moreover, Klaaste and ANC read Disgrace predominantly through the all-encompassing oppositional relations between blacks and whites, but Coetzee’s text rejects such duality to show that manifold relationships of force, constituting of race, gender, class, and sexuality, run through the South African social body. The rapes of Melanie and Lucy do not function to reverse the hierarchically ordered binary oppositional relations of race in South Africa, with the white as a victim in the new South Africa, but function to destabilize the all-consuming oppositional structure as the rapes of the women are situated in the vicious nexus between racism, sexism, and heteronormative sexuality.³¹ Lucy reminds him of the gender divide between the two of them: when discussing her rape she states, “Maybe, for men, hating the woman makes sex more exciting.”³² To which David wonders if Lucy and he share familial and racial ties, “Are she and he on the same side?”³³ As the new lines of forces are being drawn, David is uncertain of his place. He echoes Dawn here. Moreover, Lucy is a lesbian, who before David’s arrival was living with her partner Helen. After her rape, the narrator declares, “Rape, god of chaos and mixture, violator of seclusions. Raping a lesbian worse than raping a virgin: more of a blow.”³⁴ Rape of Lucy has not only violated a racially gendered body but also a lesbian “utopian space,” and hence should be considered a graver crime. One reason, among many, why this novel has posed such problems for reading is that the terrain staged in the story is filled with landmines, with multiple lines of forces (gender, race, sexuality, and class) crisscrossing the landscape in a maddening fashion. Thus, the act

of reading this novel involves hopping, stopping, calculating, and hesitating at every point that one lands on before taking another flight, and despite this one might not survive.

In the redrawn terrain of South Africa, the parallel structure of the narrative plot puts David squarely on the side of the three intruders than with Lucy. The two rapes in the text blur the “color line” between them, as the gender gap widens. He and Lucy are no more on “the same side.” Lucy draws the link between her father and her rapists: “When it comes to men and sex, David, nothing surprises me any more. . . . You are a man, you ought to know. When you have sex with someone strange—when you trap her, hold her down, get her under you, put all your weight on her—isn’t it a bit like killing?”³⁵ David resists Lucy’s understanding of *all* (or at least his) male sexuality, à la Catherine MacKinnon, as an expression of power. In another instance of the blurring of distances between his voice and the narrative voice, he ponders, “*You are a man, you ought to know*: does one speak to one’s father like that? ‘Perhaps,’ he says. ‘Sometimes. For some men.’”³⁶ But earlier in the text when David traps Melanie and forces himself on her, while deeming his actions “not quite rape,” he echoes Lucy’s words: “As though she had decided to go slack, die within herself for the duration, like a rabbit when the jaws of the fox close on its neck. So that everything done to her might be done, as it were, far away.”³⁷ Although, eventually, Lucy’s rape forces him to abandon his defense of his past actions on the basis of a liberal humanist discourse of “rights of desire,”³⁸ at this point in the text he continues to resist being labeled a rapist. A few paragraphs after defending himself against Lucy’s accusations, David, who is composing an opera on Byron’s liaison with Teresa Guiccioli, reflects on Byron’s relationship with his women: “Among the legions of countesses and kitchenmaids Byron pushed himself into there were no doubt those who called it rape. But none surely had cause

to fear that the session would end with her throat being slit. From where he stands, from where Lucy stands, Byron looks very old-fashioned indeed.”³⁹ Although Byron appears old-fashioned, so does David, who finds more affinities with the British Romantics than with Lucy’s reading. Still doubtful if Byron “pushing” himself into countesses and kitchenmaids could clearly be considered rape, David repeats flaws of legal definitions of rape (as do Klaaste and ANC) demanding that the victim show visible marks of force (throat being slit) inflicted by a stranger, which are lacking in Melanie’s case. Thus, instead of being the victimizer, he speaks of Lucy and himself, echoing escalating “white paranoia,” as being the victims of the “new South Africa.” But as the faculty of the imagination fails this professor of the Romantics in reconstructing Lucy’s perspective during her rape (failing to sympathize with her), he begins to realize that the only way he can understand her rape is by losing himself into the position of the rapist: “Lucy’s intuition is right after all: he does understand; he can, if he concentrates, if he loses himself, be there, be the men, inhabit them, fill them with the ghost of himself. The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?”⁴⁰ Recognition and identification with men across the racial lines is a simpler proposition than crossing the fraught lines of gender. Although he can inhabit the position of the male rapist, imagination fails in inhabiting the body of the woman. Thus, the ethical challenge David faces is: can he inhabit the place of a woman; but more challengingly, can he inhabit the place of the coloured woman, Melanie? In other words, can he put himself in the margins of history?

The novelistic structure sets up another parallel in order to heighten the trope of irony. While David defends his rape of Melanie in terms of “rights of desire,” he denies a woman the right to own her body. The ironic and unsympathetic dramatization of David’s

discourse of rights offers a trenchant criticism of the liberal humanist discourse of rights and private ownership. At the university hearing, composed of a diverse committee, David refuses to offer defense of his actions, but when visiting Lucy he defends his actions in terms of rights, rather than duties (as a professor), of the individual: “‘My case rests on the rights of desire,’ he says. ‘On the god who makes even the small birds quiver.’ . . . *I was a servant of Eros*: that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? *It was a god who acted through me.*”⁴¹ At earlier moments in the novel, David engages in close reading of Romantic poetry to offer passionate defense of his philandering ways. Like his favorite Romantic poets Wordsworth and Byron, governed by the pleasure, rather than the reality, principle, he wishes to cling till the end to his place in the banquet of the senses. While doing a close reading of Book 6 of Wordsworth’s The Prelude, to a largely unresponsive class, he elaborates on the limits of sense-perception: “As the sense-organs reach the limit of their powers, their light begins to go out. Yet at the moment of expiry that light leaps up one last time like a candle-flame, giving us a glimpse of the invisible.”⁴² In a later class, when discussing Byron’s “Lara,” David reminds his students that although Lucifer in the poem is driven by a mad heart, who does not act on principle but impulse, he is not judged by the poet: “Note that we are not asked to condemn this being with the mad heart, this being with whom there is something constitutionally wrong. On the contrary, we are invited to understand and sympathize.”⁴³ But in David’s reading there is limit to sympathy, not because judgments are necessary, but because Lucifer is a *thing*, a monster, given his otherworldliness. David, like Byron’s Lucifer, resists moral judgment, while demanding no limits to sympathy towards him. After all, he is a creature of this world and not a thing. But Rosalind, his ex-wife, explicitly denies him sympathy, reminding him that in the “new”

South Africa he will be judged not in terms of individual transgression but in terms of a history of collective transgressions that demand atonement: “Don’t expect sympathy from me, David, and don’t expect sympathy from anyone else either. No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age.”⁴⁴ The new South Africa has no sympathy for this classical figure of the Romantic hero conjuring up the discourses of rights and individualism. Furthermore, the ironic parallelism that the novel stages between his defense of his rights and his denial of those rights to women deliberately blocks sympathy for him from its readers. In one of the scenes with Melanie, he convinces her to stay for the night “because a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.”⁴⁵ The non-autonomous gendered subaltern’s body provides the necessary condition for establishing the self-presence of the autonomous liberal white male self.

While in class, he offers a lyrical defense of his actions, at the committee hearing he exhibits a cold, indifferent exterior, rejecting the language of confession and moral judgment. Mocking the panopticon-like structure of the committee hearing, he declares, “I have no fear of the committee. I have no fear of the observer.”⁴⁶ Although he immediately pleads guilty and desires a quick sentence, the committee is not satisfied with his admission of guilt. They wish to witness a confession of the crime and then to reform him: Farodia Rassool, one of the committee members recommends, “You say you have not sought legal advice. Have you consulted anyone—a priest, for instance, or a counsellor? Would you be prepared to undergo counselling?”⁴⁷ Finding him evasive, with no expression of contrition, the members demand a public confession, rather than a plea. David refuses to write a heartfelt confessional statement reiterating formulas the committee wishes to hear, insisting that what happens in his heart is beyond the scope of the law. He expresses guilt in

clinically legal terms, while the committee wishes to witness a quasi-religious confession of remorse and contrition. The committee hearing scene is an allegory of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings and critically engages with that historical event of national catharsis.⁴⁸ TRC was based on the religious principle that revelation of truth about the past crimes shall lead to national unity and reconciliation. The members of the TRC stood witness to the confessions of the crime and the process of reconciliation between the victims and the perpetrators. In this scene, Disgrace stages the cathartic, confessional ritual enacted by the TRC model of production of truth based on public acts of witnessing the truth, confessing the crime, and reconciling with the past. Lucy reminds David that his refusal to confess has turned him into a scapegoat, which he disagrees with by describing the difference between scapegoating and surveillance, in a quasi-Foucauldian passage:

‘I don’t think scapegoating is the best description,’ he says cautiously. ‘Scapegoating worked in practice while it still had religious power behind it. You loaded the sins of the city on to the goat’s back and drove it out, and the city was cleansed. It worked because everyone knew how to read the ritual, including the gods. Then the gods died, and all of a sudden you had to cleanse the city without divine help. Real actions were demanded instead of symbolism. The censor was born, in the Roman sense. Watchfulness became the watchword: the watchfulness of all over all.

Purgation was replaced by the purge.’⁴⁹

David is right that the university committee, instead of scapegoating him as in the olden days, desired to observe, control, and reform him through the witnessing, confessional, and correctional methods. In an earlier dialogue with Lucy, he pronounces that counseling reminds him “‘too much of Mao’s China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology. I’m

old-fashioned, I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it.”⁵⁰ David, who is rather old-fashioned, prefers, similar to the practice of scapegoating, an older form of punishment.⁵¹ Justice here is achieved in purely legalistic terms: an explicit law has been breached and the punishment would address only the penal qualification of the act itself. David wants to be punished for what he has done and not for what he might do—the behavioral potentialities of the individual. The university committee, dissatisfied with his plea, demand that he not only admit that he is wrong but prove the sincerity of the statement. To this David replies, “That is preposterous. That is beyond the scope of the law. . . . Let us go back to playing it by the book. I plead guilty.”⁵²

In essence, what David is denying the committee is the performance of the public roles of the witness and the interpreter. They desire to witness him publically confess to the crimes; and to further go beyond the literal level of the utterance of the crime into the depths of his soul. The novel disrupts the TRC model of restorative justice achieved through the normalizing gaze of the interpreter and the witness.⁵³ In this scene with the court-like body, Coetzee dramatizes the figures of the realist writer and the allegorist. The realist writer stands witness to the injustices of history; and the allegorist interprets the literal level into the pre-existing master codes—in our scene those codes are quasi-religious and quasi-legal. Ironically, the committee body wishes to perform both the roles of the realist and the allegorist, of witnessing and of interpreting the crimes of the past. In this dissertation, I have tried to show that throughout his writing career Coetzee has strongly rejected the aesthetic mode of witness writing. His novels are largely written in the anti-confessional mode. Furthermore, his relationship to the form of allegory is agonistic, as I have tried to show in my first chapter. How then do we understand his choice of the realist aesthetic mode for

Disgrace, which as this scene shows is also partly allegorical? This surely has puzzled critics of his works. In Disgrace, Coetzee I argue interrupts the acts of witnessing and interpreting both as a modality of justice and as a modality of writing.

If at the committee hearing David exhibits a cold, impenetrable exterior, after the rape of his daughter, in still another instance of the use of the parallelistic structure to heighten irony, he desperately desires to perform the function of the realist and the allegorist. The text and Lucy deny him both. Although he was present in the house at the time of the rape, he was locked in the bathroom and did not actually witness the crime. To add to his difficulties, Lucy mostly distances herself from him denying him sight and access to the scars. After her rape, she refuses to file a formal police report against the rapists, insisting that her rape is purely a “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.”⁵⁴ David, who desires justice for Lucy, insists on filing a report in order to pursue criminal prosecution. He mocks Lucy’s attempt at private salvation for crimes of the past: “Do you think what happened here was an exam: if you come through, you get a diploma and safe conduct into the future. . . . That is not how vengeance works, Lucy. Vengeance is like fire. The more it devours, the hungrier it gets.”⁵⁵ To which, Lucy angrily responds, “Guilt and salvation are abstractions. I don’t act in terms of abstractions.”⁵⁶ In an ironic reversal, David, who rejects the supervising gaze of the university committee desiring to reform him, passionately demands criminal prosecution of the rapists—trial, confession of the crime, and imprisonment. David understands Lucy’s silence and refusal to file a formal report in terms of guilt and salvation for the wrongs of history, while Lucy reads it as a purely private matter beyond such abstractions. In this regard, there is another ironic reversal with the inquiry scene earlier in

the novel, where David insists that his desires are purely private, beyond law, while Farodia Rassool reads David's actions as having historical piquancy: "Yes, he says, he is guilty; but when we try to get specificity, all of a sudden it is not abuse of a young woman he is confessing to, just an impulse he could not resist, with no mention of the pain he has caused, no mention of the long history of exploitation of which this is part."⁵⁷ In a later scene, when Lucy first discusses her rape with her father, she understands her rape in terms of debt and not guilt, in contrast to David: "What if . . . what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on?. . . . They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors, tax collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying?"⁵⁸ Lucy, who does not work with the abstractions of guilt, reads the assailants as cold and indifferent debt-collectors to whom she meant nothing. If in the inquiry scene David resists the prying gaze in terms of the discourse of rights, Lucy resists David's gaze in terms of the discourse of economics. David, failing to read the trade metaphor, insists that their aim is to enslave her, to which she responds, "Not slavery. Subjection. Subjugation."⁵⁹ Slavery is based on direct expropriation, rather than exchanging for wages, the labor-power of the slaves. Lucy feels that the rapists reminded her that she is, not enslaved, but indebted to them. As creditors, the rapists subject her to their will in exchange for the debt.

In his second essay, Friedrich Nietzsche reminds us that the beginnings of justice lie in the pre-historical contractual relationship between creditor and debtor. Thus every injury "has its equivalent and can actually be paid back, even if only through the pain of the culprit."⁶⁰ In case the debtor failed to repay, the creditor could torture the body of the debtor as there were exact legal evaluations for every part of the human body. In this way, the creditors could seek pleasure in participating in the right of the masters to subject and torture

the powerless. The pleasure is greater the lower the creditor is in the social order. This “economic” bargain, and not morality, formed the basis for the classical codes of law.

Nietzsche also points out that the German word *Schuld* implying guilt has its origins in the material concept *Schulden* which means debt.⁶¹ The feeling of guilt, of personal obligation, has its origin in the debtor/creditor relationship. In its prehistoric non-moral form, guilt did not imply fear of punishment but a feeling of indebtedness. But over time, with the formation of society, humans develop a “bad conscience,” that is, the human all too human desire for cruelty becomes a perpetual source of guilt, a fear of transgressing the norms of society, thus making oneself a liability to oneself. With bad conscience we get “internalization of man: it was that man first developed what was later called his ‘soul,’” which results in moralization of guilt and duty.⁶² Thus, humans are left with an irredeemable debt, their soul, that “gives rise to the conception of irredeemable penance, the idea that it cannot be discharged (‘eternal punishment’).”⁶³ David interprets Lucy’s refusal to take legal recourse in terms of bad conscience, the moral form of guilt, as her private penance for the wrongs of history. Lucy, vehemently resists David’s interpretations of the event, reminding him numerous times that he did not witness the crime, and suggests that the rape has marked her as being in debt. The rapists subject her to their will to punish her for her debt. What David fails to understand is the law-making function of Lucy’s rape, which is outside and above the law. Walter Benjamin distinguishes between two functions of violence: the law-making and the law-preserving function: “All violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity.”⁶⁴ Law-making violence is the foundational violence that establishes and posits a new law; law-preserving violence conserves, maintains and enforces the law, relying for

its preservation on the representation of the foundational violence. In this sense, law, as it engages in constant re-legitimation, can never abandon the originary violence. For Benjamin, juridical violence is inherent to both natural and positive law. In the novel, the violence of Lucy's rape entails a law-making character; it lies at the origin of "new" South Africa. As originary violence, it constitutes a paradox: it is above and beyond law and is simultaneously the foundational violence of a new law, a new constitution. It is a performative violence of an emergence *ex nihilo* of a legal and a political system, of a new society. Echoing Cordelia in William Shakespeare's King Lear, Lucy shields herself against the interpretative gestures of her father with the word "nothing," "Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity. . . . Yes, like a dog."⁶⁵ After the rape, Lucy will formalize a contractual relationship, based on the prehistoric creditor/debtor model, with Petrus: she will marry him for his protection. Nietzsche states that the creditor/debtor relationship is analogous to the relationship between the state and the citizen. The state promises to protect the citizen from injuries in return for obedience. When the citizen transgresses, the state, as a disappointed creditor, can throw the citizen out of the community into the savage state.⁶⁶ In Nietzsche, the origins of law, justice and society lie, not in the moral form of guilt, but in the economic relationship of indebtedness. As for Benjamin, Nietzsche maintains that if violence is uncontained before the contract, after the contract, within the sphere of the law, it is calculable and measured: "[The creditor's] anger is held in check and modified by the idea that every injury has its *equivalent* and can actually be paid back, even if only through the *pain* of the culprit."⁶⁷ In the terms of the contract, Lucy will surrender her land and her body for protection. Rape,

constituting the uncontained, originary, male violence, precipitates the concubinage-style marriage contract, in which she will “voluntarily” give herself up to the law of the master/father. In law, Lucy submits herself to reproductive heteronormativity.

Gayatri Spivak reads Lucy’s nothing as a refusal to be raped: “It is . . . casting aside of the affective value-system attached to reproductive heteronormativity as it is accepted as the currency to measure human dignity. I do not think this is an acceptance of rape, but a refusal to be raped, by instrumentalizing reproduction.”⁶⁸ Although Lucy casts aside the affective value of mothering entailed in reproductive heteronormativity, after all she enters into a concubinage-style marriage with Petrus, her status is still that of a debtor in a heteronormative relationship. Lucy, the white lesbian, surrenders ownership of her body and land for protection in the “new” South Africa. Spivak’s reading is based on the false assumption of choice—Lucy *chooses* to instrumentalize heteronormative reproduction and hence refuses to be raped. In an interview with Nermeen Shaikh, when asked to explain the term reproductive heteronormativity, Spivak states, “[It] simply means that it is normal to be heterosexual and to reproduce, and it is in terms of that norm that society is made. . . . It will never go away because that is what writes (and rights) being human . . . you acknowledge the norm, acknowledge that it is an instrument, it is a means, it has its limits, and it should not think of itself as an end.”⁶⁹ It is only *after* rape that Lucy becomes a debtor and a citizen of the new state (she does not abandon South Africa although David begs her to return to Holland to live with her mother). Lucy’s choice—of instrumentalizing reproduction (she decides to bear the child of rape to term)—is contained within the sphere of the law of the master/father. It is based on a fundamental paradox—a choice produced *within* law. After rape, she enters the realm of law and justice, of justice as law, of

distributive justice—a property owner becoming a property who will be shared within the calculable terms of the marriage contract (Petrus and one of her rapists are part of the same household). In postcolonial South Africa, private property, viciously guarded by white privilege under apartheid, enters a circulatory system of community property, where women and cars circulate hands: David ponders, “Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone can have a chance to be happy for a day. . . . Cars, shoes; women too. There must be some niche in the system for women and what happens to them.”⁷⁰ What is hard to take for several critics of the novel, some of them discussed above, in this bleak image of the new South Africa, is the novel’s depiction of a society drifting away from the promise of a full democracy, based on the principles of nonracialism, nonsexism, and distributive justice (that is, *suum cuique*, to each his or her own due).⁷¹ In Disgrace the model of distributive justice reiterates and legitimizes the law-making gendered violence—women and cars are equally distributed. The novel stages the continuation in postcolonial societies of the gendered violence of colonial penetration. Amina Mama argues that colonialism in Africa, as in several other nations, exploited preexisting patriarchal structures, only to make African women more vulnerable to various forms of violence, that only continues today with a vengeance in postcolonial Africa, more so in nations where the project of nation building has failed.⁷²

Lucy’s father has a contentious relationship with her independence (from the law of the father) symbolized by her solitary life as a settler woman in the country, her lesbianism, and her ownership of property. When imagining Lucy sexually with a woman, David admits, “The truth is, he does not like to think of his daughter in the throes of passion with another woman.”⁷³ When first meeting Lucy, he ponders, “Attractive, he is thinking, yet

lost to men.”⁷⁴ Later, he notices Lucy’s systematic separation from him (and men): “As a child Lucy had been quiet and self-effacing. . . . Now . . . she has begun to separate. The dogs, the gardening, the astrology books, the asexual clothes: in each he recognizes a statement of independence, considered purposeful.”⁷⁵ David believes women, like sheep, do not own themselves. In the beginning of the novel, he attempts to seduce his student Melanie within the terms of distributive justice, “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. It is part of the bounty she brings into the world. She has a duty to share it.”⁷⁶ After her rape, her rejection of David’s desire to perform the function of the witness and the allegorist to the crime further establishes her independence from him. Ironically, although David objects to Lucy’s surrender of property rights to her land to Petrus, her rape manifests David’s desire to contain his daughter within the sphere of fatherly influence. David’s lament that she is lost to men, existing at the level of desire, materializes after her rape as she enters into the grand circulatory system of commodity exchange, although not of generalized commodity exchange. As Petrus’ debtor, Lucy, in her state of nothingness, has no exchange-value but only use-value. In the concubinage-style marital contract, she is directly the object of utility, shared among the members of the Petrus’ household, one of whom raped her. In the system of distributive justice staged in the novel, women and cars are shared enacting the foundational violence of law, of justice as law.

In Disgrace I propose justice exceeds the law of the father; it is heterogeneous to the Law. Derrida, in response to the question, “Does deconstruction insure the possibility of justice?,” differentiates between justice as law and justice (in itself):

It is the force essentially implied in the very concept of *justice as law (droit)*, of justice as it becomes *droit*, of the law as “*droit*” (for I want to insist right away on

reserving the possibility of a justice, indeed of a law that not only exceeds or contradicts “law” (*droit*) but also, perhaps, has no relation to law, or maintains such a strange relation to it that it may just as well command the “*droit*” that excludes it).⁷⁷

In Derrida, justice as law implies both the law-making and law-preserving function of violence. The necessity of force is implied in justice as law. For Derrida, if the witnessing gaze of the law calculates, interprets, and appropriates, justice outside the gaze of the law is without calculation, interpretation, and appropriation. *Disgrace* stages the necessary force implied in justice as law, that is, in the laws of restorative, retributive and distributive justice. As discussed earlier, the TRC model of restorative justice, invoked in the university committee inquiry scene, couched in the quasi-legal confessional mode, seeks to witness and to reform the crime through the calculated (and continuous) application of violence—hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and the examination. The strict legalism of David’s desire to be shot dead (rather than reformed), based on the model of retributive justice, establishes a finite and calculated relationship between the law and punishment. In Lucy’s rape as retribution for the crimes of the past, Coetzee stages a paradox: it is outside and beyond law and the foundational violence of a new law, a new society. As originary violence, it sets forth the force and calculations of retributive and distributive justice. Justice as revenge and justice as redistribution of land enact the originary gendered violence in the novel—*Lucy in circulation*. Similarly, David’s justification for Melanie’s rape, operate within the terms of distributive justice outside the discourse of rights—women’s beauty should be shared. All these forms of justice as law reduce justice to what can simply be calculated, appropriated, and normalized. In *Disgrace*, justice exceeds law, the gaze, force, and calculations of law. It cannot be reduced to circulation, calculation, revenge, and

debt. Derrida insists that justice does not stand for “calculable equality, therefore, not for the symmetrizing and synchronic accountability or imputability of subjects or objects . . . but for justice as incalculability of the gift and singularity of the an-economic ex-position to others. ‘The relation to others—that is to say, justice,’ writes Levinas.”⁷⁸ In the novel, justice is incalculable; it is an experience of the impossible, of the absolute singularity of the other.

After Lucy’s rape David visits Melanie’s family to narrate his side of the story. He again defends his actions, to Melanie’s father, in terms of the liberal humanist discourse of rights: “Yet in olden days people worshipped fire. They thought twice before letting a flame die, a flame-god. It was that kind of flame your daughter kindled in me.”⁷⁹ Despite his shock, Melanie’s father invites him to break bread with the family. After the dinner, David, who mocks the university committee’s demand for remorse and contrition, apologizes to the father and seeks his pardon. After which he goes to the bedroom, where Melanie’s mother and sister are sitting, and “with careful ceremony he gets to his knees and touches his forehead to the floor.”⁸⁰ In this non-allegorical face-to-face encounter with the other of history, outside the gaze of the witness, in this (ex)position as a prostrator at the door of Melanie’s family, David, who at the inquiry refuses to apologize, surrenders himself to the absolute singularity of the racially gendered other. In this event, justice as ethics, and not law, is staged; Derridean “idea” of justice, à la Levinas, implies a heteronomic relation to the other, an infinite right of the other over the self. This relation to the other is the realm of ethics, outside and beyond law. This relation cannot be collapsed into the law of the same, into the law of the master/father.

Towards the end of the novel Disgrace stages, what in Levinasian ethics is understood as, an ethical event. Emmanuel Levinas, within whose conception of ethics Derrida works with, defines ethics, “A calling into question of the same—which cannot occur within the egoist spontaneity of the same—is brought about by the other. We name this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics.”⁸¹ Ethics occurs as the putting into question of the knowing subject, the ego, self-consciousness, or what Levinas calls, the same by the other. The domain of the same maintains a relation with otherness, but it is a relation in which the ego struggles to reduce the distance between the same and the other and absorb all otherness into itself. Rapes of Melanie and Lucy function as the ego’s violent interpretation and appropriation of the racially gendered other into the law of the master/father. Ethics occurs when the liberty and spontaneity of the ego is called into question by the radical alterity of the other. The ethical, therefore, is the location of a point of alterity, or as Levinas calls “exteriority,” “an access to exterior being.” Levinas’ notion of ethics is markedly different from the traditional conception of ethics as a branch of moral philosophy; for him, ethics is an event, the relation between same and the radically other, that cannot be reduced to the same. Justice is an ethical relation to the other; it addresses itself to the absolute singularity of the other, despite its claims to universality. Justice as law is a relation of debt, of calculation, of exchange, of economic circularity. In the figure of the prostrating David, Coetzee dramatizes an ethical relation to racially gendered others, who have been wronged. An act of justice outside law, which through much racist history of South Africa sanctioned, what Plaatje calls, “white peril”—white male rape of black, coloured and Asian women. Justice in this instance is irreducible to law, “irreducible because owed to the other, owed to the other, before any contract, because it has

come, the other's coming as the singularity that is always other."⁸² Justice as ethics, which is outside law, does not revert to the originary law-making violence, which, as described earlier, is both outside law and foundational violence of a new law. In other words, Lucy's rape and David's prostration, both occurring outside law, play different functions. In the rape, the distance between the self and the other is violently collapsed, in which the other enters into a state of indebtedness, into a realm of law; in David's prostration, the distance between the self and the other is established, where the absolute singularity of the other cannot be collapsed into the same, thus forcing the other into a state of indebtedness, into the law of the master/father.

In Disgrace, justice is ethics, and ethics is absolute hospitality, unconditional hospitality. For Derrida, conditional hospitality is related to law, debt, and duty. Absolute hospitality occurs when the host opens his/her home (and self) to the interruptions of the guest:

To put it in different terms, absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner . . . but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity . . . or even their names. The law of absolute hospitality commands a break with hospitality by right, with law or justice as rights.⁸³

In the novel, Issacs welcomes his enemy, David to break bread with the family, sans conditions, without demands for an apology, outside the sphere of law, of justice as law. This staging of absolute hospitality towards the end of the novel is in direct contrast to the conditional hospitality of the university committee that demands contrition from David in

order to let him stay at the university. Absolute hospitality is the condition of possibility (and impossibility) of justice, of justice as ethics, of justice outside and beyond the gaze of the law and its hermeneutic circle.

In this singular relation to the racially gendered other, removed from the horizon of presence, David, the white man, moves from the center to the margins of history. Melanie's father Issacs does not fail to notice this transformation: "'So,' says Issacs softly, and the word leaves his lips like a sign: 'how are the mighty fallen!'"⁸⁴ To which, David ponders, "Fallen? Yes, there has been a fall, no doubt about that. But *mighty*? Does *mighty* describe him? He thinks of himself as obscure and growing obscurer. A figure from the margins of history."⁸⁵ Through his eventful journey in this bildungsroman, David moves from within the sphere of law to a realm outside and beyond law, from a state of grace to that of disgrace (*apart* from grace). The state of disgrace, of apartness from Cape Town and law, is akin to a dog-like state. In the novel, the idiomatic expression "like a dog" suggests a state of shame: to be a victim of rape and a victim of apartheid (David notes, after the rapists kill the dogs, "Contemptible, yet exhilarating, probably, in a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man."⁸⁶). In Coetzee, there is another sense of the phrase "like a dog," borrowed from Kafka's The Trial; it is to be outside law, to be outside the human form, that is, to become animal. When accepting Petrus' offer for marriage, Lucy echoes Kafka's Josef K, "Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. . . . Yes, like a dog."⁸⁷ In the last lines of Kafka's The Trial, the narrator says, "But the hands of one man were right at K.'s throat, while the other thrust the knife into his heart and turned it there twice. With failing sight K. saw how the men drew near his face, leaning cheek-to-cheek to observe the verdict. 'Like a dog!' he said; it seemed as though the shame was to outlive him."⁸⁸ In The Trial,

and other works of Kafka, dog is a figure of servitude, of the shame of voluntary submission to the powers that be. Josef K, who throughout the novel mocks at the dog-like behavior of the clerks, assistants, and lawyers in the judicial hierarchy, resigns to his fate and submits to his executioners, after a brief moment of resistance. The shame of submission to the law is to outlive Josef K. But in becoming “like a dog” he also symbolizes a sacrificial animal, a scapegoat of the corruption of human law. In his reflections on Kafka, Benjamin states in parenthesis, possibly in relation to the above passage in The Trial, “Being an animal presumably meant to him only to have given up human form and human wisdom from a kind of shame.”⁸⁹ In Kafka, becoming animal is to cast aside the corruption of human laws and the shame of being human. Animals in Kafka are far away from the “continent of a man”: “It is possible to read Kafka’s animal stories for quite a while without realizing that they are not about human beings at all. When one encounters the name of the creature—monkey, dog, mole—one looks up in fright and realizes that one is already far away from the continent of man.”⁹⁰ To be like a dog is to enter the realm of animality, a realm outside human law. Rejecting the anthropomorphic readings of animals in Kafka, Benjamin understands the animals in Kafka not in terms of becoming-human of the animal, but in terms of becoming-animal of the human. Extending on Benjamin’s reading of the animal in Kafka, Deleuze and Guattari assert that becoming-animal is the object par excellence of Kafka’s stories: “What Kafka does in his room is to become animal and this is the essential object of the stories. . . . We would say that for Kafka, the animal essence is the way out, the line of escape, even if it takes place in place, or in a cage.”⁹¹ Becoming-animal, for Deleuze and Guattari, also constitutes the absolute deterritorialization of the human, with no possibility of reterritorialization by new regimes of power.

In Disgrace David's fall from grace precipitates his transformation from being human to becoming-animal. It is also a movement from within law to outside and beyond law. If in Lucy's rape a new regime of law is reterritorialized, then in David's fall into a state of disgrace, outside law, there is the absolute deterritorialization of the human. The novel ends with no possibility of reterritorialization. Towards the end of the novel, David becomes a pariah, no more the figure of the father or the Romantic hero, living on the margins of society: he has lost his job, his home, and is forced to move out of Lucy's farm house (after he attacks Pollux, one of the rapists). At the beginning of the novel, he reluctantly agrees to help Bev Shaw at the Animal Welfare Clinic, but later, he completely surrenders himself to attending to the unwanted dogs that are put to sleep by her. David has become a dog man; he is "prepared to take care of them once they are unable, utterly unable, to take care of themselves, once even Bev Shaw has washed her hands of them. A dog-man, Petrus once called himself. Well, now he has become a dog-man: a dog undertaker; a dog psychopomp; a *harijan*."⁹² *Harijan* (Sanskrit *harijanah*, children of God), a term popularized by M. K. Gandhi for Dalits who were referred to as "untouchables," are at the bottom of the Hindu caste hierarchy, traditionally assigned such occupations as sweeping, washing, and killing animals. After Lucy's rape, David becomes a *harijan*. Ostracized by Lucy and society, he spends his last days killing dogs and giving them last rites with honor. David, who is indifferent to animals, undergoes a marked transformation. After putting them to sleep on Sundays, instead of dumping the carcass along with other waste, every Monday he carefully loads the bodies of the dogs into the feeder trolley of the incinerator, watching them as they turn to ashes. Curious about his transformation, David wonders if "a man as selfish as he should be offering himself to the service of dead dogs. There must be

other, more productive ways of giving oneself to the world, or to an idea of the world.”⁹³ This offering the self to the animals, this becoming-animal, cannot be understood in terms of identification or resemblance, in short, sympathy with the other of human. Deleuze and Guattari maintain that becoming-animal, “is a question of composing a body with the animal, a body without organs defined by zones of intensity and proximity.”⁹⁴ For them, to become another is to enter an objective zone of indeterminacy, a shared proximity, that makes it impossible to discern the boundaries between the self and the other. In one of the sessions with Bev at the clinic, when asked if he likes animals, David responds mockingly, “Do I like animals? I eat them, so I suppose I must like them, some parts of them.”⁹⁵ In this perversion of Bev’s question, the selfish David collapses the boundary between himself and the animal; the animal is violently appropriated into him. After his fall from grace, he offers himself to the service of the animals, whose murder he cannot stomach: “The more killings he assists in, the more jittery he gets. One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy’s kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake.”⁹⁶ A realization of the proximity of the human with the animal, they both share the same fate, death. The human, like a dog (not metaphorical but an approximate relation), will face his/her death.

Critical of Levinas for foreclosing the question of the *l’animot* in his idea of justice as an ethical relation to the other, who remains necessarily human, Derrida asserts, “the animal, the animal-other, the other as animal, occupies the place of the third person and thus of the first appeal to justice, in between humans and the faces of those who look upon each other as brothers or neighbors.”⁹⁷ The look of the naked *l’animot*, a Derridean neologism criticizing the homogeneity of the term “animal, ” implying irreducible heterogeneity of

animality, makes the first appeal to justice. As argued earlier, *Disgrace* stages the idea of justice as ethics, as an ethical relation to the other. The other in the novel is not merely a human-other (the racially gendered other) but also an animal-other. The transformation of David, the becoming-animal of the human, occurs in the ethical relation to the animal-other, the other as animal. In this relation lies the possibility of justice, above all else, before and beyond law. In a state of dis-grace, away from the gaze of the Law of the Father, *l'animot* makes the first appeal to justice. Concomitantly, an ethical relation to the other is beyond the affective value-system. The novel invokes King Lear's demand for love in the value-form—let us calculate thy love—in Lucy's "nothing," but rejects such calculations in the end. David learns to love and let go of the dogs. The last lines of the novel are as follows: "Bearing him in his arms like a lamb, he re-enters the surgery. 'I thought you would save him for another week,' says Bev Shaw. 'Are you giving him up?' 'Yes, I am giving him up.'"⁹⁸ David learns to let go of the dogs, his daughter and the past. In the ethical relation to the human-other and the animal-other, he learns to unlearn privilege. Justice occurs in the act of giving up others, and in giving up others giving up the self, the self-forgetting of the ego. Justice is an act of freeing oneself from oneself, an act, not of liberation, but of practices of freedom.

In his last words about writing as an act of self-forgetting, Kafka writes to Max Brod in July 1922, two years before his death, "It will be a strange burial, the writer insubstantial as he is, consigning the old corpse, the longtime corpse, to the grave. I am enough of a writer to appreciate the scene with all my senses, or—and it is the same thing—to want to describe it with total self-forgetfulness—not alertness, but self-forgetfulness is the writer's first prerequisite"⁹⁹ In Coetzee, writing is self-forgetfulness of the author, the death of the

author, an act of finally consigning the longtime corpse of the author to the grave. The author does not stand in relation of witness or in relation of interpreter to others (and history). In Coetzee, echoing Kafka, writing is the process of the disruption of the gaze of the law of the father/author, of the process of becoming-other, and of the process of forgetfulness of the ego. Writing is justice; justice is writing. To write is to write oneself into oblivion; it is an act of justice par excellence.

Notes

¹ Quoted in Patrick F. Wilmot, Apartheid and African Liberation: The Grief and the Hope (Ile-Ife, Nigeria: University of Ife Press Limited, 1983) viii.

² Nelson Mandela, "Inauguration as President: Address to the nation at the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President of the Republic of South Africa, Union Buildings, Pretoria, 10 May 1994," Nelson Mandela in his Own Words, eds. Kader Asmal, David Chidester and Wilmot James (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2003) 68-70.

³ J. M. Coetzee, Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992) 341.

⁴ J. M. Coetzee, Disgrace (New York: Penguin Books, 1999).

⁵ David Attwell, "Race in *Disgrace*," Interventions 4.3 (2002): 331-341.

⁶ In 1948, when numerous former colonies of Britain and France were gaining independence, South Africa, with the election of the Afrikaner Nationalist Party, entered the darkest period in its history. The National Party instituted the racist regime of apartheid, a system of order that simultaneously ensured the exploitation of black (Black, Coloured, and Asian) labor-power while safeguarding white supremacy through strict surveillance and control of the movement of black bodies outside designated "homelands." While race-based discrimination was not new in South African history, apartheid brought about a police state to ensure, often with brutal force, the implementation of the "separate and unequal" ideology of the new regime. Apartheid, untranslatable word, implying separateness or, as the first Afrikaner Nationalist Party campaign promised, separate development of races, confined blacks to self-governing "homelands" called *bantustans*. Since its inception, the various governments enacted, with obsessive doggedness, close to two hundred laws and amendments to strengthen the grip of the repressive regime. Due to intense oppositional struggles by black peoples against apartheid and increasing isolation in the world community, President F. W. de Klerk, somewhat reluctantly, unbanned the African National Congress and released Nelson Mandela in 1990. In 1994 South Africa transitioned from a government of white minority rule to majority rule with the first universal suffrage general elections that brought the African National Congress to power. Under the leadership of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in 1995, the South African government established a court-like formal body, "The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)," to reveal the truth of the crimes suffered by the victims of apartheid and hear testimony of the perpetrators seeking amnesty for crimes they committed. TRC, a unique experiment in social justice based on the model of restorative justice in sharp contrast to the model of retributive justice of the

Nuremberg Trials, was based on the principle that the revelation of truth of the crimes shall lead to reconciliation. Although the success of this model in bringing about racial reconciliation is highly debated, there seems to be little doubt among scholars that TRC played a seminal function in South Africa's peaceful transition to full democracy. See Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger, South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid (Harlow, England: Pearson, Longman, 2004).

⁷ Sarah Lyall, "South African Writer Wins Top British Prize for Second Time," New York Times 26 Oct. 1999, 7 March 2013 <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/26/world/south-african-writer-wins-top-british-prize-for-second-time.html?ref=j_m_coetzee>.

⁸ Lyall, "South African Writer Wins Top British Prize for Second Time."

⁹ Robert McCrum, "What's the best novel of the past 25 years?," The Guardian, 8 Oct. 2006, 7 March 2013 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/oct/08/fiction.features1>>.

¹⁰ Gareth Cornwell, "Realism, Rape, and J. M. Coetzee's Disgrace" Critique 43.4 (2002): 313.

¹¹ Coetzee, Disgrace 112.

¹² Coetzee, Disgrace 112.

¹³ Coetzee, Disgrace 205.

¹⁴ J. M. Coetzee, "Time, Tense, and Aspect in Kafka's 'The Burrow,'" Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews, ed. David Attwell (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1992) 232.

¹⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 1.

¹⁶ Franz Kafka, The Trial, trans. Breon Mitchell (New York: Schocken Books, 1998) 3.

¹⁷ Coetzee, Disgrace 9.

¹⁸ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005) 508.

¹⁹ Coetzee, Disgrace 23.

²⁰ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia 510.

²¹ Coetzee, Disgrace 3.

²² Coetzee, Disgrace 4.

²³ During the first post-apartheid general elections, the Nelson Mandela-led ANC party issued a Reconciliation and Development Program (RDP), which promised that the government and private sector would cooperate to create jobs through public works. The RDP became the official policy of the ANC government of national unity. Due to failure of RDP in creating jobs and attracting foreign investments, Mandela, in 1996, abandoned RDP for a new pro-business policy labeled Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR), which “focused on growth rather than on trying . . . to make major, immediate improvements to the lives of the poor. . . . It [GEAR] committed the government to new investment incentives, further tariff reductions, a drastic decrease in public sector employment, and budgetary reforms.” Leonard Thompson, A History of South Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001) 281.

²⁴ Aggrey Klaaste, “Odious Terre’ Blanche is a cartoonist’s dream,” Soweton, 3 April 2000, 3 Oct 2010 <<http://workproduct.files.wordpress.com/2009/04/klaaste.pdf>>.

²⁵ Sol Plaatje, “The Mote and the Beam: An Epic on Sex-Relationship ‘twixt White and Black in British South Africa (1921),” Sol Plaatje: Selected Writings, ed. Brian Willan (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1996) 274.

²⁶ Plaatje, “The Mote and the Beam: An Epic on Sex-Relationship ‘twixt White and Black in British South Africa (1921)” 283.

²⁷ See Lucy Valerie Graham, “Reading the Unspeakable: Rape in J. M. Coetzee’s *Disgrace*,” Journal of Southern African Studies 29.2 (2003): 433-444. Following Plaatje’s analysis, Graham argues that Coetzee’s Disgrace performs a subversion of the “black peril” narrative.

²⁸ See Plaatje, “The Mote and the Beam: An Epic on Sex-Relationship ‘twixt White and Black in British South Africa (1921)” 274-283.

²⁹ Attwell, “Race in *Disgrace*” 334.

³⁰ Coetzee, Disgrace 25.

³¹ It is important to note here that, in his inauguration address as the first President of South Africa, Mandela identified racism and sexism as the challenges facing the new democratic nation: “We trust that you will continue to stand by us as we tackle the challenges of building peace, prosperity, nonsexism, nonracialism and democracy” (See Note 1 for citation). Numerous studies of post-apartheid South Africa have shown that rates of crime, murder, and rape have exponentially increased. The Seventh United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, covering the post-apartheid period 1998-2000, compiled by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime ranked South Africa first in assaults and rapes per capita. See United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Center for International Crime Prevention, The Seventh United Nations Survey on Crime Trends and the Operations of Criminal Justice Systems 1998-2000 31 March 2004, 8 March 2013 <<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/Seventh-United-Nations-Survey-on-Crime-Trends-and-the-Operations-of-Criminal-Justice-Systems.html>>.

³² Coetzee, Disgrace 158.

³³ Coetzee, Disgrace 159.

³⁴ Coetzee, Disgrace 105.

³⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 158.

³⁶ Coetzee, Disgrace 159.

³⁷ Coetzee, Disgrace 25.

³⁸ Coetzee, Disgrace 89.

³⁹ Coetzee, Disgrace 160.

⁴⁰ Coetzee, Disgrace 160.

⁴¹ Coetzee, Disgrace 89.

⁴² Coetzee, Disgrace 22.

⁴³ Coetzee, Disgrace 33.

⁴⁴ Coetzee, Disgrace 44.

⁴⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 16.

⁴⁶ Coetzee, Disgrace 48.

⁴⁷ Coetzee, Disgrace 49.

⁴⁸ A court-like body, TRC was based on the idea of restorative justice to confront the horrors of past crimes suffered and committed under apartheid. Desmond Tutu, the first black South African Archbishop of Cape Town, who headed the TRC, emphasizes that the traditional African jurisprudence is based on restorative and not retributive justice: “In the spirit of *ubuntu*, the central concern is the healing of breaches, the redressing of imbalances, the restoration of broken relationships, a seeking to rehabilitate both the victim and the perpetrator, who should be given the opportunity to be reintegrated into the community he has injured by his offense.” Desmond Mpilo Tutu, No Future Without Forgiveness (New York: Doubleday, 1999) 54-55. Victims of human rights violations were invited to give statements about their experiences with the objective of restoring their human and civil dignity, and perpetrators of the violent acts, committed from 1st March 1960 to 10th May 1994, too were invited to give testimony before requesting amnesty and immunity from both criminal and civil prosecution. Although TRC was not strictly a legal body, it entailed a legal threat: failure to confess could lead to criminal and civil prosecution. See Lyn S. Graybill, Truth & Reconciliation in South Africa: Miracle or Model? (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2002) 1-10.

⁴⁹ Coetzee, Disgrace 91.

⁵⁰ Coetzee, Disgrace 66.

⁵¹ Michel Foucault describes the transformation that took place in Europe from the strict legalism of Cesare Beccaria’s theory of penal law in mid-eighteenth century to the continuous individual supervision going beyond the juridical nature of punishment in Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, established at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century: “[Beccaria’s] theory of punishment subordinated the punishment, the possibility of punishing, to the existence of an explicit law, to the explicit establishment that a breach of this law had taken place, and finally to a punishment that would compensate for or, to the extent possible, prevent the injury done to society by the offense.” Foucault asserts that this legalistic theory is the opposite of panopticism, in which “the supervision of individuals is carried out not at the level of what one does but of what one is, not at the level of what one does but of what one might do. With this system, supervision tends increasingly to individualize the author of the act, while ceasing to take account of the juridical nature, the penal qualification of the act itself.” Michel Foucault,

“Truth and Juridical Forms,” Power: Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, trans. Robert Hurley and others, ed. James D. Faubion (New York: The New Press, 1994) 70-71.

⁵² Coetzee, Disgrace 55.

⁵³ TRC model of restorative justice had strong defenders and critics of the process. The most prominent critics of the TRC process were the family members of Steve Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness movement, who was brutally murdered in custody in 1977. In 1997, five former security policemen asked TRC for amnesty for murdering Biko, while maintaining throughout their confessions that he was killed in self-defense. The family members pointed to the farcical nature of their confessions and challenged the constitutionality of the process in the country’s highest court arguing that the Commission was “a vehicle for political expediency and robbed them of their right to justice.” Biko’s family maintained that justice could be achieved only through criminal prosecution rather than amnesty. See “Apartheid enforcer sticks to ‘farcical’ story on Biko killing,” The Independent, 11 Sept. 1997, 8 March 2013 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/apartheid-enforcer-sticks-to-farcical-story-on-biko-killing-1238495.html>>.

⁵⁴ Coetzee, Disgrace 112.

⁵⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 112.

⁵⁶ Coetzee, Disgrace 112.

⁵⁷ Coetzee, Disgrace 53.

⁵⁸ Coetzee, Disgrace 158.

⁵⁹ Coetzee, Disgrace 159.

⁶⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 63.

⁶¹ See Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo 62-63.

⁶² Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo 84.

⁶³ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo 91.

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, “Critique of Violence,” Reflections, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) 287.

⁶⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 205.

⁶⁶ See Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo 71-73.

⁶⁷ Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo 63.

⁶⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Ethics and Politics in Tagore, Coetzee, and Certain Scenes of Teaching," diacritics 32.3-4 (2002): 21.

⁶⁹ Nermeen Shaikh, The Present as History: Critical Perspectives on Global Power (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) 193.

⁷⁰ Coetzee, Disgrace 98.

⁷¹ The post-apartheid South African government embarked upon an ambitious project of re-allocating resources, within the framework of distributive justice, to deal with phenomenal inequalities created under the apartheid regime. Coetzee's novel powerfully shows that land redistribution, which the ANC government undertook to undo the racially skewed land and income dispensation, despite the government's attempts to achieve racial and gender equality, continues to be a transaction *between* men. Cheryl Walker's report submitted to the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in 1998, argues that, although the land reform policies in post-apartheid South Africa aimed to achieve gender equity at the level of principle, women, especially rural black women, have not been the beneficiaries of the reform policies. She maintains that lack of capacity and budget, the strength of traditional patriarchal attitudes and the absence of strong lobby of women's organizations campaigning for women's land rights have functioned as obstacles to improving access to land and greater security of tenure among women. See Cheryl Walker, "Land Reform and Gender in Post-Apartheid South Africa," 1 Oct 1998, 7 March 2013 <<http://www.unrisd.org/unrisd/website/document.nsf/%20%28httpPublications%29/AF426AFD7DD941F180256B67005B7059?OpenDocument>>.

⁷² See Amina Mama, "Sheroes and Villians: Conceptualizing Colonial and Contemporary Violence Against Women in Africa," Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures, ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997) 46-62.

⁷³ Coetzee, Disgrace 86.

⁷⁴ Coetzee, Disgrace 76.

⁷⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 89.

⁷⁶ Coetzee, Disgrace 16.

⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992) 5-6.

⁷⁸ Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, & the New International, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994) 22-23.

⁷⁹ Coetzee, Disgrace 166.

⁸⁰ Coetzee, Disgrace 173.

⁸¹ Emanuel Levinas, Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969) 43.

⁸² Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority'" 25.

⁸³ Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, Of Hospitality trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 25.

⁸⁴ Coetzee, Disgrace 167.

⁸⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 167.

⁸⁶ Coetzee, Disgrace 110.

⁸⁷ Coetzee, Disgrace 205.

⁸⁸ Kafka, The Trial 231.

⁸⁹ Walter Benjamin, "Some Reflections on Kafka," Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 144.

⁹⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka," Illuminations, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968) 122.

⁹¹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) 35.

⁹² Coetzee, Disgrace 146.

⁹³ Coetzee, Disgrace 146.

⁹⁴ Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, 274.

⁹⁵ Coetzee, Disgrace 81.

⁹⁶ Coetzee, Disgrace 142-143.

⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, The Animal That Therefore I Am,” ed. Marie-Louise Mallet, trans, David Wills (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008) 112.

⁹⁸ Coetzee, Disgrace 220.

⁹⁹ Franz Kafka, The Basic Kafka, introduction by Eric Heller (New York: Pocket Books, 1979) 294.

**4.0 ESSAYING AGAINST EMPIRE: J. M. COETZEE'S DIARY OF A BAD
YEAR**

Que sais-je?

—Michel de Montaigne¹

“There is a certain tone,” Joll says. “A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth. Training and experience teach us to recognize the truth.”

“The tone of truth! Can you pick up this tone in everyday speech? Can you hear whether I am telling the truth?”

—J. M. Coetzee²

I believe in democracy. I accept it. I will faithfully serve and defend it. I believe in it because it appears to me the inevitable consequence of what has gone before it. Democracy asserts the fact that the masses are now raised to a higher intelligence than formerly. All our civilization aims at this mark. We want to do what we can to help it. I myself want to see the result. I grant it is an experiment, but it is the only direction society can take that is worth its taking; the only conception of its duty large enough to satisfy its instincts; the only result that is worth an effort or a risk. Every other possible step is backward, and I do not

care to repeat the past. I am glad to see society grapple with issues in which no one can afford to be neutral.

—Henry Adams³

Since the tragic events of 11 September 2001 the specter of torturing democracy haunts the globe. Like Hamlet in the chill of the midnight hour, through the voice of his character-author J. C., Coetzee confronts this specter in the pages of his latest postmodern novel, Diary of a Bad Year, which constitutes fifty-five essays on politics, mathematics, literature, and writing.⁴ With the onset of the imperialist “war on terror,” the globe has witnessed the horror and the anomie of torture that has undermined the constituent and constituted power of a democracy. The terrifying images of the attack have been co-opted by democracies around the world to instill fear among their citizen-subjects of the radical Other. Coetzee’s novel meditates on the supra-political Machiavellian principle of necessity of self-preservation that justifies the practice of torture within a democracy today. If the mantra of monarchy is necessity trumps morality, then the mantra of democracy today is security trumps liberty. In this chapter, I argue that Coetzee employs the ironic, ambulatory, and the marginal form of the essay to interrupt the Machiavellian principle of necessity. It is in this marginal form that J. C., the aging liberal humanist, confronts the absent presence of the tortured bodies of the victims of the so-called war on terror. Examining the history of the form of the essay, which in the Western tradition has been considered a *parergon* to the arts, I show that in DOBY Coetzee grants prominent place to the essay form and its primary function of criticism. Working within the Montaignian tradition of the essay form, similar to György Lukács and Edward Said, Coetzee, I argue, reinscribes the work of the essayist

within political and historical human formation. Analyzing several essays in the novel on torture, terrorism, imperialism, and democracy, I demonstrate that through the essay form Coetzee attempts to disrupt the terror of torturing democracy. With the phenomenal rise of what Noam Chomsky calls “military humanism” in the past decade, Coetzee shows us that today the ethical function of criticism in general, and postcolonial criticism in particular, is to democratize democracy itself.⁵

J. M. Coetzee’s DOBY, published in 2007, is his most experimental novel so far. Formally innovative in the tradition of postmodernism, each page of the novel is divided initially into two and then three sections, echoing the split-screen technique used in cinema. The top section of the page, consisting exclusively of essays, written in the first person, is in the voice of the character-author J. C., who along with other distinguished writers, has been asked to express “Strong Opinions” on his times by a German publisher; the middle section, also narrated in the first person, is in the voice of the aging person J. C., who is suffering from Parkinson’s disease and also from a “metaphysical ache” for his Filipina neighbor and secretary; and the last section, again narrated in the first person, is in the voice of his secretary Anya, who comments on the aging distinguished author J. C.’s quirky nature, his lust for her and his boring political essays. In Anya’s monologue, we also run into her boyfriend Alan, who is a financier and a millionaire plotting to siphon off J. C.’s wealth. Alan also ridicules J. C.’s lust for Anya and his ideas on probability theory, the free market, and Australian politics.

Several reviewers read the character-author J. C. as a mirror of the writer J. M. Coetzee: writing for the New York Times Book Review, Kathryn Harrison declares, “Diary of a Bad Year [unlike Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello] forgoes the conceit of a perfunctorily

named and differentiated alter ego by following the late career of Señor C, who, like Coetzee, is a South African writer transplanted to Australia and the author of a novel titled Waiting for the Barbarians.”⁶ It is true that Señor C shares several biographical details with Coetzee. His initials are J. C., which is only mentioned twice in the novel when he writes two letters to Anya—the first time to request her to return to her secretarial duties after a misunderstanding between them and the second time when he invites her and Alan to dinner. It is Anya who refers to him as Señor C mistaking him to be from Colombia in South America. J. C., like Coetzee, has recently emigrated from South Africa to Australia (Coetzee moved to Australia in 2002 after retirement) and is the author of the great novel, Waiting for the Barbarians. It is also suggested in the novel that J. C. might have won the Nobel Prize (Coetzee won the Nobel in 2003): in Anya’s voice we are told that instead of having family photos on the wall, J. C. has “a framed scroll in some foreign language (Latin?) with his name in fancy lettering with lots of curlicues and a big red wax seal in the corner. His credentials?”⁷ While there are parallels between the fictional author J. C. and the writer Coetzee, the metafictional layerings of the text, in keeping with the style of postmodern narratives, disrupts the relationship of likeness between them. While in several of his novels including Dusklands (1974), Foe (1986), and Elizabeth Costello (2003), Coetzee’s postmodern narratives self-consciously blur the lines between fiction and reality, it is not the life of the writer Coetzee that we encounter in the pages of DOBY but the fluid author-function. The tripartite division gives voice to varieties of egos and subject positions. Speaking of the use of the first person narrative in fiction, Michel Foucault, in “What is an author?” states that the pronoun “I” refers not to the writer but to the “second self”; hence “it would be false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as to the fictional narrator.”⁸

For Foucault, one of the characteristics of the author-function is that it arises in the chasm between these multiple egos. In the split-screen Coetzee self-consciously stages, in first person narration, the chasm between the character-author J. C., the writer J. C., and the aging individual J. C. lusting for Anya. Moreover, we also hear the voice of Anya, the object of desire of J. C. and Alan. When each section of the novel is read horizontally the narrative skillfully maintains the illusion of reality and the promise of coherent communication, invoking the tradition of realist narration. Only when the three sections arranged on the same page are read vertically, the narrative plunges into postmodern world frustrating any attempt at arriving at continuous and coherent signification. Harrison warns the readers that, in the clever staging of the clash of authors, writers, narrators, and characters, they are being “deliberately manipulated by a form that is coy as well as playful, and it’s hard not to conclude Coetzee is more invested in his relationship with his readers than in his characters’ credibility and interactions with one another.”⁹ Harrison, by reading the form as manipulative, fails to see the aesthetic-ethical impulse of the style, which, in dramatizing the multiple subject positions, decenters and interrupts the authorial authority. The text stylistically denies readers the stability of a single, original, voice-consciousness of the imperial God-like author safely guiding them into a pen. From his first novel Dusklands to this latest novel DOBY, this is a key feature of Coetzee’s writing strategies, which is also suggestive of the deep ethical impulse of his writing. The tripartite division of the page functions to deconstruct the moral authority of the author. It is from this unstable and marginal subject position that character-author J. C. pontificates, in mordant tone, about political, cultural and social issues, some of them highly controversial, such as torture, neo-imperialism, terrorism, Guantanamo, state of democracy, suicide bombing, American

exceptionalism, George Bush, Tony Blair, Al-Qaeda, probability theory, J. S. Bach, Dostoevsky among others. These essays may very well contain Coetzee's own political opinions about the current state of the world, which is in fact what the Wikipedia entry on Coetzee's biography suggests quoting from reviewers and journalists. Under the sub-heading of "Politics," the Wikipedia entry states that Coetzee, like his character J. C., sees similarities in American and Australian anti-terrorism laws and the apartheid state.¹⁰ But Coetzee's text anticipates such parallels between the writer and the character by deliberately writing in the varied forms of the essay and the diary, the former suggesting that the views are personal opinions and the latter that the book is a memoir. The novel also ends with imitations of academic writing: the last two pages are "Notes" listing works cited in the essays, along with page numbers and acknowledgments to the publishers and to various real individuals, who are academics, writers, obscure linguists, and mathematicians. The last line of the acknowledgment reads thus: "For their generously given advice, my thanks to Danielle Allen [American classicist and political scientist], Reinhild Boehnke [obscure linguist who published a bilingual German-English dictionary], Piergiorgio Odifreddi [Italian mathematician], and Rose Zwi [South African writer]. For what I have made of their advice I alone am responsible."¹¹ The acknowledgments page is also signed JMC. Sardonically, these two entries are placed towards the end, when the struggle between fiction (the second and third sections) and nonfiction (the first section) ends without a resolution. These are not writings, like the essays, that J. C. asks Anya to type for him. Thus, the stylistic juxtaposition of egos and genres—diaries, fiction, nonfiction, and academic writing—thwarts any simple parallelism between J. C. and Coetzee.

Moreover, although the subjects covered in the essays have great importance for our times, Coetzee strips the character-author J. C. and himself of any moral authority of a wise sage. Additionally, J. C.'s controversial personal opinions are not only uttered from an unstable subject position but also in the modest, marginal form of the essay, which are embedded within the prose narrative. As stated earlier, the essays cover a range of topics but those related to the contemporary politics that has emerged since 9/11 dominate the pages of DOBY. In this chapter I will examine the essays that discuss torture, function of art and criticism, and the futures of democracy. But first, let us turn to the brief history of the essay form.

Michel de Montaigne's book, with a disarmingly simple title *Essais*, written during the French War of Religions (1562-98), declares its revolutionary aim in the preface to the reader to be a study of the self, not for the purpose of reputation among posterity, but for denuding oneself in front of family and friends: "You have here, Reader . . . a book which warns you from the start that I have set myself no other end but a private family one. I have not been concerned to serve you nor my reputation. . . . I have dedicated this book to the private benefit of my friends and kinsmen."¹² Although György Lukács' essay on the essay, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay," emphasizes the modest nature of the essay, the beginning of the form of the essay is couched in an immodestly modest desire of stripping down for a private show in print.¹³ Montaigne, who was neither a professional scholar nor a statesman or a general, retires to his citadel, Tower of Château, to pen down the "subject" he knew best: himself. Referring to Montaigne as an exemplary case, Foucault maintains that during the religious and political crisis of the sixteenth century several Renaissance writers rejected the Catholic confessional practices in favor of new modes of relationship to the self

by reactivating the ancient Stoic practices of “attempting” to write the self (or in Stephen Greenblatt’s terminology Renaissance self-fashioning¹⁴) rather than to “discover” the self.¹⁵

Montaigne’s originary personal essays, speaking of kings and of the groom of his riding horse, constituting a formless form, that is literary and yet not confined within the structures of prose narrative or poetic rhyme, have left an influential legacy up until our times. Virginia Woolf, commenting on the Edwardian essay in her essay “The Decay of Essay-writing,” declares Montaigne to be the first modern writer: “Perhaps the most significant of these literary inventions is the invention of the personal essay. It is true that it is at least as old as Montaigne, but we may count him the first of the moderns.”¹⁶

Comparing the public display of universal passions of the Elizabethan stage to Montaigne’s attempt at writing the self in isolation, Woolf, in her essay “The Elizabethan Lumber Room,” maintains that “the publicity of the stage and the perpetual presence of a second person were hostile to that growing consciousness of one’s self, that brooding in solitude over the mysteries of the soul.”¹⁷ For Woolf, the French Montaigne was way ahead of his English contemporaries. Moreover, she sees a common ground between Montaigne and her own experimental modernist writing, which thematically and stylistically attempts to penetrate the dark complexity of internal windings.¹⁸ Not only modernist writing claims to share common grounds with Montaigne’s non-doctrinal writing strategies but postmodern writing also makes similar claims. Jean-François Lyotard asserts that postmodern writing operates in the paradox of the future anterior, and in that it is fundamentally closer to the form of the essay. Like Montaigne’s unassuming, “formless” essays, the postmodern writer works without pre-established rules “in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*.”¹⁹ Thus, postmodern writing has the paradoxical characteristics of the essay form; it

has the character of an event and of belatedness. For Lyotard, “It seems to me that the essay (Montaigne) is postmodern.”²⁰

If in its French birth, the essay was defined by its subjective voice and digressive nature not shackled by established doctrines, in its English birth the essay was defined by the opposite qualities of impersonality and precision of scientific knowledge in order to free the human mind from the doctrine of the idols. Francis Bacon, sixteenth century English natural philosopher, statesman and jurist, first published his collection of essays, Essays in 1597. Several scholars maintain that Bacon applies his famous scientific method, formulated in opposition to Aristotelian philosophy, also known as induction, to “civil knowledge” elaborated in his essays.²¹ Although the two original essayists are similar in their use of the form to attack religious doctrine in vernacular language, the literariness of Montaigne’s ambulatory essays and the scientificity of Bacon’s epigrammatic essays have defined the binary oppositional poles within which most of the subsequent materializations of the essay form have fallen into. In her introduction to Bacon’s Essays, Mary Augusta Scott compares the style of Montaigne and Bacon’s essays:

Again, Bacon has nothing of the attractive personality of Montaigne, a man of the world who made a point of finding out what the world was like from all sorts and conditions of men. . . . Montaigne writes on and on about a subject in breezy discursiveness, like a man on horseback traversing an interesting country. Bacon’s *Essays* reflect his experience of life, but they tell us little or nothing of his personal likes and dislikes. They are austere, brief to the point of crudeness, they smell of the lamp.²²

The Spartan character of the English Bacon's essays elaborate on the need for self-cultivation, by carefully examining the relationship between public and private life, ultimately choosing the former over the latter, which is the domain of the "beasts" (and women) and extensive learning through education, that will initiate one into the public domain, bringing about advancement of personal and general knowledge.²³ The ethical dimension of Bacon's thought is expressed in the idea of *Nova Atlantis* (considered a blueprint for the founding of America), a society based on pursuit of scientific knowledge, not for the citizen's personal pleasure or for exerting his/her will to power, but, for virtuous living.²⁴ In stark contrast to Bacon, Montaigne's fashioning the self through writing invokes the ancient conception of ethics, dependent on aesthetics rather than knowledge (scientific or otherwise). Echoing philosophical skepticism, Montaigne writes the most famous words in the essays, "What do I know?"²⁵ If Bacon's essays are "counsels civill and morall," Montaigne's are idiosyncratic, amusing, and speak of the *jouissance* of food, sex, friends, and life. Although Bacon's essays have left an influential legacy, it is the literary charm of Montaigne's essays that have influenced generations of writers, scholars and philosophers up until our own times. In keeping with Montaigne's legacy, that he invokes in several interviews, the post-structuralist Foucault, in his writings on ethics, turns to the ancient Greeks to elaborate an ethics of the self, a relation to the self that is prior to knowledge.²⁶

In addition to the antithesis between the literary and the scientific character of the essay, the history of the "genre" has witnessed further contentious divisions and subdivisions. Elena Gualtieri, in her essay "The Essay as Form: Virginia Woolf and the Literary Tradition," states, "Because of its protean character, critical interpretations of the essay have usually attempted to trace this multiplicity back to the original antinomy of

Montaigne's and Bacon's works. For the English tradition in particular the essay has remained largely defined by a split between its association with *belle-lettres* as the cultivation of style for style's sake and its role as the main vehicle for the criticism of literature and the arts."²⁷ Moreover, in relation to France, she maintains that the tradition of Montaigne's essay as a form of self-expression continues to dominate "but also has been used by writers such as Roland Barthes to undermine the distinction between 'proper' or creative literature and criticism as a parasitic form of activity."²⁸ In relation to Barthes, Gualtieri cites Réda Bensmaïa's important study of Barthes as an essayist. In his inaugural lecture at Collège de France, Barthes modestly declares, "I long wished to inscribe my work within the field of science—literary, lexicological, and sociological—I must admit that I have produced *only* [emphasis mine] essays, an ambiguous genre in which analysis vies with writing."²⁹ The internal struggle between analysis and writing, argument and metaphor, science and arts, in other words Bacon and Montaigne, is at the heart of the essay "genre." Furthermore, this struggle is also manifested externally in the traditional view of the essay as a parergon to the arts. Although the tradition has acknowledged the literary nature of Montaigne's essays, the essay as a form has largely been considered a piece of criticism about the arts (and life), rather than itself a "fourth genre" of the arts, along with the lyric, the epic and the dramatic arts. In Bensmaïa's reading of Barthes' essays, he argues that in writing "writerly" texts Barthes questions the secondary status of the form of the essay in relation to the arts by deconstructing the binary oppositional relationship between them. Bensmaïa maintains that after publication of *S/Z*, an essay on Honoré de Balzac's short story "Sarrasine," Barthes engages in a new program of writing, that of the "writerly text":

‘writerly text’—a type of writing that, rather than creating a chasm between the writer and the reader, puts them in a relationship of continuum, making the reader a producer rather than a consumer of the text. The text achieves this by being “‘plural’ and ‘broken’ (lacking ‘deep structure’ and purely ‘tactical’), constructed from non-totalizable fragments and from exuberantly proliferating ‘details,’ calling upon an ‘economy’ of reading.”³⁰

Bensaïa sees the fragmentary, paratactic and incomplete character of Barthes’ post-S/Z writing as being directly influenced by Montaigne’s essays. Thus, according to Bensaïa, the Montaignian essay S/Z can be read in two ways: “It can be read as a theoretical (reflexive) text—another one—on literature, narration, form and the like. It can also be read as a ‘reflective’ text, a text that has transgressed . . . the ‘pitiless divorce,’ as Barthes says—that the ‘literary institution’ maintains between the producer of the text and its user . . . between the literary text and the ‘critical’ text.”³¹ The essay S/Z’s relationship to the literary text “Sarrasine” is both conventional and transgressive; it has the character of *aboutness*, being about the short story, and subversiveness, destabilizing the very terms on which the relation of aboutness is formulated. In this regard, the post-structuralist Barthes is working within the legacy of the Marxist literary critic György Lukács, whose dense and influential essay “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” also questions the parasitic character assigned to the essay form in relation to the arts, elaborating on the similarities and differences between them.

In the first chapter of the collection of essays Soul and Form, titled “On the Nature and Form of the Essay,” which functions as a letter addressed to his dear friend Leo Popper and as a preface to the book, the young Lukács (the book was published when he was only

twenty-five) meditates on the principles of unity that define, not the boundary of the book he is writing but the “new” literary form of the essay. What unifies the essays is not positive knowledge but the *staging* of the object itself: Lukács states that these essays are not “‘studies in literary history,’ but whether there is something in them that makes them a new literary form of its own, and whether the principle that makes them such is the same in each one.”³² In his study of the essayistic form, Lukács does not fall into the Russian formalist paradigm of valuing form over content, but rather emphasizes the dialectical relationship between them. In her introduction to the book, Judith Butler shows us that even though the book was published before Lukács’ conversion to Bolshevism, there is already a latent Marxism at work here. In his essay on the essay, Lukács lays out a historical understanding of the form: “These forms [essay, poem or drama] are not in place and intact prior to their use; they are reinvented for the purposes of conveying a very specific condition, at once existential and historical.”³³ But in Lukács the relationship between form and the condition of its possibility is not purely deterministic. If form emerges out of the necessity to convey a certain reality, which he calls the soul, this soul comes into being in the very act of expression itself.

In my discussion of the beginnings of the form, I have shown that the debate over the essay’s status as art or science has been raging ever since the appearance of the essays of the French Montaigne and the British Bacon. Lukács is on Montaigne’s side. What concerns him in this essay is the problem of delinking the essay from the sphere of science and linking it to the realm of the arts. Although Lukács’ project is Montaignian, he greatly troubles the romanticized dualistic positions in the debate between science and art. In keeping with much of the history of essay writing, Lukács maintains that the essay’s

function is criticism, which for him is a form of art and not science. He states, “I want to try to define the essay as strictly as is possible, precisely by describing it as an art form.”³⁴ His aim is to not replace one with the other, but “with something essentially new, something that remains untouched . . . by scientific goals.”³⁵ Thus, what makes criticism art and not science? The difference between science and art is that “science affects us by its contents” and “art by its forms.”³⁶ According to Lukács, science offers us information, facts and relationships, while art offers us “souls and destinies.”³⁷ If art is defined by form, criticism “glimpses destiny in forms,” that is, the “soul-content which forms indirectly and unconsciously conceal within themselves.”³⁸ According to Lukács, “Form *is* reality in the writings of critics; it is the voice with which they address their questions to life. That is the true and most profound reason why literature and art are the typical, natural subject-matter of criticism.”³⁹ Acknowledging Popper’s disdain for anarchy, Lukács assures him that the affinity between the essay and art is not a superficial one, that is based merely on the fact of being well-written, which would then include everything that is well-written. With the same “gesture” or “attitude,” that is the great experience of form, they address “their questions to life.” But for Lukács, art is a “typical” subject matter for the essay and not the only one, for life itself can be given form by the essay. Plato’s dialogues (he considers Plato to be the greatest essayist, before the beginning of the essay form in Montaigne’s works), Montaigne’s essays, and Kierkegaard’s imaginary diaries are for him examples of essays that directly address their questions to life without the mediation of art.

Although the essay is an art form, it is not like other art forms: “the essay has a form which separates it, with the rigor of a law, from all other art forms.”⁴⁰ Even though considered closer to the literary form, it has the character of invisibility in relation to all

other literary forms. For Lukács, if forms of literature were compared to sunlight refracted in a prism, the form of the essay would be the ultra-violet rays.⁴¹ Similarly, the essay exists in relation of secondariness and belatedness to art, of *coming after the fact*. The essay's function in the present is defined by an already existing past. In contrast to such traditional notions of the essay in particular, and criticism in general, Lukács proposes a creative function for criticism, that is not predetermined by the past, but gestures towards the possibility of a future, that is yet to come. The critic, he famously says, is the pure instance of a precursor, who begins to create the values by which art will be judged:

The essayist is a Schopenhauer who writes his Parerga while waiting for the arrival of his own (or another's) *The World as Will and Idea*, he is a John the Baptist who goes out to preach in the wilderness about another who is still to come, whose shoelace he is not worthy to untie. And if that other does not come—is not the essayist then without justification? And if the other does come, is he not made superfluous thereby? He is the pure type of precursor, and it seems highly questionable whether, left entirely to himself—i.e., independent from the fate of that other of whom he is the herald—he could lay claim to any value or validity.⁴²

Critic is preaching to a congregation yet to come. Without the other, on whom his fate is dependent, of which he is the herald, s/he loses value. Critic exists in an ethical relation to the other yet to come. Like the countryman in Franz Kafka's fable "Before the Law," the critic stands *before* the artwork yearning for experience and judgment, for entry into the house of the Law. As a precursor a critic's function is defined by longing rather than fulfillment of experience and judgment in a near future. Similarly, in Kafka's story, the countryman's longing does not achieve a state of fulfillment, of entry into Law. What the

countryman fails to understand in his years of waiting, is that the law is interdependent on his longing. This is captured by the haunting last lines of the story. When he inquires of the gatekeeper why nobody besides himself has attempted to access the law in all these years, the gatekeeper responds, “No one else could ever be admitted here, since this gate was made only for you. I am now going to shut it.”⁴³ In a similar vein, as a herald, the critic’s fate and value lies in the longing for the other, in the coming of the other, who is not already here or will definitely be here in a predictable future. Or as Said, whose conception of the critic’s relationship to the text and the world is influenced by Lukács’ view of the critic, says, “What I wish to emphasize here in conclusion is not only the critic’s role in writing as dialectically creating the values by which art might be judged and understood, but his role in creating the processes of the *present*, as process and inauguration, the actual conditions by means of which art and writing bear significance.”⁴⁴ Critic’s role is that of creating values by which art will be judged; it is that of a preacher preaching to a people yet to come. I will return to Said’s view on the function of criticism. I will argue that Coetzee works within the Lukácsian and Saidian tradition in DOBY, assigning a creative function for criticism that is not always already determined by a past but gestures towards a future to come. And all three of them are preoccupied with Montaigne.

In the long Montaignian digression covering nearly three-hundred-year history of the essay form, I have tried to show, examining views of the key practitioners/theorists of the form—Montaigne, Bacon, Woolf, Barthes, and Lukács—, that in the Western tradition of essay writing two questions dominate: Is the essay form an art or a science? And, does the essay have a secondary or a precursive relation to literature and other arts? As mentioned above, the literary character of the Montaignian essay has left a far more influential legacy

than the scientificity of Bacon's essay. In regards to the second question, the view that the essay is secondary to art is still pervasive, although Barthes, Lukács, and Said have challenged this in different ways. For Barthes the essay form is secondary to art as well as subversive in its critical capacity to deconstruct the binary opposition between them. In Lukács, paradoxically reinforcing a linear logic sans teleology, the essay is precursive to art, holding judgment in *potentia*. And Said is in agreement with Lukács.

A key question poses itself here: What is the *place* of Coetzee's DOBY in this tradition? The trope of place can hardly be undermined in colonial and postcolonial writing, and more so in the history of South Africa, which witnessed the violent reconfiguring of physical and social spaces. Therefore, more broadly, one may ask in relation to Coetzee, what is the *place* of a "no more European but not yet African" writer in this European tradition? In the introduction to his book, White Writing, Coetzee describes the paradoxical nature of white writing in South Africa: "Even within their temporal limits [the book examines pre-apartheid writers], they do not constitute a history of white writing, nor even the outline of such a history. Nor does the phrase *white writing* imply the existence of a body of writing different in nature from black writing. White writing is white only insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African."⁴⁵ But is this not the fate of *all* postcolonial writing? Educated in the Western tradition, the postcolonial writers inhabit the paradox of what Homi Bhabha calls the hybrid space, "not quite/not white."⁴⁶ Within the progressive teleology of Enlightenment metanarrative, the above two movements will hardly be considered "identical," as it is formulated on a conceptual assumption of a temporal gap between the European self and its others. Coetzee, in the above quote, speaks of the resistance of the white settler writer to fully embrace

Africa, being quick to love the land but not its people. In the case of a postcolonial writer, a term more often than not implying a writer from a former colony writing in one of the European languages, the experience of hybridity, at least in Bhabha's reading, suggests an appropriation of the dominant metropolitan discourse and a resistance to it. In both contrary instances of hybrid writing, the former suggesting resistance to impurity and the latter implying celebration of impurity, is not the experience of in-betweenness enabled by certain social privileges? In other words, can a subaltern embody a hybrid space? A controversial response says no.⁴⁷ Not unlike Coetzee, who occupies a privileged position as a white writer in South Africa, a large majority of postcolonial writers, acting as representative consciousness, come from social privileges based on race, gender, ethnicity, caste, class, education, religion, and sexuality. Thus, returning to specifically DOBY's, and more broadly Coetzee's *place* within this Western tradition, which is more complicated given his immigration to Adelaide, Australia, another postcolonial place, one may ask, is DOBY working with and/or against this Western tradition of essay writing? What is the place of these essays in the tradition of essay writing? Moreover, is DOBY a novel or a collection of critical essays on art and life? Since it consists of fifty-five essays, which embody much of the novel, it reads like a non-fiction book. The essay's relation of secondariness or precursiveness to art is greatly complicated in DOBY, which is categorized as a novel, whose pages stage the eternal struggle between art and criticism, each vying for a prominent place in the world. Moreover, only a few essays address their questions to art, while a large majority, in a Platonic vein, address in fiction their questions to life: politics, history, science, culture, and sex. Are the essays in DOBY in secondary or precursive relation to the novel and/or life? Additionally, Coetzee, who was a programmer for IBM before he became

a novelist, comfortably inhabits both the worlds of science and art. Several scholars have noted the mathematical precision and sparseness of his writing style. In DOBY, the essays “On Zeno” and “On Probability” address their questions to mathematics.⁴⁸ The former meditates on the relationship between mathematical and ordinary language, and the latter on Einstein’s famous statement that God does not play dice, pondering on whether probabilistic laws are better a way to understand the world than deterministic ones. Thus, are the essays art or science? In other words, is Coetzee working within the Montaignian or the Baconian tradition of essay writing?

J. C.’s essays, solicited by his German publisher, written between 12th September 2005 and 31st May 2006, are modest attempts to address the graveness of the geopolitical situation since the terrible events of 11 September 2001. Started exactly four years after the event, J. C., in his essays, meditates on the so-called war on terror, terrorism, torture, suicide bombing, colonialism, imperialism, and the fate of democracy. These topics preoccupy him through much of the fifty-five essays. But why does Coetzee choose to address these somber themes, in the voice of J. C., through a highly experimental aesthetics? Moreover, why does he address these questions in the form of the essay embedded within the novel? Such generic innovations are not new to Coetzee’s oeuvre. Like DOBY, In the Heart of the Country (1977) consists of numbered diary entries of the lonely spinster Magda in colonial South Africa. Age of Iron (1990) is an epistolary novel in which the dying Mrs Curren writes a long letter to her daughter in America, who has escaped the apartheid regime. The chapters in Elizabeth Costello (2003) are called “Lessons,” constituting of lectures that the writer Costello delivers all over the world. Coetzee has himself delivered these fictional lectures of Costello in real-life situations at Princeton University, 1997-1998, for the Tanner

Lecture series dedicated to ethical and philosophical topics. Two of the lectures from Elizabeth Costello were also published separately under the title The Lives of Animals (2001), a rather unusual practice. My previous chapters also elaborate on his use of allegory (Waiting for the Barbarians) and parody (Foe) to disrupt realism. But DOBY is the most experimental novel yet, with its tripartite division in multiple voices, making conventional ways of reading a page from top to bottom nearly impossible. For the second and third section, a coherent narrative emerges only when each section is read horizontally. But the top section, consisting only of essays, lacks a continuous narrative structure of a beginning, middle and end, even when read horizontally. The reader can read the essay section in random order, as each essay is a self-sufficient unit. If the second and third sections have a linear narrative structure, the first section, like the essay form itself is ambulatory, fragmentary, random and formless, with no linear structure, where J. C. can “try out,” in keeping with the etymological meaning of the word *essais*, ideas on different topics. In DOBY, there exists a tension between the linearity of fiction and the non-linearity of the essay form. In her wonderful book on the essay, The Essayistic Spirit, Claire de Obaldia notes:

One cannot but be aware that unlike the novel, which in the course of its history has so quickly progressed from its status as a marginal (un- or sub-literary) genre to become a respectable genre, and ultimately to embody the notion of literature itself in most readers’ and writers’ minds, the essay has made little progress from its very similar starting-point and continues to be excluded from the realm of literature.⁴⁹

Given the marginal status of the essay form in relation to the novel, poetry, and drama, why does Coetzee employ the non-serious form of the essay, embedding it within the more

respectable genre of the novel, to address the tectonic shifts that the globe has witnessed in the past decade that have shaken the very foundations of democracy? Are these essays in a secondary or a precursive relation to the novel?

In the Western tradition, the essay has occupied a marginal position in relation to the dominant discourses of the literary genres. One could even say that it exists in a subaltern relation to the institutionalized genres. Since the beginnings of the form, the essay's status as marginal to the other literary genres has not significantly changed. Although Montaigne's essays have been categorized as "literary" essays, the inclusion of the essays under the broader category of literature and its various genres has always been contentious. More often than not, it has been denied the status of a "genre," which could also explain the paucity of scholarly studies on the origin, nature, and development of the form. Given its primary function of criticism, which traditionally has meant non-imaginative rational thinking, it has been relegated to the position of a *parergon* to the other literary genres, rather than being one of them. Thus, by understanding criticism as art, Lukács is not only assigning the essay the status of a genre addressing itself to other genres but also releases it from this limited function to ultimately address life itself. He declares, "The modern essay does not always have to speak of books or poets" but can speak of life itself.⁵⁰ Coetzee appropriates this marginal form into the larger novel address questions to art and life.

The essays in the novel are fragmentary, loose, and non-linear, meandering from one topic to another, following no pre-established rules to grant them a unified structure. They speak from a tentative subject-position that is singular and contingent, eschewing all claims to Universal Truth. The "truths," precariously staged, are the character-author's precursive gestures in the dark, attempting to make sense of this world. The truths expressed are plural

and slippery, inextricably tied to the here and now of historical time. The essays fail to fulfill the reader's desire for guidance by the imperial patriarch-author in an uncertain world. They are formless and open-ended, yearning for a future yet to come. Within the space of a marginal form, Coetzee employs J. C. to render opinions that are quirky, controversial, and timely. The value of the essayistic opinions and judgments presented lie not in the daunting knowledge of the all-knowing subject, who can effortlessly discuss any topic under the sun, but in the attitude of the character-author gingerly attempting to give form to life through art, a life that has taken a terrifying turn. Several essays address the political upheavals of the last decade. But the controversial views presented are not from the authoritarian voice of the author. Echoing the philosophical skepticism of Montaigne's motto, "What do I know?," the essays speak from outside the authoritative realm of universal reason. In the postcolonial vocabulary, this is also the realm of the subaltern: Gyan Prakash states, "In dominant discourses the subaltern appears as a figure that resides outside authorized categories, signifying a pure externality beyond the realm of reason."⁵¹ The essay, as a pure externality to the Western project of universal reason, embodies the irruptive force of subaltern singularity. From a marginal place, the essays, in DOBY, attempt to give form to life itself, a form that does not "capture" life in an image of thought, but mirrors the open-ended futurity of lived experience. In this they echo the Lukácsian function of the essayist; they address themselves to an ethics yet to come.

From this marginal position the ambulatory and fragmentary essays in Coetzee's DOBY interrupt the *doxa*, the established forms of thought and collective life. They revolt against, what Said calls, "piety, heedlessness or routine."⁵² Obaldia argues that the Montaignian essayistic spirit symbolizes a revolt against *doxa* (a term popularized by

Barthes). Montaigne's indeterminate essays examine and question the embodiment of Universal Truth in the classical texts, which his contemporaries, in keeping with the Renaissance orthodoxy of imitating the ancients, mostly conserved and preserved: "The *Essais*'s confrontation with the authority or 'truth' of tradition is intimately linked to the examination and subversion of given discursive structures or forms."⁵³ The digressive nature of Montaigne's essays deliberately upset the Renaissance stylistic practice of repeating past discourses in a rigid, codified order, thus destabilizing their claims to Universal Truth. Similarly J. C.'s ambulatory essays relentlessly question the *doxa* that has emerged and normalized around the world in the past decade. In all democratic societies, public opinion, expressing the tyranny of the majority, aided by mass media, conserves particular truths as the Universal Truth. In a Montaignian spirit, numerous essayistic units criticize the emerging established forms of thought since the onset of the global imperialist "war on terror" regarding torture, security state, terrorism, military humanism, human rights, spread of democracy, etc.

Since the tragic events of 9/11 and the imperialist interventionist retaliation by the U.S. government in Iraq and Afghanistan in response to the attack on the domestic soil, the world has witnessed the creation of extra-legal prison camps such as Guantanamo Bay in Cuba and Bagram in Afghanistan to preemptively detain and torture terror suspects captured not only in countries U.S. is directly at war with, but anywhere across the globe.⁵⁴ It should be noted here that the simple dualism of yester years between the Western colonizer and the Oriental colonized is greatly troubled by the network of the "Coalition of the Willing." With the release of the photos of abuse taken at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, it was not only confirmed that the U.S. military systematically used torture against the detainees but there

also emerged a public debate over the legal status of such interrogation practices as waterboarding which the Bush administration and the mass media labeled as “enhanced interrogation techniques” and not torture.⁵⁵ Tracking the U.S. public opinion on the use of torture and what techniques constitute torture has not been easy. This recent study, “U.S. Public Opinion on Torture, 2001-2009,” assembles 30 surveys taken over the period of eight years and concludes that, “The mean over the eight-year period is 56.14% in opposition to the use of torture and just 39.43% in favor of the use of torture.”⁵⁶ But the authors Darius Rejali and Paul Gronke also admit that the opposition to torture declines towards the end of the decade due to several Pew polls that consistently show the U.S. public is more evenly divided over the use of torture: “Pew’s mean in opposition to torture is 50.56% and the mean in favor is 45.78%, a much smaller number opposed than the 56.14% opposed in the mean of all the polls.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, the study also compares U.S. public opinion polls to global public opinion polls with the U.S. ranking 23rd in a sample of 31 countries in favor of torture: “The average level of support for torture across all of these cases is 31%; the average support for torture among Americans in these polls is 38%.”⁵⁸ South Korea (51.6%) and India (50.1%) are the only two countries in the survey with outright majority in favor of torture. Domestic terrorism does not fully explain the support of torture in such democratic states as South Korea, India, and U.S. Countries like Israel and Spain, despite facing terror attacks at home in the past decade, have less than 20% of the population who support torture. With public opinion on torture so evenly divided in large democracies like U.S. and India, which have systematically used torture against terror suspects, the specter of torturing democracy haunts our globe.⁵⁹

In the essay “On Machiavelli,” Coetzee’s J. C. confronts the specter of torturing democracy. Describing the public opinion on the use of torture in another democracy, Australia, J. C. bemoans:

On talkback radio ordinary members of the public have been calling in to say that, while they concede that torture is in general a bad thing, it may nonetheless sometimes be necessary. Some even advance the proposition that we may have to do evil for the sake of a greater good. In general they are scornful of absolutist opponents of torture: such people, they say, do not have their feet on the ground, do not live in the real world.⁶⁰

Rather than comprehending this para-doxical set of values upheld by the public in an advanced democracy in terms of the failure of the civil society in the era of globalization, J. C. refers to the persistence of the ancient Machiavellian principle that the prince’s necessity for self-preservation trumps morality. He states, “The new, Machiavellian position is that infringing the moral law is justified when it is necessary.”⁶¹ The modern state coheres the contradictory positions of absolute and relative standards of value, deeming torture constitutionally illegal but necessary for its existence. Machiavellian *virtù*, not implying moral goodness but power, is the basis of the monarchical and democratic states. If the mantra of monarchy is necessity trumps morality, then the mantra of democracy is security trumps liberty, which in the post-9/11 *doxa* of end justifies means has normalized torture. In contrast to the universal assumption that a torturing democracy is a para-doxa, Darius Rejali’s book, Torture and Democracy, extensively documents the fact that throughout history democracies never abandoned torture but adapted pre-modern torture techniques for our modern times. Doing comparative analysis of modern torture techniques used by the

totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, Stalin's Russia and the apartheid state, and the democratic regimes such as American imperialist invasion of Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, Rejali maintains that modern interrogators preferred techniques that inflicted pain sans scars. Additionally, more so in democracies rather than autocratic regimes, under the watchful gaze of civil societies and the international human rights observers, torture becomes increasingly stealth, invisible and scarless: "Usually, whenever we see these clean techniques in the twentieth century, typically they are in the context of intensive public monitoring—either by churches, the press, politicians, the public or international organizations. And that is why clean coercive techniques typically show up in democratic states. When we watch interrogators, interrogators get sneaky."⁶² J. C.'s criticism of a torturing democracy goes much further than Rejali's suggestion that democracies employ stealth torture. For Coetzee's J. C. both pre-modern and modern states not only torture but also make it a necessary condition for the survival of the state. The law of necessity legitimates the use of torture by an exemplary democracy like U. S. in its global neo-imperialist "war on terror." In a democracy, the constituent power of the people as the original, revolutionary force is the paradoxical power to create *ex nihilo* new constitutional norms, that is, constituted power, which is an imperative act for every new nation. The constituent power organizes law from a pre-legal realm.⁶³ The threat of the constituent power of the people not only has the potential to give birth to a democracy but also has the capacity to keep it democratic. Ironically, the Machiavellian necessity is based on a similar paradoxical principle. The necessity for survival of the democratic state cannot be contained within the established constituted power of the nation, that is, within the checks and balances of the constitution. Both the revolutionary innovation of the constituent power and

the necessity of self-preservation of the constituted power are based on the contrary principle of creation and preservation of the law from an extra-legal realm. Torture, although constitutionally illegal, so the argument goes, is necessary for the self-preservation of the state. Criticizing liberal intellectual's habituated response to public wisdom as illogically inhabiting contradictory sets of values, Coetzee's J. C. proposes a counter-attack to the *para-doxa*: "Ordinary life is full of contradictions; ordinary people are used to accommodating them. Rather, you must attack the metaphysical, supra-empirical status of *necessità* and show that to be fraudulent."⁶⁴ What liberal intellectuals need to attack is the extra-legal, metaphysical character of necessity, which paradoxically preserves but cannot be contained within the limits of constitutional democracy. Instead, they lament about the stupidity of the masses for unquestioningly upholding contrary principles. Or worse still, liberal intellectuals, in their discomfort with incoherent contradictions, propose a new *doxa*, a new centered structure that is contradictorily coherent. As Jacques Derrida once famously said, all centered structures exhibit contradictorily coherent logic that suppress a desire, which is a desire to arrest free play and movement.⁶⁵

In one notable response to formulate a new *doxa*, a new centered structure that will coalesce the contradictory terms democracy and torture, a liberal intellectual, Alan Dershowitz, who is a law professor at Harvard Law School, in his article "Want to Torture? Get a Warrant," suggests that American democracy learn lessons from Israeli democracy, being the only kind that has employed torture within the realms of law in "ticking bomb" cases. For Dershowitz the necessity of self-preservation necessitates legalizing exceptional acts. He states, "The Israeli Supreme Court left open the possibility, however, that in an actual "ticking bomb" case —a situation in which a terrorist refused to divulge information

necessary to defuse a bomb that was about to kill hundreds of innocent civilians—an agent who employed physical pressure could defend himself against criminal charges by invoking ‘the law of necessity.’”⁶⁶ He goes on to recommend that in “ticking bomb” scenarios the American Supreme Court should allow torture but only with a warrant: “Under my proposal, no torture would be permitted without a “torture warrant” being issued by a judge.”⁶⁷ When Coetzee’s J. C. warns against the all-powerful status of the law of necessity, his critique is directed not only at the general public but also at liberal intellectuals like Dershowitz, for whom the law of necessity legitimates the unconstitutional violence of torture. If the general public, in its naiveté, inhabits contradictions of torture and democracy, the liberal intellectual is able to propose a new *doxa*, rationalizing and synthesizing the contrary forces. For him, torture, which nevertheless occurs in democracies but remains invisible, can be disciplined by the watchful gaze of the law. If, in the Machiavellian scenario, the law of necessity trumps morality, in Dershowitz’s rationalizing desire it clears the air of moral dilemma, as in legalizing torture not only the wrong has been righted but also the ethical and political status of torture as the para-doxa of the foundational, humanizing principles of democracy has been appropriated into the realm of the *doxa*.

Walter Benjamin, in his essay “On Violence,” suggests that violence has both a law-making and a law-preserving function: “All violence as a means is either lawmaking or law-preserving. If it lays claim to neither of these predicates, it forfeits all validity.”⁶⁸ Law-making violence is the foundational violence that establishes and posits a new law; law-preserving violence conserves, maintains and enforces the law, relying for its preservation on the representation of the foundational violence. In other words, the constituent power is the law-making power of revolutionary violence. And the constituted power is the law-

preserving power that demands submission to the established law through the threat of legitimate violence. Within this Benjaminian framework, how do we understand the violence of torture? More specifically, how do we understand the use of torture by a democratic state in the context of the imperialist “war on terror”? Is it law-making or law-preserving violence? Is it legitimate or illegitimate violence? Before the onset of democracy that resulted in the reformation of penal punishment and the disappearance of the spectacle of torture, in the *ancien régime*, Michel Foucault has argued that torture, rather than being an arbitrary exercise of power over the body of the condemned, was a carefully regulated affair, following precise legal doctrines and rituals. He asserts, “Torture was a strict judicial game. And, as such, it was linked to the old tests or trials—ordeals, judicial duels, judgements of God—that were practiced in accusatory procedures long before the techniques of the Inquisition.”⁶⁹ In other words, torture had a law-preserving function. But in the era of liberal democracy, the violence of torture suspends both the law-making and the law-preserving function. It is a pure form of violence in the state of nature. Torture is an exceptional case of violence, outsourced to exceptional, extra-legal spaces. The argument goes that it is a just means, albeit an exceptional one when used by a democratic state, for just ends. Thus, according to the Australian public opinion described by J. C. and the U. S. and World public opinion described by Rejali and Gronke, torturing a single “unlawful enemy combatant” to save the lives of many is considered a lesser evil.⁷⁰ Thus it loses all claims to validity. Torture, despite (and because of) its stealth use by democracies, is anathema to the ontological existence of a democracy. Hence, although the use of torture by governments and its relatively broad support by their citizens is justified as necessary for the preservation of the state, unlike the law-preserving violence, it can never be publicly

accepted as legitimate violence without threatening the foundational act of a democracy: its constitution. Nor does it share a noble character with the revolutionary innovation of the violence of law-making, although both reside in the extra-legal realm. That is, torture does not create the conditions for constituting a new law. In pointing out the relation between violence and law what Benjamin is emphasizing is that in law there is justification of violence. But in the case of torture, a supremely illegal act in a democratic state, there can be no legal justification of its violence. Torture is neither law-making nor law-preserving. In Benjamin, violence that possesses the function either of law-making or law-preserving, is termed “mythic violence.” Violence that lacks either of these functions is termed “divine violence.” Differentiating divine violence from mythic violence, Benjamin states, “This very task of destruction poses again, in the last resort, the question of a pure immediate violence that might be able to call a halt to mythical violence. Just as in all spheres God opposes myth, mythical violence is confronted by the divine. . . . If mythical violence is lawmaking, divine violence is law-destroying.”⁷¹ Unlike the juridical violence of both natural and positive law, divine violence is pure violence; it is a means without ends, without a legal justification. For Benjamin, in its law-destroying capacity, divine violence has an expiatory character: “But in annihilating it also expiates, and a deep connection between the lack of bloodshed and the expiatory character of this violence is unmistakable.”⁷² The dissolution of legal violence is the dissolution of bare life. In his concept of divine violence, Benjamin severs anomie (lawlessness) from law. Extending Benjamin’s concept of divine violence, Giorgio Agamben calls for the sundering of law and life for an immanent political action: “The only true political action [is] . . . that which severs the nexus between law and violence.”⁷³ But is it not the case that torture in

democracy has the character of divine violence?⁷⁴ As I have been arguing, in the violence of torture within a democracy the nexus between law and violence is severed. It is pure means whose ends cannot be justified as law-preserving. It exists in a pure state of anomie. It is neither law-making nor law-preserving. In the use of torture in the imperialist “war on terror,” the Machiavellian law of necessity has been severed from law and morality. All attempts to justify the violence of torture either as a suspension of the law in order to preserve it (public opinion) or as a new exceptional act legalized only in “ticking bomb” scenarios (Dershowitz) results in dissolution of the democratic state.

In order to preserve its democratic institutions from the anomie of torture, the American government outsources torture, carrying it out outside the borders of its nation-state, in states of exception such as Guantanamo and Bagram. In numerous essays, the character-author J. C., who, like the author Coetzee, emigrated from South Africa, compares the torture employed by the U. S. imperialist regime (an exemplary democracy) to the apartheid state (an autocratic regime) that systematically used torture, especially against black anti-apartheid activists. In the essay, “On the hurly-burly of politics,” reporting on a lecture he delivered at the National Library in Canberra on the pending security legislation in Australia, J. C. describes ways in which the apartheid state anticipates the security state inaugurated by the global imperialist “war on terror”: “I went on to mention . . . that any journalist who reported such a disappearance might be arrested and charged with endangering the security of the state. ‘All of this and much more, in apartheid South Africa,’ I concluded, ‘was done in the name of a struggle against terror. I used to think that the people who created these laws that effectively suspended the rule of law were moral barbarians. Now I know they were just pioneers, ahead of their time.’”⁷⁵ While J. C. is

right that there are several similarities in the two regimes, especially in the profiling of certain ethnic and racial groups, in the creation of the security state and in the use of torture to preserve the state, the fundamental difference between the two regimes is the conundrum that a torturing democracy faces (which a totalitarian regime like apartheid did not face), of the destruction of its foundational act that is the constitution, that forces it to outsource torture to extra-legal spaces. Torture is law-destroying, as its existence destroys the very idea of a constitutional democracy. Evidence gathered through torture would be impermissible within U. S. civil and criminal courts. Torture, today, is the most secretive of state activities, whose very existence is either denied or redefined as “enhanced interrogation techniques,” and when its use is revealed, as in the Abu Ghraib photos, it is generally claimed to be the unauthorized trespassing of a “few bad apples.” It is interesting to note here that, although in Coetzee’s J. C.’s account the Australian public believes that torture, otherwise evil, is necessary in exceptional cases, there is no official account arguing in favor of torture in exceptional cases. It is an exception to the state of exception. Even though several journalists and pundits claimed that the Former Vice President Dick Cheney finally admitted to supporting torture in exceptional cases, Cheney himself never used the word torture, which he declared to be evil, but claimed to order the use of “harsh interrogation techniques” against terror suspects, for which he expressed “no regrets.”⁷⁶ Although the existence of torture is an open secret, no official has been prosecuted till date given the claim, reiterated by several liberal media outlets, that the illegal acts never occurred, or in the case of Abu Ghraib were never sanctioned by the state. Like the enemy which is stateless (Al-Qaeda), the illegal violence of torture is stateless too.

Thus, to return to J. C.'s suggestion that the intellectuals should "attack the metaphysical, supra-empirical status of *necessità* and show that to be fraudulent," what he is pointing to is that in the lawlessness of torture, the Machiavellian principle of necessity for self-preservation has been severed from morality and law.⁷⁷ Instead, the law of necessity, that subverts civil liberties in the name of security normalizing torture in democracies, exhibits a God-like metaphysical and supra-empirical nature that is invisible and unverifiable. If in Benjamin the necessity of self-preservation is reified in the law-preserving strategies of administrative violence, in the imperialist "war on terror" the necessity of self-preservation of liberal democracies is reified in the utter lawlessness of the violence of torture. In both the law-making and the law-preserving functions, violence is verifiable in law. But in the anomie of the unconstitutional torture, violence is unverifiable and invisible, totally severed from law and morality. In the global "war on terror," the law of necessity has a deeply religious character. The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a global resurgence of religion in international politics that is far more dynamic and complex than the vulgar term "clash of civilizations" suggests. In his infamous book, Clash of Civilizations: Remaking of the World Order, that greatly influenced the Bush administration's framing of the "war on terror" in binary terms of West vs. Islam, Samuel Huntington declares that post-Cold War global political conflict will be fought along cultural and religious fault lines, rather than ideological or economic ones: "Cultural communities are replacing Cold War blocs, and the fault lines between civilizations are becoming the central lines of conflict in global politics."⁷⁸ This myopic view of civilizations as monolithic, warring entities cordoned off from each other and in perpetual struggle for dominance, Said, correctly calls as "the clash of ignorance."⁷⁹ In emphasizing

the metaphysical and religious characteristics of the law of necessity, Coetzee's J. C. is highlighting the return of the religious in geopolitics, which the secular forces of modernity were to have summarily defeated. In response to J. C. one may ask, how should the intellectuals attack the law of necessity? How should they retaliate against its religious and metaphysical nature? Should they attack the necessity of necessity through art or criticism or both? Should they attack it through the form of the novel or of the essay? In Coetzee's DOBY, J. C. grapples with these questions in his digressive essays throughout the novel.

In the essays in DOBY, I suggest Coetzee attacks the law of necessity through the Saidian concept of "secular criticism." Such a criticism, as Aamir Mufti has argued, is more important for Said than the term postcolonial criticism in addressing the minority question.⁸⁰ For Said, "secular criticism" is a type of criticism that is anathema to a *doxa*, is neither a political nor a religious position among warring positions, is impatient of the statist law of necessity, and is irruptive of the imperialist character of totalizing concepts. For Said the ironic, ambulatory, minor, and worldly form of the essay is the principle way in which to perform such a mode of criticism. In the introduction, titled "Secular Criticism," to his hugely influential collection of essays, The World, the Text and the Critic, Said states, "For if I am to be taken seriously as saying that secular criticism deals with local and worldly situations, and that it is constitutively opposed to the production of massive, hermetic systems, then it must follow that the essay—a comparatively short, investigative, radically skeptical form—is the principal way in which to write criticism."⁸¹ Said's view of the essay form is Lukácsian: "I prefer . . . [Lukács], for as Lukács develops it the critic's position is a vulnerable one because he awaits and prepares for a great aesthetic revolution whose result, ironically enough, will render him marginal."⁸² And Lukács' project is Montaignian. In his

emphasis that criticism is art and not science, Lukács echoes the literariness of Montaigne's essays rather than the scientificity of Bacon's essays. In echo of Said, the character-author J. C. (and Coetzee) does the work of criticism in the formless form of the essay. The essays do their work in the present and are deeply committed to their own times. Moreover, they confront and interrupt the *doxa* that has emerged in the past decade concerning torture, terrorism, and the security state. In DOBY, the incomplete and inaugural form of the essay is the primary antidote to the all-powerful law of necessity that has legitimated torture within constitutional democracy. In the novel, criticism is not *parergon* to fiction and life, but, à la Lukács, is precursive, standing *before* art and life, longing for experience and judgment that is yet to come. In this novel, Coetzee's J. C.'s essays work within the Montaignian tradition, alongside such august figures and readers of that tradition, Lukács and Said.

Given the public support of torture in several democratic countries, Coetzee's character-author J. C., in the essay "On Guantanamo Bay," meditates if art can change minds and hearts. In the concluding paragraph, he declares that a ballet titled "Guantanamo, Guantanamo!" depicting the torture of the detainees will fail to change the disinterested general public: "One day it will be done, though not by me. It may even be a hit in London and Berlin and New York. It will have absolutely no effect on the people it targets, who could not care less what ballet audiences think of them."⁸³ In a world dominated by electronic media, the traditional arts are increasingly losing their political and social function. Despite the fact that the arts are in their autumn years, in DOBY *poiesis* still has the power to resist arrestation of signification in a universal signified. In the essay, "On terrorism," J. C. ridicules the assumption of a surveillance state that all private individual

secrets are bytes of information. What data mining fails to see is the poetic capacity for free play of signifiers that infinitely defers access to the soul of the individual: “The masters of information have forgotten about poetry, where words may have a meaning quite different from what the lexicon says, where the metaphoric spark is always one jump ahead of the decoding function, where another, unforeseen reading is always possible.”⁸⁴ Both the masters of information and masters of torture fail to grasp this function of *poiesis*. In this essay there are echoes to an earlier novel of Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians, a paean to the *poietic potentia* of a human for infinite invention. In my reading of the allegorical novel in the first chapter, I show that the liberal magistrate fails to translate the tortured gendered subaltern’s body into the master codes of the Empire. Learning from his failure, he mocks the assumptions of the torturers that they can hack their way to the transcendental signified through pain: “But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. For the first time I feel a dry pity for them [torturers]: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other.”⁸⁵

Throughout his writing career, Coetzee, through the dominant genre of the novel, has disrupted the metanarratives of apartheid and Empire that violently reinscribed the body of the subaltern into the law of the master. Towards the autumn years of his life, Coetzee employs the formless form of the essay to critically think against the new, ascendant Empire and its regime of torture. Although the essays are embedded in the novel, which is what holds them together, it is in the form of the essay that Coetzee performs the Saidian secular criticism. The paratactic, ambulatory, and skeptical form of the essay is central to such a performance. Toiling within this illustrious tradition, the essays address the central

problematic of our times: the law of necessity legitimating the lawlessness of torture within constitutional democracy in the global imperialist “war on terror.” It is in the formless form of the essay, that is *necessarily* incomplete and inaugural, that the character-author (and Coetzee) places himself to do the work of criticism. Moreover, the incomplete, ironic form of the essay is the primary antidote to the all-powerful law of necessity. The essays do their work in the present and are deeply committed to their own times. The form of the essay and the work it makes possible disrupts the *doxa*. Working with a marginal form, Coetzee’s J. C. confronts the margins of history, those victims of the torture chambers. The absent presence of these subaltern figures call into question the *doxa*.⁸⁶

Moreover, Said asserts that the critic doing the work of criticism within the form of the essay inaugurates an aesthetic revolution that will render him/her marginal. The marginality of the critic is the result not only of the revolution yet to come but also of the form itself, that exists in marginal relation to the dominant genres. DOBY stages the becoming-marginal of the author figure. The becoming-marginal is occasioned both by the essay form and the tripartite division of each page that interrupts the character-author J. C.’s (and Coetzee’s) unified and continuous authorial authority. In the subaltern form of the essay, the aging liberal humanist is not only struggling to address grave world-historical problems, but in the second section of each page of the novel we also witness the fragility of his aging body and the enervation of his soul in face of lust for Anya. Meditating on authority in the essay “On authority in fiction,” J. C. asserts, “In the novel, the voice that speaks the first sentence, then the second, and so onward . . . has to begin with, no authority at all. Authority must be earned; on the novelist author lies the onus to build up, out of nothing, such authority.”⁸⁷ In the novel, the character-author (and Coetzee) struggle to earn

authority but each novelistic page remains discontinuous till the end. The form of the essay is anathema to the Machiavellian law of necessity and to the formation of a continuous authorial identity and authority.

Paul A. Bové notes that Said's reformulation of Lukács' thinking "reflects his own desire to mark the essayist's inscription within the distributed process of historical human formation. While there are many possible sources for this element in Said's thinking, including his identification with the Palestinian struggle, an intellectual source very well might be Adams' thinking about American democracy as Blackmur represent it."⁸⁸ Bové's astute turn to Adams' views on democracy, as a possible intellectual source for Said, is useful for engaging with DOBY, which confronts the historical problem of torturing democracy and meditates extensively on the possible futures of constitutional democracy. During the past decade, the hegemony of military humanism has justified perpetual war, torture, and preventive detention in the name of humanitarian intervention and the spread of democracy. If in the nineteenth-century, no decent liberal human being could be against the noble and humanizing impulse of the civilizing mission, in the twenty-first century no such human being can be against the humanitarian impulse of the democratizing mission. Elaborating on the origin of democracy, in the essay "On the Origins of the State," J. C. points to the irony of Western neo-imperialist ambitions of spreading democracy and freedom in the world:

"Spreading democracy," as is now being done by the United States in the Middle East, means spreading the rules of democracy. It means telling people that whereas formerly they had no choice, now they have a choice. Formerly they had A and nothing but A; now they have a choice between A and B. "Spreading freedom"

means creating the conditions for people to choose freely between A and B. . . . The people engaged in spreading freedom and democracy see no irony in the description of the process just given.⁸⁹

Graham Greene, in his trenchant criticism of the American intervention in Vietnam, in the novel The Quiet American, famously called this humanitarian impulse to spread democracy and freedom, the Empire of “good intentions.”⁹⁰ Adams, in his novel, Democracy, mocks the post-Civil war corruption of the constituted power of American democracy that has lost the revolutionary force of the constituent power of its foundational document that was its 1787 constitution. But he, like his character, Nathan Gore, a diplomat and historian, commonly read as expressing Adams’ views on democracy, believed in the experiment that is a democracy, flawed and yet to come. Gore, in speaking to Mrs Lee, asserts, “I believe in democracy. I accept it . . . I grant it is an experiment, but it is the only direction society can take that is worth its taking.”⁹¹ Quoting Gore’s lines, Bové notes, “For Adams, democracy is an essay that masses and critics together might achieve.”⁹² Writing in the context of the “war on terror” that has normalized torture within a constitutional democracy, Coetzee’s J. C. may not be so assertively hopeful about democracy as Nathan Gore, but, in a somewhat similar vein, sees a danger in embodying a supra-political position that is outside of democracy to critically engage with it. Immediately after the lines on the spreading of democracy quoted above, J. C. queries, “Why is it so hard to say anything about politics from outside politics?” In response to his own question, he states, “To strive for a systematic, supra-political discourse about politics is futile.”⁹³ The danger of the Machiavellian principle of necessity is that it functions outside the mess of the political

process, inhabiting a metaphysical realm beyond the reach of politics and history. This supra-political discourse necessitates torture.

A secular criticism of democracy is possible and desirable only from *within* and not without it. The essays in Coetzee's novel present a secular criticism of democracy from within the experiment that is a democracy. The form of the essay, which Coetzee deliberately employs, is central to that criticism. It is also true that democracy, unlike other forms of government, provides such a *space* for criticism. In this precise sense, democracy embodies the essayistic spirit. The form of the essay holds in *potentia* the power to democratize democracy itself.

Notes

¹ Michel de Montaigne, The Complete Essays, trans. M. A. Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 591. The line is translated as “What do I know?”

² J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians (New York: Penguin Books, 1999) 5.

³ Henry Adams, Democracy: An American Novel (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, Inc., 1952) 53.

⁴ J. M. Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year (New York: Penguin Books, 2007). Hereafter shortened to DOBY.

⁵ See Noam Chomsky, The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2002). In this book, Chomsky famously talks about how the use of force by Western powers in the name of humanitarian intervention is increasingly becoming the norm.

⁶ Kathryn Harrison, “Strong Opinions,” New York Times Book Review 30 Dec 2007, 8 March 2013. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/12/30/books/review/Harrison-t.html?ref=jmcoetzee>>.

⁷ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 47.

⁸ Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” Language, Counter-Memory, Practice, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1977) 129.

⁹ Harrison, “Strong Opinions.”

¹⁰ See “J. M. Coetzee,” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 28 Aug 2011, 28 Aug 2011 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._M._Coetzee>.

¹¹ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 231.

¹² Montaigne, The Complete Essays lix.

¹³ See György Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay,” Soul and Form, trans. Anna Bostock, ed. John T. Sanders & Katie Terezakis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). I will discuss Lukács’ essay in greater detail later.

¹⁴ See Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983).

¹⁵ See Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth, trans. Robert Hurley and others, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998) 276-80.

¹⁶ Virginia Woolf, "The Decay of Essay-Writing," The Essays of Virginia Woolf, vol. 1 1904-1912, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1986) 25.

¹⁷ Virginia Woolf, "The Elizabethan Lumber Room," The Common Reader: First Series, ed. Andrew McNeillie (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) 41.

¹⁸ See Virginia Woolf, "Montaigne," The Common Reader: First Series, ed. Andrew McNeillie (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984) 58-68.

¹⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 81.

²⁰ Lyotard, The Postmodern Condition 81.

²¹ See Jacob Zeitlin, "The Development of Bacon's Essays—with special reference to the question of Montaigne's influence upon them," Journal of English and Germanic Philology 27 (1928): 446-519.

²² Mary Augusta Scott, Ed., introduction, The Essays of Francis Bacon by Francis Bacon (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908) lxi.

²³ See John J Miller, "'Pruning by Study': Self-Cultivation in Bacon's *Essays*," Papers on Language and Literature: A Journal for Scholars and Critics of Language and Literature 31.4 (1995): 339-61.

²⁴ See Francis Bacon, New Atlantis; The Wisdom of the Ancients; The History of King Henry VII, and; Historical Sketches (London: Ward, Lock, & Co., 1890).

²⁵ Montaigne, The Complete Essays 591.

²⁶ See Michel Foucault, The Care of the Self: The History of Sexuality, vol. 3, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1988).

²⁷ Elena Gualtieri, “The Essay as Form: Virginia Woolf and the Literary Tradition” Textual Practice 12.1 (1998): 49.

²⁸ Gualtieri, “The Essay as Form: Virginia Woolf and the Literary Tradition” 49-50.

²⁹ Roland Barthes, “Inaugural Lecture, College de France,” A Roland Barthes Reader, trans. Richard Howard, ed. Susan Sontag (London: Vintage, 1993) 457.

³⁰ Réda Bensmaïa, The Barthes Effect: the essay as reflective text, trans. Pat Fedkiew (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987) xxviii.

³¹ Bensmaïa, The Barthes Effect: the essay as reflective text xxix-xxx.

³² Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 16.

³³ Judith Butler, introduction, Soul and Form, by György Lukács, trans. Anna Bostock, ed. John T. Sanders & Katie Terezakis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) 4.

³⁴ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 17.

³⁵ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 18.

³⁶ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 18.

³⁷ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 18.

³⁸ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 23.

³⁹ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 24.

⁴⁰ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 17.

⁴¹ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 22.

⁴² Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 32.

⁴³ Franz Kafka, “Before the Law,” The Penal Colony: Stories and Short Pieces, trans. Willa and Edwin Muir (New York: Schocken, 1974) 150.

⁴⁴ Edward Said, “The Text, the World and the Critic,” The Bulletin of the Midwest Language Association 8.2 (1975): 21.

⁴⁵ J. M. Coetzee, White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 11.

⁴⁶ Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994) 92.

⁴⁷ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois, 1988) 271-313. In her famous question, Spivak poses a similar problem differently. Her response declaring that a subaltern cannot speak rhetorically marks a place of aporia within dominant discourses. I am in agreement with Spivak.

⁴⁸ I am aware of the long debate concerning mathematics, whether it is a science or a system of logic, which makes it closer to philosophy. But such debates are beyond my expertise and the scope of this paper, which in somewhat crude way understands mathematics as a science.

⁴⁹ Claire de Obaldia, The Essayistic Spirit: Literature, Modern Criticism and the Essay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) 4.

⁵⁰ Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” 32.

⁵¹ Gyan Prakash, “The Impossibility of Subaltern History” Nepantla: Views from South 1.2 (2000): 287.

⁵² Said, “The Text, the World and the Critic” 22.

⁵³ Obaldia, The Essayistic Spirit 67.

⁵⁴ The “Coalition of the Willing” constituted of forty eight nations, who formed a multinational force directly or indirectly aiding in the military occupation of Iraq. For a list of nations that deployed troops in Iraq see “Multi-National Force- Iraq” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 8 Aug 2011, 8 March 2013. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Multi-National_Force_-_Iraq>.

⁵⁵ The brilliant American lawyer, columnist and blogger for Salon, Glenn Greenwald, has relentlessly documented and attacked the word games played by the Bush administration and the mass media in the use of the term torture. In one such blog entry, “Bill Keller’s self-defense on ‘torture,’” Greenwald shows how the executive editor of New

York Times, Bill Keller, in response to a Harvard study, “Torture at Times: Waterboarding in the Media,” which documents how the newspapers labeled waterboarding as torture for 100 years before the Bush administration officials muddied the waters, acts as mouthpiece for the government propaganda by claiming there has always been a “debate” whether waterboarding is torture. See Glenn Greenwald, “Bill Keller’s self-defense on ‘torture,’” Salon 3 July 2010, 8 March 2013 <http://www.salon.com/news/opinion/glenn_greenwald/2010/07/03/keller>. For the Harvard Kennedy School study see Neal Desai, Andre Pineda, Majken Runquist and Mark Fusunyan, “Torture at Times: Waterboarding in the Media,” Harvard Student Paper, April 2010, 8 March 2013 <<http://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4420886>>.

⁵⁶ Darius Rejali and Paul Gronke, “U.S. Public Opinion on Torture, 2001-2009,” Paper, 2 May 2009, 29 Aug 2011 <<http://cforjustice.org/wpcontent/uploads/2010/01/TortureWhitePaperV2.pdf>>. I have not provided page numbers because the report does not include them.

⁵⁷ Rejali and Gronke, “U.S. Public Opinion on Torture, 2001-2009.”

⁵⁸ Rejali and Gronke, “U.S. Public Opinion on Torture, 2001-2009.”

⁵⁹ Leaked Wikileaks cables have shown that the Indian police and security forces have routinely used torture against detainees in Kashmir and elsewhere to gather evidence from terror suspects, which is then used by the courts to prosecute them. See Jason Burke, “Wikileaks cables: India accused of systematic use of torture in Kashmir,” The Guardian 16 Dec 2010, 8 March 2013 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/16/wikileaks-cables-indian-torture-kashmir>>.

⁶⁰ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 17.

⁶¹ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 17.

⁶² Darius Rejali, Torture and Democracy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007) 9.

⁶³ See Antonio Negri, Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State, trans. Maurizio Boscagli (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009). In this book, Negri details the seminal conflict on which modern insurgencies are based, the conflict between the constituent power, the originary revolutionary force, and constituted power, the established constitution and government hierarchies.

⁶⁴ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 18.

⁶⁵ I am here referring to the most famous line in Derrida's lecture, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science," delivered at Johns Hopkins University in 1966, "And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire." The lecture is published in Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Science," Writing and Difference, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 279.

⁶⁶ Alan Dershowitz, "Want to Torture? Get a Warrant," San Francisco Chronicle 22 Jan 2002, 8 March 2013 <<http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/openforum/article/Want-to-torture-Get-a-warrant-2880547.php>>.

⁶⁷ Dershowitz, "Want to Torture? Get a Warrant."

⁶⁸ Walter Benjamin, "Critique of Violence," Reflections, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) 287.

⁶⁹ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1991) 40.

⁷⁰ The United States Military Commission's Act of 2006 distinguished between "lawful enemy combatants," defined as a member of the armed forces of a State at war with the U. S., and "unlawful enemy combatant," defined as a person who engages in hostilities against the U. S. According to the Act, an "unlawful enemy combatant" can only be tried by a military commission, rather than by a criminal court, suspending their constitutionally guaranteed habeas corpus rights. The act also makes it harder to prosecute officers who employ torture against the combatants. See "Military Commissions Act of 2006," Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 14 May 2011, 8 March 2013 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_Commissions_Act_of_2006>.

⁷¹ Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" 297.

⁷² Benjamin, "Critique of Violence" 297.

⁷³ Giorgio Agamben, State of Exception, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005) 88.

⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida is critical of Benjamin's idea of pure divine violence as bloodless but expiatory. For him, the Nazi "final solution" can be read as expiatory because bloodless: "When one thinks of the gas chambers and the cremation ovens, this allusion to an extermination that would be expiatory because bloodless must cause one to shudder" in

Derrida, "Force of Law: The 'Mystical Foundation of Authority,'" Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992) 62. I share Derrida's discomfort with the idea of pure violence but do not agree with his reading of it as possibly expiating the Nazi "final solution."

⁷⁵ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 171.

⁷⁶ "Dick Cheney has no regrets about waterboarding terror suspects," The Associated Press 25 Aug 2011, 8 March 2013 <http://www.syracuse.com/have-you-heard/index.ssf/2011/08/dick_cheney_has_no_regrets_abo.html>.

⁷⁷ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 18.

⁷⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (New York: A Touchstone Book, 1997) 125.

⁷⁹ See Edward W. Said, "The Clash of Ignorance," The Nation 22 Oct 2001, 8 March 2013 <<http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance>>.

⁸⁰ See Aamir Mufti, "Auerbach in Istanbul: Edward Said, Secular Criticism, and the Question of Minority Culture," Critical Inquiry 25.1 (1998): 95-125.

⁸¹ Edward Said, The World, the Text and the Critic (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1983) 26.

⁸² Said, "The Text, the World and the Critic" 21.

⁸³ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 37.

⁸⁴ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 23.

⁸⁵ J. M. Coetzee, Waiting for the Barbarians 42.

⁸⁶ Some have suggested that Anya, the Filipina secretary, is the subaltern figure in the novel. I find this reading not convincing. The figure of the subaltern is absent, though haunts the text and calls into question the emerging doxa that normalizes torture.

⁸⁷ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 149.

⁸⁸ Paul A. Bové, "Essaying the Form: Henry Adams and Democracy," Annals of Scholarship 17.1-2 (2007): 63.

⁸⁹ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 9.

⁹⁰ See Graham Greene, The Quiet American (New York: Random House, Inc., 2004)
213.

⁹¹ Adams, Democracy: An American Novel 53.

⁹² Bové, “Essaying the Form: Henry Adams and Democracy” 64.

⁹³ Coetzee, Diary of a Bad Year 9.

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