

**Banished, Disgraced yet Obstinate: the Politics of
Humiliation in J.M. Coetzee's Novels**

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Abstract

Ever since J.M. Coetzee won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003, numerous critical studies have been published, enriching the research previously in print. Although his work has been examined from various angles, a number of critics have approached his work strictly through postcolonial thought viewing him as a writer mainly concerned with South African issues. Though such a reading is partially correct, it stands to ignore a major aspect of his work, namely his concern with universal suffering and the inevitable humiliation of the human being. Furthermore, Coetzee's novels introduce the reader to a world perceived in terms of a Beckettian kind of minimalism, which, on the surface, may not be as severe as Beckett's own world. Several theorists have referred to the theme of human degradation in Coetzee's work but no detailed study has been made of this area of concern especially with respect to how pervasive it is across Coetzee's literary output to date. This study examines what the novels portray as the circumstances that contribute to the humiliation of the individual, namely the abuse of language, master and slave interplay, aging and senseless waiting and how these conditions, singularly or in unison can lead to the alienation and marginalization of the individual. I also demonstrate how the individual's world is punctuated by dwindling resources and fading hopes, with no prospect of improvement. I begin by exploring authoritarian language's use as a method of subjugation and torture, contributing to the shaming of the other. Secondly, I investigate the role language has played in relation to the Coetzeean female characters and how it with its patriarchal essence estranges, subjugates and degrades the female. I discuss the methodology of master/slave relationships and their consequences for both the Subject and Other. Here, I examine the cruelty and violence that are practised against the natives, the destruction of a land that is essentially foreign to the settler, and the stereotyping of the native into an inferior other. In addition, I examine how rape is used as a method of control and oppression. I then look at the role of old age in Coetzee's novels, its implications and the various ways the characters deal with their endings. Approaching the end, the Coetzeean character rummages through the remnants of an incomplete life. Initially inept in a world that has discarded them, old age becomes more difficult to endure, accentuating the characters' sense of alienation and humiliation. Finally, I examine the method with which the majority of Coetzee's characters continuously wait for an invisible saviour, a Godot-like figure, craving a form of salvation.

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I would also like to thank J.M. Coetzee for the time he generously gave me during his visit to Jordan.

Abbreviations

<i>AI</i>	<i>Age of Iron</i>
<i>D</i>	<i>Dusklands</i>
<i>Di</i>	<i>Disgrace</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons</i>
<i>F</i>	<i>Foe</i>
<i>IHT</i>	<i>In the Heart of the Country</i>
<i>LTMK</i>	<i>Life and Times of Michael K</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Slow Man</i>
<i>TMP</i>	<i>The Master of Petersburg</i>
<i>WFB</i>	<i>Waiting for the Barbarians</i>

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Illustration 1
Dwane Powell



Illustration 2
Glenn McCoy



JUST WATCH. THE PRESS IS GOING TO TRY TO PUT SOME NEGATIVE SPIN ON THIS!

2/13

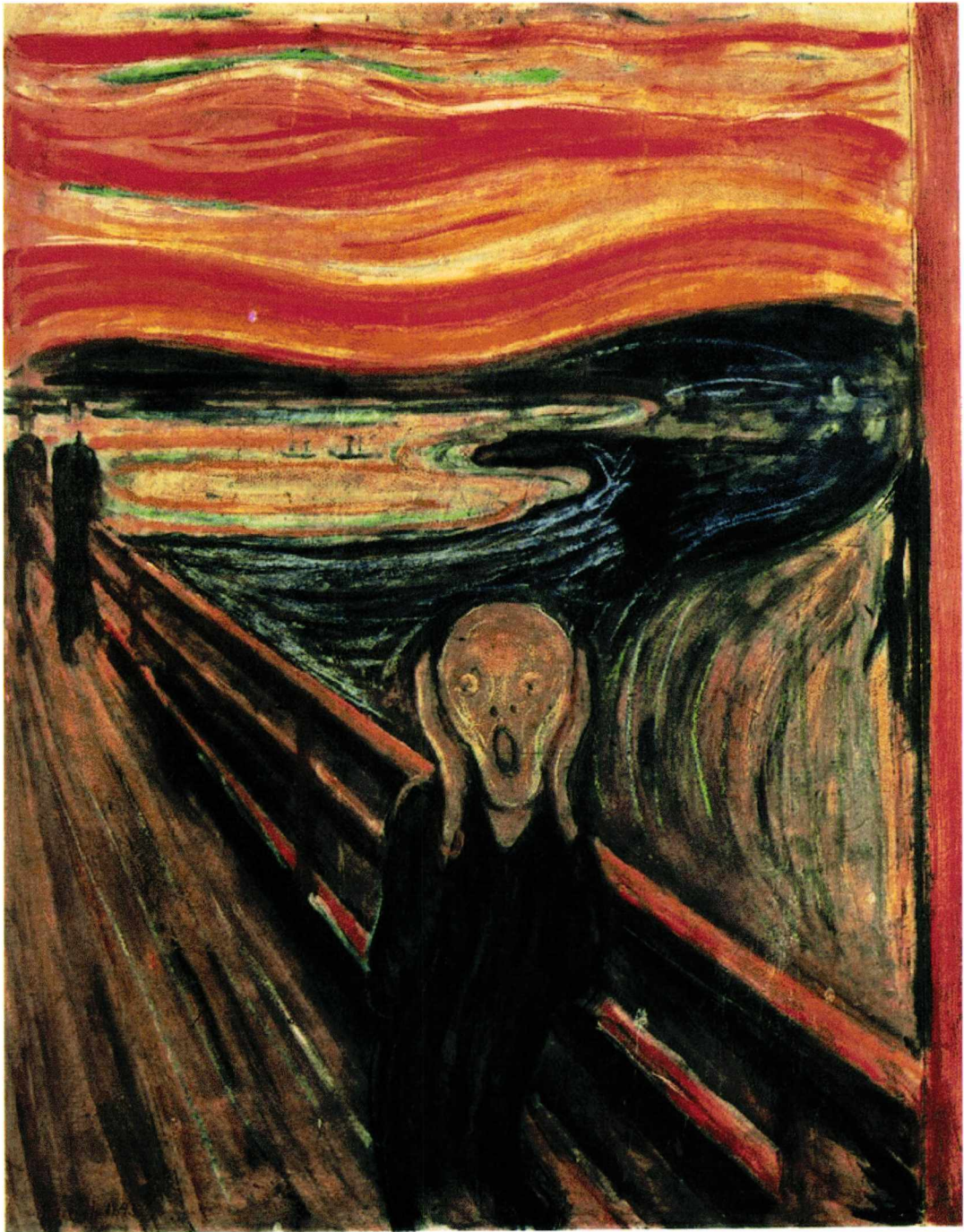
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INTRODUCTION

He has entered the zone of humiliation; it is his new home; he will never leave it; best to shut up, best to accept (*SM* 61).

I think 'humiliation' is a very different condition of mind from humility. 'Humiliation' no man can desire; it is shame and torture (Macdonald IIX).

The *OED* defines humiliation as the "action of humiliating or condition of being humiliated; humbling, abasement" (*OED*). To feel humiliated is to lose one's respect for oneself, to have one's pride injured by an agent that is external to oneself. Humiliation is a condition imposed on the human being, a condition that at once humbles and shames. It brings with it a feeling that one is no longer in control. Humiliation is the theme that stealthily haunts J.M. Coetzee's novels. In spite of the varied plots, periods, locales and nationalities of characters, it emerges to occupy centre stage. Although numerous studies have been published on Coetzee's work, the extent to which humiliation of the individual traverses his writings has not been researched in depth. This is what I propose to do in this work. In Coetzee's earlier novels, the individual's humiliation is primarily induced by a political situation or an external force generally larger than the person is, but in the later novels, the instigation becomes more personal, arising from a physical disability or the undesired process of ageing. In this thesis I examine the factors that I feel contribute to the humiliation of the individual: namely, language as the site of oppression, the female's relation to masculine language, the master and slave relationship, aspects of old age and the endless Godot-like wait for an eventuality that will never occur. I also argue how Coetzee's concern with the alienation and emptiness of the individual reveals an excruciating and overwhelming sense of shame. I discuss how the various themes of his novels contribute to this overall sense of desolation and hollowness. Nearly all his characters at some point in their lives describe themselves as being hollow to the core. The word "hollow" at once resonates with the opening stanza of T.S. Eliot's poem, "The Hollow Men" and the Beckettian characters' cries of being metaphorically hollow inside. A number of critics have written on

Coetzee's stripping down of his characters to the bare minimum, a Beckettian tradition where only words remain.

In his essay "Commitment," Theodor Adorno writes:

Beckett's *Ecce Homo* is what human beings have become. As though with eyes drained of tears, they stare silently out of his sentences [...] However, the minimal promise of happiness they contain, which refuses to be traded for comfort, cannot be had for a price less than total dislocation, to the point of wordlessness (Walder 111).

Adorno's pessimistic view of the human condition is akin to Samuel Beckett's. To both, a transition in life is "from the minimum to nothing at all" (Adorno *NL* 266). The same situation presents itself in Coetzee, but not initially. The characters progress towards the inevitable fact of "nothing to be done" (Beckett *WFG* 7). Coetzee's characters begin with more than their Beckettian counterparts do but as the novels unfold they are deprived of the little they once had. Michiel Heyns refers to this process as "an experiment in deprivation [and] how [...] people react when they have ever less and less" (63). Caroline Rooney remarks that there exists an "identification with a pervasive spiritlessness or deathliness in all things," while Harald Leusmann views Coetzee's "aesthetics of failure [as] almost [bordering] on the absolute" (2005, 433, Leusmann 63). Similarly, Judith Shulevitz writes:

A brutal, laconic writer working consciously in the tradition of Beckett and Kafka, Coetzee places his protagonists in opposition to an oppressive or anarchic state, then subjects them to the grimmest circumstances imaginable: starvation, imprisonment, homelessness, terminal illness, social disgrace, sexual slavery. He seems to need to strip away their dignity to find the core of stoic resistance that is their last hope for survival as sovereign beings rather than as automatons or beasts (Shulevitz <http://lnk.in/3wr4>).

Their resistance borders on failure. Humiliation and an impending sense of death accompany them making their lives akin to those of beasts. It is worth noting that Coetzee is an advocate of animal rights.¹ To be humiliated as a beast, to become-

animal, is to occupy the position that some humans have allocated to animals, an inferior position, inviting maltreatment. Coetzee aspires to a society in which human beings can “have a dignity that sets them apart from animals and consequently protects them from being treated like animals,” but his novels fail to provide any possibility of this happening (Coetzee *GO* 14). In addition, he looks forward to a time “when animals will have their own dignity ascribed to them, and the ban will be reformulated as a ban on treating a living creature like a thing” (Coetzee *GO* 14). This does not happen in his novels. As the matter stands, to become-animal is to be abused and humiliated.

Although echoes of existential and post-modern western writers reverberate in his novels, Coetzee has long posed a challenge to critics who could have been more comfortable if they would have been able to categorize him or to locate him in a certain tradition. Coetzee describes identity as having “become overwhelmingly a matter of group identification: of identifying with and/or being claimed by groups” (Coetzee 1986). From his novels, one senses a reluctance to be claimed by one group or another. However, a number of critics have tried to situate Coetzee purely in a South African context. This has resulted in various attacks on his work and his person, specifically for not having taken a clearer and allegedly more responsible position regarding the injustice that has long formed a part of the history of his country.² In his own discussion on the relation between the novel and history, Coetzee states:

I would like to talk about the novel and history in South Africa today; about what I see as a powerful, perhaps even dominant, tendency, to subsume the novel under history, to read novels as what I will loosely call imaginative investigations of real historical forces and circumstances; and to treat novels that do not perform this investigation as lacking in seriousness [...] It [the novel] cannot be both autonomous and supplementary. If the novel aims to provide the reader with the vicarious first-hand experience of living in a certain historical time, embodying contending forces in contending characters and filling our experience with density of observations, then for the rest (its principal structure, depending on the model of history), its relation to history is evidently a secondary relation (Coetzee 2003).

By simply narrating historical events, the novel's position is reduced to being a supplement of history and not an entity in its own terms. To be a mere reporter of events is something Coetzee has not chosen to be. Coetzee writes:

For the writer the deeper problem is not to allow himself to be impaled on the dilemma proposed by the state, namely, either to ignore its obscenities or else to produce representations of them. 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 (Coetzee 1986).

Coetzee has selected not to play by what others have expected of him and hence refrained from producing pure representations of the South African suffering. Likewise, Adorno is more partial towards autonomous art than committed art because according to him, “[c]ommitted works all too readily credit themselves with every noble value, and then manipulate them at their ease” (Walder 112). Committed art tends to dictate the stand that the reader has to take. Furthermore, it hypothesizes that change for the better is feasible. It creates a Manichean structure by assuming an authoritarian stand that claims to uphold the truth. In turn, this deprives the reader of independent thought, as a different view could be considered adversarial. By choosing autonomous over committed writing, Coetzee opens his novels to endless interpretations, giving them an existence beyond the boundary of one state or a single reading. An autonomous text opens the possibility of inexhaustible deductions rather than being merely didactic. Adorno stresses that autonomous literature, (and here he refers to Beckett and Kafka), “compels the change of attitude which committed works merely demand” (Walder 112). By making existence existence and not a concept of it, Coetzee as well as Beckett create characters that relentlessly expose what it is to be human (Adorno *NL* 246). In an interview with Tony Morphet, Coetzee emphasizes that he is reluctant to reproduce the real world. He says:

The geography is, I fear, less trustworthy than you imagine--not because I deliberately set about altering the reality of Sea Point or Prince Albert but because I don't have much interest in, or can't seriously engage myself

with, the kind of realism that takes pride in copying the "real" world (Coetzee 1983 & 1987, 454).

Coetzee is not trying to give us a replication of historical events. Instead, throughout his novels, he has essayed to provide his readers with a study of human suffering, regardless of the cause or the place. Yet, the debate and urge to place him persist.³ During an exclusive interview with David Attwell, Coetzee describes himself as follows:

Seen from the outside as an historical specimen, I am a late representative of the vast movement of European expansion that took place from the sixteenth century to the mid twentieth century of the Christian era [...]
I say that I represent this movement because my intellectual allegiances are clearly European, not African.
I am also a representative of the generation in South Africa for whom apartheid was created, the generation that was meant to benefit most from it (Interview 2003).

Coetzee has, occasionally, cited authors in the modernist and post-modernist tradition who have influenced his own work, such as Samuel Beckett, Franz Kafka, Rainer Maria Rilke, Ford Maddox Ford, to name but a few.⁴ On reading his work, one senses a continuation of this tradition; more specifically, one hears echoes of these writers as their words eerily haunt his novels. In his "Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech," Coetzee describes South African literature as "a literature in bondage" (Interview 2003).⁵ In his opinion, this element prevents it from developing into "fully human literature" due to its inability "to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them" (Interview 2003). For Coetzee, preoccupation with a specific political situation or historicity confines the literature. However, this confinement does not render it a literature of lesser importance.

Attwell addresses the literary critics' need to package and label the artist. He asserts that Coetzee's fiction "draws on the European heritage--in particular, on novelists of high modernism and early postmodernism," whilst at the same time, in spite of his efforts in his novels "to hold South Africa at arm's length,"

Coetzee cannot avoid an encounter with the South African situation (Attwell *JMCSAPW* 4, 3). South Africa is a locale, which is both absent and present in the Coetzeean novel. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which is set in a non-specific country and written in one of the bleakest moments in the history of South Africa, invokes an endroit at an edge of an unnamed empire, and a cruelty that cannot be affixed to a nationality. *Age of Iron*, on the other hand, is set in South Africa and recounts the suffering of a woman whose body is riddled with cancer, whilst witnessing the ravages of civil war. Whether his novels are specifically set in South Africa, another country, such as Australia, Vietnam or even in an undetermined place, and irrespective of the background and peculiarity of the character, they seem to be concerned with what it is to be human. This point is confirmed in one of his interviews in which he discusses his earlier novels. Coetzee states:

There is nothing about blackness or whiteness in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The Magistrate and the girl could as well be Russian and Kirghiz, or Han and Mongol, or Turk and Arab, or Arab and Berber. In *Foe*, Susan and Friday are "white" and "black." They are also "woman" and "man," "free" and "slave," "European" and "African." Which of these--what shall I call them?--identity pairs--is primary? Is blackness blankness? In itself the question seems meaningless to me. To decide that humanity falls "naturally" into three divisions, white, black, and yellow, or into two, men and women, means lapsing straight back into the Discourse of the Cape, or a version of it (Coetzee 1992, 424).

Coetzee is once again emphasizing his reluctance to fix characters into ethnic groups or into products of a specific historicity. Coetzee rejects the colonial discourse that creates black and white. He emphasizes that "black is black as long as the white constructs himself as white" (Coetzee 1992, 425). Skin colour is rarely mentioned in his novels. Making his characters interchangeable stresses the fact that they are representatives of a wider humanity with each life enjoying its own specificity. Coetzee provides the reader with a study on the implication of racism per se and the crimes committed by authoritarian and unjust powers. What is at stake here is a colonial or imperial power that claims to know the

other. To maintain that one has knowledge of the other is “to dominate it, to have authority over it” (Said *O* 32). Racial crimes are not symptoms of a single country or system. Coetzee sees the “South African situation as only one manifestation of a wider historical situation to do with colonialism, neo-colonialism” (Coetzee 1978, 23). On another occasion, Coetzee describes apartheid a “farical replay of a history [here he is referring to Nazi cruelty] that ought [...] to have been obsolete” (Coetzee <http://lnk.in/4rah>). Such crimes are not unique to South Africa. *Dusklands* provides a very good example. Composed of two novellas and separated by both locality and time, the novel presents us with two forms of colonialism. It is not perchance that the name Coetzee features in both.

In a television interview, Ariel Dorfman comments:

I think that he strips bare the human contemporary condition. He explores the very bleak landscape of the human soul in our times and does so with, I would say, radiance, luminosity, tenderness. But I would say if you had to speak about one thing that John does basically well is he doesn't lie. He doesn't lie about himself. He doesn't lie about the human condition. He doesn't lie about his characters. He goes to the depth of what we are as human beings: Men, women, beggars, princes (*NewsHour* <http://lnk.in/3wqa>).

The dominating theme in Coetzee's fiction is what being human entails. Coetzee is determined to show how the actual process of living inevitably brings about a certain degree of humiliation. For Coetzee, the human being is at once resilient and vulnerable but ultimately defenceless. There are, however, small successes, which I will discuss in the body of the work. What is demeaning for the characters is their inability to find justification for the humiliation they have to endure. In addition, they are incapable of understanding the presence [or lack] of logic, that governs their lives. Their vulnerability brings about further shame.

My primary sources are *Age of Iron*, *Disgrace*, *Dusklands*, *Elizabeth Costello*: *Eight Lessons*, *Foe*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Life and Times of Michael K*, *Slow Man*, *The Master of Petersburg* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. My secondary sources include references to the works of authors I believe have a

similarity with Coetzee's work, such as that of Samuel Beckett and Franz Kafka. I also draw on Coetzee's non-fiction studies as well as a number of post-modern theorists and philosophers whom I perceive as relevant to any study of his novels. My first chapter, "In the Name of Truth," examines how language has the potential to be used as a method of torture. If placed in the wrong hands, it evolves into an instrument of torture and humiliation with respect to both the perpetrator and the victim. The chapter is divided into three parts, covering colonialism's or dictatorships' use of language as a mode for abuse of the other and control, the silent reaction of the subaltern; and how a once privileged language can come to both alienate and humble its users. For my argument, I mainly draw on Adorno's *Jargon of Authenticity* in which the author demonstrates how language can be manipulated to further injustice.

My second chapter, "Words: Great Mercies," examines the implication of a masculine language on the Coetzeean female who is caught between resistance to this language and a need for it. I look closely at the role of words in the lives of the women, and how words function in a dual way, at once liberating and enchaining. Having no choice but to exist in this language alienates and humiliates them. Here, I bring into my argument two opposing views, those of Hélène Cixous' and Jacques Derrida's perspectives on the feminine and masculine discourse even though both critics' theories of language are not in line with Coetzee's. For Cixous, writing the female body is a celebration of the feminine, while for the Coetzeean heroine it is a method of survival. In *Spurs*, Derrida attempts re-inserting the feminine in the text, [similar to what Coetzee does in *Foe*], granting her own space. He questions the correlation between the voice of the masculine and presence, affirming writing cannot achieve presence for either sex. In Coetzee, feminine absence is presented as a dilemma, as the females unsuccessfully attempt to work within the phallogentricity of representation while for Derrida writing, the non-presence, functions like a deferral, which opens the door for possibility.

My third chapter, "Chains that Bind: the Master and the Slave," examines the abuse of power by despotic regimes and the violence that is exercised against the individual through that power. The chapter also explores the implication of

oppression on the female, in particular, how sex as an instrument of power transforms the female into a commodity that can be owned and used in transactions. I also demonstrate how the violence exercised against the other turns full circle to encompass its executor, shaming everyone involved. Here, I have found Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Jean-Paul Sartre relevant specifically in their analysis of colonialism's effect on the subaltern.

In my fourth chapter, "'Ah for youth! Ah for Immortality:' Ageing in Coetzee," I study what growing old means for the Coetzeean character, and the bodily and mental decline that lead to an overwhelming sense of humiliation. Furthermore, I study the implication of the decaying body on its owner, where the body becomes a source of abjection that needs to be scorned. Moreover, the abject body entails a feeling of social rejection, increasing the sense of alienation experienced by the individual.⁶ Simone de Beauvoir's *Old Age*, although socio-economical in nature, has been helpful in my study of ageing. Susan Sontag's treatise of illness as metaphor has proven to be useful in my analysis of the ailing body as it is juxtaposed against the breakdown of the state in both *Age of Iron* and *The Master of Petersburg*. I have also drawn on Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection, and developed it further to include the masculine, in order to demonstrate the abject position that the ageing body begins to represent for its owner.

My final chapter analyses the concept of empty Messianism in Coetzee, a term expounded by Derrida in *Specters of Marx*. At the end, the Coetzeean protagonist hopes for some salvation to a life that has brought on endless shame. The deliverance that is sought is not religious in nature but presents itself as a form of relief from a painful existence. The characters find themselves stranded at real and allegorical gates through which they are unable to pass. I draw on Derrida's discussion of the *arrivant* even though the wait in Coetzee's novels does not hold in its folds the promise of something better to come. I also cite Samuel Beckett's play, *Waiting for Godot*, as I find the waiting experienced by Estragon and Vladimir comparable to that of Coetzee's ageing characters. As for the underlying theme of my thesis, I particularly find Theodor Adorno's analysis of Samuel Beckett and Giorgio Agamben's study of life stripped of dignity useful in

regards to the overall theme of my work. I would like to add that most readings of Coetzee have tried to situate his characters' anguish in a purely postcolonial context. I propose that this is not enough. The treatment of suffering, even though at times is a product of colonialism, remains in the tradition of postmodern writers, such as Beckett and Kafka. Although characters like Magda and Michael K are situated in South Africa, their existence is rather anachronistic. Moreover, Coetzee's texts present a resistance to the possibility of a better world, inviting a reading beyond the postcolonial.

In *Age of Iron*, Curren states: “[p]erhaps shame is nothing more than the name for the way I feel all the time. The name for the way in which people live who would prefer to be dead” (*AI* 86). Humiliation is an aspect of living that can never be shed. Caught in a purgatorial state, the Coetzeean characters can neither choose life nor death. They resemble:

[...] the hollow men
[...] the stuffed men
[...Their] dried voices, when
[They] whisper together
Are quiet and meaningless
[...]
Shape without form, shade without colour,
Paralyzed force, gesture without motion
(Eliot 83)

The above image characterizes the emptiness that the Coetzeean character feels at the centre of her/his being. This void stems from their inability to hold humiliation at bay. Thus, a life bringing in its folds humiliation accentuates the hollowness within, with no possible hope for redemption. Ultimately, for Coetzee, to be human is to suffer. Salvation is not a viable option and even though the future may be as bleak as the past, his characters persist.

¹ This issue is discussed in detail in “Lives of Animals,” one of the lessons in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*.

² On March 6th, 2006, J.M. Coetzee was granted the Australian nationality.

³ Derek Attridge, Dominic Head and Dick Penner have written extensively on the need to place Coetzee in strictly a post-colonial framework, the author’s ‘perceived’ failure of political activism in his novels and accusations of his writing as being elitist. In my thesis, I will not be pursuing this argument in depth.

⁴ Coetzee has been brought up in a European household; the schools he attended taught European curricula. He discusses this issue in his novel, *Boyhood: Scenes from a Provincial Life*, which is a semi-autobiographical account of his early years.

⁵ I agree with Coetzee on South African Literature’s obsession with history. Apartheid and race relations presented through illicit relationships or rape dominate the works of Marc Behr, Achmat Dangor, Zakes Mda and Zoë Wicomb. The novelists are unable to shed the cruel history that has formed South Africa.

⁶ Adorno considers *Endgame* a true gerontology (Adorno NT 266). He states: “By the criterion of socially useful labor, which they are no longer capable of, the old people are superfluous and should be tossed aside [...]” (Adorno NT 266).

Chapter One: In the Name of Truth

What are we waiting for, assembled in the forum?
The barbarians are due here today.
Why isn't anything happening in the senate?
Why do the senators sit there without legislating?
Because the barbarians are coming today
(Cavafy 87).

The above stanza from Constantine Cavafy's poem describes how during the ritual of waiting normal facets of everyday life are disrupted, leaving humans in a state of apprehension and paralysis. In such circumstances, everything is suspended, and the only action allowed is the actual waiting. The vague essence that defines the waiting can hold people captive. People wait, ensnared by a power they fail to understand and their wait becomes the inactive activity that defines their lives. The artificial state that is begotten by the process of waiting not only suspends the linear passage of time but also allows certain realities to be imposed under the pretext of times of emergency. In Cavafy's poem "Waiting for the Barbarians," the citizens are paralyzed by this uncertainty, awaiting further instructions from the authorities who inform them that when the barbarians arrive the state of suspension will be lifted. At least that is what the emperor has promised, but the night nears and there are no signs of the barbarians; instead, Cavafy writes:

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.
(Cavafy 87).

And the persistent question is no longer when the barbarians would come, but “now, what’s going to happen to [them] without barbarians? /They were, these people, a kind of solution” (Cavafy 87). As with Estragon and Vladimir in Beckett’s play *Waiting for Godot*, who continuously wait, marking their days with futile words and useless acts bordering on inactivity in the hope that Godot may appear, they wait without respite clinging to a promise. In order that Estragon and Vladimir do not despair, Godot dispatches his messenger at the end of both acts with virtually the same message: “BOY: Mr. Godot told me to tell you he won’t come this evening but surely to-morrow” (*WFG* 33). At the end of the second act Vladimir recites the same promise:

VLADIMIR: You have a message from Mr. Godot.
BOY: Yes, Sir.
VLADIMIR: He won’t come this evening.
BOY: No, Sir.
VLADIMIR: But he’ll come to-morrow.
BOY: Yes Sir.
VLADIMIR: Without fail.
BOY: Yes Sir (*WFG* 58).

They continue to wait as the final stage direction states “They do not move” (Beckett *WFG* 60).

In all probability, with the dawning of another day, the citizens in Cavafy’s poem will gather once again in their wait for some other pledge by the emperor or another barbarian arrival. This interim situation epitomised by the waiting is what enables certain governments, totalitarian regimes, colonialists and racist regimes, to enact whatever they consider suitable for their self-interest and preservation. Invariably in such situations, individual freedom is sacrificed. Recent examples are the *Patriot Act* passed on October 2001 in the USA following September 11th which claims “to deter and punish terrorist acts in the United States and around the world, to enhance law enforcement investigatory tools, and for other purposes” and the United Kingdom’s *Civil Contingencies Bill of 2004*. Such acts are often written in a confusing and vague manner aimed at alienating the layperson. In such unnatural conditions, the public, unsure of what the acts mean, wait for the emergency laws to be lifted, while governments

overstep their jurisdictions for the sole purpose of fighting the enemy. Suspension at once displaces the citizens, putting them outside history, forbidding them entry into these laws, and grants limitless power to the Empire/government, allowing them to enact forms of jurisdiction of their choice. The state of waiting recalls the state of martial law, where in the so-called interest of an empire or country, all normality and all justice are suspended for a greater enigmatic good. This lawlessness not only places the citizens of a country outside the law, on the fringes of their history, but also allows the ruling power to execute any sentence it deems fit on individuals or groups. In this state of extremely controlled measures, lawlessness reigns. It is in the sole interest of such regimes that citizens wait, the latter becoming the fertile ground on which excuses for and justifications of violations are sown. In a number of his novels, J.M. Coetzee examines this state of suspension and the methodology used to implement it resulting in cruelty, humiliation and grave injustice.

Waiting for the Barbarians, Coetzee's third novel, which takes its title from the aforementioned poem, is set on the fringes of an unnamed Empire, thriving on emergency laws in an undefined space and time. The outpost where a large part of the novel takes place is controlled by a magistrate whose sole aspiration is to live the rest of his days with as little trouble as possible. However, the Empire has other plans for him and his outpost, namely, to fight the so-called impending barbarian threat. The myth of the enemy at the gate not only has to be continuously revived, but also becomes the main justification for exerting more control. In *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Michael Moore claims that the United States government manipulates the use of red, orange, yellow, blue and green alerts to keep its citizens on their guard. As with the fate of the citizens in the poem, everything is possible in this interim time.

I will divide this chapter into three major sections. In the first section, I would like to examine the concept of cruelty and authoritarianism in relation to the Empire's/Colony's/dictatorships' use of language and with particular respect to how language becomes an instrument in their hands. In addition, in times of suspension and waiting language evolves into an integral instrument to be employed by despotic regimes for further abuse. In such situations, language is

resurrected into another form, an inhumane idiom, solely used for control, forfeiting its initial communicative role. In this part, I will be drawing on *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In the second part, I will demonstrate how *Foe* and *Life and Times of Michael K* introduce a counterpoint, this being the reaction of the oppressed towards injustice. In the third section, I will discuss how a once privileged language has lost its position, eventually alienating and humbling its users, specifically in *Disgrace*. In aid of my argument, I will draw mostly on Adorno's *Jargon of Authenticity*, as I believe his treatise on fascist regimes' deployment of language relevant when analyzing the role language plays in the empires or colonies exposed by the novels of J.M. Coetzee. My treatment of the novels will not be chronological but thematic. Furthermore, I will show how, as with any form of violence, the damage inflicted on the other by language does not exclude its primary proponent, an essential consequence of such interplay, leading to the humiliation of both parties involved.

1. Oppressed by Language *Waiting for the Barbarians*:

Epistemic violence is nearly always deployed to establish the native as other. Creating this distance between the subject and other is primarily for establishing a hierarchy, favourable to the ruling power. Gayatri C. Spivak highlights this process, as follows:

The clearest available example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other. This project is also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity (*MIC* 281).

The manipulation of language and knowledge is exercised to control and suppress the other, at the same time serving to displace her/him. Derrida essentially views discourse as originally violent and hence it "can only do itself violence" through its attempt at affirming itself (*WD* 130). The violent aspect of discourse can be moulded into a viable instrument for inflicting pain by colonialist/dictatorial regimes and this makes it one of the favoured methods for torture by unjust

governing bodies. Coetzee addresses this very concept of discursive violence and its implication on the master and slave in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It is worth noting that Coetzee employs a non-violent style to discuss the brutality that can be inflicted by language. Initially, discourse negates itself in order for affirmation to be achieved. Faced with nothingness, Derrida states, “discourse chooses itself violently in opposition to [this] nothingness or pure non-sense” (*WD* 130). In this process, it does onto itself and at the void within the self, which is usually perceived as other, violence. In the novel, the Magistrate is very much aware of the power exerted by the Empire’s language, yet he is unable to uphold the discourse it represents. Before he departs on his journey to return the girl in his custody to her people, he attempts to write a report but fails. He reflects:

What the second document is to be I do not yet know. A testament? A memoir? A confession? A history of thirty years on the frontier? All that day I sit in a trance at my desk staring at the empty white paper, waiting for words to come. A second day passes in the same way. On the third day I surrender, put the paper back in the drawer, and make preparation to leave (*WFB* 62-63).

His inability to write stems from the fact he can no longer partake in the jargon of the Empire, albeit the repetitive nature of such a discourse renders it at best vacant, a mere echo at once resonating inside him and outside of him. In some respects, the language of the Empire functions like the language of the patriarch. Adorno sees the authority that the father assumes as borrowed from God. Humans learn to “respect authority in itself because of their innate human insufficiency. Although such authority now rarely calls itself god-sent, it still holds on to the regal insignia which once it borrowed from God the father” (*JA* 53). Having been both a perpetrator and a receiver of the discourse of the Empire, as epitomized by Colonel Joll’s language, the Magistrate has partially recognized the inadequacy of such a language, especially when it is thrown at a silent non-responsive other. Coetzee, however, considers that the linguistic resources available to the likes of the Magistrate are confined to what the Empire deems sufficient to its purpose. The Magistrate has gained some awareness of

language's limitation but remains ignorant of its full effect on him. Coetzee states:

The resources of language and intellect granted to him are not enough to prevent him from being fooled. The questions he is allowed to formulate for himself are not the questions that really concern him, while the answers he arrives at are not even his own, but emanate from voices of authority speaking through him (*WW* 133-134).

For the most part, the language that speaks through the Magistrate is that of authority. He is made to utter words whose meaning he has failed to grasp yet have the power to destroy him and the other facing him. The Magistrate will never be allowed the full knowledge of such a language as this privilege belongs to those in the higher hierarchy in the system. He is merely mimicking the words of others, without being fully conscious of the implication of such words. A dominant feature of such a language is its tendency to address a vacuum as its dual role is to negate the other and confirm the subject. Yuan Yuan states: "the colonial sovereign subject speaks to himself instead of speaking to the other [...]" (76). Inadvertently, the Magistrate begins deconstructing and questioning his own language but is unable to formulate one to replace the one he has known. The page will remain a blank, like the blank that has formed inside him. Ironically, the nameless Magistrate remains an absence throughout the novel; he who is without a name is incapable of naming, let alone writing. The jargon, which has thus ruled his life, the language through which he has spoken, has left him empty. Adorno perceives a link between jargon and the vacuous existence in humans. He tells us, "jargon goes hand in hand with a concept of Man from which all memory of natural law has been eradicated" (*JA* 53). Jargon, thus, replaces the void within, standardizing the individual. Furthermore, the incomprehensibility that arises from the jargon confuses and alienates those whom it addresses. Coming from the position of the all-powerful, language assumes the same position of might and rules accordingly. In the process, it moulds individuals into non-descript inactive masses. At first, it can excite them, and then subdue them, providing them with a form of catharsis. The jargon

exercised by an Empire or a dictatorship flatters itself by being the one and only holder of the truth. Adorno emphasizes an important link between language and fascism. He remarks:

Fascism was not simply a conspiracy [...] but it was something that came to life in the course of a powerful social development. Language provides it with a refuge. Within this refuge a smoldering evil expresses itself as though it were salvation (*JA* 3).

The power of the Empire is consequently dictated by language. The latter becomes the medium through which force on the other is exerted and the refuge through which evil transpires. This language of power not only alienates the native, granting itself more power, but it also exerts cruelty on the native. At times, the foreboding nature of a language that is specifically employed to dictate violence can even exhibit a sacrosanct aura, forbidding any queries. Adorno adds that the formal nature of the jargon allows it to be “accepted through its mere delivery, without regard to the content of the words used” (*JA* 5). When the troops decide to withdraw, Mandel reads a statement to an apathetic public in the square. Coetzee describes the scene, as follows, through the Magistrate’s eyes, laying emphasis on the empty rhetoric by using quotation marks:

I return to the square in time to hear the end of a statement [Mandel] reads to the public ‘in the name of the Imperial Command’. The withdrawal, he says, is a ‘temporary measure’. A ‘caretaker force’ will be left behind. There is expected to be ‘a general cessation of operations along the front for the duration of the winter’. He himself hopes to be back in the spring, when the army will ‘initiate a new offensive’. He wishes to thank everyone for the ‘unforgettable hospitality’ he has been shown (*WFB* 154-155).

In the above paragraph, Coetzee steps back to permit the language of authority speak. The vacuous nature of the words uttered renders the speech comical. The sheer repetition of these hackneyed phrases has emptied the words of their content. In reality, little information is divulged. The troops are withdrawing

simply to avoid the winter cold, but the natives are instructed to continue to wait for the barbarians and when it is deemed convenient for the Empire a new offensive will be launched. Essentially, the content of the Empire's harangue is immaterial. Adorno states:

In many cases the distinction between essential and inessential, between authentic and inauthentic, lies with the arbitrariness of definition, without in the least implying the relativity of truth. The reason for this situation lies in language. Language uses the term "authentic" in a floating manner (*JA* 100-101).

Yet the Empire's insistence on being the sole bearer of truth creates a Manichean dialectic, which invariably precludes and subjugates the other.¹ The latter's feeling of exclusion and inability at comprehension can only be reciprocated with an absence. In an interrogation early on in the novel, the Magistrate performs the ritual needed to expose the assumed truth:

'Listen,' I say. 'They tell me you have made a confession. They say you have admitted that you and the old man and other men of your clan have stolen sheep and horses. You have said that the men of your clan are arming themselves, that in the spring you are all going to join in a great war on the Empire. Are you telling the truth? Do you understand what this confession of yours will mean? Do you understand?' I pause; he looks back vacantly at all this vehemence, like someone tired after running a great distance (*WFB* 11).

The response from the boy is to close his eyes on the Magistrate (*WFB* 11). At a later stage, when the Magistrate subjects the barbarian girl to a barrage of questions, she can only meet his repetitive queries with silence (*WFB* 28).² Colonialism establishes itself by obliterating the history of the other. Spivak notes that: "[i]f, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow," having been exploited at more than one level (*MIC* 287). Furthermore, the silent response is at once stemming from a lack of communication between the subject and the other, and awareness of the other that whatever is uttered by her/him will

always be considered as the untruth. Yuan remarks: “the native speech becomes the disfranchised voice through which only untruth—the alien tongue—speaks” (77).

In the opening pages of the novel, Colonel Joll justifies his method of trying to extract the truth from the natives. As the Empire believes that they are genetically prone to the untruth, the only way to draw out some truth from them is through torture. Likewise, Fanon explains this phenomenon: “[t]he native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare to admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is the absolute evil” (*WE* 32). Moreover, to extract this evilness the other must undergo torture for truth to emerge. Torture begins with mental anguish exercised through language and then is invariably followed by physical torment when extraction fails. Joll comments:

I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see—this is what happens—first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth (*WFB* 5).³

If pain is truth but everything else is subject to doubt, as the Magistrate learns, then abusive language and torture have to be employed for the benefit of what the Empire considers the truth (*WFB* 5). Cruel language becomes the truth and the vehicle that is needed to induce the truth. The truth the authority is seeking is a confirmation of its own belief; once the victim consents to the imposed truth, her/his submission is complete. Language subjugates in both its spoken and written form and only those who have the power to write are allowed into history. Michael Valdez Moses states: “[t]hose who do the writing make history; or what amounts to the same thing, those who make history are the only ones in a position to write it” (120). He adds: “[a]ccordingly, the barbarian Other generally appears in the novel as a black slip onto which the Empire engraves itself; that is, the empire gives itself form by writing on its subjects” (Moses 120). With writing, the Empire can claim more power as “the fundamental distinction between

civilization and barbarism is that between the lettered and the unlettered [...] The reason for this is quite explicitly political; only with the foundation of the State can writing exist and history commence” (Moses 117). Therefore, only those who can write in the language of the Empire are able to enter history; the others will remain on the periphery.

Another facet of cruelty involving language is the Empire’s literal engraving of itself in writing on the body of the other. This is best illustrated by Colonel Joll’s actions in the following paragraph:

The Colonel steps forward. Stooping over each prisoner in turn he rubs a handful of dust into his naked back and writes a word with a stick of charcoal. I read the words upside down: ENEMY ... ENEMY ... ENEMY ... ENEMY. He steps back and folds his hands. [...] Then the beating begins. The soldiers use the stout green cane staves, bringing them down with the heavy slapping sounds of washing-paddles [...] The black charcoal and ochre dust begin to run with sweat and blood. The game, I see, is to beat them till their backs are washed clean (*WFB* 115).

Engraving the body with the crime at once shames the other and sets her/him apart; the letters become the label and hence the burden that s/he has to bear through her/his life; and the markings stigmatize the native as the other, a quasi-human being from whom the civilized need to be protected. The above scene is reminiscent of the torture inflicted on the condemned man in Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony.” Whilst proudly exhibiting his latest instrument of torture to an unsuspecting visitor, the officer explains: “[w]hatever commandment the prisoner has disobeyed is written upon his body by the Harrow. This prisoner, for instance”—the officer indicated the man—“will have written on his body: HONOR THY SUPERIORS!” (Kafka *KCSS* 144)⁴ He later elaborates on the technique of the Harrow: “[e]ach long needle has a short one beside it. The long needle does the writing, and the short needle sprays a jet of water to wash away the blood and keep the inscription clear” (Kafka *KCSS* 147).⁵ The body of the condemned man is to be violated by the power of the letter. The official states: “[o]f course the script can’t be a simple one; it’s not supposed to kill a man

straight off, but only after an interval of, on an average, twelve hours” (Kafka *KCSS* 149). The process of engraving the words denoting the command that the prisoner allegedly resisted brings together bodily and verbal torture.⁶ In spite of the duality of the pain inflicted upon him, the condemned man is oblivious to the crime he has committed, and following in Colonel Joll’s tradition, the officer assumes that if interrogated the prisoner “would have told lies, and had [he] exposed these lies he would have backed them up with more lies, and so on and so forth” (Kafka *KCSS* 146). Moreover, the writing of the Colony has to be difficult to decode and the prisoner has to decipher “it with his wounds” but this is impossible, as he will never be allowed to understand the language of the Colony (Kafka 150).

According to the Empire’s beliefs, knowledge of the workings of its language can transform the non-human native into a closer approximation of a human being.⁷ This in itself is not desirable, as the other must remain ignorant of the language of the subject, forever designated as the non-human other. For Fanon, “[a] man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language” (*BMWS* 18). To possess a world implies a form of existence, yet one who fails to possess the language of the Empire can hardly be considered as existing. Knowledge of the Empire’s language not only bestows power on the individual but also defines the latter as human. The inability to write in the language of the Empire inherently strips one of human qualities. At best such a person will remain the undecipherable other on the outskirts of civilization, his “powerlessness and nothingness” further plundered by the jargon thrown at him (Adorno *JA* 52). Adorno notes that the “first price exacted by language is the essence of the individual,” which is a first step to a complete negation of the whole person (*JA* 10).

The need to document everything is essential for empires and dictatorships to gain more power; endless reports are written about the other. The other is rarely understood but is created through the language of the subject. Moses writes: “[t]he Empire produces its own conventional truth through its power to inscribe; it defines itself by literally marking off those who lie beyond its boundaries but within its power to subjugate” (121). The other is never to be understood but

recreated, marked, subjugated or unmarked. His actual existence is irrelevant to the subject; the idea created in the psyche of the subject is what is relevant to the subject, and not the individual behind the idea. Having become an idea, the object is incapable of signifying, and is forced to remain an absence vis-à-vis the subject. Attwell points out that Coetzee “by showing that Empire’s images of the barbarians are wholly contingent on its own need for self-realization, [...] the enclosed world of signs on which Empire depends [is broken down]” (*JMC* 71). Homi Bhabha describes such a process:

The Other is cited, quoted, framed, illuminated, encased in the shot/reverse-shot strategy of a serial enlightenment. Narrative and the cultural politics of difference become the closed circle of interpretation. The Other loses its power to signify, to negate, to initiate its historic desire, to establish its own institutional and oppositional discourse (31).

Stepping out of the realm of the Empire, the Magistrate attempts to understand the dilemma of the barbarian other; yet, Rosemary Jane Jolly can only equate the Magistrate’s treatment of the girl to that of Joll’s.⁸ This in itself is not wholly accurate as the Magistrate, contrary to Joll who completely rejects the other, tries to encompass the subaltern, in this case the barbarian girl.⁹ It is worth noting that the Magistrate’s attempt at understanding the other extends only to the barbarian girl. Earlier on in the novel, he chooses not to hear the screams from the granary (*WFB* 8).¹⁰

Aware of her position the girl upholds her peace. The Magistrate’s numerous questions thrown at her are answered with silence. An empty gaze reciprocates his probing looks into her eyes. The manipulation of a gaze or its absence can be interpreted as another method for exercising cruelty, at once granting and denying recognition. The opening lines of the novel begin with reference to Colonel Joll’s dark shades:¹¹

I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wires. Is he blind? I could understand if he wanted to hide blind eyes.

But he is not blind. The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them (*WFB* 1).

Colonel Joll is intentionally holding back his gaze. The black shades at once decree the stratified nature of the relationship, defining who possesses the power that occludes, and the power to discard the other, by simply returning the reflection, a vacant image. The same trend of wearing dark shades is seen amongst bodyguards/security men, accompanying public figures, deliberately sealing themselves off from their surroundings, severing any form of communication through the eyes, alienating and reminding the public that they are in control. The barbarian girl's shifting eyes can only "look through and past" the Magistrate, her gaze settling "somewhere behind [him]" (*WFB* 27). Rooney writes:

The Magistrate seems only to perceive the gaze in the orientating confrontational way of looking at an object and being looked at by an inscrutable other, where there is not a looking with. If he cannot see the girl it may be because he always has his back to her for he is the one-to-eclipse-her (*ALAP* 201).

One of the reasons the Magistrate is unable to see the girl clearly is because her presence eclipses part of his consciousness. In his dreams, the barbarian girl is obscured:

I am aware of my bulk, my shadowiness, therefore I am not surprised that the children melt away on either side as I approach. All but one. Older than the others, perhaps not even a child, she sits in the snow with her hooded back to me working at the door of the castle, her legs splayed, burrowing, patting, moulding. I stand behind her and watch. She does not turn. I try to imagine the face between the petals of her peaked hood but cannot (*WFB* 10).

The eclipsing of the barbarian girl may not have been the Magistrate's intention, but is a result of years of cruelty exercised by a system of government of which he is a product. Aware of these misfortunate exploits and cruel acts by the

Empire, the Magistrate strives to decode the scarred other.¹² His wanting to understand the barbarian girl becomes the more urgent, and when normal forms of communication fail him, he resorts to deciphering the scars on her body; he tells us: “[i]t has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl’s body are understood I cannot let go of her” (*WFB* 33). The semi-blinding of the girl is a conscious act on behalf of the Empire to “deprive her of her ability to see otherwise, deprive her of her eyes and her ‘I;’” having lost both the ‘eye’ and ‘I,’ she becomes firmly positioned as the slave outside history on the fringes of civilization (Rooney *ALAP* 199). If eyes are the mirrors of the soul, depriving the barbarian girl of her eyes is as good as rendering her a soulless being, in symbolic terms.

It is not perchance that one of the favoured methods of torture applied by the Empire has involved the eyes.¹³ In her description of her own affliction, the barbarian girl tells the Magistrate “[t]hey did not burn [her]. They said they would burn [her] eyes out... The man brought [the fork] and made [her] look at it. They held [her] eyelids open. But [she] had nothing to tell them” (*WFB* 44). On another occasion, when the Magistrate examines the corpse of an old man tortured by Joll’s men, he finds that “the lips are crushed and drawn back, the teeth are broken. One eye is rolled back, the other eye-socket is a bloody hole” (*WFB* 7). The cruel silencing of the other involves both speech and sight. Deprivation of the ability to speak and to see is an extreme facet of how communication and language are cruelly denied. The Empire decides when to grant the privilege and when to withdraw it. Freedom of speech and vision is not an innate right, but a favour that is handed out and withdrawn at the whim of the Empire.¹⁴

The Magistrate decides to grant the barbarian girl such a favour. To him, she becomes the vehicle through which he attempts not only to understand the other in her but the other personified by her civilisation. He admits: “it is the marks on her which drew [him] to her but which, to [his] disappointment, [he] finds, do not go deep enough? Too much or too little: it is she [he] want[s] or the traces of a history her body bears?” (*WFB* 70) His inability to decipher the marks on her body excludes him from the unwritten history of the other to which she may have

been a code. At one stage in the novel, he has even attempted to create another reality for the girl, in the hope of understanding her. Whilst massaging her swollen ankle he describes the act as kneading, bringing to mind a certain process of creation (*WFB* 59). As he rubs her body with oil, the Magistrate can also be perceived as the healer with divine power. In another instance, the Magistrate equates the barbarian girl to the fox cub that is in his rooms, another wild animal needing to be tamed and brought into history (*WFB* 37). Even his lovemaking has failed to write her body, for he has not been able to “engrave” himself on her (*WFB* 148). It is worth noting that the one time the Magistrate is able to penetrate the barbarian girl’s body is when they are drawing closer to her own people. Momentarily, she assumes the power to dictate, to write part of her lost history through her body. In this scene, the barbarian girl awakens the Magistrate from his sleep. He narrates:

[...] wide awake, [he] feel[s] her hand groping under [his] clothes, her tongue licking [his] ear. [...] Her hand finds what it is seeking. [...] Beneath her smock she is bare. With a heave [he] is upon her; she is warm, swollen, ready for [him]; in a minute five months of senseless hesitancy are wiped out and [he is] floating back into sensual oblivion (*WFB* 69).

Yet, what the barbarian girl chooses to implant on his memory is nothingness. When he tries to recall what she looks like, his memory invariably fails him. During a sexual intercourse with one of his mistresses, he tells us:

Occupied in these suave pleasures, I cannot imagine what ever drew me to that alien body. The girl in my arms flutters, pants, cries as she comes to a climax [...] it occurs to me that I cannot even recall the other one’s face. ‘She is incomplete!’ [...] I have a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin (*WFB* 45).

His vision is for the most part accurate because this is the vision that the girl wishes to be remembered by as “[f]rom her empty eyes there always seemed to be a haze spreading, a blankness that overtook all of her” (*WFB* 94). Her own body resents documentation. She refuses to divulge any information regarding herself

or her tortured body. She forbids him entry. She is “[b]lank, like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blank body beneath it, without aperture, without entry” (*WFB* 45). Jennifer Wenzel states: “[b]y not allowing her tortured body to be translated into language, she prevents the othering that the magistrate’s categorizations would impose” on her and her story (66). His failure to understand is not restricted to the girl, but includes a gross incomprehension of the natives and their culture. In the following, he reflects:

Perhaps when I stand on the floor of the courthouse, if that is what it is, I stand over the head of a magistrate like myself, another grey-haired servant of Empire who fell in the arena of his authority, face to face at last with the barbarian? How will I ever know? By burrowing like a rabbit? Will the characters on the slips one day tell me? There were two hundred and fifty-six slips in the bag. Is it by chance that the number is perfect? (*WFB* 16-17).

The characters of the slips will never reveal their secret, in spite of “the long evenings [he] spent poring over [his] collection isolat[ing] over four hundred different characters in the script, perhaps as many as four hundred and fifty. [He has] no idea what they stand for” (*WFB* 121). The Magistrate’s hope of deciphering the so-called script is two-fold, a desperate attempt to erase part of the guilt he holds on behalf of an Empire that has formulated him, and an urgent need to write a history of himself in the tradition of that Empire. Attwell writes of this predicament:

In his isolation from the capital, the Magistrate’s historical interests are a series of wistful projects aimed at achieving such consonance. But concord-fictions do not, will not materialize: he remains outside history, outside, that is, of the writing-of-history (77).

Indeed, the Magistrate lingers on the fringes having departed “from the tranquil familiarity of his interpretive community” to “an apparently permanent exile, a migration from the reassuring certainties of the empire to the shaky ground of uncertain signs” (Saunders 225-226). The language of cruelty, which has once served him, has now left him on the periphery of the Empire, on the edge of the

realm of power. Due to his rebellion, the Magistrate is as good as being banned.¹⁵ It is ironic that when the Magistrate attempts to step out of the language of the Empire in order to decipher the others' language he has, in effect, inadvertently banned himself from re-entry into its world.

1. OPPRESSED BY LANGUAGE *DUSKLANDS*:

In the previous section, I have discussed how language becomes susceptible to manipulation, making possible its deployment as a method for torture by authority, especially in times of emergency. In this part, I will further demonstrate how *Dusklands*, in spite of being Coetzee's first novel, takes this further as it typifies the cruelty that is exercised by the ruthless language of the Empire and the effects of its propaganda machine on the others. The novel consists of two parts, set in both Vietnam and South Africa, nearly 300 years apart. By juxtaposing the two novellas, Coetzee affirms that cruelty is an intrinsic part of human nature, exposed in times of dictatorships, and not specific to a certain race or system of government. In the first part, Eugene Dawn, an expert in US psychological warfare and propaganda collapses under the strain of the military practices about which he appears to be writing a report to his superior, Coetzee. The protagonist in the second novella is Jacobus Coetzee, an ancestor of J.M. Coetzee, an explorer-colonizer, who launches a very cruel offensive against inhabitants of the interior, out of sheer revenge. In spite of the centuries and the cultures that separate both men, they epitomize the worst of colonialism.

The epigraph at the beginning of *Dusklands* is taken from Herman Kahn's book, *Can We Win in Vietnam*, encompassing an analysis of the Vietnamese war and possible scenarios drawn for the outcome of the war. Kahn is one of the founders of the Hudson Institute and who later joined the Rand Cooperation as a military strategist and system theorist. For Attwell, the operative word in Kahn's epigraph is 'unreasonable'. He elaborates:

Unreasonable [which] is the key word here, illustrating the spirit of cool, technological equanimity that Dawn aims for in his report—unsuccessfully, of course. By contrast, Kahn is successful, discussing at some length the “instrumental” position of trying the moral issues with the question whether the war is actually winnable (*JMCSAPW* 41).

Technological mastery and colonial jargon/propaganda tend to function in unison, the assumption being that if one possesses technology one also commands language. In establishments like the Hudson and Rand, such belief is rampant. In part II of the “Vietnam project,” the report, that Eugene Dawn is in the process of writing, mimics military reports that are prepared by such think tanks in the United States, reports composing war scenarios and preparing strategies. The same still holds true today where in such institutions, wars are still being fabricated and planned and propaganda for mass consumption is spun. Reports that are released by think tanks are specifically to perpetuate lies; a very good example is the war on Iraq, 20th March 2003, where the public was overwhelmed with false information claiming that Iraq had to be attacked because it possessed weapons of mass destruction, therefore, posing a danger to both its neighbours and beyond.¹⁶

One of the major roles of a think tank, such as the Rand Foundation, is the fabrication of stories that, by sheer repetition, become the truth. This psychological warfare has prevailed since the Vietnamese war. The object is to keep the public ignorant of the truth, and to create false reality in order to persuade the sceptics within the system. Keeping the public ignorant is essential to the balance of power. Harold Pinter, in speaking of this, stresses this point:

Political language, as used by politicians, does not venture into any of this territory [doom and ugliness of war] since the majority of politicians, on the evidence available to us, are interested not in truth but in power and in the maintenance of that power. To maintain that power it is essential that people remain in ignorance, that they live in ignorance of the truth, even the truth of their own lives. What surrounds us therefore is a vast tapestry of lies, upon which we feed (<http://lnk.in/4qpw>).

Colonialism, whether in Iraq, South Africa or Vietnam, has to create a truth from a lie, reiterate the lie repeatedly, until it becomes a reality. The sheer reiteration of the lie can even convince its own maker that it is the truth. Adorno states: “[t]he pure tautology, which propagates the concept, while at the same time refusing to define that concept—and which instead mechanically repeats the concept—is intelligence in the form of violence” (*JA* 109). This form of psychological warfare based on this kind of intelligence, perpetuated by the repetitive nature of the lie, is what has destabilized Dawn. Both a perpetrator and a victim of the mental warfare of the propaganda he spins, its process psychologically destroys Dawn. Describing the broadcast that is targeted at the Vietnamese, he tells us:

But the voice which our broadcasting projects into Vietnamese homes is the voice of neither father nor brother. It is the voice of the doubting self, the voice of René Descartes driving his wedge between the self in the world and the self who contemplates the self. The voices of our Chieu Hoi (surrender/reconciliation) programming are wholly Cartesian (*D* 20).

Cartesian logic, which is namely based on binary opposition, has no resonance within the Vietnamese culture. Dawn adds that such propaganda has “failed because [it] speaks out of an alienated doppelgänger rationality for which there is no precedent in Vietnamese thought. We attempt to embody the ghost inside the villager, but there has never been any ghost there” (*D* 20). The logic and language that US colonialism tries to exercise over the Vietnamese backfires. Their culture, we are told, is not based on a white/black, master/slave division. This dialectic, however, is the one that formulates the language of the master. When Dawn realizes its failures, he becomes lost between its opposites, and a wedge is driven between him and his psyche. Exposition to a reality, other than his own, ends up being the ghost that haunts him. The Vietnamese, Dawn informs us, value the elder-brother relationship, as opposed to the father-son one, where the father is seen as the master who dictates and controls the son (*D* 21).

In spite of being part of the propaganda machine, Nguyen, a colonel in the National police, is the one broadcaster who distresses Westerners, but having

“worked up a typically Vietnamese elder-brother relationship with his audience,” has proved to be a success. To the Vietnamese, the father’s voice as conceived by the Americans is nothing but:

[...][t]he voice of the father [which] utters itself appropriately out of the sky. The Vietnamese call it “the whispering death” when it speaks from the B-52’s, but there is no reason why it should not ride the radio waves with equal devastation. The father is authority, infallibility, ubiquity. He does not persuade, he commands (*D* 21).

The authoritarian voice typifies death and wreaks destruction. Dawn adds:

The father-voice is not a new source in propaganda. The tendency in totalitarian states, is however, to identify the father-voice with the voice of the Leader, the father of the county. In times of war this father exhorts his children to patriotic sacrifice, in times of peace to greater production (*D* 21).

The voice of the leader is the one that always dictates, and claims to be in control and is knowledgeable of the truth. The colonizer/leader is the omnipotent one who has power over his subjects, a power that is exercised through language, be it through speeches, propaganda churned over the airwaves, in the press, or the like. According to Bhabha, Western nationalist discourse:

[...] normalizes its own history of colonial expansion and exploitation by inscribing the history of the other in a fixed hierarchy of civil progress. What is articulated in the doubleness of colonial discourse is not simply the violence of one powerful nation writing out the history of another [but] is a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently reinscribes, across differential power relations, both colonizer and colonized (Bhabha 95-96).

In addition, writing the other inadvertently writes the self, as in the case of Dawn. His very writing has destroyed him. Figuratively, one can regard Dawn’s words

and pinning of the note, proposing chemical annihilation, on Coetzee's door, as a form of moral and physical ruin, ultimately committing him to an asylum.

The master, Dawn informs us, is also the one who is capable of creating or abolishing myths. For psychological war to succeed, Dawn points that "[t]he science of mythography teaches us that a subtler encounter is to subvert and revise the myth. The highest propaganda is the propagation of a new mythology" (*D 25*).¹⁷ The myth that he wants to destroy is the one involving the killing of the father by his rebellious sons. Dawn tells us:

In origin the myth is a justification of the rebellion of the sons against a father who uses them as hinds. The sons come of age, rebel mutilate the father, and divide the patrimony, that is, the earth fertilized by the father's rain. Psychoanalytically the earth myth is a self-affirming fantasy of the child powerless to take the mother he desires from his father-rival (*D 25*).

Dawn adds:

In popular Vietnamese consciousness the myth takes the following form: "The sons of the land (i.e., the brotherhood of earth-tillers) desire to take the land (i.e., Vietnamese Boden) for themselves, overthrowing the sky-god who is identified with the old order of power (foreign empire, the U.S.). The earth-mother hides her sons in her bosom, safe from the thunderbolts of the father; at night, while he sleeps, they emerge to unman him and initiate a new fraternal order (*D 25*).

The sky-god father figure symbolises destruction; he is neither a giver of language nor a protector of his sons. The rebellion by the sons is not a "death-thrust but a humiliating blow that renders him sterile" (*D 26*). Once "the father is overthrown there must be a new father, new rebellion, endless violence" as the myth assumes that "father and mother [...] live in symbiosis" (*D 26*). The hierarchy of the master and slave is absent in the Vietnamese myth. The Americans have to establish another kind of myth, one that they are familiar with, even though it may be alien to the one they want to oppress. Their language, propaganda and attempts at rewriting myths fail at imposing another order on the

Vietnamese. Re-creating myths is closely linked to the fabrication of stories. For Memmi, the colonizer “endeavors to falsify history, [...] rewrites laws, [...] would extinguish memories—anything to succeed in transforming his usurpation into legitimacy” (*TCTC* 96). It also functions as a way of trying to change the reality on the ground and convince the self and the other that all is well and the Empire is in control. Recreating myth is necessary for rewriting the history but in the process, it obliterates what exists and replaces it with another reality more suitable and workable for the colonial power. Essentially, the exercise augments the denial of existence of the other, leaving the latter paralyzed unable to record or salvage one’s own history.¹⁸

Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the US military has resorted to such tactics by hiring the Lincoln Group, a propaganda-making firm, to spin favourable propaganda, translate it into Arabic and publish it in the Iraqi press.¹⁹ However, when the propaganda fails to achieve its target, only one technique remains to secure success, namely the annihilation of the other and the spread of destruction. Once again, in order to justify the destruction and “elimination of enemy villages,” the Empire manipulates language; therefore, villages are not called such, but are referred to as “armed strongholds” (*D* 22).²⁰ In this way, not only is the Empire rewriting the history of the other, the enemy combatants, but imposing another reality by nullifying the other and establishing a void in its place. In the face of their interrogators, they hold their silence as “they are [...] broken down with drugs and a little clever confusion [to be made to] talk freely, holding their interrogators’ hands” (*D* 17). Words are forced out of them through relentless questioning. They are moulded into “ghosts or absences of themselves: where they had once been is now only a black hole through which they have been sucked” (*D* 17).

Not trusting the order he has come to establish, or the notes that he is preparing in the language of the Empire, Dawn resorts to photographs, which are partially pornographic in nature. He describes them:

The photographs I carry with me in my briefcase belong to the Vietnam report. Some will be incorporated into the final text. [He adds] these pictures could be relied on to

give my imagination the slight electric impulse that is all it needs to set it free again. I respond to pictures as I do not to print. Strange that I am not in the picture-faking side of propaganda (*D* 13).

To him, the photos are more valuable than print as he responds to them more poignantly. He tells us: “[p]rint is the hard master with the whip” and the “[w]riter is as much abased before [such a master] as reader” (*D* 14). Pornography, for example [“written on the walls of lavatories” (*D* 14)], or in the form of images, can prove just as cruel as the language of the Empire. Coetzee suggests that both the pornographer and the receiver of pornography are doomed. The Magistrate reflects:

The pornographer is the doomed upstart hero who aspires to such delirium of ecstasy that the surface of the point will crack beneath his words. We write our violent novelties on the walls of lavatories to bring the walls down. This is the secret reason, the mere hidden reason [...] we write on lavatory walls to abase ourselves before them (*D* 14).

By the process of debasement, pornography destroys the onlooker and dehumanizes the producer. Martha Nussbaum views pornography as debasing to women and as encouraging abuse towards them. She states:

Much pornography, it is no news to say, depicts sexuality in a way designed to reinforce misogynistic stereotypes, portraying women as base and deserving of abuse, as wanting and asking for abuse, and as outlets for the male’s desire to humiliate and abuse (139).

Coetzee writes that it is “in the pornographic mode that real assaults have taken place” given that “[p]ornography is a form of warfare” (*GO* 30, 31).²¹ Marcus Wood equates pornography with the degradation of the individual. He writes:

[P]ornography is present where the victim is represented (i) as a dehumanized sexual object, thing, or commodity; (ii) as a sexual object which enjoys pain and or humiliation; (iii) as a sexual object cut up, or mutilated or physically hurt; (iv) where the victim is depicted in

postures of sexual submission or sexual servility, including inviting penetration; (v) body parts are exhibited such that the victim is reduced to those parts; (vi) the victim is shown in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture, shown as filthy or inferior, bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that make these conditions sexual (*SEP* 93).

The images that Dawn carefully guards, exhibit at once the cruelty exercised on the victims and the degradation involved. The photographs project the possibility of brutality through the visual language. Two of the photographs specifically exhibit inhumane barbaric acts. One photo:

[...] shows Clifford Loman, 6' 2", 220 lb., onetime linebacker for the University of Houston, now a sergeant in the 1st Air Cavalry, copulating with a Vietnamese woman. The woman is tiny and slim, possibly even a child, though one is usually wrong about the ages of Vietnamese. Loman shows off his strength: arching backward with his hands on his buttocks as he lifts the woman on his erect penis [...] He smiles broadly; she turns a sleepy, foolish face on the unknown photographer (*D* 13).

The other disturbing photograph, which Dawn guards, depicts:

Two Special Forces sergeants named (I read from their chests) Berry and Wilson. Berry and Wilson squat on their heels and smile, partly for the camera but mostly out of the glowing wellbeing of their strong young bodies. Behind them we see scrub, then a wall of trees. Propped on the ground before him Wilson holds the severed head of a man. Berry has two, which he holds by the hair. The heads are Vietnamese, taken from corpses or near-corpSES (*D* 15).

The Empire has not only inflicted absolute damage on the other, but boasts of such barbarity by documenting it in picture form. In the recent war on Iraq, the Abu Ghreib prison photos have proven to be just as shocking as the ones that Dawn cherishes.²² The inquisitors and the guards, who appear to have sadistically relished in their actions, have taken photos of the abused, humiliated, sodomized and tortured prisoners.²³ The fact that they have chosen to document

their behaviour in photographs reveals the need to cherish such abuse.²⁴ The same holds true for Dawn who treasures such images, a matter, which I will discuss in depth in my third chapter. The photos have provided him with perverse entertainment, contributing to his destruction. By repeatedly ogling them, he becomes insensitive to the violence that they represent. This desensitization is also an outcome of the television media, where graphic images of war and violence are continually transmitted. At first the image shocks, then habituates, then estranges. In spite of his failures, Dawn remains until the end of the novella hopeful of rewriting himself in a better light. For instance, he reflects: “[p]erhaps one of these days, when I am feeling better, I will sit down with a block of paper and build for a second time all the sentences, erect with their power of their truth, that constituted my part in the New Life Project” (D 46-47).

In the third part of the Vietnam Project, Dawn in some ways anticipates Jacobus Coetzee, the colonizer-explorer of *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee*:

Had I lived two hundred years ago I would have a continent to explore, to map, to open to colonization. In that vertiginous freedom I might have expanded to my true potential. If I feel cramped nowadays it is because I have no space to beat my wings (D 31-32).

Given the century in which the novella is set, Jacobus does have the space to beat his wings in the interior of a land through which few white men have tread. He gathers an expedition with few of his men to visit the people of the interior for trade. Quite early on in his narrative, the stage of Us versus Them is set. Christianity is cited as the reason for the dichotomy that exists between the Us and Them, the assumption being that people of the book are superior. Jacobus believes that: “[t]he one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They become Christians too, but their Christianity is an empty word” (D 57). It is as if religion can only be acquired superficially because the converted are genetically incapable of being true Christians. People of the book, especially monotheistic religions, generally place themselves on a higher level than others. It is as if they are individually

chosen by a higher being and granted the unique task of spreading the word, the assumption being that God is always on the side of the colonizer, his God being the good one fighting the demonic gods of the other. Pinter simplifies this concept whilst sarcastically entertaining the idea of applying for the post of a speechwriter for the current US President, George W. Bush. In one of the assumed speeches, and in a mocking comment on the War on Terrorism, launched post September 11th, he proposes to write:

God is good. God is great. God is good. My God is good.
Bin Laden's God is bad. His is a bad God. Saddam's God
was bad, except he didn't have one. He was a barbarian.
We are not barbarians. We don't chop people's heads off.
We believe in freedom. So does God. I am not a barbarian
(Pinter <http://lnk.in/4qpw>).

The logic of the above argument is almost childlike but constitutes the essence of colonialist thought. God is on the side of the powerful. A colonizer, convinced of being endowed with the word, the sole holder of the “truth,” exhibits no qualms when subjugating others in the name of religion. The supposition being that they are the chosen ones and have a divine right bestowed upon them by God. They are the ones who possess the Logos, and therefore far more superior than those who survive on oral tradition.

When Jacobus returns to the Namaqua with the sole purpose of ruthlessly avenging them, he once again has God on his side. In his sermon, which he proceeds to give in Dutch, for the sole purpose of exerting his power, and re-establishing the dominant order, he quotes *The Bible*. The vengeance starts with the slaughter of a sacrificial lamb, mimicking Abraham: he says: “[l]ike God in a whirlwind I fell upon a lamb, an innocent little fellow who had never seen his master and was thinking only of a good night’s sleep, and slit his throat” (*D* 100). The slaughter of the lamb sets the stage for what is to follow. In his sermon, which could have been given by a man of the cloth, he uses the royal “we” not only to grant him more authority but also to put him on par with God. He preaches:

We do not require of God that he be good, I told them, all we ask is that he never forget us. Those of us who may momentarily doubt that we are included in the great system of dividends and penalties may take comfort in Our Lord's observation on the fall of the sparrow: the sparrow is cheap but he is not forgotten. An explorer of the wilderness I have always thought myself an evangelist and endeavoured to bring to the heathen the gospel of the sparrow, which falls but falls with design (*D* 101).

Jacobus employs a Biblical reference, at once to restore the order of hierarchy of the Empire, and to justify the crimes he is about to commit as the gospel "falls with design" (*D* 101). Although the nomad is likened to a cheap sparrow, his acts will never be forgotten in the larger scheme of things. A higher invisible authority will document him, along with his insignificant acts, for knowledge empowers. An order that is created by the Divine should never be questioned.

On numerous occasions in the novel, Jacobus, believing in his superiority, has likened the Bushman to a beast, and he, in contrast, sees himself as:

[...] a domesticator of the wilderness, a hero of enumeration [...and he] who does not understand number does not understand death. Death is as obscure to him as to an animal. This holds true of the Bushman, and can be seen in his language, which does not include a procedure for counting (*D* 80).

The Bushman, we are told, "has no conception of number, anything more than two is "many [...]. One, two, many, is how he counts" (*D* 61). Ignorance of the colonial system of numbering definitely puts the Bushman at another disadvantage. Colonialism, which prides itself in documenting and numbering the other, definitely considers itself on a higher moral ground than a barbarian who is alien to its system of numeration. When Jacobus describes himself as having killed and "presided over the becoming number of ten thousand creatures, omitting the innumerable insects that have expired beneath [his] feet," he is boasting by the grandiose number he has achieved (*D* 80). Therefore, when the Empire slaughters large numbers of the other, it can be viewed an achievement of its civilized order. Numbers and words are but instruments in the hands of an

Empire whose mission it claims is “to bring light to what is dark” leaving behind individuals devastated by a cruel system that has enforced language upon them in the most cruel of ways, and has turned them into mere numbers (*D* 106). The revenge that Jacobus has sought is not solely for what the Namaquas have done to him, [i.e. placing him in the menstruation hut when he was ill (*D* 77)], but is precisely because of what they have not done. Their simple and relaxed life-style fails to provide material for the adventurer Jacobus, indirectly withholding material for his book or memoirs. Coetzee writes about this in regards to the Hottentots, who also fail to provide content to those who want to document them. He writes:

What I do wish to stress, however, is that the almost universal denunciation among the travel writers represents a reaction to a challenge, a scandal, that strikes particularly near to them as writers; that the laziness of the Hottentot aborts one of the more promising of discourses about elemental man. Nor is this generation of writers the last to respond with frustration to the recalcitrance of the colonies to generate materials to fill out its discourse (*WW* 23).

The urge to fill out the discourse intrinsically rises from the ultimate need to document one’s own existence. The discourse of the colonizer needs to be filled out for his role to be justified. The negative aspects claimed in others are the very ones he has inwardly seen and has projected onto others. It may be impossible to save the colonized from the colonizer’s dehumanizing myth as the “portrait of wretchedness has been indelibly engraved,” in the end a portrait imprinted in the psyches of the colonizer and colonized (Memmi 126).

2. Silence as Method *Life and Times of Michael K*:

In the previous section, I have discussed how language within a system of colonialism is manipulated, and how its communicative function has been forfeited in favour of a cruel role. Language evolves into an instrument for exerting power. In this part, I will further demonstrate how language becomes fixated in a certain role that results in further cruelty, albeit at times

subconsciously. To counteract this inhumane practice, characters opt for silence. My discussion will be of Coetzee's *Life of Times of Michael K* and *Foe*, in which, I believe resistance is exercised on a conscious level.

Life and Times of Michael K is a novel exclusively set in South Africa of the 1980s, troubled times of revolt and immense cruelty and repression. Born with a hare-lip, the novel's hero, Michael K is a form of counter-existence to the mores that prevail around him. Leading a solitary life as a gardener, his ailing mother persuades him to leave his job and accompany her to her birthplace, an arduous task in times of war. The opening line of the novel introduces us to Michael's physical disability:

The first thing the midwife noticed about Michael K [...] was that he had a hare lip. The lip curled like a snail's foot, the foot, the left nostril gaped ... [and on seeing him the mother] shivered to think of what had been growing in her all these months. The child could not suck of the breast and cried with hunger. She tried a bottle: when it could not suck from the bottle she fed it with a teaspoon (*LTMK* 3).

The unwelcome unidentifiable "it" has to be marginalised, making sure 'it' does not disturb the established order. Unable to confront others' "smiles and whispers," the mother "kept it away from other children. Year after year, Michael K sat on a blanket watching his mother polish other people's floors, learning to be quiet" (*LTMK* 4). Michael's unfortunate birth more or less defines the life he later leads. His deformity has labelled him as a subordinate being. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri observe that: "[s]ubordinated peoples are thus conceived (at least implicitly) as other than human, as a different order of being" (191).

His inability to speak coherently forces him to retreat into the world of silence. To the rule of silence, he has adhered well, even at times of unemployment when he has lain "on his bed looking at his hands" (*LTMK* 4). Often, Michael has wondered as to why he has been brought into the world. The narrator tells us:

The problem that had exercised him years ago behind the bicycle shed at Huis Norenius, namely why he had been brought into the world, had received its answer: he had been brought into the world to look after his mother [... and] had believed through all the years in Huis Norenius that his mother had left him there for a reason (*LTMK* 7, 8).

Not only has Anna K rejected her son at birth but has also exploited his simplicity. She has encouraged the notion that he has been brought into the world for the mere purpose of taking care of her. She has failed to grant him the language that he may have needed, but nonetheless, has continued to manipulate him through the language from which he has been occluded. The mother has set the stage for her son to be prepared for further abuse in his life.

Susan V Gallagher finds Michael's silence "one of the most striking and revealing" aspect of his character (161). She observes:

Unlike the central characters in Coetzee's previous novels, who are all obsessive talkers, endlessly chronicling their lives in their first-person accounts, Michael does not tell his own story. In using a third-person limited point of view, Coetzee gives us access to Michael's mind but preserves Michael's silence (Gallagher 161).

Even if Michael wants to tell his own story, he is unable to as he lacks the know-how.²⁵ He reflects:

And if I had learned storytelling at Huis Norenius instead of potato-peeling and sums, if they had made me practice the story of my life every day, standing over me with a crane till I could perform without stumbling, I might have known how to please them (*LTMK* 181).

Michael will never be able to tell his story. To him, his father represents an absent authority that can only dictate laws. That is why Michael refers to his father by the orphanage's name. Michael, "the signifier that escapes systematization" is incapable of signifying or naming (Attridge *JMCER* 49). Michael reflects:

My mother was the one whose ashes I brought back, he thought, and my father was Huis Norenius. My father was the list of rules on the door of the dormitory, the twenty-one rules of which, the first was "There will be silence in dormitories at all times" (*LTMK* 105).

Fanon maintains that a man who has no language consequently cannot possess the world that is implied by that language (Fanon *BSWM* 18). It can be added that instead, he can try to possess its opposite, the silence. However, Michael has no control over the silence especially that everyone tries to disturb the stillness that is his life. Being fatherless and nameless, authority is compelled, for its own safekeeping, to exert its force and impose certain realities on Michael. The role of language is reduced to giving orders. In this way, actual communication falters, and the only intercourse that is available is a master and slave dialectic. Gallagher sees his silences as a testimony "[...] to the history of the silencing of the Others in South Africa" (162). She continues:

Seen in the context of the impersonal forces that control and shape his life, Michael's passivity suggests the hopelessness that such a system breeds. As a physically handicapped, coloured, apparently simple-minded gardener who works for the Council and lives in a hostel, Michael epitomizes those at the margins of power and authority who have been repeatedly silenced in South Africa (162-163).

As the novel progresses, Michael begins to assume political significance even though he has not striven to do so. Authority's confrontation with him forces him to adopt a stance. His silence becomes a form of rebellion. In spite of his reluctance to speak, Michael has actually obeyed and responded verbally to all the orders that have been inflicted upon him. The hospital official confirms the latter in an undelivered letter that he addresses to Michael. He writes:

In fact you did not resist at all. When we told you to jump, you jumped. When we told you to jump again, you jumped again. When we told you to jump a third time, however, you did not respond but collapsed in a heap; and we could all see, even the most unwilling of us, that you had failed

because you had exhausted your resources in obeying us
(*LTMK* 163).

One of the rare occurrences in which Michael has refused to follow orders is when they have asked him to sing; and “[a]s punishment he was made to do exercises: squats and star-jumps. After half a dozen of these he collapsed and could not be revived” (*LTMK* 144). Cruelty has no boundaries; when asked as to why Michael has been asked to sing, the officer, offhandedly, replies “[i]t’s in the book” (*LTMK* 145). After all, the written word cannot be disputed. Michael has not only obeyed the inexplicable orders of the authority but also his mother’s wishes and the rules of the orphanage, which he has envisaged as stemming from an absent father.

Teresa Dovey views the absence of the father as what specifically forces Michael into the world of silence: “There is no father, so K remains subjected to the mother’s desire, and in, a sense, outside language, relegated to the realm of silence” (297-298). Even though the absence of a father remains an important factor behind his condition, it is not the primary cause. Michael’s world of silence is a product of many factors. From birth, he may be transfixed as “the innocent victim of the object of narration,” but his subaltern status is intensified by nearly all whom he encounters on his journey inwards (Dovey 284).

Practically, all of the people Michael meets on his trip to the Karoo not only urge him to tell his story, but also attempt to place him in a history they understand. If Michael consents to telling his story, he may be able to enter the history he has chosen to forsake, theirs. He chooses not to. Michael Marais sees “the novel [as consisting] of a series of replicated episodes, each of which brings Michael K into contact with a character who attempts to assert himself by asserting K’s alterity” (2001, 108). The need, to affirm the self, stems from both the fear of the other and the necessity for control of that other.²⁶ Attridge notes “that phrases like “[he] thought” are frequently resorted to, continually reminding us that we are outside Michael K’s consciousness. [And] this stylistic choice— together with the use of the past tense—allows Coetzee to sustain throughout the fiction the otherness of K’s response” (*JMCER* 50). In effect, that which is realized is the otherness of the whole person. For this reason, language, in its

many facets, becomes the mode of imposing control and subjugating the otherness within Michael. Attridge states:

Since it is language that has played a major role in producing (and simultaneously occluding) the other, it is in language—language aware of its ideological effects, alert to its own capacity to impose silence as it speaks—that the force of the other can be most strongly represented (2004, 669).

Michael's inability and reluctance to speak does not grant him this representation. The only way he can assert his own will is by *preferring not to* (Melville 10). Michael's rejection is a refusal to be coerced into doing something he dislikes. His mode of rejection is primordial, refusing to talk and declining to eat.²⁷

The officials Michael encounters are more likely than not to speak at him rather than to him. Failing to understand the official language they represent, he persistently asks for clarification and invariably the reply at best pushes him away. Whilst trying to explain to the police officer as to why he needs the permit early, the response he gets is:

Don't waste my time, if the permit is granted the permit will come! Don't you see all these people waiting? Don't you understand? Are you an idiot? Next!' She braced herself against the counter and glared pointedly over K's shoulder: 'Yes, you, next!' (*LTMK* 20)

A similar scene repeats itself when on his departure from the city he is stopped by soldiers asking for permits: "'[h]ave you got a permit, yes or no?' demanded the corporal in command. 'I don't care who you are, who your mother is, if you haven't got a permit you can't leave the area, finished'" (*LTMK* 23). Authoritative language can only function in binary opposition and its primary function is to exert the power it upholds. Officials, at the mercy of the language in which they have been instructed to use, no longer have the ability to communicate their response in a coherent way; it becomes merely a mechanical reaction to repel the other rather than to inform. Partially, they have become instruments of an authoritative-hierarchal language without even realizing it.

Michael K fails to understand why the authorities refuse to listen to him. Rules pinned on the door of the orphanage, unbending laws that officials refuse to explain, continuously talked at, and urged to be quiet, are the very practices that he has been brought up on and exposed to all his life. When the practice is slightly altered, he fails to respond. All his life he has been accustomed to be at the receiving end of language. When his mother dies at the hospital, he is unable to provide the hospital official with any information. The official is the person who signs the mother's death certificate (*LTMK* 31). On another occasion in the novel when asked a simple question of "[h]ow are you feeling today" by the doctor, "K hesitate[s], not knowing what to say," and like everyone Michael encounters, the doctor stops listening, preferring to make up his own story (*LTMK* 72). Confused and incapable of answering, Michael retreats once again into his silence. In more than one respect, Michael is rendered foreign, "dematerialized," "outside of proper meaning" (Saunders 219).

At times, Michael is both verbally abused and called derogatory names by the people in authority (*LTMK* 77, 87, 123). Agamben documents some of the facetious terms used to refer to the Nazi prisoners:

The living dead there were termed 'donkeys'; in Dachau they were 'cretins,' in Stutthof 'cripples,' in Mauthausen 'swimmers,' in Neuengamme 'camels,' in Buchenwald 'tired sheikhs,' and in the women's camp known as Ravensbruck, *Muselweiber* (female Muslims) or 'trinkets' (*RAWA* 44).

In this manner, language is used to break an already broken soul. The being is transformed into the non-human, on the verge of the abyss between the state of living and non-living (Agamben *RAWA* 52). Nussbaum remarks: "[o]ne way of putting a group down is to cause it to occupy a status between the fully human and the merely animal" (110). Michael, who walks the thin line separating the living from the dead, resists when he is symbolically flogged by merciless words and fights against becoming "the threshold between the human and the inhuman" (Agamben *RAWA* 55).²⁸ The one thing he is not allowed to do is to escape the world of words. To him, heaven becomes the place where one can exist in

complete silence, as when he reflects: "I could live here forever, he thought, or till I die. Nothing would happen, every day would be the same as the day before, there would be nothing to say. The anxiety that belonged to the time on the road began to leave him" (*LTMK* 46). He strives to be liberated from the anxiety caused by language. Marais writes that "K's visit to the farm suggests a state that is akin to what Levinas refers to as the *il y a*, that is, the experience of consciousness without a subject, a totally impersonal, neutral situation in which Being is detached from beings which control it" (2001, 111). Michael is happiest alone on the farm, removed from humanity, amidst his pumpkin seeds where his relationship is solely to the earth that he feels he has some control over.²⁹ Michael's escape into the land, avoiding any contact with other humans, is akin to Herman Melville's *Bartleby* who also chooses to remain on the fringes of language and society. Throughout the novella, whenever he is asked to perform a task, *Bartleby* invariably responds with one phrase "I would prefer not to" (Melville 10). *Bartleby*'s persistent refusal stems from a reluctance to be part of the mainstream. If he does not engage in the society, it is his belief that society can let him be and is incapable of exerting power over him. Agamben writes that:

As a scribe who has stopped writing, *Bartleby* is the extreme figure of the Nothing from which all creation derives; and at the same time, he constitutes the most implacable vindication of this Nothing as pure, absolute potentiality. The scrivener has become the writing tablet; he is now nothing other than his white sheet (*P* 253-254).

This is also Michael's very desire, to continue being the white sheet, to remain on the periphery of a society that has already shunned him, yet insistent on codifying him. Hardt and Negri view "K's refusal of authority [...] as absolute as *Bartleby*'s, and that very absoluteness and simplicity situate him, too, on a level of ontological purity"(203-204); the difference, however, lies in *Bartleby*'s conscious intention to assume a stand, while Michael's rejection stems from avoidance of what is unpleasant and painful. Unfortunately for Michael, the ontological purity, stemming from his desire to abstain from any social interaction, is violated at the end of the novel when a prostitute performs oral

coitus on him, which leaves him a state of shame (*LTMK* 178-179). Left to his own devices, Michael prefers to shun human contact in favour of living in the wilderness growing his own food.³⁰ Dovey considers “K’s act of producing pumpkins from the earth which contains his mother’s remains, [...] an attempt to give expression to desire, and is likewise, no more than a ‘trick of words’, because desire is beyond articulation” (293). Nonetheless, I am more inclined to agree with Marais’ position in which he observes, “K’s passive state on the farm is an effect of the absence of language” (2001, 118). Michael’s ideal situation is precisely neither to be forced to talk, nor to tell a story. Michael’s unsuspecting life runs parallel to the existence of others, on the fringes, and not in conscious confrontation with life. He would have preferred to continue in this fashion. However, in a world that needs to document humans turning them into numbers and statistics, Michael will never be able to enjoy the silence he craves. In order to survive on the farm and lead a solitary existence, Michael trains himself to want very little. He has mastered his control of hunger, as the narrator tells us in the following:

As a child K had been hungry, like all the children of Huis Norenius. Hunger had turned them into animals who stole from one another’s plates and climbed the kitchen enclosure to rifle the garbage cans for bones and feelings. Then he had grown older and stopped wanting. Whatever the nature of the beast that had howled inside him, it was starved into stillness (*LTMK* 68).

Michael’s answer to the starvation inflicted on him by the authority at the orphanage is stillness. Michael’s reply to the authority that consistently interrogates him is silence. In both cases, Michael is resisting being turned into a sheer animal at the mercy of the authority. To Dovey, Michael’s “fasting implies a retreat out of the life of the discourse, into the death, or silence, which brings life” (305). By shying away from discourse, Michael hopes to regain his earlier life. As with Magda, who tells us “I am a being with a hole inside me,” Michael can never be complete or whole, as the hole inside his being consumes the words that are poured inside it, and only the gap remains (*IHC* 44, *LTMK* 110).³¹ Force-feeding Michael fails to fill the literal and figurative hole within him.³² The

medical officer understands why Michael rejects the food: “‘It’s not a question of dying,’ I said. ‘It’s not that he wants to die. He just doesn’t like the food here. Profoundly does not like it. He won’t even take babyfood. Maybe he only eats the bread of freedom” (*LTMK* 146). In some respects, Michael is a translation of an earlier abstainer, the hunger artist in Kafka’s short story with the same title. The hunger artist spends his whole life fasting because he simply “couldn’t find the food [he] liked” (*KCSS* 277). Contrary to Michael, the hunger artist thrives on being an exhibit, while Michael digs a dwelling for himself in the earth in order that he may protect the hole that has formed within him:

His first step was to hollow out the sides of the crevice till it was wider at the bottom than the top, and to flatten the gravel bed. The narrower end be blocked with a heap of stones. Then he laid the three fenceposts across the crevice, and upon them the iron sheet, with slabs of stone to hold it down. He now had a cave or burrow five feet deep (*LTMK* 100).

Michael’s burrow is at once a shelter from intruders and an answer to the fear that is at his core, “a hollowing of a pre-existent form” (Dovey 287). Michael’s burrow echoes Kafka’s man in the short story with the same title, who also digs a hole in the earth, *claiming* fear is not the motive behind his little adventure. He states:

But you do not know me if you think I am afraid, or that I built my burrow simple out of fear. At a distance of some thousand paces from this hole lies, covered by a movable layer of moss, the real entrance to the burrow; it is secured as safely as anything in this world can be secured (*KCSS* 325).

It is fear of engagement with humanity that prompts both men to build their burrows deep in the earth. In their respective burrows they can lie quietly, undisturbed, curled up like foetuses in their mothers’ wombs. The silence is short-lived, as Michael cannot escape the authority that wants to document him.³³

Language, which at once has failed to “write” him, to fill the hole within him, becomes Michael’s biggest crime. This manifests itself every time the authorities

arrest him. When he is rounded up for sleeping in the doorway of the Volkskas office without any documents, he is presented as the obscure other, who has dared evade the authority's system of writing. The constable says:

No one knew where he was from. He had no papers on him, not even a green card. On the charge sheet he was listed 'Michael Visagie—CM-40-NFA-Unemployed,' and charged with leaving his magisterial district without authorization, not being in possession of an identification document, infringing the curfew, and being drunk and disorderly (*LTMK* 70).

The need to document and classify, irrespective of the information noted, forms the essence of authoritarian/colonialist regimes. Records give credence to the latter. Assigning words to people and events is their sole protection against the other they fail to understand. The hospital official exclaims to Michael:

Extraordinary, though, that you should have survived thirty years in the shadow of the city, followed by a season footloose in the war zone (if one is to believe your story), and come out intact, when keeping you alive is like keeping the weakest pet duckling alive, or the runt of the cat's litter, or a fledgling expelled from the nest. No papers, no money; no family, no friends, no sense of who you are. The obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy (*LTMK* 142).

Once again, the extraordinary phenomenon that has eluded documentation is described condescendingly in animal terms. Even the term prodigy, in this particular case, cannot be viewed as complimentary, the implication favouring the spectacle rather than the genius. The hospital official, like the Magistrate's stance towards the barbarians, appears a bit more sympathetic towards Michael. Nonetheless, he remains suspicious of Michael's story. He has urged him to tell his story, and when he eventually does, the story fails to satisfy the authority, for the assumption is that whatever is first said is always suspect. When Michael is arrested under suspicion of helping the Swartberg insurgent gang, he is urged to tell the truth, the belief being that he is most likely to be untruthful. When:

They brought K over to confront his handiwork, holding him upright, no longer disposed to be kindly. Tears ran down his face. 'Did you make this?' they asked. He nodded. 'Are you alone here?' He nodded. The soldier holding him brought his arm sharply behind his back. K hissed with pain. 'The truth!' said the soldier. 'It is the truth,' said K (*LTMK* 121).

Moreover, when he describes his mother's life to them, the official reciprocates with "[a]s for your mother, I am sure you have not told the full story and I am sure you know that" (*LTMK* 136).

The other is always at the mercy of the authority's assumptions, even if the latter are unfounded or cause pain. The higher authority is not interested in Michael's tears and as Bohm finds "[s]uffering is [... neither] correct nor interesting nor true when uttered by those without power" (31). This contrasts sharply with Michael who does not have any preconceived notions. When told by the stranger he meets "[p]eople must help each other," he ponders over the statement (*LTMK* 48). Authority claims to be certain of its beliefs and figures, possibly stemming from its insecurity. In contrast, Michael is incapable of explaining himself even to himself. The narrator reflects:

Always, when he tried to explain himself to himself, there remained a gap, a hole, a darkness before which his understanding balked into which it was useless to pour words. The words were eaten up, the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it: a wrong story, always wrong (*LTMK* 110).

In their flurry of documentation, those in authority choose the names, qualify people, but the information is often inaccurate. None of the officials who interrogate Michael is bothered to address him with his own name. Instead, they choose a name for him, and the person whom this name is supposed to signify is converted into a non-person. Choosing the name Michaels for him further obliterates him:

Noël brought out the register. 'According to this,' he said, 'Michaels is an arsonist. He is also an escapee from a

labour camp. He was running a flourishing garden when on an abandoned farm and feeding the local guerrilla population when he was captured. That is the story of Michaels' (*LTMK* 131).

By imposing their own version of his story on him, the real Michael ceases to exist, and is replaced by the non-existent Michaels. In some respect, by pluralizing his name, they have turned him into a generic commodity. For the authority, their story of "Michaels" must be correct as it is documented, the assumption being that whatever is written is the truth. Michael is neither able to fend for himself verbally when asked to tell his story, nor is he capable of fighting the written world. Granted "[t]he story of his life had never been an interesting one;" yet the hospital official tells him: "[y]ou ask why you are important, Michaels. The answer is that you are not important. But that does not mean you are forgotten. No one is forgotten" (*LTMK* 67, 136). Michael is important because he is yet to be documented; power is yet to be exercised on him. In an indirect reference to *Luke* [12: 4-7], Michael is told no sparrow is forgotten (*LTMK* 136). Quoting *The Bible* grants more authority to the hospital official. Head notes: "[i]n an imagined final address to the fleeing K, [the hospital official] acknowledges his position as 'persecutor, madman, bloodhound, policeman', but the pursuit of meaning has now become his *raison d'être*" (108). The medical officer may have gained some insight into what Michael is, but he persists in his interrogation (*LTMK* 140).

The need to "write" him is paramount, so the officials must "[m]ake up something for the report," realizing that there is nothing there, no story of the slightest interest to rational people [...] He is not of [their] world. He lives in a world all his own" (*LTMK* 141, 142). Bhabha describes the reason for Colonialism's obsession with documentation in the following paragraph:

The colonial space is the terra incognita or the terra nulla, the empty or wasted land whose history has to be begun, whose archives must be filled out; whose future progress must be secured in modernity. But the colonial space also stands for the despotic time of the Orient that becomes a great problem for the definition of modernity and its

inscription of the history of the colonized from the perspective of the West (246).

The belief that the future can only be secured through documentation is the cause behind the insistence of authoritarian regimes or colonizers to impose language in its cruellest form on the colonized. He has to be documented from a perspective that is foreign to him by a culture that has marginalized him but is suddenly in need to label him. Michael best describes the need to categorize people when he sardonically suggests towards the end of the novel:

Now they have camps for children whose parents run away, camps for people who kick and foam at the mouth, camps for people with big heads and people with little heads, camps for people with no visible means of support, camps for people chased off the land, camps for people who live in the mountains and blow up bridges in the night (*LTMK* 182).

Occasionally in the novel and specifically in the last section I feel that the narrator is Coetzee and not Michael; the author appears to be reflecting on Michael's achievement of escaping the authority of the camps (*LTMK* 182). In an interview with *VPRO*, Coetzee describes the conclusion of this novel as happy because with a little water one can live again (Coetzee <http://lnk.in/4rah>, *LTMK* 184).

Having been in a camp on two occasions, Michael is aware what the transient state of this kind of establishment entails. Suspended outside the law, anything becomes possible. Agamben finds that the camp [he is describing concentration camps] develops into the "hybrid of [the] law" (*HSSPBL* 170). Michael eludes authority and escapes. In the novel's epigraph, Coetzee quotes Heraclitus: "War is the father of all and king of all/Some he shows as gods, others as men/Some he makes slaves, and others free."³⁴ Likewise, during war, emergency laws take over allowing the authority to impose whatever it sees fit, haphazardly choosing its victims.³⁵

Earlier in the novel, the medical officer describes Michael's presence in the camp as an allegory:

Your stay in the camp was merely an allegory, if you know that word. It was an allegory—speaking at the highest level—of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it. Did you notice how, whenever I tried to pin you down, you slipped away? (*LTMK* 166).

Michael can never be grasped, as his whole existence has been literally one deferral after another. In an interview with Morphet, Coetzee remarks: “[t]here is a sense in which Michael K cannot die” (Coetzee 1983, 1987, 464). The inability to pin down Michael adds a haunting quality to his very existence. Derrida writes that the sign:

[...] takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. We take or give signs. We signal. The sign, in this sense, is deferred presence (*ADRBB* 59).

Through his silence, Michael has eluded authority. They have failed to grasp him in the present, or signify him through a past; he will continually exist as a deferred presence, resisting signification. Paradoxically, Coetzee is writing about a character whose preferred method of expression is silence. With words, Coetzee is invoking silence. The inability to capture or define Michael renders both the actual person and the text that has created him questionable, open to interpretation. “I am what I am” he tells the doctor, but this is the very *I* that they fail to comprehend or seize (*LTMK* 130).

2. Silence as Method: *Foe*:

In the preceding section, I have demonstrated another aspect of the subaltern’s reaction to the violence exerted by the authoritarian language, namely in Michael K’s choosing silence in the face of a cruel system that tries to document him. Michael K presents a departure from the traditional rebellion to the colonizer’s language. Response to the language of the colonizer takes on different shapes

and forms. Some may reject it, yet acquire and speak it with native accuracy, in defiance of the colonizer; others reluctantly incorporate part of the language, adding their own version of idioms and grammar, whilst a number resent it in its entirety, choosing silence as a form of response. The latter is evident in *Foe*, where Friday is both physically and symbolically silent and ultimately aborting Susan Barton's attempt to be able to tell her story. His missing tongue prevents him from being vocal but one cannot ignore a sense of resentment that is exhibited by Friday throughout.

In the tradition of explorers and travel writers, Barton, a female castaway, is confident that she has enough material to have her story written into a successful novel. On her arrival in England, with Friday, the slave she has inherited from Cruso, she contacts a certain Mr. Foe, whom she hopes will write her story. Initially, very keen to document her experiences on the island, Barton is at once a victimizer and a victim of the language of colonialism, a provider of a narrative and an extractor of a story. The story Barton aspires to have written falls in the tradition of the colonizer's story-telling genre, in which the locale and the native are usually romanticized and perceived exotic, imposing another reality on the 'natives'. This inaccurate portrayal of the native renders her/him at best unreal, forever eclipsed. However, Barton is unable to follow in the footsteps of this tradition. Her narrative begins to deconstruct itself from the very beginning of the novel, her story an antithesis of the genre that she has anticipated. She comments:

For readers reared on travellers' tales, the words desert isle may conjure up a place of soft sands and shady trees where brooks run to quench the castaway's thirst and ripe fruit falls into his hand, where no more is asked of him than to drowse the days away till a ship calls to fetch him home (*F* 7).

As Barton narrates her story, a contrariety to this Utopia unfolds. As I will be discussing her linguistic anguish in the second chapter, I will concentrate on the implications the language of colonialism has had on Friday. His given name at once places him in the role of the slave. In earlier times, for lack of care or

interest, slaves were given the name of the day on which their new masters bought them or when they were born into captivity. The naming process itself does not only add a tag to their existence, a label announcing that they are slaves, but also objectifies them, rendering them subhuman. Samuel Durrant finds:

The “failed” names of Friday, Michael K, and the barbarian girl make it impossible to conjure them away; their bodies, seemingly more “material” than other bodies, assault our (ethical) sight. Their disfigurements—Friday’s severed tongue, Michael K’s harelip and emaciation, the barbarian girl’s scars—literally disfigure or unname them, confirming their status as objects, rather than subjects, of history. Instead of marking their entrance into the symbolic order of language and culture, instead of naming them as fully individuated subjects, their disfigurements function to disallow the entrance into the symbolic order, to mark them as abject, foreign bodies, bodies that fail to function as the sign of individual humans [...] (2000, 437-438).³⁶

In his discussion of C.H. Kühn’s trilogy, Coetzee writes: “[r]elinquishing his true given name (as “Friday” in the Crusoe story relinquishes his), Toiings [hence] accepts the name his master gives—objectively a name of derision, however much masked with affection—and becomes his master’s creature” (132). Coetzee’s Friday is in no position to accept or reject the name that his master Crusoe has chosen for him. Friday’s predicament epitomizes the most tyrannical form of silencing at the hands of colonialism. Friday’s mutilated tongue sentences him to a life of speechlessness, forever unable to define his being. Crusoe tells Barton: “Perhaps they wanted to prevent him from ever telling his story: who he was, where his home lay, how it came about that he was taken. Perhaps they cut out the tongue of every cannibal they took, as punishment” (*F* 23).

Eradicating his history further emphasizes his position as object, a semi-human being. Not only is Friday forced to inhabit this world of muteness, without a history, but is also rendered partially deaf in his silent world. Crusoe has ruled what words Friday needs to be taught and allowed to hear, only “[a]s many as he needs [...]”. This is not England, we have no need of a great stock of words” (*F*

21). Words for orders and objects' names define the boundaries and his limited entry into the world of language. Contrary to what Crusoe wants us to believe, Friday is not given the words he needs, but those words that his master has deemed essential. To teach Friday too many English words could prove to be dangerous. Limited knowledge is a virtue; it perpetuates his role as a slave, an inferior who will not pose a threat. For Barton, however, conversations are "blessings of civilization" and speechlessness is equated to imbecility (*F* 22). Had Crusoe taught Friday the art of conversation, the latter would have evolved into the better man who is capable of entertaining his master. Unlike Michael K who declines to sing when forced by Sergeant Albrechts, Friday, "obedient to his master, [begins] to hum in a low voice" to appease "Mistress Barton" (*LTMK* 144, *F* 22). Throughout the novel, Barton is seen using derogatory terms when she refers to Friday: animal, child, dog, frightened horse, shadow and slave, all underlining his incomplete existence. Adorno states that the cruelty imposed on the victim diminishes in proportion to how the other is viewed. He writes:

Indignation over cruelty diminishes in proportion as the victims are less like normal readers, the more they are swarthy, 'dirty,' dago-like. This throws as much light on the crimes as the spectators.[...] after all, it's only an animal'—reappears irresistibly in cruelties done to human beings, the perpetrators having again and again to assure themselves that it is 'only an animal', [...] The mechanism of 'pathetic projection' determines that those in power perceive as human only their own reflected image [...] (Adorno *MM* 105).

Calling Friday names allows Barton to carry on with the tradition of enslaving him; he is never asked if he wants to accompany her. She automatically takes him over, a commodity she inherits from Crusoe after he dies, an object she does not even like but towards which she feels some responsibility (*F* 111). Barton even persuades herself that Friday can be moulded according to her desire:

Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a

cannibal: I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman (*F* 121).

Friday's history has been stolen from him; Barton and Crusoe attempt at replacing it with another narrative. It is exactly what they need to perceive in themselves that they transfer on the other in front of them. The other becomes an extension of their narrative, though in an incomplete form. Barton informs Foe "Friday has grown to be [her] shadow" (*F* 115). The narratives are intertwined; the boundaries between master and slave become less defined: as per Bhabha "there is only the matter of the enslaved master, the unmastered slave" (131). Barton's own story can never be complete without Friday's, a realization she becomes more aware of as the novel progresses. Barton stresses to Foe that she is a "substantial being with a substantial history in the world," but her own identity cannot be complete without the history of Friday's which has been eradicated (*F* 131). Yet in the colonialist tradition, Barton is certain that if Friday could talk, "(Friday might not know the meaning of the word truth...)" he would only utter untruths (*F* 68). She attempts communicating with Friday, to establish a form of dialogue, be it through music, through teaching him to write, but Friday doggedly holds his silence. She tells Foe that: "[i]n every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story" (*F* 141). The heart of her story is Friday's story, which refuses to allow her entry, for Friday's language, as with Michael's and the barbarian girl's, inhabits "a place where bodies are their own signs" (*F* 157). Once again, Coetzee is emphasizing that the story of the oppressed cannot be told by the oppressor. Attwell sees: "Friday, [as] the symptomatic presence of all colonial narratives, seemingly dead but in fact not dead, [outlives] the stories that might or might not include him" (*JMCSAPW* 116). It is not perchance that Friday's O's are what reverberate at the end of the novel and not Barton's words.

As with the barbarian girl and Michael K, Friday defies the Empire and its language. When forced to write, he chooses to write rows of the letter O, or composes a pattern of open eyes and feet, signs that only he can understand (*F* 152, 147). Friday's defiance is clearly exhibited through his dances, forms of

a trance that allow him to escape into his world, which is forbidden to others (*F* 92). In a letter addressed to Foe, Barton notes how the latter's robes, which Friday discovered, had set Friday dancing:

The robes have set him dancing, which I had never seen him do before. In the mornings he dances in the kitchen, where the windows face east. If the sun is shining he does his dance in a patch of sunlight, holding out his arms and spinning in a circle, his eyes shut, hour after hour, never growing fatigued or dizzy (*F* 92).

The robes have at once provided Friday with the shield that protects him from the colonizer's words and the veil that conceals his mutilated self from the world. They have also granted him the freedom to communicate on his own terms, through a defiant circular dance, hour after hour, in front of a window, his eyes shut, immersed in world of signs from which all are excluded. Friday's dance could also be viewed a form of ritual. Durrant considers the bodily rituals in Coetzee "closer to melancholia than to mourning "because of Coetzee's reluctance to attribute a redemptive meaning to suffering. Because we do not have access to the interior lives of his figures of alterity, we cannot tell whether their silent rituals afford them relief" (*PNWM* 64). We can only speculate if Friday's dance offers him relief. More likely, it is a dance of defiance.

Alternatively, Adorno writes that "[t]he human is indissolubly linked with imitation: a human being only becomes human at all by imitating other human beings" (*MM* 154). With a lost history, Friday has had to imitate his masters. However, he has rejected being subjected to the cruelty of their language; his dissent at times comes in the form of mimicry. When he sits at Foe's table, donning the robes, Barton mistakes him for Foe:

But the man seated at the table was not Foe. It was Friday, with Foe's robes on his back and Foe's wig, filthy as a bird's nest, on his head. In his hand, poised over Foe's papers, he held a quill with a drop of black ink glistening at its tip (*F* 151).

For a brief moment, Friday inserts himself into the role of the master, but ultimately on his own terms. Barton has thought that by making “the air around [Friday] thick with words, memories will be reborn in him” but the only thing that she has achieved is stifling him further for the language and memories that are resurrected consist of different signs (*F* 59); after years of servitude his “identity has been centered elsewhere” (Coundouriotis 856). When Barton finally manages to open his mouth, an interrupted stream flows from it not only to envelop her but the world beyond. It is as if his O’s have been released from the paper, carrying their own signs, inhabiting another world.³⁷

3. Words that shame: *Disgrace*:

Although language in *Disgrace* functions differently from its role in the novels I have previously discussed, I find it, nonetheless, just as oppressive. *Disgrace* is set in the post-apartheid era of South Africa. The hero is David Lurie, a disgraced university professor, who escapes to his daughter’s farm in the Eastern Cape after being made to resign. Unlike the previous characters that are marked by a physical deformity that shames them, Lurie is shamed by his action. An English Language and Literature Professor, he is a product of a language and a problematic colonial system that are no longer applicable. Throughout the novel, he finds himself suspended in an inapt discourse adding to his sense of alienation in a country that is no longer recognizable. Bhabha states: “[f]ixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition” (66). Bhabha’s concept of *fixity* is embedded in the character of David Lurie. Lurie is part of the colonial discourse that has provided him with the rigid linguistic framework through which he functions. Language, which has once aided him, now fails him.³⁸ Having been brought up in the Western tradition and with the language of the Empire, he is, at the present, incapable of coping with the events and the changes that are happening around him. When in need, he resorts to this failed discourse.

Although his conventions are no longer relevant, they become valuable through times of stress. In his lifetime, the narrator tells us that:

[...] he has published three books, none of which has caused a stir or even a ripple: the first on opera (Boito and the Faust Legend: The Genesis of Mefistofele), the second on vision as eros (The Vision of Richard St Victor), the third on Wordsworth and history (Wordsworth and the Burdens of the Past) (*Di* 4).

He is also currently working on a chamber opera on the love life of Lord Byron, which will never see the light, an opera that is being composed by a person he himself depicts as “obscure and growing obscurer. A figure from the margins of history” (*Di* 167). His opera is as irrelevant as the language he insists on using; they both belong to a Western tradition that is losing its ground in the new South Africa. Graham Pechey sees Lurie as identifying with the Romantic poets he enjoys, specifically Byron, the subject of his opera. Lurie’s affiliation with Byron is his overwhelming feeling of having become an exile in his country. Pechey writes:

Like Lurie, its male representatives led ‘imperfect’ lives and were forced out of England into more permissive climes. Lurie’s identification with them develops into a sharing of their fate, an exile that in his case is internal. He hankers after the realization of a small-scale opera which will use music in an Orphean way to bring the ghost of Romantic erotic pathos back from the dead (380).

Lurie can neither resurrect the erotic pathos of the Romantics nor revive the erotic within him. He depicts himself as “[n]ot cold but not hot, even at his hottest”; and when he burns he does not sing, in spite of his blaming Eros for his various sexual exploits, at best deviant escapades which I will discuss in detail in my third chapter (*Di* 195, 171). In one of his musings, he tries to convince himself that “[he] was a servant of Eros: that is what he wants to say, but does he have the effrontery? It was a god acted through me” (*Di* 89). With such hubris, once again, David is resorting to his colonial heritage. Disillusioned by the new curricula at the university, he does not miss the teaching profession when the

committee forces him to resign over an affair with one of his students. In a conversation with Bev Shaw, the lady at the animal care centre, he describes himself as “a scholar [who] wrote books about dead people,” echoing Curren who tells Vercueil that as a Classics teacher she has tried to give voice to the dead (*Di* 162, *AI* 192). Paralyzed by the language of colonialism, he is unable to let go. Obsessed by and chained to the intricacies of the English grammar, he is seen on a number of occasions in the novel conjugating verbs. In one of his reveries, he evokes a lecture he has given:

Two weeks ago he was in a classroom explaining to the bored youth of the country the distinction between drink and drink up, burned and burnt. The perfective, signifying an action carried through to its conclusion. How far it all seems! I live, I have lived, I lived (*Di* 71).

It is as if the lecture is for his sole enjoyment, his students completely disinterested in the various forms and applications of the verb. Even when his daughter’s attackers set him on fire, he is left “hurling out shapeless bellows that have no words behind them;” and the only thing he is capable of doing is to conjugate the verb to burn “[b]urned, burnt” (*Di* 96, 97). Even though, Lurie resorts to the nuances of language, the shapeless bellows introduce us to a more humane Lurie, a dimension of his character we have not seen before. During his awkward visit to Melanie’s father’s school, he once again falls back onto conjugating the various past forms of verb, to burn: “[B]urned—burnt—burnt up” (*Di* 166). In his uncomfortable meeting with Melanie’s boyfriend, he also escapes into his conjugations, but this time the verb to drive: “[t]he seed of the generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman’s body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven” (*Di* 194). But these conjugations and verbs neither come to his aid nor help him understand the people he encounters on the farm, or to establish a coherent defence during the committee’s interrogation, which at best seemed like people talking at cross purposes. Mike Kissack and Michael Titlestad state:

As an academic and intellectual, involved in the exploration of life-complexities through the medium of literature, he has always articulated and defended abstract schemes and claims. His dependence upon, and faith in, this kind of activity is gradually eroded by his experiences on the farm (139).

Although the erosion that takes place begins before his experience on the farm, what is pertinent is his failure at finding a replacement. His lack of understanding lies in his reluctance to learn languages that are spoken in South Africa. Likewise, he resents the monosyllabic status that the English language has acquired. He comments on Petrus' choice of words:

A distasteful word, it seems to him, double-edged, souring the moment. Yet can Petrus be blamed? The language he draws on with such aplomb is, if only he knew it, tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites. Only the monosyllables can still be relied on, and not even all of them.

What is to be done? Nothing that he, the one-time teacher of communications, can see. Nothing short of starting all over again with the ABC. By the time the big words come back reconstructed, purified, fit to be trusted once more, he will be long dead (*Di* 129).

David remains hopeful that the old language will come back again; the big words will replace the monosyllabic ones, perhaps counter-revenge by the colonial power.

The disdain he has for the monosyllabic language tends to extend to other South African languages. On one occasion, in Lucy's living room, he watches a soccer match with the sound turned down, because the "commentary alternates between Sotho and Xhosa" (*Di* 75). When the attackers come, he finds himself powerless and speechless:

He speaks Italian, he speaks French, but Italian and French will not save him here in darkest Africa. He is helpless, an Aunt Sally, a figure from a cartoon, a missionary in cassock and topi waiting with clasped hands and upcast eyes while the savages jaw away in their lingo preparatory to plunging him into their boiling cauldron (*Di* 95).

The burning cauldron evokes Shakespeare's three witches in *Macbeth*, who are seen at the beginning of the play brewing the fate of the main characters. Lurie waits at this point to see what fate the three attackers lay out for him. This time, he stands alienated through a language he does not understand. In all of his conversations with Petrus, there never seems to be any communication.³⁹ David asks the questions and Petrus just repeats whatever he has heard. At best, Petrus is only acknowledging a presence but not willing to divulge any information, forever holding back. To every question, David is faced with reciprocation: "'Do you know who this is?' he asks Petrus. 'No, I do not know what this is,' says Petrus angrily. 'I do not know what is the trouble. What is the trouble?'" (*Di* 132). At other times, David finds himself pleading with Petrus for some information, only to get back grammatically incorrect sentences disclosing nothing. Mark Sanders states that what has actually happened is transference of language:

We suspect that when, in the aftermath of the attack on the farm, Petrus says 'It is finish', and Lurie contradicts him with 'It is not finished. On the contrary, it is just beginning', Petrus is not simply saying that 'what happened' is over (372).

The language with all its implications has been handed over to Petrus and with him it has not ended but is only beginning. A new order with a new grammatical form has been established, similar to the 'post' state in which Lurie's students find themselves. Grant Farred notes: "If his students are 'post' everything, Lurie too is rooted in the aridness of his moment" (355). Gallagher observes:

South Africans [...] are often at a loss for words because their language is not inhabited, or enlarged. Such a loss of language reflects a loss of self, for despite the Afrikaner attempt to create an identity by means of marginalizing others, the institutions of marginalization dehumanize them as well (41).

This is the very apparatus that has rendered David a cripple, unable to move forward and powerless at retrieving the order he has once known.⁴⁰ Failed

communication is also evident between David and Lucy. He fails to understand why she has refused to report the rape to the police, and why she has surrendered to the new order that is being dictated. David fails to comprehend “the difficulty of talking about the body in pain” (Wenzel 64). “The terms for torture that Coetzee employs are deeply embedded in language,” a historicity that Lucy apprehends (Wenzel 64). Unlike David, Lucy tries to locate her story within the framework of the new realities. In contrast, Michael Holland sees David’s “story [as] becoming unlocatable within the topography of the novel. It is also becoming dislocated, voiding itself of content and leaving Lurie indifferent to everything” (398). Lucy tells him that in order to survive the new reality, one has to erase everything from memory, a concept he finds humiliating:

‘How humiliating,’ he says finally. ‘Such high hopes, and to end like this.’

‘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’ (*Di* 205).

Forcibly humbled by the past of his country, Lurie realizes that in order to survive in post-apartheid South Africa, he has to succumb to a new reality that leaves him humiliated. Lurie is reluctant to surrender the privileges or possessions he has formerly held, the concept being that possessions and weapons (symbol of power) granted dignity. His visit to Melanie’s house is for the sole purpose of apologizing; the humbling he experiences is temporary. Lucy, on the other hand, is willing to give it all up, in an attempt at a new beginning in a changed country.

Moreover, the “intellectually landlocked” David cannot accept the new dictates of the emerging South Africa (Farred 355). Language is still the vehicle of cruelty and oppression; and it is through it that Petrus and his people dictate the new terms. As with the *ancien régime*, the methods remain the same, the body being a means through which words are imposed. The negotiations that take place between Petrus and David specifically involve Lucy’s body. Georgie Horrell writes:

The postcolonial implications for a white South Africa are spelled out in Coetzee's text, as Lurie is forced to accept the terms of new, black ownership and the conditions for residence in the 'new' nation, conditions negotiated through the body of his daughter (4).

Lucy is allowed to stay on the farm and in her house if she accepts Petrus' marriage proposal, land in exchange for her body. Elleke Boehmer notes that:

More than once he [David] schematically conceives of the new South African society as a great circulatory in which goods, which are always scarce and explicitly which include women as booty, are ceaselessly redistributed, without much thought for reparative justice (346).

Petrus is very much aware of this system where women are nothing but spoils to be appropriated. The colonising of women and land has long been linked in the order that Empires have striven to set, the woman symbolizing the mother earth, while at the same time considered part of property that has to be controlled. I will discuss this point in depth in my third chapter. Likewise, language partakes in this circulatory exchange of goods. Petrus' newly acquired wealth has empowered him to impose a new language. Petrus, who has understood this equation well, appropriates the language of the master in his attempt at establishing himself as the new master when he plays by the rules of the old. Petrus exemplifies the colonized man who, having initially rejected the language of the colonizer (as evident in his dialogues with Lurie), assimilates it then redefines it according to his own rules.

CONCLUSION:

In his discussion on the master-slave discourse, Agamben does not consider the battle as one between life and death, or even master and slave but "rather of an infinite "discipline," a meticulous and interminable process of instruction and apprenticeship in which the two subjects end by exchanging their roles" (*RAWA* 108). This new reality has henceforth rendered the likes of Petrus more powerful,

the master who administers the new language and rules. Michael Foucault sees individuals as merely “vehicles of power,” as “[p]ower must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain” (*P/K* 98). In its role as an instrument of power, language also acquires the power to circulate. Initially, it is brutally inflicted on the other, and then it is absorbed by the other, only to be regurgitated at the person who has initiated it in the first place. More importantly, the cruelty of the language is what eventually destroys its perpetrators, as I have attempted to prove in my analysis, namely of the Magistrate, David Lurie, Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee. In contrast, the other or recipient may firstly suffer at its hand, but gradually learns to assimilate it within the self, only to re-employ it in the same manner to which he has been subjected. This development is evident in Coetzee’s post-apartheid novel, *Disgrace*, and implicitly with Petrus, who can be seen as a departure from the earlier characters. What comes out when he assumes the role of the master is not the original language but a distorted version of it, as demonstrated by his dialogues with Lurie. However, Friday, Michael K and the barbarian girl are unable to disturb the master/slave order in the same manner that Petrus has done; at best their method of dissent is typified by their silences, stressing that “slavery is a tale that cannot be told” (Wood *SEP* 36). Friday’s endless O’s remain, however, an extreme representation of this defiance, indecipherably talismanic symbols holding both the master and the slave in their chains.

¹ Richard Begam notes Derrida deconstructs “an opposition between speech and writing [while] Coetzee deconstructs an opposition between black speech and white writing” (117). Here, Coetzee is deconstructing an opposition between authoritative speech and subaltern’s silence.

² Wenzel states “pain of torture eliminates the voice of the victim, the traditional guise of torture as a means of eliciting the truth is unmasked” (63). She adds “[f]or the victim, truth is negated along with the voice of an integrated self, although torturing continues to demand truth while further destroying the victim’s ability to speak, or even to know, truth” (63).

³ Maria Boletsi remarks that repetition by the empire contaminates truth, rather than revealing it (88).

⁴ Joan Copjec remarks: “[c]linical evidence shows that the pervert is one who constantly seeks out respectable people [...] not as mere delegates but as actual, infallible instances of the law. The purpose of this association is the humiliation or debauchery of the law [...] in order better to revere it” (229). Therefore, the law is better served when the officer in Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony” demonstrates how the machine inflicts pain on a law abiding citizen.

⁵ Copjec notes the “ultimate goal of the sadist, however, is not the simple scene of suffering he manages to stage [...] [T]he sight that arouses the sadist’s excitement is that of the other’s choosing to stop rising above the pain [...] The source of the sadist’s [...] pleasure is the other’s free decision to identify himself with the obscene, unutilizable facticity of pain” (223).

⁶ Copjec believes that the more the victim resists, the more insistent the torturer becomes (149).

⁷ Fanon states: “[t]he Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio of his mastery of the French language” (18).

⁸ Jolly writes “there is one aspect of his “reading” of the barbarian girl” that corresponds to Joll’s “writing” and “reading” of her. Both Joll and the magistrate, by making her body into a sign that will develop into the figure of the truth, turn the “girl” into an other whose person, outside of that figuring, is irrelevant to them” (128).

⁹ Gilbert Yeoh writes: “the magistrate attempts searching, sincere, and well-intentioned self-examination; yet he comes no closer to telling the truth about himself [...]” (Summer 2003, 336).

¹⁰ In a number of testimonies recorded in Antjie Krog’s book, the whites claimed they were not aware of what was going on.

¹¹ Penner writes: “Joll is ethically blind, as is the empire that he represents; in the capital, he tells the magistrate, everyone wears such glasses” (77). The people living in the capital are blind to what is going on in the periphery.

¹² Wood writes: “Coetzee reiterates that the suffering of the other or another will always be out of bounds and beyond recovery. *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a parable about voyeurism, a supreme indictment of the desire to transform another’s trauma into gossip, or worse, a mirror for curiosity. The book is a warning that there are some places where you don’t go poking your nose, no matter how pure you convince your motives are. The Magistrate [...] is the universal representative of this obscenely appropriative type. On the face of it, he seems a descent sort, a universal liberal. But the book teaches that he is finally a hateful figure, the embodiment of an imaginative tradition that sees no problem in the processes of inventing testimonies which tell us that they can speak for the victim. Coetzee’s absolute victims of imperial power, his Friday, his Barbarian girl, are not allowed to say anything. Crucially they do not want to say anything either, which is not the same thing as saying that they have nothing to say” (36).

¹³ Philip Dickinson remarks that the loop of wire which runs through the hands and cheeks of the prisoners recalls the loops of wire holding Joll's glasses "directly [connects] perception and violence" (11).

¹⁴ Post September 11th 2001, certain liberties, intrinsic rights, were withdrawn from citizens in various countries. This proves that freedom is not a right but an acquired right.

¹⁵ The practice of banning was practiced during apartheid. Gallagher writes banning "systematically deprives one of the ability to exercise one of the most fundamental human attributes: communication with others [...]" (33).

¹⁶ Pinter details the justification and the lies that preceded the US invasion on Iraq: "[...] the justification for the invasion of Iraq was that Saddam Hussein possessed a highly dangerous body of weapons of mass destruction, some of which could be fired in 45 minutes, bringing about appalling devastation. We were assured that was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq had a relationship with Al Qaeda and shared responsibility for the atrocity in New York of September 11th 2001. We were assured that this was true. It was not true. We were told that Iraq threatened the security of the world. We were assured it was true. It was not true" (<http://lnk.in/4qpw>).

¹⁷ Jolly writes: "[t]he argument of Dawn's report is that American propaganda will not be effective until the myth by which it attempts to control the enemy is one with which the Vietnamese are familiar [...]" (112).

¹⁸ The other is unable to reclaim lost history. Asha Varadharajan suggests: "[h]istory can be rewritten from the point of view of the vanquished only if the postcolonial historiographer, for example, can break the spell of what is in favor of what might be or of what was denied existence" (60). Rarely can the spell be broken.

¹⁹ For more information on the planted stories, please refer to Lolita C. Baldor's article in *The Los Angeles Times*, Wednesday 30th, November, 2005. Also, please see illustrations 1 & 2.

²⁰ Dana Milbank wrote in the *Washington Post* that Donald Rumsfeld, the former US Defence Secretary, has ended the Iraqi insurgency when he suggested that the term "insurgents" should be replaced by "ELIG," Enemies of the Legitimate Iraqi Government" (Milbank <http://lnk.in/3wqn>).

²¹ Coetzee writes: "[t]he torture room thus becomes like the bedchamber of the pornographer's fantasy where, insulated from moral or physical restraint, one human being is free to exercise his imagination to the limits in the performance of vileness upon the body of another" (Coetzee 1986).

²² The photos were first published by the *Washington Post* in May 2004.

²³ For an in-depth analysis of why atrocities were committed in Abu Ghreib, please refer to Walter A. Davis' book, *Death's Dream Kingdom: the American psyche since 9-11*, 33-39.

- ²⁴ Krog similarly writes in her book that witnesses spoke of albums being kept of the tortured. One witness tells us: “[t]he photograph was that of a severed head of someone I personally trained in Luanda. [...] The rest of the album contained photos of his body parts strewn across a street...” (82).
- ²⁵ Dana Dragunoiu sees that “[a]n integral component of K’s education rests in his discovery that opportunistic motives are concealed beneath such ostensibly charitable projects [i.e. the orphanage]. Under the banner of promoting the virtue of work and eradicating parasitism, an economy of exploitation parades as an economy of care” (2006, 79). I disagree with Dragunoiu as I do not think that Michael’s intellect allows him to take a political stand. He finds charity humiliating and rejects it.
- ²⁶ Newman writes: “People in a marginal state, placeless, left out of the social patterning, become sources of danger because their status is undefinable [...]” (129). This is why Michael needs to be contained.
- ²⁷ Dragunoiu states: “K objects to the injustices perpetrated by a society that ascribes no intrinsic value to human life. His refusal to eat in the rehabilitation camp is an attempt to evade an exploitative system that claims to be founded on an ethics of care” (2006, 71). Michael simply does not eat at the camp because he fails to understand the system.
- ²⁸ Moses remarks: “Michael K [...] overcomes the fear of death only by approximating a condition of lifelessness [...] the solitary walker blurs the boundary that demarcates life from death” (148).
- ²⁹ Rita Barnard suggests: “the novel does present, albeit in anorexic form, a new pastoral fantasy: a vision of rural life without patriarchal or colonial domination” (389).
- ³⁰ Tamlyn Monson even considers the action of the Visagie son’s trying to force Michael into servitude a “violent epistemological certitude” which literally reduces Michael into an “inert prop, devoid of agency” (92).
- ³¹ Krog cites victims who refer to their souls as eaten up by maggots: “That part of my soul was eaten away by maggots and I will never be whole again” (276). Once the body/soul is destroyed from within, the human being not only feels vacant but also shamed. Most of Coetzee characters complain of a hole inside them.
- ³² Dragunoiu suggests: “[t]he thinness of K’s body operates as a supple metaphor for the novel’s ambivalent relationship with liberal doctrine. As the direct outcome of K’s assertion of his autonomy, his thinness embodies the liberal prioritization of an ethics of justice over an ethics of care [...] K is thin because he (or his body) objects to an ethical system which prioritizes the good over the right [...]” (2006, 71).
- ³³ Durrant notes: “by the end of the first section, K has eluded the surveillance of the seemingly omniscient third person narrative, abdicated his position as subject, and found a way out of his life and times” (*PNWM* 39).
- ³⁴ Heraclitus became a hermit at the end of his life, eating what he cultivated. This is similar to the life that Michael K wanted for himself.

³⁵ T. Kai Easton states that Heraclitus epigraph defines the “war in Michael K” which has been “constructed by the founding father” (593).

³⁶ Durrant points out “naming makes representation” whilst the failed names “of Friday, Michael K and the barbarian girl arrest this process of representation [...]” (32).

³⁷ Lewis MacLeod states Friday “refuses to be a resource to be manufactured elsewhere, and, in so doing, retains a measure of elusive dignity. He refuses to plant the seed, the story, that will finally have him sitting at the feet of his “superiors.” Instead, Friday's dubiously designated pictogram and his forceful but undecipherable utterance in the final section of the novel assert presence while simultaneously frustrating efforts to fix him into a particular discursive place in *Foe's*, or even Coetzee's, narrative” (7). Likewise, Michael slips away (166). Failure of fixity functions on a number of levels. Coetzee rejected being “pinned down” when asked to define what kind of author he was.

³⁸ Eleni Coundouriotis writes: “Coetzee’s imagery of age and decay here portrays the English language not only as obsolete, but as untruthful, and hence a kind of obstacle” (857).

³⁹ Peter Boxall compares silence in Beckett and Coetzee: “David Lurie and Petrus in *Disgrace* are inhabited by Mercier and Camier, or Didi and Gogo, and the quality of the silence that hangs over their communications has an uncanny fidelity to the silence which incubates in Beckett’s writing [...] But the silence that Coetzee inherits from Beckett, [...] is a silence in which an entirely new political and ethical configuration is held in store. Where for Beckett, in 1937, it ‘is becoming more and more difficult, even senseless, for me to write an official English’, so for Lurie in Coetzee’s *Disgrace*, it becomes clear that ‘English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa’” (304).

⁴⁰ Martin Swales argues that the use of the present tense “means that there is an innervating lack of interpretative hindsight [...] a flavour of still unfinished business” (10).

Chapter Two:

Words: Great Mercies

I was not, after all, made to live alone. If I had been set down by fate in the middle of the veld in the middle of nowhere, buried to my waist and commanded to live a life, I could not have done it. I am not a philosopher. Women are not philosophers, and I am a woman. A woman cannot make something out of nothing (*IHC* 130).

In a direct reference to Winnie in Beckett's *Happy Days*, Magda lives in the constant fear of finding herself one day condemned to live "[e]mbedded up to above her waist" in a mound of sand, having to relinquish the little control she assumes she has of her life (7). Against such a haunting image, Magda resorts to words, Winnie's "great mercies" to fill her days, even though she tells us that she is not a philosopher and, being a woman, she finds herself incapable of making something out of nothing (Beckett *HD* 52). Nonetheless, throughout the novel, Magda persistently strives to make something out of nothing. Faced with an empty existence, exaggerated by the vastness of the farm, she endeavours to create herself in words in order to ward off the loneliness and confusion that define her life. In *Spurs*, Derrida writes: "it could be said that if style were a man (much as the penis, according to Freud in the 'normal prototype of fetishes'), then writing would be a woman" (*SNS* 57). Writing is affirmed as woman only because for Derrida it exists in opposition to style, which he views as man. Although Derrida is re-inserting the feminine, the space allocated to her exists within the boundaries of the male's perspective. Therefore, when in *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda tries to internalize the phallic language, she fails leading to further mental instability. If her father through whom she acquired the paternal language represents style, then her answer to this suffocating style is writing. Words become her only salvation in an existence that is at best not lived; and "what [she] lack[s] is the courage to stop talking, to die back into the silence [...]" (*IHC* 65). In his essay, Julian Gitzen states:

Inseparable from the existence of all of these characters is language. Whether or not they regard themselves as shapers of history or wish to be numbered among that group, the most self-conscious among them are keenly aware that the pattern of their own lives can be given a permanent shape only in words (4).

Magda “is afraid to stop talking because, if she consists merely of a stream of words, to stop speaking would be literally to cease to exist” (Cantor 94). Language for Magda functions on many levels: words help her to combat the void, words aid her to validate her existence and words assist her in making sense of a wasted life. Her diary entries are but an attempt at inventing scenarios of another life. Ultimately, language, both a form of escape and oppression, fails her as it does the other females in Coetzee’s novels. Previously, I have argued how language has often been used for control in a very cruel manner and how such brutality was met for the most part by silence. In this chapter, however, I will examine the role language specifically denotes for Coetzee’s heroines, in the following novels, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Age of Iron*, *Foe* and *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*; and how words at once liberating and imprisoning, are essential for them as a means of finding and confirming their respective identities. Like Beckett’s *Unnamable*, the Coetzee female is “in words, made of words, others’ words, [...], the place too, the air, the walls, the floor, the ceiling, all words” (Beckett *MMDU* 386). In my discussion, I will highlight the underlying similarities between Samuel Beckett and J.M. Coetzee, persuaded that the Beckettian heroine is the ancestor of the Coetzeean female. I will also be drawing on Derrida’s and Cixous’ readings of the feminine as opposing perspectives on the masculine and feminine discourse.

“Words are Coin” *In the Heart of the Country*:¹

In the Heart of the Country consists of 266 diary entries by Magda, an old spinster, living on a remote farm. The diary entries resemble an endless and often contradictory monologue, exposing a pitiable unstable female, existing on the fringes of society. Magda is best defined as a face “so lost to age and aspect,” a

bewildered woman of an undetermined age living her days on a farm in the middle of the Afrikaner heartland in a forgotten time (Beckett *C* 45).² The culture she once knew no longer applies, rendering her whole existence meaningless, making her a victim of a system that no longer functions. Physically and emotionally barren, she drags herself along, her days punctuated by emptiness, futility and pain. Her emptiness is both internal and external; a result of loneliness at once stemming from the geographical location and the role that she has failed to play. Coetzee views the farm as “pettiness in the midst of vastness,” while Rooney sees the farm represented as “a backwater of isolation, loneliness and boredom and as a desert of apathy-inducing heat and aridity” (*WW* 65, 2005, 431). The cruelty of the land can only add to the feeling of nothingness and worthlessness inside of Magda, for “[t]o accept the farm as home is to accept a living death” (*WW* 66). Sartre sees that in nothingness lies “the peculiar possibility of being and its unique possibility” (*BN* 55). The nothingness within, which is derived from human reality, lies at the foundation of the being and produces the void that is at the heart of that being (Sartre 55). Magda fails to realize a being out of the nothingness that is within and can only fill the void with her diaries. In an interview with John Gruen, Beckett, similarly, alludes to the startling concept that “[s]omewhere [man] must know that self-perception is the most frightening of all human observations. He must know when man faces himself, he is looking into the abyss” (Zeifman 35). This is the very abyss that lies at the heart of Magda. She perceives herself as not existing, and furthermore she internalizes the view of femininity as nothing. This stems from the fact that the feminine is forever juxtaposed against the masculine, so it can only exist in relation to the masculine and not on its own terms. As her father refuses to acknowledge her presence, through her father’s eyes, she can only see herself as an absence. “To my father,” she says:

I have been an absence all my life. Therefore instead of being the womanly warmth at the heart of this house I have been a zero, null, a vacuum towards which all collapses inward, a turbulence, muffled, grey, like a chill draft eddying through the corridors, neglected, vengeful (*IHC* 2).

Motherless, Magda needs her father to be the other through which her existence is defined. Her whole attitude to herself is punctuated by the way she is perceived by her father; in the absence of the mother, Magda attempts making him the other. The image that is reflected back to her through that other is the being that she can become or aspire to be. However, as the other only sees her as an absence, the mirror image that is sent back is a hollow one. The absence at the core of Magda is augmented by being female; doubly-displaced, she remains throughout incapable of seeking recognition from a non-existent mother and a father who holds back in disappointment at her gender. The father possesses the symbolic power to grant her the recognition she needs but chooses not to. Furthermore, Sartre sees the presence of and acknowledgement by the other as a necessity to hold the emptiness at bay. This forms the essence of the relationship with the other. Sartre defines the interplay between the “I” and the other, as follows:

Such is the origin of my concrete relations with the Other, they are wholly governed by my attitudes with respect to the object which I am for the Other. And as the Other's existence reveals to me the being which I am without my being able to either to appropriate that being or even to conceive it, this existence will motivate two opposed attitudes: First—The Other looks at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I am. Thus the profound meaning of my being is outside of me, imprisoned by an absence (*BN* 339).

The secret to Magda's being remains with her father; his failing to reveal that secret forever imprisons her in an absence against which she continuously fights. A product of a cruel culture that considers daughters inferior, whilst highly regarding the sons, the father resents granting his daughter any kind of recognition. His heir can only be a son; a son is the one being who can bestow upon the father acknowledgement and permanence through a line of continuity. Only in such a situation will the father reciprocate such recognition. In such a structure, Magda does not feature. Jacques Lacan's interpretation of the imago is applicable to Magda where she remains the symptom caught in the mirror stage of development; Lacan's definition is that the mirror-stage is “a particular case of

the function of the imago, [whose role is essential] to establish a relation between the organism and its reality" (*E* 4). Due to the absence of a mother, the imago in this case becomes her father, a father who can only see her as absent and is reluctant to provide her with any form of signification to render her present. For Magda, the "I [remains] precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject" (Lacan *E* 2). Denied signification from the father, Magda remains stunted unable to secure her identification with the 'I' of language. Cixous speculates on why a woman's growth should be dwarfed. She writes:

Ultimately one might even think, as we know, that the woman must remain in childhood, in the original primitive state, to rescue human exchange from an imminent catastrophe owing to the progressive and inescapable entropy of language (*TNBW* 28).

By imposing a continual state of childhood on the woman, language fails to develop into an entity in its own right. In this way, it can only exist in the context of the masculine, its unequal opposite, a barrier Cixous has striven to overcome by her own writing. Likewise, Magda attempts to step out of the childhood role, to assimilate with an imago in the form of an absent mother, but fails. The absence of the mother denies Magda the much-needed source of identification. Lacan writes: "[i]n the other, in the mirror's image, in his mother, the child sees nothing but a fellow with whom he merges, with whom he identifies" (Lemaire 78). Excluded from the ritual of seeing her image in her mother, she can only merge with the absence that is reflected in that image; the one thing that she can identify with is emptiness. The one portrait that hangs in the dining room, she tells us, must be that of her long-lost mother. (Magda cannot verify that the photo is that of her mother's; she just assumes it is). However, when Magda tries to conjure up the image of the long-lost mother, one she can relate to, she can only see "a grey blur, a strip of grey blur [...]" (*IHC* 23). Yet, she is hopeful that one day she will find her. Having no mother to identify with, the image that is returned to Magda is incomplete and distorted. Lacking the initial relationship

with her mother, Magda is unable to learn how to perceive herself as whole. The image that is continually confronting her comes in fragments.³ Insistently, she deconstructs her body into fragments: at times she is a hole with spindly legs, a sour face, a torrent of sound, feet with horny callouses, a prim voice, sour breast, but never a complete entity. When others look at Magda, they perceive this abject image, a result of a physical reality and the projection she chooses to put out; as a result, this very image is reflected back to her and internalized by her. At the end of the novel, the boy stares back goggle-eyed at the sight he sees, which she herself describes:

[...] let me recreate the scene—at the crone in the black dress flecked with foodstains and verdigris, with the big teeth pointing in all directions and the mad eyes and the mane of grey hair, knowing in that instant that all stories were true, that worse was true (*IHC* 135).

Even in her ugliness, Magda has needed affirmation from others; the stories about her are not figments but truths. This negative image and disintegration of the body are also Beckettian concepts, where the horror of all horrors for Mouth in *Not I*, is to end up “imagine! ...whole body like gone ... just the mouth ... lips ... cheeks ... jaws ...” (Beckett *EO* 119). On the other hand, for Cixous a female can only be regarded as a whole made up of parts. She states: “if she is a whole, it is a whole made up of parts that are wholes, not simple, partial objects but varied entirely, moving and boundless change, a cosmos where eros never stops traveling, vast astral space” (*TNBW* 87). Magda’s symbolic travel consists of forever trying to escape the disintegration that makes her. As per Lacan, this disintegration stems from the individual’s “[h]aving no symbolic substitute for his own self, he is deprived of individuality, subjectivity and a place in society” (Lemaire 82). In similar fashion, Magda cannot even name a symbolic substitute. In an earlier description of her mother, she narrates:

My father’s first wife, my mother, was a frail gentle loving woman who lived and died under her husband’s thumb. Her husband never forgave her for failing to bear him a son. His relentless sexual demands led to her death in

childbirth. She was too frail and gentle to give birth to the rough rude boy-heir my father wanted, therefore she died (*IHC* 2).

Naming her mother “father’s first wife” adds to Magda’s sense of alienation and displacement that deny her the signifier that is needed to make her become whole. When looking through her father’s eyes, she only sees herself as the “rude boy-heir” that never saw the light, an improper birth that leads to an incomplete life. The father’s lack of acceptance leads to a symbolic absence of the father figure. This figurative absence of her father is a result of assuming neither the role of nomination nor the position of the signifier, augmenting her state of limbo (Foucault *MF* 16). This feeling of not being properly born, not being properly named, stemming from an imperfect birth, is also echoed in a number of Beckett’s plays, for example:

Mrs Rooney: I remember his telling us the story of a little girl, very strange and unhappy in her ways, and he treated her unsuccessfully over a period of years and was finally obliged to give up the case. He could find nothing wrong with her, he said. The only thing wrong with her as far as he would see was that she was dying. And she did in fact die, shortly after he washed his hands of her.

Mr Rooney: Well? What is there so wonderful about that?

Mrs Rooney: No, it was just something he said, and the way he said it, that have haunted me since.

Mr Rooney: You lie awake at night, tossing to and fro and brooding on it.

Mrs Rooney: On it and other...wretchedness. When he had done with the little girl he stood there motionless for some time, quite two minutes I should say, looking down at his table. Then he suddenly raised his head and exclaimed, as if he had had a revelation, The trouble with

her was she had never been really
born (Beckett *KLT* 83-84).⁴

An improper birth leads to a hollow existence. Beckett affirms this in his description of another character, May: “[a] life, which didn’t begin as a life, but which was just there, as a thing [...]” “[...] she hasn’t been born. She just began. There is a difference. She was never born” (Asmus 84).⁵ The feeling of never been born, amalgamated with a sense of never having enjoyed life, exaggerate the melancholic feeling within. Expelled from the womb, Magda has no mother to elucidate the ache for her. Magda obsesses over the pain that has become the norm in her life. The same is true of Mouth, as if it is by chance that the “tiny little girl” whose parents are unknown, came to this world. They both just began but never actually existed. Magda is forever reminding the reader:

I am incomplete, I am a being with a hole inside me, [who moves] through the world not as a knifeblade cutting the wind, or as a tower with eyes, like my father, but as a hole, a hole with a body draped around it, the two spindly legs hanging loose at the bottom and the two bony arms flapping at the sides and the big head lolling on top. I am a hole crying to be whole (*IHC* 44).

The hole can become whole by filling it with words.⁶ Moreover, words are also the only weapons of defence to throw at the fragments that define her body. “I am a hole crying to be whole. I know this is in one sense just a way of speaking, a way of thinking about myself, but if one cannot think of oneself in words, in pictures, then what is there to think of oneself in?” (*IHC* 44-45). The hollowness that defines her echoes Conrad’s Kurtz who is also “hollow at the core,” and Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men” (*HD* 133). Perhaps, by linking herself to a literary genealogy, Magda can achieve some form of permanence and value to her life, even though through the existence and words of others. In some respect, Coetzee is feminizing the hollowness at the core of being. What Magda narrates does not come from her, for language does not originate from within; Lacan writes “it is always out there in the world outside, lying in wait for the neonate. Language always ‘belongs’ to another person” (*IHC* 8, Lacan *JL* 5).

With Magda, language continues to belong to that other, typified by her domineering father, who “blasts[her] and buries [her] and locks [her] up” (*IHC* 55). Her father turns her again into a child, denying her the signifier that she needs to become whole, fixating her in the mirror stage that “situates the instance of the ego in a line of fiction, of alienation” (Lemaire 80). Magda’s inability to escape the “mirror-stage” condemns her to a life-long condition of fictitious presence, which she invents and re-invents repeatedly. Magda resorts to fiction in order to create a story to confront the pain stemming from the void, to fill her tedious days with some meaning, to partially escape the humiliation that dogs her life, in the hope that not all is in vain. She wants her story to have “a beginning, a middle, and an end” (*IHC* 46). Her words echo the Unnamable’s who “must attribute a beginning” and later adds: “[...] the idea being to demonstrate, to the backers, and bystanders, that [he] had a beginning, and an end” (Beckett *MMDU* 333). This urgent need to have a history, a meaning to her existence, equally preoccupies Magda:

I live, I suffer, I am here. With cunning and treachery, if necessary, I fight against becoming one of the forgotten ones of history. I am a spinster with a locked diary but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness but I am more than that too. When all the lights are out I smile in the dark. My teeth glint, though no one would believe (*IHC* 4).

To believe she exists, she creates herself in words. Her diary can be viewed as an attempt at artistic expression. But this notion is aborted as soon as it presents itself as her diary will forever be locked, unfortunately accentuating her role as one of the forgotten ones. To console herself, she tells us that the “land is full of melancholy spinsters like [her], lost to history” (*IHC* 3). In her pseudo-diary, “Magda speaks an obsessive interior monologue that rarely resembles a language of social intercourse” (Attwell *JMC* 58). Her words are remnants of a bygone era. Although, her speech mimics that of an Afrikaner woman, her character fails to live up to the expected image of such a woman. Gallagher writes:

Viewed against the ideal Afrikaner woman extolled in national mythology, Magda clearly is a parody, an anti-heroine. She is neither vrou nor moeder, and she is a solitary social being with neither a mother nor siblings. Her physical and emotional characteristics are antithetical to the Afrikaner ideal. The images with which Magda characterizes herself are negative and perverted; she repeatedly describes herself as black, scrawny, dried-up, and sterile (94).

Her image of herself as having failed to uphold the ideal of Afrikaner woman is something of which she is very conscious. The Voortrekker monument, which includes sculptures of Afrikaner women, was inaugurated on December 16th, 1949 in honour of the trekkers who colonized the interior of South Africa. The statues epitomize the ideal of the Afrikaner woman, courageous and strong: one of the bronze sculptures is of a woman gazing at a distance with her children pulling at her skirt, while the other is of a woman standing barefoot staring hard into the vastness (*VM*, see illustrations 3 & 4). Paula Krebs states “[a]fter the early stages of the war, [...], white and black families appear to have been brought in [to stay in the camps] because the British had confiscated or burned their homes and food. Even with burned crops and homes, however, many Boer women begged British officers to be allowed to stay on the veldt and await the return of their men rather than enter the camps” (59). This is in line with the strength that the Boer woman exhibits, very different from Magda’s weak character.

Fighting against this notion of being an anti-heroine, Magda attempts repeatedly to rewrite her past, in the hope that her present is not so bleak. In her fictitious world, she even has siblings, a much-loved half-brother with the name of Arthur. She writes:

But of all my stepbrothers and stepsisters it was Arthur I loved most. If Arthur had thrashed me I would have squirmed with pleasure. If Arthur had thrown a stone I would have run to fetch it. For Arthur I would have eaten bootblackening, drunk urine. But alas, golden Arthur never noticed me [...]

 (*IHC* 52).

To her imagined beloved stepbrother, she remains an absence. In her mind, even the image of golden Arthur and herself “running hand in hand on the seashore” is a fleeting one (*IHC* 52). The haunting reflection of her younger self in her imaginary school days is one of a young girl with a “sour face” “sitting in the darkest corner draped in spiderwebs” (*IHC* 51). Loneliness frightens her as she tells us: “What will become of me now that I am alone? For I am alone again, alone in the historical present: [...] and I feel the very worst” (*IHC* 131). Sadly, the worst has come for Magda, as she is unable to disentangle from the historical present or from her inherited language. Her final attempt at liberating herself from the binds of the paternal language is to create her own. A temporary relief comes through the overhead planes whose schedule she scrupulously studies. For them, she devises an elaborate system of signs made up of stone and engravings of nonsensical words (*IHC* 144-145). Her escape into narratives and forms of an earlier self provides no reprieve for Magda. She remains alone encircled by her melancholy in the face of a clinging abject self. Beckett’s Krapp ceaselessly listens to recordings of his earlier selves which is his way of contending his emptiness, trying to relive a life not lived through. The woman in Beckett’s *Rockaby* has no companions but her recorded voice rising from a tape-recorder, repeating the same words. Likewise, Magda has her words, a respite from being a Beckettian “godforsaken hole” like Mouth in *Not I* (Beckett *EO* 14). Language to Magda and Mouth is on certain occasions a relief while at other times an oppression. Discourse, which substitutes for the role of the mother, allows Beckett’s females to find refuge in the language of the m/other. Kristeva writes: “[a] representative of the paternal function takes the place of the good maternal object that is wanting. There is language instead of the good breast. Discourse is being substituted for maternal care” (*PH* 54). Magda, on the other hand, is unable to speak through the language of the m/other or through a substitute. The language she employs is paternal, enhancing her sense of banishment. To Cixous:

It is in writing, from woman and toward woman, and in accepting the challenge of the discourse controlled by the phallus, that woman will affirm woman somewhere other

than in silence, the place reserved for her in and through the Symbolic (*TNBW* 93).

With her diary entries, Magda can only exist in the symbolic. By using the language of the phallus, not only does she challenge its discourse, but also affirms her position as the symbolic other. Being female, she falters. She tells the reader, "My lost world is a world of men, of cold nights, woodfire, gleaming eyes, and a long tale of dead heroes in a language I have not unlearned" (*IHC* 7). The challenge for her is in the deployment of such a language and not in the success of using it or creating one that she finds more suitable. Magda inserts herself into the language of the other but is unable to assume a masculine role. "[L]anguage of the heart," which is feminine to Magda, disappoints, as does her impression of the Spanish language that she conjures up (*IHC* 145).

Magda will always remain a victim of a cruel/phallic language that she tries to escape. To her, language is a manifestation of the patriarchal law that suffocates. She tells us:

The law has gripped my throat, I say and do not say, it invades my larynx, its one hand on my tongue, its other hand on my lips. How can I say, I say, that these are not the eyes of the law that stare from behind my eyes, or that the mind of the law does occupy my skull, leaving me only enough intellection to utter doubting words, if it is I uttering them, and see their fallaciousness? How can I say that the law does not stand fullgrown inside my shell [...] (*IHC* 91-92).

As with the man in Kafka's "Before the Law," she stands paralyzed by the law. She resents the fact that she is the product of a domineering paternal language, forever juxtaposed against attempts of feminine discourse. Gallagher notes that at times Magda resorts to the "imagery of sewing to describe the construction of her narrative, speaking of 'embroidering' her story," an attempt at conjuring up a feminine discourse (*ASSA* 109). Her feminine discourse fails her. She lacks both the power and the skill to fight as she cannot be sure that when she "ha[s] had the chance to make this utterance, the lips and teeth of the law will not begin to gnaw their way out of this shell, until there it stands before you, the law grinning and

triumphant again,” leaving her “sloughed, crumpled, abandoned on the floor” (*IHC* 92). Magda is worried that language will lead to further annihilation and humiliation of the self reducing her to the zero sign she most dreads or “a vacuum towards which all collapses inward” (*IHC* 2). Likewise, as her reflection in the mirror reveals only a “grey blur,” Magda tries very hard to understand the “blur” within by establishing a form of communication with Hendrik and Anna that is not built on the hierarchal system to which she has been accustomed. She fails. The only language she knows is that of colonialism, her words manifestations of orders. She reflects:

I cannot carry on with these idiot dialogues. The language that should pass between myself and these people was subverted by my father and cannot be recovered. What passes between us now is a parody. I was born into a language of hierarchy, of distance and perspective. It was my father-tongue, I do not say it is the language my heart wants to speak (*IHC* 106).

However, Magda, the “grey blur” is unable to escape the dilemma of being “both the victim and perpetrator of the colonial structure” (*IHC* 23, Head 51). Attwell states that history “is the process that steadily breaks through the “eternal present” of Magda’s consciousness, inducing panic and a sense of failure and pushing Magda into desperate attempts to create a transcendent, ahistorical language” (*JMC* 72). Unable to escape the cruelty of a repressive language or create one that transcends what feels like an eternal present, she resorts to *killing* her domineering father, a symbol of the oppressive regime. James Wohlpart suggests by this action, she may:

[...] subvert the ideology of power while existing outside of history. Her attempt fails, however, because this ideology is necessarily encoded into language, and thus any attempt at speech, even one that ignores the father’s language and originates from outside of history, still re-encodes this hierarchy (221).

Magda discovers that the nature of language is hierarchal. This becomes more obvious when she tries to establish a new order of hierarchy with Hendrik and

Anna when following the killing or symbolic-killing of her father, she invites them to share the house. Caroline Rody even sees her as staging:

[...] a metaphoric revolt against, simultaneously, the regimes of language and literature, and of patriarchy and colonialism, inscribing a degree of alienation and rage within the upper echelons of colonial system far beyond what texts by white writers had shown in the past (160).

Magda does not succeed for her tools of combat are the very ones that have subjugated her all her life, the patriarchal language of colonialism. Lost to history, “she does not have access to a subject-position that is inside the history-making self-representations offered by the father” (Attwell *JMC* 61). Being a woman, Magda is more than aware of the system of hierarchy that exists in a colonial system whose one facet of oppression is through language, the woman’s position akin to that of the other/slave. In one of her diatribes, she clearly defines her position: “I who living among the downcast have never beheld myself in the equal regard of another’s eye, have never held, another in the equal regard of mine” (*IHC* 8). And she is only capable of creating another reality “in the words” that have created her in a “world of men” through a language she has not been able to unlearn” (*IHC* 8).

When all have left, Magda desperately tries to strike a dialogue with the messenger who comes bearing a letter. The boy is reminiscent of the boy messenger in *Waiting for Godot*, who likewise becomes the unfortunate subject of an unwelcome interrogation:

‘Whose signature is this?’ I asked the child. He shook his head, watching me, unwilling to come nearer. ‘Who sent the letter?’

‘Post office, old miss.’

‘Yes, but who?’

‘Don’t know, old miss, Old miss must sign. For the letter.’ He held out a little notebook and a stub of pencil.

[...]

‘Sit,’ I said, and he sat on his heels. ‘How old are you?’

‘Twelve, old miss.’

‘And what is your name?’

‘Piet, old miss’ (*IHC* 136).

The monosyllabic words that dominate the above passage echo at once an interrogation and orders usually given to subordinates. The unkindness, she has been subjected to and has fought all her life, is subconsciously exercised on an impassive other, even though she cannot completely escape her feminine side. Magda is trying to hold at bay the cruelty of the silence inflicted upon her. Nevertheless, she remains alone with the language that has tortured and held her captive. It is ironic that the cruelty in language that she fought against has become her only solace as she craves communication. She continues to fluctuate between the various facets of language, at once the cruel master and the victimized other. She comments: “[i]f I were truly a slave resigned to my chains would I not have learned the word *Yes* long ago? Yet where in my speech can *Yes* be pointed to? If my speech is not rebellious from beginning to end, what is it?” (*IHC* 147).

In *Dusklands*, Jacobus Coetzee comments that “[t]here was no word for “Yes” in Hottentot,” the word, initially a foreign concept, has only entered their dictionary following colonization (*D* 115). By learning the word *Yes*, Magda can enter the world of slavery. Though her speech is at times rebellious, language, in its speech and in its silence, continues to dictate its own terms. Her father has subverted the language she has used and what she speaks and writes is nothing but a parody of a language (*IHC* 106). Spivak remarks:

[The subaltern], the subject of exploitation cannot know and speak the text of female exploitation, even if the absurdity of thenonrepresenting intellectual making space for her to speak is achieved. The woman is doubly in shadow (*MIC* 288).

Incapable of representing her, the father, the agent of exploitation, will never make a space for Magda to speak. By this token, she is doubly-negated, condemned to exist on the periphery. Paul Cantor notes Magda could only achieve completeness through language when she played with the servants’ children:

[E]arly in her narrative, Magda looks back nostalgically to the days when she shared a language with the children of the servants on the farm, a language by means of which she could participate in a form of storytelling that made a unity of her world (106).

Unfortunately, her older self is unable to tell one complete story to aid her in her struggle against the emptiness. Instead, her fictions are incomplete stories, narrated to us through the different versions she has created. Her description of the scene when her father brings home a new wife and her depiction of Hendrik's coming home with Anna is practically identical, causing the reader to become lost in her plots, lingering on the edge of fiction and reality (*IHC* 1, 18). Her stories provide no reprieve. She tells Anna that she has never known words of true exchange. Words have come down to her and she just passes them on (*IHC* 110). In a Derridean manner, Magda is very much aware of the truth/untruth contradiction at the heart of being a woman. Derrida speculates that the definition of the feminine is directly linked to male subjectivity. Furthermore, he hypothesizes the female is always sceptical. He argues:

Because, indeed, if woman is truth, she at least knows that there is no truth, that truth has no place here and that no one has a place for truth. And she is woman precisely because she herself does not believe in truth itself, because she does not believe in what she is, in what she is believed to be, in what she thus is not (Derrida *SNS* 53).

Having been passed on to her by her father, her words have no truth. Untruth is what results when she uses them to prove who she is, for it is not the language that represents her, but a symbol of what she should be, "[t]he language that should pass between [herself] and these people was subverted by [her] father and cannot be recovered" (*IHC* 106). She wishes to speak the language of the heart but is incapable as the feminine eludes her. Yet she remains determined to prove that she is real and not a phantom, nor a straw woman. She notes: "[t]he words that whisper through those blue lips are mine. I drown into myself. A phantom, I am no phantom. I stoop. I touch this skin and it is warm, I pinch this flesh and it hurts. What more proof could I want? I am I" (*IHC* 59). The *I* that defines

Magda is the weakest entity in language. Its shifting nature stems from the person it is referring to at the time of use (Lacan *JL* 31). “I am I” ironically provides the least support in her search for identity; instead it qualifies and affirms the emptiness within. In an essay on Beckett, Coetzee remarks: “[i]t is the language not of *cogito ergo sum* but of *cogitate ergo est*: the speaking ‘I’ and its speech are felt not securely as subject but as object among other objects” (*DP* 44). The *I* is therefore lost in the process of signification, amidst other objects. As an undefined identity, Magda fails at realizing a self and remains transfixed in the present incapable of transcending her state or the discourse of the father, for it is her father’s oppressive tone that flows through Magda’s mouth. She has sought help from her father, but to no avail. She has also attempted to seek some form of confirmation from Hendrik and Klein-Anna but has also failed. Brian Macaskill writes:

She looks to her father for this lead, but how could she possibly find it there? Tautology is the only dowry her father can bequeath Magda. His is the language and the home she must abandon, but he cannot lead her out, and there are no suitors for her hand. Desperately she turns to Anna and Hendrik, but they leave without her, and she finds herself “alone again, alone in the historical present” (2001, 461).

Instead, she shoots her father in the hope that she may assume the dominant role in the household. She is incapable of assuming her father’s role. Magda is unable to bury the past that has brought her so much pain and remains unapt at acquiring another self. The difficulty she and Hendrik encounter whilst trying to bury her father symbolically accentuates her inability to break free from her father’s world and her past. Magda will forever be burdened by the heavy heritage that he has left her. Endlessly, she alludes to a beast that stalks her and questions if the beast is in effect her father (*IHC* 53). Dick Penner takes the beast to be a multifaceted being representing “a composite of all the characters caught in their particular place and time in a labyrinth of master/slave relationships and language” (62). This suspension in relationships and language maintains the status-quo. She

remains suspended in the discourse that will not recognize her. In life, as in death, his figure looms heavily on her, oppressive and crippling.

Although Magda's relationship to her body is one of alienation, as a last recourse she turns to communicating through the body, a body that has afforded her pain more than any *jouissance*. Cixous notes that feminine discourse will always go back to the body:

At first, individually, on two inseparable levels: -- woman, writing herself, will go back to this body that has been worse than confiscated, a body replaced with a disturbing stranger, sick or dead, who so often is a bad influence, the cause and place of inhibitions. By censoring the body, breath and speech are censored at the same time (*TNBW* 97).

By censoring her rejected body, Magda censors speech. In spite of her repeated effort to establish a closer relationship with Klein-Anna, she does not succeed. Caught in the master/slave dialectic, both are rendered immobile. To everything, Klein-Anna replies "yes miss." The same inadvertently applies to her rapport with Hendrik, but in this case, the roles are reversed. She becomes the slave and he the master. Unable to assume the language of her father, they exchange places and this becomes very evident in the sexual interaction that evolves between them. Once again, the communication is aborted before it begins; rape is what ensues, not a love scene. Magda tries to make some sense of it, to interpret and rename the act by establishing a dialogue, but to no avail. Magda asks Hendrik if she actually makes him happy (*IHC* 120). She questions whether she is a woman now, but the experience leaves her more fragmented than ever (*IHC* 117); and when like Mouth she was supposed to be having pleasure, "she was in fact ... having none...none the slightest [...]" (Beckett *EO* 16).

The hole through which Magda has hoped for pleasure, and which she finds synonymous with her image is reminiscent of the mouth/vagina in *Not I*. Through this cavernous mouth/vagina, the babble flows endlessly.⁷ The babble of words fabricate and re-fabricate her into something else, something that parodies a mouth/vagina symbolizing the hollowed-out phallus through which words flow and at which words are thrown (Lacan *JL* 128). The words themselves not only

recount Magda's aborted sexual fantasies, but also accentuate her sexless existence. The Antichrist of the desert who comes to lead her infested sons and daughters to a promised land is conceived via one of her sexual fantasies with her father (*IHC* 11). The latter can only result in rat-like children/grandchildren, runty girls, the spitting image of her.

Rat-like children, asexual life, featureless entity, are some of the causes that make Magda resent her father. Being the person who has robbed her of life, he embodies the absent mother, posing as her negative, and hence deserving of death. The death wish falls on the father as she stands "in the empty kitchen hating him" (*IHC* 41). Magda has to kill her father, repeatedly in the novel as to her he is the cause of everything that is abject in her life. In her mind, father and death are one. She hopes that killing her father may provide her with some form of release. However, what transpires at the end of the novel is a scene in which Magda is seen sitting by her father's side in the garden, reminiscing a bygone era, another attempt at a dialogue with him (*IHC* 148). For Magda, the father can never die; symbolically for her, he epitomizes the loss of being, and being a loss negates an existence in the first place; on the other hand, he could be a "ghost [who] never dies, [but] remains always to come and to come-back" (Derrida *SM* 99). Rody, on the other hand, finds the shooting scene liberating (168). However, Magda is never freed but becomes ridden with guilt. Cixous considers the feeling of permanent guilt as the easiest solution for the *I* to become a subject. She writes:

That is the easiest solution: keeping oneself in a state of permanent guilt is to constitute oneself as a subject. For the time being the guilty one is not the hysteric, but the hysteric is also not entirely a subject. Caught up in themes which are not hers, repeating her cues, always somewhere between sleep and wakefulness, between a hypnotic and an excited state, she is not she, but through the play of identifications, she is successively each one of the others. They are going to help her become a subject: they are going to make her guilty (*TNBW* 46).

Magda's construction of fictitious realities may enhance the feeling of guilt but fails short at granting her the position of subject; instead, she continues in a state

of suspension, in a hysteric condition, between sleep and wakefulness. Furthermore, her attempt at separating herself from the imposing presence of her father's corpse leaves her mummified and trapped, forever in the company of paternal death (Kristeva *DL* 149-150). The physical presence of the corpse in the house, her inability to bury the body, may ironically provide her with some meaning to her life, the presence of the decaying body, juxtaposed against her own, affirms the fact that she is still alive. The ugly image of the corpse is also but a reflection of her inner self, a continual reminder of the abyss that is within. She cannot flee from the ugliness that has accompanied her day in and day out. As in life, her father haunts her in his death, or semi-death state; their lives will forever be entwined. The abject/corpse becomes the object/life that is already lost; a successful burial is an impossibility. Instead, she hovers between Eros and Thanatos, between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, forever suspended (Freud 122).

"Language before language" *Age of Iron*:⁸

In the first section, I have shown how at the closing of the novel Magda is left paralyzed in a quasi-death, suspended between the world of the dead and that of the living. Adorno depicts what transpires in the intermediate space between life and death in his essay on Beckett's play *Endgame*:

In the realm between life and death, where it is no longer possible even to suffer, everything rides on the distinction between sawdust and sand; sawdust wretched byproduct of the object-world, becomes a scarce commodity, and being deprived of it means an intensification of one's life-long death penalty (*NL* 266).

When the being's existence becomes a blur where life and death can no longer be defined, s/he is left scrounging for the little that remains. Details, once immaterial, assume paramount importance, the fear being that the future can only hold in its fold further deterioration. This dread accentuates the feeling of an impending death penalty, which although having accompanied the being all along

becomes more pronounced with the passing of the years. In *Age of Iron*, the death penalty comes in the form of a debilitating illness. The opening page paints a picture of an alley frequented once by children but now is a “dead place, waste, without use, where windblown leaves pile up and rot,” sawdust changing into sand (AI 3). Curren has just returned from Dr. Styfret’s clinic armed with the news that she is dying of cancer. The alley, through which she passes, becomes the symbolic space that links a living past and a dead present. At the end of the alley of death lies a derelict in his card-board box, an epitome of those who linger, the dead in life, “[a]sleep in his box, his legs stretched out like a marionette’s, his jaw agape. An unsavory smell about him: urine, sweet wine, moldy clothing, and something else too” (AI 14). Moreover, the man who visits himself on her on this particular day unintentionally accompanies her on this pending journey between life and death (AI 14). Her one comfort at this stage of her suffering unexpectedly becomes Vercueil, whom she hopes will act as her messenger following her death. Playing with the various letters that compose his name, Curren tries to understand the meaning of his name and story behind this stranger in her house. Gallagher points out that *kuil* in Dutch means “hole in the ground” (SSAJMCF 203); consequently, the chosen messenger to bear the oracle is the unsavoury derelict from the underworld, where “a little begging, a little thieving; dirt, noise, drunkenness” prevail (AI 17). In one of the few optimistic points in the novel, Curren alludes to the possibility that Vercueil can epitomize her angel. She informs the reader that she has just “[r]ead Tolstoy—not the famous cancer story, which I know all too well, but the story of the angel who takes up residence with the shoemaker” (AI 14). For temporary relief, she evades her predicament in words and in fiction and draws a comparison between the angel in Tolstoy’s novel and the derelict who takes up residence with her, uninvited. She entrusts Vercueil with the letter she hopes he will deliver to her daughter upon her death. Her written voice becomes the heirloom to be transported across the seas. This is the only way that her dying voice can be metamorphosed into an eternal one, a responsibility that has to be handed over to the next generation. Failing this, the futility of her senseless, hollow life is accentuated, an un-lived life belonging to a non-descript old woman, a ruin amidst

a ruined country. She begins to wonder whether she has ever lived as she reflects on an earlier incident in front of the camera:

Worse: does not mother hold me back from striking the camera to the ground because I, in my doll's way, know that it will see what the eye cannot: that I am not there? And does my mother know this because she too is not there? (*AI* 111)

The fear of not having been there has haunted Curren since childhood. An empty existence is a life not lived: “[n]ot properly born: a liminal creature, unable to breathe in water that lacks the courage to leave the sea behind and become a dweller on land” (*AI* 139). At one point, she even questions her whole existence, wondering if she has ever been real or merely a doll. If she is a doll, can it recognize another of its kind? (*AI* 109)⁹ Nonetheless, the story, be it of a doll or a female, has to be told and the self signified. Once again, the gaze of the other is of paramount importance even if it is granted through a camera lens. In Freud's essay, “The Uncanny,” a woman tells him that “at the age of eight she had still been convinced that her dolls would be certain to come to life if she were to look at them in a particular, extremely concentrated, way” (*XVII* 233). However, when Curren probes into the eyes of Vercueil seeking some recognition, the only image reflected back is “the light shining into his vacant green eyes” (*AI* 17).

As the novel progresses, the derelict's vacant green eyes are her only comfort. Physically and spiritually homeless, the derelict forms an allegiance to this undefined terrain inhabited by the dead in life, as opposed to Dr. Syfret whose allegiance is undoubtedly to the living (*AI* 14). Confronted by her impending death, Curren resorts to words. Although, to Derrida: “[w]riting in the common sense is the dead letter, it is the carrier of death,” it is also venerated as “it is equal in dignity to the origin of value, to the voice of conscience” (*OF* 17). Aware of the finality of the written word, Curren begins composing a letter to her daughter in the USA, concurrently establishing a dialogue with the derelict at her doorstep. The discourse that ensues between her and the tramp is at best one sided, nothing but words thrown at the silence he subsumes. Much like the gaze, Curren's words sadly resonate with silence. For Foucault, it is on the onset of

death that language surges in to discover the story before the story (*FEW* 90), as death “may indeed be the last great foe of writing, but writing is also the foe of death” (*AI* 115-116).

Language may hold death at arm’s length, but time heavily weighs down on her in a Draconian fashion. A victim of time, Curren applies herself to drawing on the peculiar events that are taking place around her, merely writing words in order that she may test them. Caught in this death-in-life condition, where the end heavily looms, time oppresses. As with Proust’s creatures, a victim of “this predominating condition and circumstance—Time,” Curren cannot escape the hours, nor the days nor the yesterdays that have deformed her (*Beckett P* 2). She compares the impact of time on her state to that of Florence’s son, Bheki, just before he dies:

Within this interval there is no time, though his heart beats time. I am here in my room in the night but I am also with him, all the time, as I am with you across the seas, hovering.

A hovering time, but not eternity. A *time being*, a suspension, before the return of the time in which the door bursts open and we face, first he, then I, the great white glare (*AI* 176).

Until such a time, suspended in eternity, she has only words to fill her painful remaining days. As with the other females in Coetzee’s novels, Curren positions herself as the author of her own narrative (Parry 157). Curren bears witness to a history that she feels compelled to document. In the face of such cruel events, she stands speechless, as words cannot describe the ugliness that prevails around her. Though, Derrida sees the exercise of writing, due to its finitude, betraying life, menacing “at once the breath, the spirit, the history as the spirit’s relationship with itself,” it is at the same time “that forgetting of the self, that exteriorization” which “opens the history of the spirit” (*OG* 25). In its paralysis, a certain presence is confirmed. In classical representation, the dying person’s spirit insinuates a butterfly emerging from the soul (Marais 2000, 171). Curren alludes to this metaphor, but depicts her spirit as a moth:¹⁰

The moth is simply what will brush your cheek ever so lightly as you put down the last page of this letter, before it flutters off on its next journey. It is not my soul that will remain with you but the spirit of my soul, the breath, the stirring of the air about these words, the faintest of turbulence traced in the air by the ghostly passage of my pen over paper your fingers now hold (AI 130).

Through the writing process, the self is exteriorized and possibly granted another life. In selecting the written word, Curren is hopeful that the spirit of her soul remains with her daughter. She resists being reduced to a mere witness, at times with eyes shut, as when she endeavours to look at John, Bheki's friend.¹¹ For no apparent reason she dislikes the latter immensely, but she is reluctant to relinquish life with this hatred and ugliness within her. She views writing as a product of pain and salvation as stemming from accepting abjection (AI 175). She states:

That is my first word, my first confession. I do not want to die in the state I am in, in a state of ugliness. I want to be saved. How shall I be saved? By doing what I do not want to do. That is the first step: that I know. I must love, first of all, the unlovable (AI 136).

She also has to witness and name the unlovable/object, hence signifying it; through the other, she can regain herself, albeit only in words. She looks away and "the 'detour' of looking away has become the act of writing with eyes shut, suggesting that this gesture is no longer driven by totalizing desire, but by respect for the Other" (Marais 2000, 165). Once expropriated from all referential reality, a being in discourse can say nothing as he finds himself incapable of speaking. As a subject of enunciation, as a spectator to all that is going on, Curren is compelled to comment but having placed herself in discourse, she is unsuccessful; Agamben observes that: "[t]he subject of enunciation is composed of discourse and exists in discourse alone. But, for this very reason, once the subject is in discourse, he can say nothing; he cannot speak" (RA 116-117). Therefore, it is essential for Curren to see herself in the other, to be able to write about herself. Of Vercueil, Curren tells us: "[b]ecause he is and he is not I.

Because in the look he gives me I see myself in a way that can be written" (*AI* 19). As with Magda who bitterly strives to see herself in the gaze of the father/other, Curren seeks recognition in the derelict's strange green eyes, or even in the eyes of the "stupid, obstructive, intractable" John (*AI* 78). One must respect being whether through a glance or a form of speech. Through the novel, Curren attempts to provoke both glance and speech, be it through her association with Vercueil or through her relation with Florence and her children, so as not to remain on the fringe of existence (Derrida *WD* 143). Words, to witness, to name, to fill a void, can only be born through such a gaze. Durrant draws a comparison between the narratives in Beckett, Coetzee and Kafka:

Like the work of Beckett and Kafka, Coetzee's novels remain speechless before history [...]; their fundamental position is that of Mrs. Curren in *Age of Iron*, called upon to witness and to name the destruction of a township, the "crime being committed in front of [her] eyes:" "To speak of this—[she] waved a hand over the brush, the smoke, the filth littering the path—"you would need the tongue of a god" (2000, 434).

The horror that Curren has witnessed leaves her numb. Incapable of expressing her views on the atrocities, she remains paralyzed; the language of the Classics, she has excelled in, fails her in situations like these. The emerging violence she is witnessing in South Africa requires another kind of language. An involuntary witness, she tells us that she is reluctant to comment, as language does not suffice; nevertheless, having nothing else, she incessantly resorts to words. Having lived all her life amidst words, she is unable to relinquish their power. A Classics teacher, she has dwelled in the language of the dead. She tells Vercueil: "Yes, it was my job. I made a living from it. Giving voice to the dead" (*AI* 192). Foucault emphasizes how important it is for Ulysses to "sing the song of his identity and tell of his misfortunes to escape the fate presented to him by a language before language" (*A* 90). In some ways, Foucault is suggesting that by speaking of misfortunes, one is able to avoid the apocalyptic. For it is "the gods [who] send disasters to mortals so that they can tell of them, but men speak of them so that misfortunes will never be fully realized, so that their fulfillment will

be averted in the distance of words” (Foucault *MF* 90). Speaking of misfortunes serves a double purpose. For one, talking of disasters can lessen their actual impact while, on the other hand, words can give a false impression of keeping such disasters at bay. Intrinsically, Curren avails herself of words in the hope that she may avert the disasters encircling her, aspiring to give voice once again to her dying self and to the extinct Age of Innocence. The world has degenerated into the Age of Iron, uncontrollable violence, an age in which “[t]here are no more mothers and fathers” (*AI* 39).¹² As with Magda words are her only salvation, language her one redeemer. Magda’s words are recounted to the reader through her speech; and she, being aware of the transient nature of her discourse, resorts to writing in stone, a final attempt at communication and a way of creating some permanence to her narrative, an inscription in stone (*IHC* 144-145). Curren, on the other hand, resorts to words and permanence when she begins to write what at first appears to be a letter to her daughter. As the novel progresses, a document, at once autobiographical and a commentary on the times, is revealed.¹³ Her narrative, whether written or heard, is very similar to Magda’s, though more convincing. It is not what she writes that is ultimately important but the writing act itself. The Unnamable tells us:

I invented it all, in the hope it would console me, help me to go on, allow me to think of myself as somewhere on a road, moving between a beginning and an end, gaining ground, losing ground, getting lost, but somehow in the long run making headway. All lies, I have nothing to do, that is to say nothing in particular, I have to speak, whatever that means. Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak (Beckett *MMDU* 314).

Curren may or may not be inventing it all, may or may not be writing the letter at “the dead of night”; nonetheless, she feels compelled to do it (*AI* 175).¹⁴ She hesitates because she “meant to go through with it, began to go through with it, did not go through with it” (*AI* 116). She hopes for redemption through words; discourse is her tool. She has to speak in defiance of all that is pervading her life, cancer, loneliness, old age, a country on the brink of civil war. She resents her abject body, and can only see it in fragments:¹⁵

I look at my hand and see only a tool, a hook, a thing for gripping other things. And these legs, these clumsy, ugly stilts: why should I have to carry them with me everywhere? Why should I take them to bed with me night after night and pack them in under the sheets, and pack the arms in too, higher up near my face, and lie there sleepless amid the clutter? The abdomen too, with its dead gurglings, and the heart beating, beating: why? What have they to do with me? (*AI* 13)¹⁶

Kristeva considers writing vis-à-vis the abject a form of indefinite catharsis; this exercise has provided Curren with relief (*PH* 208). Moreover, she desires to do it truthfully through her own words: “I must find my own words, from myself. Otherwise it is not the truth” (*AI* 176). Coetzee argues, “[a]uthenticity does not demand that language reproduce a reality; instead it demands that language manifest its ‘own’ truth” (*DP* 268). This is precisely what Curren is attempting to do. She can only describe the situation in her own way.

Attwell considers writing to represent a form of self-preservation for Curren. He states: “[w]hat Elizabeth says is no more important, in this configuration, than the fact that she finds a way to speak: writing becomes Elizabeth’s mode of self-preservation” (Attwell *JMC* 122). Curren struggles to apprehend the grimness enveloping her surroundings and her inward abjection. Her letter is none but a form of *hupomnēmata*, “to capture the already-said, to collect what one has managed to hear or read, and for a purpose that is nothing less than the shaping of the self” (Foucault *EST* 211). Trying to shape and understand the self requires a contemplation of the past in order that the soul can detach itself from the concerns of the future (Foucault *EST* 212). Hence, she escapes into the past with stories of her mother. Heard several times, the stories have literally brought Curren into being. Retelling them not only provides her with an escape into a preferable time, but also renders her stronger in confronting such awful times. Her mother’s stories have been fundamental in the formation of her discourse. She clings to them as she does to her memory. She explains to Vercueil:

That is the reason—I bring it forward now for you to see—why I cling so tightly to the memory of my mother. For if she did not give me life, no one did. I cling not just to the

memory of her but to her herself, to her body, to my birth from her body into the world. In blood and milk I drank her body and came to life. And then was stolen, and have been lost ever since (*AI* 110).

Even in dreams, the feeling that life is nothing but a stolen moment that one needs to salvage prevails. The Coetzean female is forever competing against the unknown other who robs her of existence. The unknown could also be one's fear of an impending death. Nevertheless, the story she holds on to is a memory of her dead mother. Upon waking up, she recalls, "it was into light and peace" (*AI* 17). This strange dream metonymically echoes her own life from which she hopes she can wake up and discover that it has all been a simple dream. Her mother has never divulged her dream to any member of her family, but has chosen to pass it on to her daughter during their trips to the Piesangs River. Unfortunately, on visiting the "most beautiful place on earth" she sees only destruction where a river is only a trickle, hardly a giver of life, ridden with mosquitoes and reeds (*AI* 18). In spite of the disappointment at the place and the inconsequential dream, she holds on to the story. She writes:

I have held on to that story all my life. If each of us has a story we tell to ourself about who we are and where we come from, then that is my story. That is the story I choose, or the story that has chosen me. It is there that I come from, it is there that I begin (*AI* 120).

To begin in order to have a middle and hope for an end is essential to evade the hollowness within. Durrant sees the Coetzean bodies as empty shells; "[f]ar from housing a soul or a subject, these bodies contain "a story with a hole in it," through which the subject seems to disappear" (439). Curren confirms the same condition when she refers to herself as a hollow shell (*AI* 112). Even if the letter to her daughter represents a form of life giving, how can an empty shell grant life (Marais 2000, 168-170)?

Having failed to embrace life, she persuades herself to accept death: "[t]o embrace death as my own, mine alone. To whom this writing then? The answer: to you but not to you; to me; to you in me" (*AI* 16). Writing is ultimately for

herself, a compulsion she cannot escape. At the end of the novel, she tells her daughter, "I am going to release you soon from this rope of words" (*AI* 197). It is herself who is entangled in this web of words, and not her daughter. She has employed words to dispel the shadow of death, but as words fail, she begins to welcome death, her one saviour from the rope of words, ironically through the language of mourning, commemorating those who are still alive. Her letter is nothing but an obituary written for herself and her country.

"Words came to me unbidden" *Foe*:¹⁷

The urge to tell her story in writing forms the essence of Barton's quest in *Foe*. Like Curren, she feels compelled to have her experience documented. Not possessing the art of story telling, she approaches Foe to write her story. Ironically, Coetzee employs Barton to tell a story, while she searches for a male author to tell hers. Initially, she hopes that her unconventional castaway tale leading to her encounter with Crusoe on a deserted island would amass her a little fortune. As the novel unfolds, Barton begins to reflect on herself and acquires a certain awareness of the self when she tells her story repeatedly in speech and letters to Foe.¹⁸ Similar to Magda, this self-revelation puts her whole history into question; and as truth begins to elude her, the need to commit to words becomes the more urgent. In some respects, Magda anticipates the arrival of her counterpart, Barton. She tells us:

But tonight I have beaten the waters too long, I am weak, I am tired of telling myself things, tonight I am going to relax, give up, explore the pleasures of drowning, the feel of my body sliding out of me and another body sliding in, limbs inside my limbs, mouth inside my mouth. I welcome death as a version of life in which I will not be myself (*IHC* 58).

Barton is possibly a less abject version of Magda, resurrected. Not only has Barton beaten the waters for too long and explored the pleasures of drowning, she also wants her tale formalized in words, in order that she can relish the desire that

is born of the merger of two bodies. In Lacanian fashion, Barton, as with her predecessors Magda and Curren, understands the relationship that connects language, desire and being (Lin 49). In one of her diatribes with Friday, she attempts to describe speech to him: "Oh, Friday, how can I make you understand the cravings felt by those of us who live in a world of speech to have our questions answered! It is like our desire, when we kiss someone, to feel the lips we kiss respond to us" (*F* 79).¹⁹ At a later stage in the novel, she fantasizes about being the muse who will inspire Foe to write her story. In her description:

The Muse is a woman, a goddess, who visits poets in the night and begets stories upon them. In the accounts they give afterwards, the poets say that she comes in an hour of their deepest despair and touches them with sacred fire, after which their pens, that have been dry, flow (*F* 126).

Swiftly she re-enacts this particular account:

I calmed Foe. 'Permit me,' I whispered—'there is a privilege that comes with the first night, that I claim as mine.' So I coaxed him till he lay beneath me. Then I drew off my shift and straddled him (which he did not seem easy with, in a woman). 'This is the manner of the Muse when she visits her poets,' I whispered, and felt some of the listlessness go out of my limbs (*F* 139).

Barton is a victim of narrative in more than one way. *Foe* itself introduces the element of metafiction, its title a metonym of an earlier one. The character itself, unlike Crusoe and Friday, did not exist in the earlier novel. Sardonicly, the non-existent Barton in *Robinson Crusoe* is attempting to come into being in *Foe*, hence the need to formulate her self in language.²⁰ In every action she takes, she needs an affirmation from the world of language. She is always quoting or referring to a story of which invariably the title has escaped her and by an author, whose name she fails to remember (*F* 113-114). Nevertheless, in order to be believed by others and ultimately by herself she needs to substantiate her story by another's. Her lack of confidence in herself and her feeling of incompleteness prompt her to seek salvation in words. Barton wants her story told, but on her

own terms. It is ironic that the story she wishes to document is eventually not hers, but Cruso's, in spite of the fact that being a female castaway is in itself something worth writing about. The part of herself that she chooses is the one that is directly related to Cruso. Despite his demise in the middle of the novel, "his ghostly presence continues to haunt over the text," and over Barton (Dragunoiu 2001, 309).²¹

Whilst on the island, Barton has persistently pestered Cruso for his story and that of Friday's, but whatever he has divulged is very scant.²² She has aspired for tales that she can add to her semi-literate repertoire, more stories to authenticate her existence, but as Dragunoiu states, "Cruso's taciturnity coupled with the multiple narratives he offers Barton regarding his and Friday's origins, reveals a deep-seated distrust of language as an effective medium of knowledge and communication" (2001, 317). Cruso's refusal to teach Friday more than a few words betray a certain rejection of language vis-à-vis Barton's near immersion in it. Barton's speech is rendered suspect because it evolves from her inability to remain silent. For Lacan, the process of throwing words at the silence is a method of filling the emptiness within. Similarly, Barton talks in the face of the silence that envelops her and because of the nothingness that is within her, the resounding echo is vacuous, evolving from her own emptiness (Lacan *E* 40).

In Cruso's desert island, the vacuity Barton experiences is at once literal and spiritual. The barrenness of the land, accentuated by the empty terraces Cruso and Friday dig with no intention of planting, amplify the silence that envelops her as she describes her days:²³

'Time passed with increasing tediousness. When I had exhausted my questions to Cruso about the terraces, and the boat he would not build, and the journal he would not keep, and the tools he would not save from the wreck, and Friday's tongue, there was nothing left to talk of save the weather. Cruso had no stories to tell of the life he had lived as a trader and planter before the shipwreck. He did not care how I came to be in Bahia or what I did there. When I spoke of England and all of the things I intended to see and do when I was rescued, he seemed not to hear me (*F* 34).

Barton identifies herself in language. In Lacanian fashion, she needs to lose herself in words, to objectify herself, so “what is realized in [... her] history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what [...she is], but the future anterior of what [... she will] have been for what [... she is] in the process of becoming” (*E* 86). The story she aspires Foe will eventually write will allow her to become. In *Foe*, as with Agamben’s “real individual,” Barton fluctuates between the subject and the object or the process of subjectifying and desubjectifying herself. By identifying with the pure shifter *I*, she can become the subject of enunciation (Agamben *RA* 116). She needs the presence of Cruso, the male figure, in her story to render her enunciable. She wants Foe to compose her story, her own character sidelined, told only in connection to Cruso, suppressing her earlier days in Bahia and her search for her missing daughter. The girl who shows up with the same name may or may not be her kidnapped daughter. Nonetheless, she is quick to reject her as her own, claiming, “there are no stories of daughters searching for mothers,” once again basing her belief on a story (*F* 77). If she were to accept this girl as her own daughter, Barton, theoretically, becomes displaced, finding herself outside the narrative she is attempting to write. Admitting that the girl “with a round face and a little O of a mouth and a story of a lost mother?” is hers, places Barton outside the discourse she is trying to inhabit, which is typified by Friday’s O’s at the end of the novel (*F* 75, 152). Barton finds herself unable to face the woman who accompanies her daughter and who is introduced to her as the nurse from Deptford; the pounding in her ears, the coldness that runs through her nearly making her fall to the floor can only be provoked by an unpleasant memory from the past (*F* 129). The nurse uncannily mirrors the image of her, a reminder to her of her role as an absent mother. Confronted by this spectre from the past, she hastily affirms that they have never met. Nurse Amy’s name echoes Beckett’s play, *Footfalls*, in which the protagonist, Amy/May, a tattered figure, immersed in a pale shade of grey, paces up and down the stage in a ghost-like manner listening to her mother’s voice (Beckett *EO* 42). Incidentally, Barton earlier describes her daughter “as a child in old woman’s clothes”—similar to the rags that enshroud Amy/May, denying her any form of human shape or entity. The

daughter may as well have been born old, denied any of life's pleasures. The daughter and Amy/May have sought recognition from their mothers as proof of existence. Amy/May, feeling that her mother has denied her life, repeatedly refuses to acknowledge her mother's story: "I mean, Mother, that to say I observed nothing ... strange or otherwise. I saw nothing, heard nothing, of any kind. I was not there" (Beckett *EO* 48). By her continual negation, Amy/May threatens her mother's very existence. The mother is left questioning herself wondering if she has been there at all. Barton's continual denial of her daughter, telling her that she must be father-born is another form of self-negation (*F* 91). Her daughter symbolizes her own repressed history, and acknowledging her would bring her suppressed narrative to life. In spite of her claim that she has been looking for her, she really does not feel she needs her and therefore denies her that recognition.

Both times, when Amy and her daughter have come to visit, Barton searches for Friday, finding him invariably marginalized "standing listlessly in a corner" (*F* 77). She turns to him attempting to reposition him as a central figure in her narrative, the missing child that she needs to find in order to complete her story. She does not need her daughter because finding her would create another story that Foe has striven to write. It becomes a story she has fought against, written by a man, from a man's perspective, giving her a beginning, middle and an end. Foe dictates the outline of her story:

'We therefore have five parts in all: the loss of the daughter; the quest for the daughter in Brazil; abandonment of the quest, and the adventure of the island; assumption of the quest by the daughter; and reunion of the daughter with her mother. It is thus that we make up a book: loss, then quest, then recovery; beginning, then middle, then end (*F* 117).

In this manner, Foe is not only the author of her story but her selective autobiographer.²⁴ Gallagher points out that "[w]hile Defoe is commonly seen as one of the "fathers" of the novel and Robinson Crusoe is marking the beginning of a new literary genre, Barton's story embodies the voice of the woman that has been silenced in traditional literary history" (186). She fights against this silence

by trying to carve a niche for herself in a tale dominated by men, hoping that being a castaway she can begin to break certain conventions. Her Foe refuses to listen. He can only function in a world with set rules and clear role models. When constructing Barton's character eludes him, he tries to mould her in the role of a courtesan or a mother, positions he can understand. He needs to erase the uniqueness of her adventure and turns it to a common one identified by all. Being a courtesan or mother is much easier to deal with than the life of an unconventional "free woman" (*F* 115).

Spivak points that although the woman as subject is given the "philosophical value of the capital I," she reverts to being an object by the male author "le style," ending up doubly displaced (1983, 171). When Foe attempts to write Barton as subject, he renders her an object for two reasons: "le style," imposes his power as male, and rejects what he cannot understand.²⁵ When the male writer feminises himself in order that he may write the role of the woman, he sacrifices the truth, for he is unable to offer "truth and his phallus as his own proper credentials" (Derrida *SNS* 97). In such a situation, a woman like Barton is "taken as a figure or pontentate of falsehood, finds herself censured, debased and despised" (Derrida *SNS* 97). "Le style," therefore, doubly displaces Barton as she shuttles between the author's subject and object, between truth and falsehood. In the process, her "essence as a woman" is lost, and she becomes averted of herself (Derrida *SNS* 51). Foe will never be able to convey her story in the manner that she wants him to as "the abyssal divergence of the truth" renders Barton "but one name for that untruth of truth" (Derrida *SNS* 51).

Nonetheless, with the strength of literary history behind her, Barton remains resilient. She tells him that the life he has recommended for her and her story "is abject. It is the life of a thing" (*F* 126). Her story need not have a beginning, middle and an end, because she has already departed from what is acceptable, from the enslavement that traditional narration brings. She has given herself the freedom of stepping in and out of it as she pleases, at times losing her own identity. Dragunoiu writes:

'[W]hat kind of woman was I, in truth?' she asks herself after the ship's captain advises her to go by Mrs. Cruso in

order to avoid scandal. In England, her roles multiply: she thinks of herself as Friday's mistress, Foe's housekeeper and muse, and after the journey to Bristol, even as a gypsy and stroller (2001, 319).

By assuming various personae, she resists being subjugated but her many roles render her "full of doubt. Nothing is left to [her] but doubt. [She is] doubt itself" (*F* 133). Yet she is "a substantial being with a substantial history in the world" (*F* 131). To realize this substantiality, Barton needs Friday. Friday, the castrated mute, allows her to escape the male dominance. His silence allows her to create her own narrative, write her life in the way she sees fit, until such a time when she realizes that his silence is stifling and not a comfort. She narrates to Foe:

[W]hen I lived in your house I would sometimes lie awake upstairs listening to the pulse of blood in my ears and to the silence from Friday below, a silence that rose up the stairway like smoke, like a welling of black smoke. Before long I could not breathe, I would feel I was stifling in my bed. My lungs, my heart, my head were full of black smoke (*F* 118).

Unless Barton is able to bear witness to Friday's loss of history, she cannot salvage her own. His silence becomes the core of the emptiness within her narrative.

According to Agamben, the speaking being enters:

[...] into language without noticing it. Everything that is presupposed for there to be language [...] is nothing other than a presupposition of language that is maintained as such in relation to language precisely insofar as it is excluded from language (*HS* 50).

As a speaking being, Barton has entered into a phallic language without noticing it; she swiftly realizes that it is all a presupposition, excluding her from language upon which she bases her existence. She is banned from language and her salvation lies in Friday's muffled silence. Sartre states that the other being "stands as an indication of what [h/she] should be obliged to recover and found in order to be the foundation of [the self]. But this is conceivable only if [s/he]

assimilate[s] the Other's freedom" (340). Thus, Barton's only chance of recovering herself lies in absorbing this other, which is Friday, and assimilating his freedom (Sartre 340). Barton's narrative cannot be complete without the history of the subaltern. "For until Friday is able to learn the language necessary to tell his story and acquire his freedom, Susan will not be able to bring her own narrative to a close" (Begam 122).

Early on in the novel, she wonders about the benefit of a life of silence, where, according to her, language would have made Friday a better man (*F* 22). Barton has initially striven to talk to Friday, "to educate him out of darkness and silence," but soon realizes she requires a form of interaction with him in order that she may authenticate her own existence (*F* 60).²⁶ She has thrown words at Cruso in order that he may reciprocate them, only to have them thrown back at her. One cannot ascertain how much of her words he takes in. Cruso's presence recalls that of the auditor's in *Not I*, who can only lift a hand from time to time, granting Mouth a slight recognition.²⁷ For Lacan, the role of a silent auditor is necessary; Cruso, on the other hand, is reluctant to play the role of the auditor and Barton's speech is met for the most part with silence, the first thing making itself heard is the void from within (Lacan *E* 40). Words are needed to fill this void. Earlier, she describes her own presence on the island: "[w]hen I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso" (*F* 51). This hollowness inside becomes more piercing when she apprehends that: "[t]o tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost!" (*F* 67). She tells Foe that her story seems stupid because it is incomplete as "it so doggedly holds its silence. The shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday's tongue" (*F* 117). So unless Friday is given a voice, "the true story will not be heard" (*F* 118).

Barton discovers the presence of another form of language when she tries to relate to Friday by playing his little tune (*F* 96). According to Foucault, when "the philosopher discovers the existence of another language that also speaks and

of which he is not the master,” silence is what ensues (*A* 79). The presence of another language transiently equates the master and the slave. For a brief moment, Barton is no longer Friday’s mistress but his equal. Incapable of mastering his language, she falls silent, dispossessed. Subtle discord has qualified that instance. Barton cannot even penetrate Friday’s dancing ritual. His symbolic dance will forever be foreign to her, an indecipherable language. On two occasions, she attempts to interpret his movements, but draws different conclusions (*F* 98, 103). Essentially, it is her language that Friday is holding at bay, refusing to partake in it for fear of being contaminated.

Having described Friday throughout the novel in derogatory terms, namely, animal, cannibal, dog, horse, beast of burden, to name but a few, it is surprising that Barton can think that they can become equal and play a tune harmoniously when she dictates it. Admittedly, she has been successful at stepping in and out of roles, but with this one, the other is involved, and that other is unwilling to grant her the recognition that would make her whole.²⁸ When her efforts at teaching him speech and writing fail, she hastily dismisses Friday as stupid. She herself has stated earlier that she does not love him but he is hers, perhaps referring to a sense of responsibility towards him, like Curren with the boy John (*F* 111). In spite of Barton’s opinion and her dismissal of him, Friday occupies another space, his silence safeguarding him from “the I-Thou, I-It objectifying process of language,” or name-calling (Dragunoiu 2001, 318).²⁹ His silence and his absent story dwell in Barton’s interiority. Without his voice, she will never be able to attain any closure to her story, the hollowness within forever reverberating. Friday continues to inhabit his mysterious world, impenetrable. Sidelined earlier on in the novel, a shadow of Crusoe and later of Barton’s, he evolves to occupy central stage, as it is written:

[T]he man seated at the table was not Foe. It was Friday, with Foe’s robes on his back and Foe’s wig, filthy as a bird’s nest, on his head. In his hand, poised over Foe’s papers, he held a quill with a drop of black ink glistening at its tip (*F* 151).

Mimicking Foe, Friday is the one who is going to write the story:

The paper before him was heavily smudged, as by a child unused to the pen, but there was writing on it, writing of a kind, rows and rows of the letter o tightly packed together. A second page lay at his elbow, fully written over, and it was the same (*F* 152).

The hollow shape of the letter mirrors a circle, in which they are bound together, prisoners within its walls, unable to step outside. While, the O emulates zero, the infinite nothingness at the heart of being, Friday's sketch of "row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes" embody within them a fleeting gaze, a reluctance to confront or grant Barton, the subject, the wholeness she craves.³⁰ To look at reality is to realize that "at the 'bottom' of the human being there is nothing other than an impossibility of seeing—this is the Gorgon, whose vision transforms the human being into a non-human"(Agamben 54). Friday's walking eyes at once protect him from the Gorgon, but render them vacant to others. Their vacant reflection is what transforms Barton into a non-being as she probes into them for the truth.

In the final section of the novel, Coetzee surprises the reader with what initially appears to be a new narrator. The latter is none but Barton's omniscient alter ego, coming back to haunt the novel. Coetzee remarks:

For Susan Barton, the question takes care of itself: the book is not *Foe's*, it is hers, even in the form of the trace of her hunt for a Foe to tell it for her. But Friday is the true test. Is his history of mute subjection to remain drowned? I return to the theme of power. The last pages of *Foe* have a certain power. They close the text by force, so to speak: they confront head-on the endlessness of its skepticism (*DP* 248).

The narrator at the end of *Foe* does indeed attempt to force a sense of closure. However, as with Coetzee's other novels, the text resists closure. Consequently, it will remain "open" for further analysis. In some respects, Barton is stepping back, away from the frame; Barton, the *I* as subject, is distancing herself, from Barton, the *I* as object. This distancing allows the story to be rewritten, unceasingly, at once adding an aspect of permanence and another of postponement to the text. Breaking away from it can even render the story a

multi-faceted fantasy with an inconclusive ending, an opened text, on which a form of *différance* is exercised, allowing various interpretations and reinterpretations.³¹ In this manner, Barton not only refuses to give up her storytelling but also manages to deconstruct her own narrative. Her earlier story not only becomes doubtful at this stage, but also fragmentary. Unsure, Barton attempts to ascertain her earlier discourse when she touches Friday's hair to confirm that it "is indeed like lambswool" (*F* 154). She twice climbs the "dark and mean staircase," stumbling over the body of her rejected daughter who is 'light as straw,' "wrapped in a grey woollen scarf" (*F* 153, 155). Her actions and words call everything into question; when she slips overboard, she fails to recognize any of the wrecks. At one point, she turns to Friday enquiringly, "what is this ship?" (*F* 157) Her dive is a last attempt at rescuing her story. Head describes the three wrecks:

It is here that the narrator 'dives' down to a wrecked ship which seems to conflate three different ships: Crusoe's wreck (it is located off his island); the ship from which Barton is originally set adrift (she is found with 'her captain'); and the vessel which rescues her (and Friday, who is on board as well). She and the captain have become bloated corpses, and once more the signs of life come from Friday, as the narrator urges him to speak (*JMC* 125).

Barton slips her fingers through Friday's clenched teeth, forcibly trying to open his mouth in a last bid at salvation. When Friday's vacant mouth opens, from it comes:

[A] slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face (*F* 157).

Friday's silent scream, 'stream of syllabi', stemming out of fear, is also his method of defying the world that has been imposed upon him. It recalls the one

heard by Edvard Munch's figure in *The Scream*--the person stands slightly sidelined at the forefront, covering his ears while the scream, scattered by the ripples, echoes throughout the canvas and beyond (*TS*: see illustration 5).³² The black waves created by the scream envelop the earth, the sea and the sky, transforming them into one. The scream epitomizes the sense of alienation felt by the figure, leaving him and the onlooker with a haunting presence. Friday's scream towards the end of *Foe* is equally haunting, displacing all, leaving Barton with the scattered petals floating in the water, mourning her loss, and a story whose end will forever be invisible (*F* 135).

An unwritten story of an incomplete life seeped with death underlies the void within Barton; she will never be released from the chains that bind her to Friday. The dependence on the subaltern to reveal the story is somewhat humiliating for Barton; her story will remain undecipherable until Friday's can be told. Similarly, in *Age of Iron*, the reliance on Vercueil brings with it its share of shame. Attridge notes, "Vercueil remains unknowable to the end, and in that end fuses—or is fused in Mrs. Curren's mind—with the equally irreducible otherness of death" (1994, 66). The dead baby Barton and Friday find along their way epitomizes the death that has journeyed along with them, a premonition of her aborted story, and the symbolic demise of all the characters in the novel, with the exception of Friday, whose silent scream at the end, to me, envelops all.

"Word-mirror is broken" *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*:³³

As with Magda, Curren and Barton, the spectre of death accompanies the heroine of *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* throughout. An old woman, a well-known author, renowned for her fourth novel, *The House on Eccles Street*, whose principal character is James Joyce's *Ulysses*' Marion Bloom, Elizabeth Costello finds herself reluctantly giving lectures and receiving awards in various countries. Earlier on, she tells us: "I have forgotten why I agreed to come. It seems a great ordeal to put oneself through, for no good reason" (*EC* 3).³⁴ In spite of her many achievements, her face, like the ones of Coetzee's other heroines, is featureless: "[a] face without personality, the kind that photographers have to work on to lend

distinction. Like Keats, [her son] thinks, the great advocate of blank receptiveness” (EC 4). The clothes she *chooses* to wear enhance the characterless aspect of her physique. To her son, “[t]he blue costume, the greasy hair, are details, signs of a moderate realism. Supply the particulars, allow the significations to emerge of themselves” (EC 4). Daniel Defoe, he adds, pioneers this procedure, when the odd pairs of shoes found on the beach symbolize the death of his shipmates. This metonymical reference not only evokes Coetzee’s own œuvre, *Foe*, but also introduces the death theme in the opening pages of the novel. Costello is an ageing woman whose dress code invokes “[t]wo shoes, not fellows: by not being fellows, the shoes have ceased to be footwear and become proofs of death, torn by the foaming seas off the feet of drowning men and tossed ashore. No large words, no despair, just hats and caps and shoes” (EC 4).³⁵

Against the premonition of impending death, Costello resorts to words. She is forever complaining about the lectures that she has consented to give, not fully comprehending the reasons for doing so. Giving lectures and attending conferences become Costello’s one recourse, a way of holding death at bay, a struggle against the physical exertion caused by her passing years. Her son, John, describes her writing as “an instance” and it is against this instance that she fights (EC 8). With the years, her novels having become rare, lectures and unwelcome interviews are the only way of keeping abreast with life. John, points out that “[h]er strategy with the interviewers is to take control of the exchange, presenting them with blocks of dialogue that have been rehearsed so often [he] wonders they have not solidified in her mind and become some kind of truth” (EC 9). The repetitive nature of her dialogues not only adds credence and truth to her speech, but also allows for assuming a form of permanence, solidifying their presence, and ultimately her own. Describing herself as a “mortal shell,” she attains survival through her creations (EC 17). Short lectures, giving no hope of permanence, replace the writing of novels as the process becomes more difficult with age.

In a discussion with the Nigerian writer Egudu on board the *Northern Lights*, she maintains that the novel is “never intended to be the script of a performance. From the beginning the novel has made a virtue of not depending on being

performed” (*EC* 50). In defence of the oral tradition, Egudu fervently defends his point of view on the African novel, claiming, “Africans need the living presence, the living voice” (*EC* 50). She suggests to him to compose straight onto a tape, speaking directly to an audience, without the detour of print (*EC* 49). In his lecture, Egudu maintains that the African novel is:

[...] in its very being, and before the first word is written, a critique of the Western novel, which has gone so far down the road of disembodiment—think of Henry James, think of Marcel Proust—that the appropriate way and indeed the only way in which to absorb it is in silence and in solitude (*EC* 45).

To Egudu, literature has for centuries denied voice to humankind, and “time has come to stop privileging writing” (*EC* 45). Pitiably, with words letting her down, a declining Western heritage she invokes throughout in her support, Costello finds herself at the mercy of the oral tradition/the voice, performing directly to an audience. She is alive through the speech she finds temporal, although it is the letter that she finds the more permanent of the two.

During one of the interviews earlier in the novel, when asked about the message she carries, Costello adamantly says that she is not obliged to carry any, quizzically wondering if one ought to (*EC* 10). The question she poses is not to the interviewer but to herself. This ongoing self-interrogation can only exaggerate her feeling of the temporal and uncertain. Attridge focuses on her insecurities:

Elizabeth Costello's speech in accepting her award is not so much a presentation of ideas, however, as a revelation of her uncertainties and fears about the status of writing and of language more generally, and by implication a questioning of the value of the art to which she has devoted her life. She will be haunted by this question, in various guises, throughout the book (2004, 262).

She opts to lecture yet the qualms over the status of writing and language escalate as the reader accompanies Costello on her tours. Having devoted her life to writing this notion of doubtfulness is very disconcerting. Her son tells us:

For as far back as he can remember, his mother has secluded herself in the mornings to do her writing. No intrusions under any circumstances. He used to think of himself as a misfortunate child, lonely and unloved. When they felt particularly sorry for themselves, he and his sister used to slump outside the locked door and make tiny whining sounds (*EC* 4).

Moreover, he adds: “[t]he change came when he was thirty-three. Until then he had not read a word she had written. That was his reply to her, his revenge on her for locking him out. She denied him, therefore he denied her” (*EC* 5). It is ironic that the only time his mother existed for him is when he read her novels; otherwise, she is best described as the absence/presence behind the locked door. Her words have granted her life: “[s]he shakes him; that is what she presumably does to other readers too. That is presumably why, in the large picture, she exists” (*EC* 5). Yet the author “does not have a good delivery. Even as a reader of her own stories, she lacks animation. It always puzzled [her son], when he was a child, that a woman who wrote books for a living should be so bad at telling bedtime stories” (*EC* 63).

Due to old age, her inability to tell stories has transfigured into her inability to write them, as words begin to fail her. Words are all she has, but sadly like Beckett’s *Unnamable*, “the words fail, the voice fails” (Beckett *MMDU* 413). In spite of the alienation and as with the *Unnamable*, Costello finds that it is “impossible to stop, impossible to go on, but [she] must go on” (Beckett *MMDU* 395). Costello is metaphorically left with a faint voice, emitting from a frail body, insisting to go on. In Beckettian tradition, she “must say words, as long as there are any” (*MMDU* 414). She must give lectures as long as she is invited to do so. Words precariously remain her one salvation, only means of existence. She contemplates the fate of fame and writing:

But of course the British Museum or (now) the British Library is not going to last for ever. It too will crumble and decay, and the books on its shelves turn to powder. And anyhow, long before that day, as the acid gnaws away at the paper, as the demand for space grows, the ugly and unread and unwanted will be carted off to some facility or other and tossed into a furnace, and all trace of them will

be liquidated from the master catalogue. After which it will be as if they had never existed (*EC* 17).³⁶

An unread text on a dusty shelf in a library is as good as the book and its author not having existed at all. For to exist is to have her books read; “unless we are read, we are nothing” (Attridge 1996, 174). The *House on Eccles Street* is the one novel that the public recognizes. Goodwin, a professor of English Literature, whom she meets at the university where her sister Blanche/Bridget receives an honorary degree, fails to recognize her, her fame being but a fleeting “instance” (*EC* 124, 8). The vision of the library that haunts her is not: “a library in which all conceivable books, past, present and future, coexist, but a library from which books that were really conceived, written and published are absent, absent even from the memory of the librarians” (*EC* 18).³⁷ The loss of her books can only signify a negation of her own presence, and relying “on the British Library or the Library of Congress [is like relying on] no more than on reputation itself to save us from oblivion” (*EC* 18).

The time of belief has in itself sunk into oblivion: “[t]here used to be a time, we believe, when we could say who we were. Now we are just performers speaking our parts” (*EC* 19). The passing of time is what turned Costello into a mere performer, continuously reciting her lines. It is not perchance that she compares herself inadvertently to the ape in Kafka’s story when she begins her lecture on realism. She tells her audience: “[i]f you know the story, you will remember that it is cast in the form of monologue, a monologue by the ape,” her lecture apes a monologue given in front of a cynical audience, to which she becomes more and more alien,” forced to perform in front of a gathering of critical strangers” (*EC* 18). Her lectures parody the ape’s as she stands in front of an audience that is unable to understand her, in a world where “there is no communication any more,” hence the absurdity is not in a dialogue with realism but develops out of the realism that has become absurd (Adorno *NL* 263). Academia itself is scrutinized.³⁸ To Adorno, communication fails when “[t]he absurdity of talk does not unfold in opposition to realism but rather develops out of it” (*NL* 263). Failure to understand reality results in a form of communication bordering on the

absurd. Costello's incomprehensible state is in keeping with her self-doubt and lack of belief, calling everything into question, including the text itself:

There used to be a time when we knew. We used to believe that when the text said, "On the table stood a glass of water," there was indeed a table, and a glass of water on it, and we had only to look in the word-mirror of the text to see them.

But all that has ended. The word-mirror is broken, irreparably, it seems [...] The lecture hall itself may be nothing but a zoo. The words on the page will no longer stand up and be counted (*EC* 19).

If words have become suspect, no longer signifying what they were initially meant to, then her very existence, which depends on being read, is questionable. She evolves into what "looks to us like an illusion [...], one of these illusions sustained only by the concentrated gaze of everyone in the room. Remove your gaze for but an instant, and the mirror falls to the floor and shatters" (*EC* 19-20). It is the gaze from the audience that is granting her life, as with Freud's little girl in "The Uncanny," who believes that she can impart life on her dolls if she only stares hard and long enough.

Costello is both a creator of novels and a character in a novel, imparting life to others. She has resurrected Marion Bloom by taking her out of Joyce's *Ulysess*, and granting her another existence in her own novel. The interplay of the roles between the author and character is a technique employed by Coetzee in both *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* and *Foe*, whereby "Defoe the novelist becomes a fictional creation of Crusoe's (as Elizabeth Costello the novelist is a fiction of Coetzee's)" (Attridge 2004, 260). Not only is Costello a character, but also a mouthpiece for Coetzee, giving lectures that the author himself has given before. Three of the lectures she delivers constitute an earlier published work, *The Lives of Animals*.³⁹ In this way, the author, Coetzee distances himself from the author Costello, who in reality is but a medium through which an idea begets other ideas. Attridge views the technique as a means of self-examination:

That Elizabeth Costello is a novelist is not simply a device to generate self-referential ironies in the fictions about her;

it is a means toward a profound self-examination on the part of Coetzee, a testing of, and by, the obligations and temptations faced by the literary writer. The reader, moreover, is not a spectator of this process, but a participant, since the event of reading cannot be separated from the event of writing (Attridge 2004, 261).

Invited to test the ideas, the reader is at once a participant and a witness to this self-examination by Costello and eventually by Coetzee. The former personifies the ideas of the latter; whilst being an author herself, she occupies the position of a begetter of her own concepts. In addition:

[W]hen it needs to debate ideas, as here, realism is driven to invent situations—walks in the countryside, conversations—in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby in a certain sense embody. The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. In such debates ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are enounced, and generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world (*EC* 9).

By giving voice to contending ideas then embodying them, the speaker becomes the vehicle through which ideas transpire, ultimately developing into the idea itself. Costello is at once the signifier and the signified, the idea and creator of ideas, or more accurately “the signifier of the signifier,” the idea of the idea, which eventually conceals and erases itself (Derrida *OG* 7). Coetzee casts ideas in the shape of characters, sets them free and then refuses to comment. She embodies the ideas that cannot exist alone, and having embodied them, she becomes them. Costello evolves into the character who judges on behalf of Coetzee.⁴⁰ David Lynn notes:

[...As] a character located in a specific historical moment, and even more important, a period of introspection, discovery, and change in her own life, Elizabeth Costello is the idea about the lives of animals that has come to possess her and alienate her from her family and the world (131).

The author/subject character/object jouissance allows Coetzee to turn “inward[ly] to reflect on the process of making up stories like these, of inventing characters to incarnate ideas. It is, [Coetzee] seems to suggest, an imitation of God and not a particularly kind one, since once you set these exemplary creatures loose in the world, they err, they decay, they get woefully lost” (Shulevitz <http://lnk.in/3wr4>). Costello, incarnating such notions, errs and becomes as vulnerable as the ideas she is forced to uphold. Shulevitz considers “Costello [...] a metacharacter inside a metafiction, creator and creation both. She's touched with a godly or ungodly power yet is also off-puttingly fallible” (<http://lnk.in/3wr4>).

The frailty does not stem from her age alone, or even her disaffected ideas, but is a quality that is inherent in the Coetzeean female. To a certain extent all of Coetzee's characters have “suffered the disgrace and despair of having outlived a more decent world,” a less commercialized world (Shulevitz <http://lnk.in/3wr4>). Their inability to relinquish the age of innocence exaggerates their feeling of alienation. Language and perseverance are their sole modes to counteract the emptiness, loss and their obsession with their own mortality. They are the living dead whose fear is that “[f]or an instant, before [their] whole structure of knowledge collapses in panic, [they are] alive inside that contradiction, dead and alive at the same time” (*EC* 77).

In January 2004, the character of Costello resurfaces in a short story, “As a Woman Grows Older,” and in September 2005 in the novel *Slow Man*. The short story begins with an arrival. This time she is visiting her daughter, Helen, in Nice, previously a mere mention in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*. In the piece, she tells her children that she is in the process of writing short stories, and wonders if they want to hear a “bedtime” story, an art in which she does not excel. She is obstinate; although words are just words and she is sick of them, she will go on. By writing a short story with its principal character being Costello, Coetzee is determined, that the text remains alive, open to interpretation, as long as it is read. Re-introducing her in *Slow Man* adds another dimension to her position as author. She arrives unannounced at the doorstep of Paul Rayment with the intention of bringing him back to life. In some ways, Rayment becomes a character in a plot she is yet to create with the hope that she

may write him as a main character (*SM* 229). Coetzee establishes another element to narration; both he and Costello are simultaneously constructing the character of Rayment.⁴¹ At the same time, Coetzee has the luxury of stepping back and have Costello, his fictional alter ego, write her own story.⁴²

As with *Slow Man* and the short story, each chapter in the novel, begins with Costello's arriving at a new destination. Her final stop is at the gate. Each journey she embarks on symbolises a new beginning, her way of deferring death; yet her final stop in this novel is a place to where she has never been, and from which she is unlikely to leave. In *Age of Iron*, Curren ponders over what the afterlife will be like, "not a lobby with armchairs and music but a great crowded bus on its way from nowhere to nowhere" (*AI* 30). Costello arrives uncomprehendingly and unwillingly on a bus from an unknown place to an unfamiliar locale, suspended at its gate, unable to move on, unable to return. The one thing that defines the place is a gate through which she attempts to cross. "At the Gate" strongly echoes Kafka's "Before the Law," in which a man finds himself at a gate, negotiating with a doorkeeper to allow him to pass. As with Costello, the man has no idea why he is at the gate, making appeals to uncouth doorkeepers to allow him to enter, as he fails to reach the Law that would grant him permission to proceed (Kafka 3-4). Both Costello and Kafka's man do not comprehend the reason behind their insistence on wanting to enter the gate. Fear of endless begging and futile arguments with the doorkeepers is what gives them the incentive to want to move on. The prospect of nonsensical debates threatens the very thinking process. Agamben writes:

[...] the possibility that thinking might find itself condemned to infinite negotiations with the doorkeeper or, even worse, that it might end by itself assuming the role of the doorkeeper who, without really blocking the entry, shelters the Nothing onto which the door opens (*HS* 54).

In spite of the possible nothing that awaits Costello, she remains resilient. Although she finds herself unable to write the statement that would allow her to enter the gate, she perseveres. In some ways, Costello's crossing the gate can be seen as her symbolically crossing which Cixous perceives as "a dangerous line,

the cultural demarcation beyond which she will find herself excluded” (Cixous *TNBW* 33). Traversing the gate will only accentuate her sense of alienation. She is destined to remain motionless and helpless in nowhere land, occupying a third space. Costello will forever linger at the gate, waiting in a place to be allowed in, a soul in limbo.⁴³ Her inability to describe her non-existent beliefs to the judges is two-fold, a shortcoming of language and writing and her non-existent beliefs, for she believes in what does not bother to believe in her, namely, a shrewd reference to God (*EC* 218).⁴⁴

Nicholas Dawes observes: “[f]aced with an endless interrogation of her capacity for belief, Elizabeth begins to learn that she will only be released from the eternal rewriting of her "statement" if she opens herself to the world in a way that cannot be comprehended by reason” (<http://lnk.in/56m2>). Confronted with the absurdity of such a world, Costello is unable to do so, remaining in her undefined space. According to Attridge:

We never learn, perhaps she never learns, whether this second answer is accepted; and although this makes for something of a narrative anticlimax, it leaves us strongly aware that what has mattered, for Elizabeth Costello and for the reader, is the event—literary and ethical at the same time—of storytelling, of testing, of self-questioning, and not the outcome (2004, 265).

The insistence on storytelling in defiance to all the predicaments that haunt her recalls R.M Rilke’s poem, “The Panther,” to which incidentally, Costello refers earlier on in the novel. Much like the caged animal, she incessantly gazes at the bars/gate (*EC* 95). Her bars may be invisible but as foreboding as the panther’s cage. In the poem, the panther paces determinedly up and down his cage:

His vision, from the constantly passing bars,
has grown so weary that it cannot hold anything else.
It seems to him there are a thousand bars, and behind the
bars, no world.

As he paces in cramped circles, over and over,
the movement of his powerful soft strides is like a ritual

dance around a center in which a mighty will stands paralyzed.

Only at times, the curtain of the pupils lifts, quietly. An image enters in, rushes down through the tense, arrested muscles, plunges into the heart and is gone (<http://lnk.in/3wqy>).

In spite of his resolve, the panther is incapable of displacing the chains that bind him. Exhausted, the panther is, at the end, at the mercy of a feeble image extinguished as soon as it enters. Likewise, Costello remains determined to pass through the gate, but her tired gaze can bear it no more. The vision that lies ahead of her is obstructed by a stretching old dog and “beyond him is nothing but a desert of sand and stone, to infinity” (*EC* 224). “Her first vision in a long while” she cannot trust, “in particular the anagram GOD-DOG. Too literary, she thinks again. A curse on literature” (*EC* 224-225).⁴⁵ The anagram God-Dog, is not only reminiscent of Beckett’s “inversion of the divine,” but “the lame or sick dog figures absolute alterity” (Poyner 2003).⁴⁶ The curse is both on the language that has failed her and the extraneous cruel force she is incapable of comprehending. The man at the desk, weary of her incessant questions, “lays down his pen, folds his hands, [and] regards her levelly. ‘All the time,’ he says. ‘We see people like you all the time’” (*EC* 225).

His statement is confirmed by the postscript in the novel. In it, a certain Lady Chandos composes a pleading letter to Lord Bacon on behalf of her husband, justifying his inability to write, an affliction that has been plaguing him for a while.⁴⁷ Lady Chandos’ letter appears to be Coetzee’s reply to Hugo von Hofmannsthal’s famous essay, which is also a fictive letter by Lord Chandos to Lord Bacon, from which Coetzee quotes an excerpt at the beginning of her letter. In Hofmannsthal’s essay, “Ein Brief,” Lord Chandos has become cynical of language: “words no longer reach him, they shiver and shatter” (*EC* 229). Unable to express himself logically and coherently, he has grown suspicious of everything that is around him. An Elizabeth C. signs Lady Chandos’ letter on 11 September AD 1603, not only casting doubt on the actual identity of the signatory, but also hauntingly adding a historical dimension to Costello’s character, at once placing her in the past and the present.

The postscript is possibly, what Costello presents at the gate, her final plea to the doorkeeper, epitomizing her disillusioned state. “[A]t such moments even a negligible creature, a dog, a rat, a beetle, a stunted apple tree, a cart track winding over a hill, a mossy stone” can enjoy more of an existence than Costello can (*EC* 226). Words that “give way beneath [her] feet like rotting boards” cannot redeem her as she drowns further into herself, unable to write of her fate (*EC* 228, 230). The reality Costello is assured of is one of dwindling resources and the shame caused by a deteriorating condition. Once again, her situation reminds us of the Unnamable’s; even borrowed words fail her. She is in silence and the story that she is supposed to tell has not been a story at all, but a borrowed postscript, revealing the nothingness within (Beckett *MMDU* 413).

Conclusion:

In spite of her attempts at freedom and salvation through language, the Coetzeean female is mostly unsuccessful. Her triumphs are small; Magda keeps her diary, Curren writes her letter, Barton hopes her story will be told and Costello may attempt writing again. The wider picture speaks of alienation and failure. The Coetzeean female, in spite of her endeavours, remains in flux between her feminine being and the masculine genre she has at times assumed; her acquired masculine tools do not aid her, as they are emanating from the other whom she finds suffocating. Even her attempts at writing her body and finding a feminine voice do not succeed, leading to further alienation and torment. She is unable to affirm the body she finds abject. In contrast, Joyce’s *Ulysses*’ Marion Bloom (briefly mentioned in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*) accepts her body and is not repulsed by it. Similarly, Cixous writes the female body in a more positive light. The Coetzeean female, on the other hand, is left stranded between a Cixous-like attempt at a feminine discourse and an aborted acquisition of a masculine voice as per Derrida’s definition of “le style.” In turn, she is denied entry into what is considered “truth.” The failed utterance excludes her from any attempt to achieve permanence. Her male counterpart may also strive for permanence through a language that is not so foreboding; the female, however,

can only hope for an affirmation of an existence in and through the language of the other. Her life has passed her by; her one desire is to try to salvage what is left and to rid herself of some of the humiliation, which in Costello's words, has "no limit" (*EC* 152). In a less than perfect world, the confinement that the Coetzean female feels is both physical and psychological, her abject body and gender restrict her intellectual development and bodily movement, denying her any form of *jouissance* leaving her stranded at Costello's gate. Initially, Costello may seem to be a departure from the typical Coetzean female, but with the passing years, her privileges are withdrawn; the language fails; the body image deteriorates and the ideas alienate. At the end, she is transformed into an idea of an idea, left wondering whether she has ever existed. Elizabeth C., whose name appears at the end of the postscript written in 1603, and Costello who reappears in a short story and in *Slow Man*, add a generic dimension to her whole existence. Costello evolves into a conveyor of words, an emblem of the Coetzean female who is constantly locating and relocating, in search of a feminine voice that continually eludes her.

¹ Magda refers to the alienating nature of words (*IHC* 28).

² Krebs writes: "Victorian and especially Boer War stereotypes of Boers presented illiterate and crude peasants who never washed or changed their clothes; [the Boers were a nation of peasants, paralleled in the British working classes and poor, but they were also holdovers from an earlier stage of European civilization, either in a state of arrested development or culturally degenerate]" (117). This racism accentuates Magda's victimization.

³ Sarah Gendron sees "the splitting of the subject [as] impossible to avoid [and...] is a consequence of being born into language" (Gendron 52). Magda's I will always be apart from herself.

⁴ The third lecture, by C.G Jung at the Tavistock Institute, stayed with Beckett for many years. In it, Jung describes a girl he was treating and whose problem is solely not being born properly. Please refer to James Knowlson's *Damned to Fame* (176-177), or Deirdre Bair's *Samuel Beckett: a Biography* (401).

⁵ In the German Production rehearsals of *Footfalls*, Beckett described the character of May as existing but not actually living. Please see, Walter Asmus, "Rehearsal Notes for the German Première of Beckett's *That Time* and *Footfalls* at the Schiller Theater Webskatt Berlin" *JBS* 2 (82-95).

⁶ Rody suggests Magda is attempting “to emerge out of text and into life” (163). Magda attempts to escape from an unfulfilling life. Rody adds if Magda “could escape from words [...] she would really be entering life” (164). I disagree as Magda sees herself in words.

⁷ Adorno sees the babble in Beckett as becoming nonsense especially when presented in a clownish manner posing as sense. This leads to decay in language and alienation (*NL* 262).

⁸ Curren stresses the lack of communication between her and Vercueil (*AI* 8).

⁹ Head notes: “[i]n a family photograph from 1918, she wonders whether to interpret the gesture of her infant self, reaching towards the camera, as an impostor’s attempt to prevent the camera from revealing the truth about the ‘doll-folk’. Again the metaphor implies a personal loss, yet also points at a falsity and a moral vacuity in Mrs Curren’s heritage, the legacy of the colonizers, the doll-folk” (*JMC* 136).

¹⁰ Moth is a nocturnal creature regarded as a pest. By comparing her spirit to a moth, Curren assumes a ghostly presence.

¹¹ André Viola writes: “Une autre métaphore du roman oppose le ‘sang ténu’ qu’elle répand sur le papier, au ‘sang lourd’ que John a répandu et qui pèse de tout le poids de l’histoire” (105). Curren cannot bear the weight of history that inhabits John.

¹² Hesiod describes the Age of Iron: “[...] men never rest from labor and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them. But, notwithstanding, even these shall have some good mingled with their evils. And Zeus will destroy this race of mortal men also when they come to have grey hair on the temples at their birth. The father will not agree with his children, nor the children with their father, nor guest with his host, nor comrade with comrade; nor will brother be dear to brother as aforetime. Men will dishonor their parents as they grow quickly old, and will carp at them, chiding them with bitter words, hard-hearted they, not knowing the fear of the gods. They will not repay their aged parents the cost of their nurture, for might shall be their right: and one man will sack another's city. There will be no favor for the man who keeps his oath or for the just or for the good; but rather men will praise the evil-doer and his violent dealing. Strength will be right, and reverence will cease to be; and the wicked will hurt the worthy man, speaking false words against him, and will swear an oath upon them” (180-195).

¹³ Yeoh suggests Curren’s letter is “vacuous.” This introduces a Beckettian element, “a transposed Beckettian notion of a writing of nothing” (2003, 121).

¹⁴ Beckett’s Molloy writes at midnight: “It is midnight [...] I get up and go to my desk” (Beckett *MMDTU* 92).

¹⁵ Benita Parry states the “Coetzee’s female narrators explicitly represent the body as the agent of language” (*WSA* 156). They find their bodies abject yet strive to use them as substitutes for language.

¹⁶ The reference to a hook conjures up unsavoury characters, such as pirates, generally associated with unlawful acts, grabbing what is not theirs. By referring to her own hand

as a hook, Curren, is commenting on the history of South Africa, the white settlers initially acquiring land that is not theirs. It is as if this disturbing apartheid history that she has to take to bed every night.

¹⁷ Susan describes how her story came to her (*F* 120).

¹⁸ Macaskill & Jeanne Colleran see in Barton's desire to tell her story as overcoming the "phallogentric insistence as bearer rather than maker of meaning" (441).

¹⁹ Unlike Magda and Curren, Barton is more at ease with her desire.

²⁰ MacLeod writes: "[a] novel such as *Foe*, [...], isn't always a story of its own so much as a metafictional critique of narrative practice itself, one that forces the reader to consider how fiction (a collection of made-up sentences describing events that never happened) might comment on the truth of real (political, social, psychological, emotional) life. If we accept that the stories encoded in works of fiction have the power to shape and influence human experiences and subjectivities, Coetzee asks, what is the nature of that power, where does it reside, and how is to be (justly) governed? [...]" (1-2). Does Barton's attempt bring her closer to the truth within?

²¹ MacLeod remarks that by linking her story to Crusoe's, Barton makes hers "more saleable," whilst comprising it (5).

²² In "He and His Man," Coetzee refers to Crusoe again: "[i]t seemed to him, coming from his island, where until Friday he lived a silent life, that there was too much speech in the world" (*NL* 6). Crusoe's need of silence stems from a rejection of civilization.

²³ This runs contrary to colonialist tradition of cultivating land and multiplying.

²⁴ MacLeod suggests that Barton is upset by being manipulated to suit "narrative conscription," but has no scruples when she is doing the manipulating (5).

²⁵ MacLeod equates narration with power and authority (3). The need to tell her own story can be seen as a power struggle between Barton and Foe—truth v le style.

²⁶ MacLeod writes: "Friday's silence prevents him from becoming the raw materials of someone else's narrative. [...] Foe overwhelms Barton and takes over her story, but Friday's silence is finally impenetrable [...] because no one can locate Friday well enough to manipulate him" (6).

²⁷ In some productions of *Not I*, the auditor was removed. Please refer to, *Not I*. Writ. Samuel Beckett. Dir. Anthony Page. Perf. Billie Whitelaw, BBC, 1982.

²⁸ Attridge feels that the otherness in Coetzee's novels makes demands on us as readers as it is the *otherness* that exists outside language. Having been excluded by "two thousand years of continuously evolving discourse," the subaltern is unlikely to speak (Attridge *JMCER* 29, Attridge 2004, 655).

²⁹ Peter Morgan writes: "Friday is the closed in the story to a traditional "feminine" role model, spearing as he does as a sort of male domestic, passive and grateful, simple and

devoted” (84). We are never given the privilege to get into Friday’s mind. In all likelihood, he is neither simple nor passive.

³⁰ Head sees the “row upon row of open, walking eyes” emblematic of “displacement of the enslaved” plus giving the “sense of bearing witness” (*JMC* 123).

³¹ Critics have speculated on the ‘I’ in the last section of *Foe*. I cite two comments. Barbara Eckstein sees the final ‘I’ nearer to Coetzee’s voice: “[t]he narrating *I* must itself be a perceiving eye and a receiving *you* in order to become the self and therefore grasp an/other” (71). Head sees the “narrating persona” at the end an “‘authorial’ voice supplying an ultimate frame to this metafiction” and “installing an apparently ‘higher’ omniscient position” (*JMC* 123).

³² In *The Scream*, “we see the fear and loneliness of Man in a natural setting which [...] picks up the scream and echoes it beyond the bay unto the bloody vaults of heaven [...]. Munch’s diary contains an entry written in Nice during a period of illness in 1892 which recalls this scene: ‘I was out walking with two friends—the sun began to set—suddenly the sky turned blood-red—I paused, feeling exhausted, and leaned on a fence—there was blood and tongues of fire above the blue-black fjord and the city—my friends walked on, and there I still stood, trembling with fear—and I sensed an endless scream passing through Nature’” (Bischoff 53). (Please see illustration 5).

³³ Costello shows how words lost their capability to signify (*EC* 19).

³⁴ In an interview with Attwell post the Nobel Prize, Coetzee says: “[a]lready [he] is being peppered with invitations to travel far and wide to give lectures. That has always seemed to [him] one of the strange aspects of literary fame: you prove your competence as a writer and an inventor of stories, then people clamour for you to make speeches and tell them what you think about the world” (Exclusive Interview 2003). His sentiment on lectures is carried over by Costello.

³⁵ In “He and His Man,” Coetzee also referred to “a pair of shoes that were not mates” (*NL* 12).

³⁶ Borossa and Rooney write: “Wordsworth [...] imagines in his poem an apocalyptic situation in which all our libraries of treasured books are destroyed” (302).

³⁷ During the war on Iraq in 2003, at least six major libraries with major holdings were looted, burned or destroyed, erasing centuries of the history of humankind; hence, a major part of civilization has sunk into oblivion (Nashif 41-54). This is precisely what Costello dreads, destruction of libraries, leading to the obliteration of civilization.

³⁸ In her lecture, Blanche argues that humanities are dead (*EC* 119-123). Costello sees Humanities as no longer the core of universities (*EC* 125).

³⁹ J.M. Coetzee gave the Tanner Lectures at Princeton University in 1997-1998, under the title of “The Lives of Animals,” which were later published as a novel. “The Novel in Africa” was previously published by Townsend Center in 1999.

⁴⁰ In an essay on Walser, Coetzee writes: “[t]he distancing effect allowed by an authorial self split off from an R self, and by a style in which sentiment is covered in a light veil of parody, allows Walser to write movingly, now and again, about his own (that is, R's) defenselessness on the margins of Swiss society” (Coetzee 2000). This is the very technique he uses with Costello. The authorial split between Coetzee and Costello allows him to write about being defenceless and marginal.

⁴¹ Matt Thorne remarks: “Costello not only knows (almost) everything about Rayment's predicament, but can recite lines from the novel in which he is trapped, emphasising that he is a fictional character and she is his creator” (<http://lnk.in/3wr9>).

⁴² Terry Eagleton writes: “[...] she is also a secret emissary of the author himself, and like Coetzee appears to be writing a story in which Rayment figures as the central character. It isn't surprising that she tends to speak like a book. Is Rayment, then, just an unreal creation of Costello, who is in turn a figment of Coetzee's imagination? And if characters are just figments of writers, is it not also true that writers are in a sense creatures of their own creations?” (1917) Question is open ended.

⁴³ Sami Musallam considers the crossing of the gate a perpetual act to which we all are subjected. His opinion reflects the absurd situation caused by the daily torment of Palestinians, endlessly trying to pass checkpoints (<http://lnk.in/3wqq>).

⁴⁴ James Wood points that “Coetzee probably has in mind Spinoza's blankly chilling proposition that ‘He who loves God cannot endeavor that God love him in return’. He may also be thinking of Aristotle's notion of the poet as one who lavishes love on those - his characters - who cannot return it” (<http://lnk.in/3wra>).

⁴⁵ Coetzee describes the novelist as “a person who, cramped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene and a story of the actors in it and how they come to be there” (Coetzee 1986). Costello, behind the gate, is banned from entry; yet, she tries to comprehend “that scene” and the “story” behind the place.

⁴⁶ Dogs appear in nearly all of Coetzee's novels.

⁴⁷ Letter of Elizabeth, Lady Chandos, to Francis Bacon was published before.

Chapter Three

Chains that Bind: the Master and the Slave

In the introduction to my first chapter, I discussed how in a state of emergency anything is rendered possible. At such times, chaos masquerading as law rules unquestionably. Martial law procedures are common in systems like apartheid, colonialism and dictatorship. Power and stringent edicts are imposed on individuals, and personal liberties are withdrawn and all practices, lawful or otherwise, are acceptable, for everything is considered to be for the safeguarding of public good and protection of the state. Moreover, any form of apartheid/colonization/occupation involves a certain degree of violence. In this chapter, I will be discussing the implications that such systems have upon the master and the slave, with respect to what extent such a form of government holds them both in its chains. I will also discuss the misconceptions that arise from such structures, and how “that space of the other is always occupied by an *idée fixe*: despot, heathen, barbarian, chaos, violence” (Bhabha 101). I will also explore the colonialist’s feeling of discomfort and foreignness in his new environs, and how in spite of the claim that he has come to cultivate the land, he ends up leaving a wasteland behind. Furthermore, the chapter will examine the implication of colonialism on women, specifically how a system founded on male hierarchy can only consider her a commodity, an object to be possessed, very much akin to the relationship that the colonizer has with the land he appropriates. In addition, I will discuss the role of sex in relation to the female, colonizer and the colonized; and how sex, in this particular framework, consensual or otherwise, is nothing but an instrument for the advancement of power and how desire is one of the driving forces behind colonialism.¹ In this context, desire is essentially a negative sentiment stemming from paranoid repression and uneven relationships, such as a master desiring a slave, whilst the envious slave fantasizes about assuming the master’s position.

In conclusion, I would argue how the violence exercised against the native turns full circle, humiliating everyone involved, and to quote Gilles Deleuze and Felix

Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, we are left with "slaves commanding other slaves" (276). My arguments will be thematic and on the previously discussed novels, drawing on critics like Fanon, Memmi and Sartre, whom I believe essential to any post-colonial discussion, and on Deleuze and Guattari for their argument on colonialism as being but an extension of capitalist desire.

"Two masks ... two voices" *Waiting for the Barbarians*:²

In his preface to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, Sartre examines the concept that lies behind the master and slave dialectic, the reason for and mechanism used to turn the native into a half-breed, neither human nor animal. As soon as the settler occupies the land of the native, a Manichean order is born. Sartre remarks: "[f]or it is the settler who has brought the native into existence and who perpetuates his existence" (*WE* 28). Furthermore, the native is rendered a slave by the mere arrival of the settler, his very presence questioned. Bhabha writes:

Tell us why you, the native, are there. Etymologically unsettled, 'territory' derives from both *terra* (earth) and *terrere* (to frighten) whence *territorium*, 'a place from which people are frightened off'. The colonialist demand for narrative carries, within it, its threatening reversal: *Tell us why you are here.* (Bhabha 99-100).

The native not only has to explain to the settler his culture, but also has to justify being there in the first place. For Fanon, the reason for the definition of the individual using the terms native or slave, "is because the white man has come, and if at a certain stage he has been led to ask himself whether he is indeed a man, it is because his reality as a man has been challenged" (Fanon *BSWM* 98). The very reality of the native has to be incessantly affirmed then negated; this is the only way a system, like colonialism, is able to perpetuate itself insuring the continual existence of the settler. The native is made to feel that he is constantly indebted to the colonizer even for his mere existence. It is for this reason that the settler needs to fashion the native into a subhuman, be it through blows,

starvation or torture.³ Nevertheless, in order that he may succeed in deploying him fully, the breaking-in, according to Sartre, has to stop at halfway:

The result, neither man nor animal, is the native. Beaten, under-nourished, ill, terrified—but only up to a certain point—he has, whether, he’s black, yellow or white, always the same traits of character: he’s a sly-boots, a lazybones and a thief, who lives on nothing, and who understands only violence (Fanon *WE* 14).

The labelling of the native also renders it easier for the colonizer to be. If the person facing him is not fully human, then all actions, including extermination, are justified.⁴ According to Sartre, the one means that the usurpers can establish their privileges is by: “debasement of the colonized to exalt themselves, denying the title of humanity to the natives, and defining them as simply absences of qualities—animals, not humans” (Memmi 22).⁵ The important thing is to set the native as the other, perpetually marking him with alien traits. Deleuze and Guattari see in this process of coding and decoding an essential part of capitalism, which in itself is a motor for colonialism (Deleuze and Guattari 153, Young 167). The despotic or colonialist machine forces any earlier codes into a bottleneck and it erases them by over-coding them, which becomes the essence of setting up a new order (Deleuze and Guattari 217). The latter causes the earlier system to break and establishes a new system in its place, appropriating and coding property and people set by the new despot who in this case is epitomized by colonialism.⁶ This process will always involve violence and destruction, as it attempts to set its own law. The codification of the native is essential. Michael K spends his whole life trying to hide from the authority that tries to code him. When the Visagie’s grandson arrives at the farm where Michael has been hiding, Michael flees, aborting any chance of the establishment of a master/slave relationship (*LTMK* 60-61, 106). In extreme cases, the master even goes as far as thinking himself the grantor of life, having successfully erased the culture of the other. Moreover, if the native believes in him, follows his rules, he will be allowed to live. Jacobus echoes this very sentiment when he refuses to rescue his drowning servant: “I was disappointed to see no faith in his eyes. If he had

believed in me, or indeed in anything, he would have recovered. But he had the constitution of a slave, resilient under the everyday blows of life, frail under disaster” (*D* 94).

Ironically, the characteristics that the colonialist chooses to impart on the native are what attract the Magistrate to the “other” in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. He is diverted by that other, as he stares out of his window at the fisherfolk; and even though they amuse him, he intrinsically finds himself mentioning their otherness: “[f]or a few days the fisherfolk are a diversion, with their strange gabbling, their vast appetites, their animal shamelessness, their volatile tempers” (*WFB* 20). When one of the soldiers decides to “play,” with one of the females, he “is pelted with stones” and a “rumour begins to go the rounds that they are diseased, that they will bring an epidemic to the town” (*WFB* 21). Hence, “the kitchen staff refuse them utensils and begin to toss them their food from the doorway as if they were indeed animals” (*WFB* 21). The other is fine as long as he accepts the rules that are imposed on him by the subject. Nevertheless, once he does not obey, the subject searches for confirmation of the inferior status of the other, and then justifies the behaviour because of this inferiority. The colonizer/settler at once scorns the native and fears him. The fisherfolk’s girl refuses to “play” with the soldier; therefore, they [she and her people] must all have some fatal disease, the Magistrate’s assumption repeats the rumours he has heard. In spite of his various efforts to escape the mould in which he finds himself, the Magistrate can only think through the formulas and rules of the Empire. In answer to the grievances he witnesses, he can deal only with them in the realm of establishing yet another empire:

It would be best if this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, if these ugly people were obliterated from the face of the earth and we swore to make a new start, to run an empire in which there would be no injustice, no more pain (*WFB* 26).

The Magistrate’s idealism is in itself problematic. By deluding himself that an empire can be created on different terms, he is attempting to alleviate part of the guilt he harbours. He appreciates that obliteration is not possible, as the *ugly*

people cannot be buried in a large pit forever and forever; an empire will remain an empire (*WFB* 27). Sartre states:

First of all, that there are neither good nor bad colonists: there are colonialists. Among these, some reject their objective reality. Borne along by the colonialist apparatus, they do every day in reality what they condemn in fantasy, for all their actions contribute to the maintenance of oppression (*Memmi* 21-22).

The Magistrate regards himself as “a good colonist,” but ultimately he functions as part of an apparatus that survives on destroying and subjugating the other. His solution is one of annihilation of what he deems ugly. Memmi analyzes why a colonialist would wish for “the disappearance of the usurped, whose very existence causes him to take the role of usurper, and whose heavier and heavier oppression makes him more and more an oppressor himself” (97). As long as the usurped remains, the guilt, which is experienced by the likes of the Magistrate, will remain a heavy burden to bear. Therefore, the *ugly people* will remain along with the fear that has been perpetuated through and in them by the colonizer. The fear of the barbarian is multi-faceted. It usually encompasses a fear of the unknown, as the colonizer has never really intended to understand the other, but has instead imposed realities on the latter that can be satisfactorily understood by him, his own value system obliterating that of the other.⁷ It is also at once a dreading and a fascination of the sexual prowess and inclination towards the alleged promiscuity that defines that other. Coetzee’s Magistrate supposes:

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 house, breaking the plates, setting fire to the curtains, raping his daughters (*WFB* 9).

The above citation arises from the assumption that the white woman is frightened of and attracted to the black man. It also emphasizes the role of the white man as the protector against the evil represented by the black man.⁸

Fanon presents the white man's concept of the black man's sexuality: "the Negro is fixated at the genital; or at any rate he has been fixated there" (*BSWM* 165). The state of being fixated at the genital is, invariably, a trait that characterizes the natives, whoever they might be. The sexual standards and physical attributes of the natives are never in concordance with "normal" western standards; least of all, the natives are viewed for the most part irresponsible and too promiscuous.⁹ Jacobus Coetzee claims that Bushmen, "men and women are sexually misinformed. The men go into death with erections" (61). The Coetzeean male in a position of authority, consistently exhibits and enacts all the practices that he attributes to and condemns in the native. The traits that he claims are the natives are essentially qualities he has chosen to attribute to the other, be they practices he abhors in himself or fear of what is different. The predominant sentiment in him is one of disgust and fascination. Fanon wonders whether the practice of lynching is not in itself a form of sexual revenge, as for "the majority of white men the Negro represents the sexual instinct (in its raw state). The Negro is the incarnation of a genital potency beyond all moralities and prohibitions" (*BSWM* 159, 177).

Throughout *Foe*, Barton wonders whether the mutation of Friday's tongue is linked to genital castration. Addressing Foe, she recounts:

Now when Crusoe told me that the slavers were in the habit of cutting out the tongues of their prisoners to make them tractable, I confess, I wondered whether he might not be employing a figure, for the sake of delicacy; whether the lost tongue might stand not only for itself but for a more atrocious mutilation: whether by a dumb slave I was to understand a slave unmanned (*F* 119).

Her curiosity is two-fold, arising from fear and desire. If Friday is a eunuch, then she need not fear him. If he proves otherwise, then "[i]s it not only a matter of time before the new Friday whom Crusoe created is sloughed off and the old Friday of the cannibal forests returns" (*F* 95). Barton is at once frightened by and attracted to Friday's sexuality. In some ways, she symbolically has wished for it:

A woman cast ashore on your island, a tall woman with black hair and dark eyes, till a few hours past the companion of a sea-captain besotted with love of her. Surely desires kept banked for many years must have flamed up within you. Why did I not catch you stealing glances from behind a rock while I bathed (*F* 86).

When Barton mentions Friday's "disdain for intercourse" with her, the word intercourse can be interpreted as both communicative and sexual (*F* 98). Friday cannot desire her; on one level, he is the slave who has been chained to certain rules. This is established in the opening pages of the novel. Finding difficulty in walking, Friday carries her on his back. Robert Post writes "the literal action of the white woman riding on the back of the black man [which] is analogous to the figurative action of whites progressing on the labor and denied privileges of nonwhites"(147). On another level, he has been castrated; and this shames Friday, fixating him in his role, as he struggles to hide his humiliation with Foe's robes (*F* 119, 92). The other's sexuality has to be disciplined. Foucault believes that "the political significance of the problem of sex is due to the fact that sex is located at the point of intersection of the discipline of the body and the control of the population" (*P/K* 125). In effect, controlling sex constitutes a form of governance.¹⁰

Robert Young introduces another dimension to colonialism and desire, which he regards as:

[N]ot only a machine of war and administration, [but] it [is] also a desiring machine. The desiring machine, with its unlimited appetite for territorial expansion, for 'endless growth and self-reproduction', for making connections and disjunctions, continuously forced disparate territories, histories and people to be thrust together like foreign bodies in the night. In that sense it was itself the instrument that produced its own darkest fantasy—the unlimited and ungovernable fertility of 'unnatural union' (*CDHTCR* 98).

Both the desire and repulsion of the native are products of a capitalistic colonialism. Deleuze and Guattari view it as a natural extension of a system that, in its essence, appropriates and exploits and not stemming from a lack from

within the individual as postulated by the Freudian school. Instead, “[d]esire is not bolstered by needs, but rather the contrary; needs are derived from desire: they are counterproducts within the real that desire produces” (Deleuze & Guattari 28). Desire of the other is part of territorial desire, rejection of the other, however, is a result of the socius’ codifying the primal psychic repression within the self (Deleuze & Guattari 35). Nonetheless, as in the colony laws dictated by the socius tend to break down as a capitalistic system can only permit “increases and improvements of standards at the center, [whilst displacing] the harshest forms of exploitation from the center to the periphery” (Deleuze & Guattari 408). The colonialist living at the periphery is subjected to the same exploitation and breakdown as the colonized. The prohibitive law that has been instilled within collapses along with destruction of the periphery; desire for the other becomes something that is not only sought but also favoured. Memmi views the impact of colonialism on “the colonialist [who] is [no longer] sure of his true nationality. He navigates between a faraway society which he wants to make his own (but which becomes to a certain degree mythical), and a present society which he rejects and thus keeps in the abstract” (112). Separated from his roots, he desires what he has been taught to reject, an object that will remain in the abstract.

On the other hand, for Coetzee, desire:

[...] does not know itself. It proceeds from a lack. What the desiring subject lacks, and ultimately desires, is fullness of being. The model is adopted as model because it appears endowed with superior being. Imitating the desires of the model is a way of gaining being (*GO* 91).

In this case, the lack that the desiring subject feels is imposed by a system that undermines both the colonizer and the colonized. Desiring the other, here, serves a dual purpose. Stemming from a want, which is a result of a repression that forbids this kind of liaison, the subject aspires for an object of desire, preferably exotic, fashioned by fantasy. The fantasy the colonizer carries within him is not an individual one but is a product of a group fantasy engrained within and a product of the colonialist desire (Deleuze and Guattari 32). Desire also serves as a method for control, an extension of the colonist’s authority over the native. At

the same time, although the colonized is envious of the colonialist world from which he is barred, he waits for the appropriate time to make his entrance.¹¹

Colonialism employing sexual dominance as a form of control is invariably one of the cruellest forms of governance, for the object of desire, which is usually female, undergoes a double kind of subjugation, to a man and to a system. Coetzee notes that:

Female sexuality is a construction of male power. Constructed for her by others, belonging in essence to ideology, female sexuality dictates that a woman's experience of (heterosexual) sex should be of being possessed as an object and consumed. Through the vehicle of the real woman, the man has intercourse with the image-of-the-woman; as for the woman, she experiences herself as a sexualized and therefore sexually constructed being at an equally imaginary level.

This account of desire and sexuality in the service of power, and of power in the hands of men, is totalizing in its ambition (*GO* 72).

The unfortunate female is at the mercy of a patriarchal system and a cruel system epitomised by colonialism. In such relationships, hypocrisy takes centre stage, manifested in its ugliest form and invariably defended by a system of double standards. This is specifically evident in *Disgrace*, *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In the latter novel, the age difference between the Magistrate and the girl does not in any way shame him, while Jacobus who peeps into his servants' hut commends the age of the young girl he sees sleeping there: he observes, "[h]er breasts had barely formed. [And approvingly he informs us that] [t]hey had caught her at the right age" (*D* 86). Likewise, age is no factor for the Magistrate when he decides to establish a subject/object relationship with the barbarian girl, for he fails to see her as human. The only time he realizes that "she is not just the old man's slut, she is a witty, attractive young woman" is when they are approaching her people (*WFB* 68). By having transformed her into his "slut," the Magistrate realizes that the girl will be forever shunned by her own people (*WFB* 148). He excuses himself for his actions: "I feel a quiet affection for her which is perhaps that best can be hoped for between an ageing man and a

girl of twenty; better than a possessive passion certainly” (*WFB* 24). In spite of his claim of affection, the girl remains throughout the barbarian girl, nameless, at best an object on which he can exercise his fantasies. Young notes that fantasy has featured prominently in nineteenth century studies of race: “Nineteenth-century theories of race did not just consist of essentializing differentiations between self and other: they were also about a fascination with people having sex—interminable, adulterating, aleatory, illicit, inter-racial sex” (*CDHTCR* 181). The Magistrate tries to enact the above fascinations although he tries to persuade the reader that he has sex under control:

Later that promiscuity modulated into more discreet relations with housekeepers and girls lodged sometimes upstairs in my rooms but more often downstairs with the kitchen help, and into liaisons with the girls at the inn. I found that I needed women less frequently (*WFB* 48).

Essentially, what unfolds is that the older he gets the younger his conquests become. He adds: “[w]hen I was young the mere smell of a woman would arouse me; now it is evidently only the sweetest, the youngest, and the newest that have that power. One of these days it will be little boys” (*WFB* 49). The girls/women he has liaisons with are nothing but objects of desire; Boehmer notes that “[f]undamentally, therefore, this evil is the evil of having objectified others, through reason, as entirely different from ourselves, and so to be used as we see fit” (346). The females he encounters are commodities to be used for his pleasure and then discarded.¹² This forms the essence of a capitalist system that treats individuals as merchandise that can be replaced as needed. In *Dusklands*, Dawn describes the Bushman girl as an object that “is completely disposable” “a rag [one] wipe[s] [oneself] on and throw[s] away” (61). The Magistrate may not entertain the exact opinion, but his attitude towards the native women is not altogether different. His relationship to the barbarian girl is almost fetishistic. Bhabha’s definition of the fetish aptly describes the Magistrate’s character:

The fetish or stereotype gives access to an ‘identity’ which is predicated as much on mastery and pleasure as it is on anxiety and defence, for it is a form of multiple and

contradictory belief in its recognition of difference and disavowal of it. This conflict of pleasure/unpleasure, mastery/defence, knowledge/disavowal, has a fundamental significance for colonial discourse. For the scene of fetishism is also the scene of the reactivation and repetition of primal fantasy—the subject’s desire for a pure origin that is always threatened by its division, for the subject must be gendered to be engendered, to be spoken (75).

The marginalized colonizer, at once threatened by a retreating Empire, old age, failing sexuality can only turn the barbarian girl into a fetish that can afford him some wholeness. Unable to penetrate her, the Magistrate ritualistically anoints her with almond oil (*WFB* 32). At other times, he describes massaging her ankle as kneading (*WFB* 32, 59). He is trying to mould her into the object he desires, to hold the vortex of oblivion at his centre at bay (*WFB* 51). The only time their relationship is consummated is when they are near her people. This becomes the one moment that she is able to step out of the mould in which he has placed her. When the Magistrate looks inside of himself, there is nothing but darkness; Rooney remarks that “[i]n short, what this delivers is the perception of the darkness of the centre function of Western man, as is said of Kurtz: ‘hollow at the core’” (2000, 191). Incidentally, the Magistrate’s perception becomes more acute following the episode of torture; to him, Colonel Joll has evolved into a presence seeped in blackness (*WFB* 160).¹³ Even though the lenses have gone, Joll still epitomizes the darkness that is rooted deep within. In anger, the Magistrate “[...] mouth[s] the words and watch[es Joll] read them on [his] lips: ‘The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves,’ [he] say[s]. [H]e nod[s] and nod[s], driving the message home. ‘Not on others,’ [he] say[s]” (*WFB* 160).

Yet, his revelation has come too late. Throughout, the Magistrate has been unable to look upon the barbarian girl as anything beyond an object. His views are shared by the Empire he represents. When Warrant Officer Mandel and his man bring him in for questioning, they hand him “a woman’s calico smock” to wear (*WFB* 128). They have to demean him in order to subject him to the kind of torture in which the Empire excels. The Magistrate evolves from a representative of the Empire to a recipient of its decadence.¹⁴ This, he has to suffer alone.¹⁵ Turning him into a woman makes the whole thing more justifiable, no longer

fully human, but en route to becoming an object.¹⁶ His torturers he tells us “were interested only in demonstrating to [him] what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well” (*WFB* 126).¹⁷ Having become a woman, a parody of an object of desire, he can no longer entertain notions of justice.¹⁸ In an hour, they have shown him “the meaning of humanity” and how justice can be manipulated (*WFB* 126). Rooney suggests that what is implied is “that torture deprives the other of truth in reducing awareness to the extreme sensations of body” (*ALAP* 200). The acute awareness of the body is precisely to turn the object into its bare animalistic state; the only way an animal is allowed to die is like “a dog in a corner” (*WFB* 128). The equation drawn between beast and man is prevalent in Coetzee’s novels; degradation of humans is often equated with the status of animals in human society.¹⁹ Demotion to the state of an animal is what justifies the inhumane practices of the Empire. No longer considered human, everything is permitted. The comparison of a person’s degraded state to a dog resonates with the conclusion of Kafka’s *The Trial*, the final humiliating act in a person’s life compared to a dog’s ending (251).²⁰ Lucy echoes this same sentiment. After everything that has happened to her, she has to start at ground level without dignity like a dog (*Di* 205). Likewise, David in the closing scene of the novel is seen sacrificing the crippled dog, giving up on it, symbolically forfeiting his dignity for the new order of things (*Di* 220). The old dog re-emerges in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, “at the foot of the gate, blocking the way [...],” a reminder of the humiliation she has endured (224). The dog symbolically becomes the emblem that defines indignity separating it from dignity.

“Undesired to the core” *Disgrace*:²¹

In spite of being a university professor, David’s attitude towards women does not differ greatly from that of the Magistrate’s. The opening sentence introduces us to a fifty-two year old man who, like the Magistrate, claims has “solved the problem of sex rather well” (*Di* 1). As the novel unfolds, the reader realizes this is the very problem David has failed to solve. Divorced twice and unable to

sustain a relationship with someone close in age and status to himself, he can only be gratified by the women who denote the complete other, in age, race and status, in spite of his claim that he is drawn to wit (*Di* 71). One of his ideas of solving the problem of sex is through an encounter with a prostitute on Thursday afternoons. The otherness of the female is set at the opening page:

He strokes her honey-brown body, unmarked by the sun;
he stretches her out, kisses her breasts; they make love.
Soraya is tall and slim, with long black hair and dark,
liquid eyes. Technically he is old enough to be her father,
[and to justify this inappropriateness to himself, he adds]
one can be a father at twelve (*Di* 1).

The name Soraya is derived from the Arabic word "Thoraya: ثريا", which means a very bright unattainable star; this particular star becomes attainable in "the desert of the week Thursday [which] has become an oasis of *luxe et volupté*" (*Di* 1). The attraction to Soraya is the allure of the exotic. The relationship with her is simply a monetary transaction. When he sees her in public with her two boys, the mystery is shattered and she loses her appeal (*Di* 6). The reason for this revulsion is the mundanity of her being a wife and a mother, no longer the paid mistress/the prostitute; furthermore, he realizes he can no longer exercise full control over the object he has created. Being a mother/wife grants her the status of a complete being. She is no longer a mere object of desire that can be used according to his whim. In his psyche, David is unable to reconcile the three; the search for another Soraya begins. He finds one who is no more than eighteen (*Di* 8). Unperturbed by the age difference with the various Sorayas, he finds the same age a problem when he engages in a short-term relationship with Dawn, the secretary at the department (*Di* 9). Not merely on the receiver's end, he finds Dawn's participation in their lovemaking distasteful and starts to avoid her at the department (*Di* 9). He even wonders whether it is not time to "retire from the game" or in more extreme measures, he contemplates castration after the example of Origen of Alexandria (*Di* 9).²² The Magistrate contemplates a similar thought as he resorts to an herbalist who advises him:

‘Try bread mould and milkroot,’ the herbalist says. ‘It may work. If it does not, come back to me. Here is some milkroot. You grind it and mix it to a paste with the mould and a little warm water...’

‘But tell me,’ he says: ‘why should a fine healthy man like yourself want to kill off his desires?’

‘It has nothing to do with desire, father. It is simply an irritation. A stiffening. Like rheumatism’ (*WFB* 163-164).

Incapable of stifling his own desire, David, instead, progresses to preying upon one of his students, Melanie, young enough to be his daughter and quite exotic:

She is small and thin, with close-cropped black hair, wide, almost Chinese cheekbones, large, dark eyes. Her outfits are always striking. Today she wears a maroon miniskirt with a mustard-coloured sweater and black tights; the gold baubles on her belt match the gold balls of her earrings (*Di* 11).

The prey has been selected and the object of desire has been scanned and fragmented into bits, for easier consumption. Moreover, in order that he may justify his action, he tells her “a woman’s beauty does not belong to her alone. She has a duty to share it” (*Di* 16).²³ He usurps “this beauty” and in another encounter he proceeds to make love to her on his daughter’s bed, not only accentuating the age difference between them, but also culminating in his turning her into a mere object of desire. The fact that David makes loves to Melanie on his daughter’s bed introduces undertones of incest. On more than one occasion in the novel, David is seen describing his own daughter as a man and not as a father. He informs us that she is too fat, negligent of her beauty, attractive in a sense but lost to men (*Di* 59, 76). By viewing his daughter in this manner and his desire for Melanie, David resembles an old man lusting after young girls:

He sits down on the bed, draws her to him. In his arms she begins to sob miserably. Despite all, he feels a tingling of desire. ‘There, there,’ he whispers, trying to comfort her. ‘Tell me what is wrong.’ Almost he says, ‘Tell Daddy what is wrong’ (*Di* 26).

When the university accuses David of harassment, he admits to being guilty as charged, but refuses to repent.²⁴ By repenting, he feels that he has to apologize for a history of exploitation, and this is exactly what some of his colleagues have urged him to do:

[W]hen 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 (*Di* 53).

From a personal issue, abuse of his position as a professor, harassment, and rape, the event assumes wider political implications. When David asks:

‘Why? Why it is so important that I subscribe to a statement?’ [He is told] ‘Because it would help to cool down what has become a very heated situation. Ideally we would all have preferred to resolve this case out of the glare of the media. But that has not been possible. It has received a lot of attention, it has acquired overtones that are beyond our control (*Di* 53).

The procurement of the underlying theme of apartheid, in some ways, turns the enquiry into a historical trial of all the ills that such a system has represented and the painful effect of its ideology that is still currently felt. It is ironic that his interrogation takes place on Rape Awareness Week at the university’s campus (*Di* 43). By repenting David sees himself as accepting guilt that is larger than his committed crime. Furthermore, “[f]or David, any other admission or confession would be complicity with a moral discourse with which he can have no sympathy” (Kissack & Titlestad 138). For Attridge, meanwhile, “Lurie represents the all-too-typical white consciousness of his time: by no means an apologist for apartheid, he nevertheless exhibits on occasions attitudes complicit with racist ideology” (2002, 317). Whether David does this consciously or sub-consciously, he remains a product of an apartheid system that has formed him.²⁵ Farred sees how David himself epitomises the contradictory apartheid system: “[i]n this stubborn, reticent encounter with the new authorities, Lurie becomes at

once an anachronistic symbol of white, apartheid ideology and an ironic representative of anti-apartheid loss” (356). Realities and sensitivities change but certain beliefs and characteristics remain. Coetzee explains the implications of such a system on all concerned:

As an episode in historical time, apartheid was casually overdetermined. It did indeed flower out of self-interest and greed, but also out of desire, and the denial of desire. In its greed, it demanded black bodies in all their physicality in order to burn up their energy as labor. In its anxiety about black bodies, it also made laws to banish them from sight. Apartheid did not understand itself and could not afford to understand itself. Its essence from the beginning was confusion, a confusion it displaced wildly all around itself (*GO* 164).

This confusion is at the very heart of David’s character. He fails to understand the implication of his relationship with Melanie.²⁶ Michael S. Kochin remarks on the fact that Melanie chooses to wear black on the two occasions she meets David, and that her “sombre clothes are one of the few signs of her own attitude toward the affair between her and Lurie” (7). David justifies it to himself by blaming it on Eros.²⁷ He even tries to persuade himself that the reason that he has been ostracized is due to changing times. This remark stresses that David’s values are extinct, highlighting his sense of alienation. During a conversation with his daughter, he reminds her of an episode involving their neighbour’s dog, in some ways identifying with the animal, and a feeble attempt at justifying his own position:

‘It was a male. Whenever there was a bitch in the vicinity it would get excited and unmanageable, and with Pavlovian regularity the owners would beat it. This went on until the poor dog didn’t know what to do. At the smell of a bitch it would chase around the garden with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide.’

[...]

‘There was something so ignoble in the spectacle that I despaired. One can punish a dog, it seems to me, for an offence like chewing a slipper. A dog will accept the justice of that: a beating for a chewing. But desire is

another story. No animal will accept the justice of being punished for following its instincts' (*Di* 90).

This anecdote only emphasises his delusion over his forced resignation. He attempts to persuade himself and the others that he has been punished for simply following his desires.²⁸ By comparing himself to the neighbour's dog, he expects to displace part of the assumed guilt, being controlled by his instincts and not his intellect. This self-denial sharply contrasts with his interpretation of the sexual encounter with Melanie:

She does not resist. All she does is avert herself: avert her lips, avert her eyes. She lets him lay her out on the bed and undress her: she even helps him, raising her arms and then her hips. Little shivers of cold run through her; as soon as she is bare, she slips under the quilted counterpane like a mole burrowing, and turns her back on him. Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core (*Di* 25).

Lurie also tries to delude himself that the episode is not actually a rape, as no violence has been involved, undesired yes, but not forced. In another conversation with Lucy, he volunteers another interpretation:

'These are puritanical times. Private life is public business. Prurience is respectable, prurience and sentiment. They wanted a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact. I wouldn't oblige' (*Di* 66).

David does not want to understand that it is not for his desires that he has been condemned, but because of the misappropriation of these desires. Even during his visit to Melanie's parents when he is supposed to be apologizing, he is instead contemplating a ménage à trois with Melanie and her sister Desiree (*Di* 164). Kochin interprets David's visit to the family as "a quest for the sources of Melanie's beauty" instead of a gesture of friendship towards the family (5). Towards the end and in spite of everything, David is once again seeking gratification from a very young prostitute (*Di* 194). During the tribunal, his

colleague, Swarts, suggests that perhaps banning should be exercised regarding teacher/student relationships: “[p]erhaps a ban on mixing power relations with sexual relations” (*Di* 53). This could prove to be more appealing for David; a ban always makes the object more desirable. Power is perhaps the operative word in this case. It is not the sheer fact that David has abused his position as staff that brands him a rapist, but the pleasure he has derived from exercising that power granted to him by the university. The pleasure that a rapist attains from his action is primarily due to his need to assert control over the victim and not specifically from the sexual act itself. David, who has lost control over most aspects of his life, the white South African who has reluctantly conceded power to the black man, resorts to rape to ascertain that he is still partially in command. Therefore, a ban such as the one his colleague suggests would mean that he stands to lose more control over his life. The perverse desire that is in him can be construed to be the product of the apartheid system. Coetzee writes:

This separation (apartheid) will remove the white man from the daily view of the black man and thus ensure that an unattainable white culture and lifestyle do not become the object of his envious desire. It will also remove the black from the view of the white and prevent the black from becoming the object of white sexual desire (*GO* 176).

The black having been marked as the object of desire in the psyche of the white man is partially what formalized David’s desire. Likewise, the lust that permeates the novel is precisely a result of the forbidden, the unknown and the misunderstood. The abuse of desire, which turns the other into an object or a slave, remains its worse aspect. When the three youths attack Lucy, their crime does not solely stem from their urge to rape, but has deeper implications. In some respect, it is not Lucy whom they are raping, but what Lucy represents. Envious of a culture that has long marginalized them, they retaliate by placing themselves in the role of the colonizer, at the centre and not the periphery. Violence and discrimination are the annals that are engraved in the youths’ collective memory; they can only resort to what has been imprinted in their subconscious in their

fight back, in their revenge.²⁹ Memmi explains how aggression towards the other develops:

If xenophobia and racism consist of accusing an entire human group as a whole, condemning each individual of that group, seeing in him an irremediably noxious nature, then the colonized has, indeed, become a xenophobe and a racist.

All racism and all xenophobia consist of delusions about oneself, including absurd and unjust aggressions towards others (174).

The delusions that are at play are ones of grandeur and what better way to enact them than through violent acts of control. Hendrik's raping of Magda, the black slave with the white lady of the house, mirrors her father's abuse of Hendrik's wife, Anna, the white master with the black slave. Black/white vis-à-vis white/black is but two sides of the same coin; the roles are now reversed. Magda's rape arises from the very hatred that Lucy has mentioned. In her recounting of it, Magda tells us: "He lifts my legs in the air. I stiffen and cry out with shame. [...] I cry, there is no end to this humiliation. I am soggy, it is revolting, it must be with his spit, he must have spat on me while he was there. I sob and sob" (*IHC* 116). Realizing that she has become nothing but an object to be humiliated, to be used for the revenge of previous wrongs, she questions the role of sex in the power struggle. Head remarks that the repetition of the rape scene enforces the role of victim on Magda. He writes: "It is important, however, not to lose sight of Magda as victim in these scenes, something which is surely reinforced by the repetition which, it seems to me, serves to intensify rather than ameliorate the impression of ordeal" (Head 59). She marvels at the ordeal and tries to equate it with desire, attempting to understand if she is in anyway implicated in what has happened to her. Unlike Lurie, and although acknowledging the problems posed by the desiring body as she questions "[w]hat does one do with desire" Magda is able to distinguish between welcome and unwelcome sex (*IHC* 124).³⁰ She equates the abuse of desire with possession:

I am not one of the heroes of desire, what I want is not infinite or unattainable, all I ask myself, faintly, dubiously, querulously, is whether there is not something to do with desire other than striving to possess the desired in a project which must be vain, since its end can be the annihilation of the desired (*IHC* 124).

Magda is here questioning whether desire for control and position is gender related. The masculine endeavours to appropriate the feminine even though some regard it inferior.

In another rape account, Costello tells the reader:

When [the rapist] was bored with hitting her he tore up her clothes and tried to set fire to them in the waste-paper basket [and having fought him off] she had created an opening for the evil in him to emerge, and it emerged in the form of glee, first at her pain (*EC* 165, 166).

Costello has always understood how violence can only breed further violence and how in this sinister form can be equated with pleasure, a concept that Magda has also recognized.³¹ Costello's way of breaking the chain, however, is to remain silent on evil: "For half a century the memory has rested inside her like an egg, an egg of stone, one that will never crack open, never give birth. She finds it good, it pleases her, this silence of hers, a silence she hopes to preserve to the grave" (*EC* 166). To remain silent over violence is a way of not endowing the act with a voice, not giving it "a new purchase on the world" (*EC* 166). Likewise, Lucy's refusal to report the rape incident to the police is her way of trying to put an end to the cycle of violence. Lacan states that according to de Sade the nature of repetition makes "the sufferings inflicted on the victim go on indefinitely" and reliving the episode is comparable to opening "the flood gates of desire [...] In essence, pain. The other's pain as well as the pain of the subject himself, [...] To the degree that it involves forcing an access to the Thing, the outer extremity of pleasure [which] is unbearable...[and] fantasms cannot bear the revelation of speech" (*TEP* 295, 80). Excessive pain can be morbidly, at certain times, confused with pleasure, Lucy and Costello decide to remain silent in the hope that the completely dark episode is obliterated.³² Lucy's father fails to understand her

point of view as to why she has chosen not to talk of the rape. David, however, has another observation to make when he learns of Lucy's pregnancy:

The gang of three. Three fathers in one. Rapists rather than robbers, Lucy called them—rapists cum taxgatherers roaming the area, attacking women, indulging their violent pleasures. Well, Lucy was wrong. They were not raping, they were mating (*Di* 199).

The gang of three is in fact implanting a new reality in the wombs of the women they attack, sowing new seeds in the mother-earth and asserting that in the new order of things, they are the ones in control.³³

At this point, I would like to introduce the notion that female rape is often compared to the unlawful requisition of land. This primarily stems from rape being an instrument of control and subjugation, and more often than not exercised against the feminine.³⁴ Incidentally, as the gender allocated to land in most languages is feminine, ravage of the earth is equated with exploitation of the female. Pechey states that:

[R]ape is a familiar metaphor of colonization, and the epidemic of rape that has accompanied South Africa's recent *decolonization* has prompted concerned individuals in that country to cast about for meanings, explanations, counter-metaphors appropriate to a long historical process that began with the violation of the land itself (381).

It is also worth noting that in wars, ransacking of the land has often been accompanied by the rape of women, as the latter were generally considered part of the booty. Territorial desire often includes appropriation of both land and women.³⁵ Magda wonders if Hendrik's actions and ambitions lie in starting a line and establishing a farm modelled on the Afrikaner tradition (*IHC* 26). Her fear is symbolically confirmed not only by the sexual crime committed against her but also by finding Hendrik on a number of occasions adorning her father's clothes (*IHC* 107). Stepping into her father's clothes is akin to stepping into the territorial possessions of his previous master.³⁶ The new master, Hendrik, now dominates everything that has previously constituted the father's estate, including

the daughter.³⁷ Deleuze and Guattari discuss how a new system is established, invariably, on the relics of the other. Their argument on capitalism is relevant here where they see it as “constructed on the ruins of the territorial and the despotic” (Deleuze & Guattari 333).

Moreover, the relationship to the acquired land mimics the relationship to the procured sexual object, one of yearning and repulsiveness. This practice habitually turns the perpetrator into a troubled settler, especially because force has been used in the seizure of both. Uneasy with his acquisition of the land, the settler is foreign to its elements and peculiarities, discontented by its nature, and its climate.³⁸ Because of the aforementioned reasons, the settler is more prone to destroying than preserving, whilst at the same time convincing oneself that he is cultivating the land. Ravaging the land is akin to ravaging the body of the native, specifically the female. The Magistrate narrates how the destruction of the barbarian goes hand in hand with the ransacking of the land (*WFB* 90). At the beginning of the novel, Captain Joll is elated about a hunting trip he has taken: “when thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot”—a wasteland of skulls (*WFB* 1). Michael echoes the same observation when he witnesses the ravaging caused by the soldiers of his pumpkin patch and the farm as they claim to search for the Swartberg insurgent gang (*LTMK* 122-123).

The *OED* defines the term “scorched earth policy” as “the burning of crops etc. and the removing or destroying of anything that might be of use to an enemy force occupying a country.” This practice is prevalent amongst the colonisers/settlers, who generally out of spite destroy the land, leaving nothing for the native.³⁹ This practice still applies. Images that we have witnessed on our television screens, as recently as in the year 2005, of the “forced” evacuation of the Israeli settlers from the settlements in the Gaza Strip have reflected such a policy. With their departure, the Israeli settlers have demolished homes and the infrastructure along with the uprooting of the trees. The feeling of being an alien to the land he has occupied has never left the settler. The Magistrate remarks on the transient nature of the colonizer’s existence:

We have been here more than a hundred years, we have reclaimed land from the desert and built irrigation works and planted fields and built solid homes and put a wall around our town, but they still think of us as visitors, transients (*WFB* 55).

Jacobus echoes the same sentiment: “I am nothing to them, nothing but an occasion” (D 91). The Israeli poet, Haim Gouri, makes a similar observation when he compares the Jewish settlers in Palestine to the Palestinian Arabs/Arabs in general. He says: “So even today when you see on television soldiers dispersing young demonstrators and people say tyrannical occupier, it is not so simple. Because if you think about it [...], you can see that in fact those young demonstrators are stronger than we are. Because they are part of a vast world. They are part of an invincible power [...]. Because no Egyptian will ask himself whether Egypt will still exist in another 50 years. No Arab will have that feeling of life on the finish line” (9). Jacobus’ “occasion” needs to become part of history, and this can only be achieved through destruction. The momentary feeling accompanies the settler throughout, putting him at odds with the land and its people, never becoming part of either.⁴⁰ To him, the land becomes the other to be controlled, made productive and in the event that one is forced to relinquish it, destroyed. This practice is akin to the treatment of the female native, the body that has to be used then discarded. The settler, who has built his house on appropriated land, is reluctant to leave anything behind but utter ruin, houses demolished, trees uprooted and infrastructure destroyed. It is ironic that it is the very settler who has once claimed that he made the desert bloom, is in fact turning cultivated fields into a wasteland.⁴¹

In his effort at restoring himself, the native resorts to the same violence that he has seen played in front of him. Aware of this formula, the Magistrate, at one point, almost wishes it:

Shall I tell you what I sometimes wish? I wish that these barbarians would rise up and teach us a lesson, so that we would learn to respect them. We think of the country here as ours, part of our Empire—our outpost, our settlement, our market centre. But these people, these barbarians don’t think of it like that at all (*WFB* 55).

For Fanon, the process of decolonization employs the same violence. He writes:

Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy of any supernatural power; the ‘thing’ which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself (Fanon *WE* 28).

In order that he may recreate himself as human, the object resorts to the same violence that he has been subjected to and has used in his fight for liberty. Fanon writes:

If we want to answer correctly, we have to fall back on the idea of *collective catharsis*. In every society, in every collectivity, exists—must exist—a channel, an outlet through which the forces accumulated in the form of aggression can be released (*BSWM* 145).

The channelling of aggression is necessary for both the colonizer and colonized. If the release of aggression is stifled then humanity stands to witness violence of the worst kind. On the other hand, Sartre views the aggression of the colonized a reaction to earlier violence administered by the colonizer. Sartre describes events that occurred in Algeria and Angola when the Europeans were massacred at sight: “[i]t is the moment of the boomerang; it is the third phase of violence; it comes back on us, it strikes us, and we do not realize any more than we did the other times that it’s we that have launched it” (Fanon *WE* 17). The violence currently taking place in South Africa is a consequence of years of cruel and violent oppression. At the beginning, Sartre states that “the only violence is the settler’s; but soon they make it their own; that is to say, the same violence is thrown back upon us as when our reflection comes forward to meet us when we go towards a mirror” (Fanon *WE* 15). Colonialism not only dehumanizes but also distorts everyone who is exposed to it. Moreover, Sartre adds, “that no gentleness can efface the marks of violence; only violence itself can destroy them” (Fanon *WE* 18). At such times, the prevalence of violence makes such incidents the norm.⁴² Farred states: “the quotidian everywhere-ness of violence as *mundanacity* [...] renders attacks on the individual body and the national psyche as nothing more

than a mundane, ordinary experience” (354). Similarly, after the attack, David reflects and attempts to justify the pain inflicted upon him:

It happens every day, every hour, every minute, he tells himself, in every quarter of the country. Count yourself lucky to have escaped with your life. Count yourself lucky not to be a prisoner in the car at this moment, speeding away, or at the bottom of a donga with a bullet in your head (*Di* 98).

Throughout the frightful episode and what follows, Lucy is reluctant to speak to her father about her own experience or even provide any details of what exactly has happened. For David, he believes that her reluctance to speak may lie in his inability to understand what it is to be violated from the female point of view. He remarks that he can inhabit the violator’s role; however, “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?” (*Di* 160). I believe that David can delve into the minds of Lucy’s attackers, but is incapable of understanding the assault from a woman’s standpoint.⁴³ Although Marais suggests that David “does eventually manage to view the events that transpired in the bedroom from [Lucy’s] perspective,” I tend to disagree (2006, 77). David only comprehends the pain that has been inflicted on his daughter, but not what the rape of a female entails.⁴⁴ He is surprised when she refuses to report the incident to the police. When she tries to make him understand, her words evoke the marks of the violence and the hatred that has scarred her, a hatred that is deeply entrenched in the consciousness of her violators:

Halfway home, Lucy to his surprise speaks. ‘It was so personal,’ she says. ‘It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest...expected. But why did they hate me so? I have never set eyes on them.’

[...]

‘It was history speaking through them,’ he offers at last. ‘A history of wrong. Think of it that way, if it helps. It

may have seemed personal, but it wasn't. It came down from the ancestors' (*Di* 156).

What actually transpires is not solely a reminder of atrocities committed by the ancestors against the black other, but a reminder of what women have been subjected to during the apartheid years. Coetzee writes, "[r]ape forces upon [the victim] 'a sexual personality' and thereby paralyses her, robs her of flexibility of movement" (*SS* 35). Lucy has been forced into a role that she has shunned, a characterless object of desire, subjected to the control of a man and the role of enforced motherhood, the traditional feat of her white ancestors. Boehmer notes:

White dominance *and* the overcoming of white dominance are both figured as involving the subjection of the female body, as part of a long history of female exploitation of which the narrative itself takes note. In both cases the victims obtain no justice or confession of responsibility from their abusers (344).

The implication and consequence of Lucy's rape compels her to accept a marriage proposal which would otherwise have been completely unacceptable, the third wife to Petrus. She accepts because she understands that rape has robbed her of her being, has made her relinquish control of her life, and acknowledge the protection of a new emerging power. Lucy has been mistreated because of her ancestry and gender; her payment to history is double-fold, being a woman who has forsaken the traditional female role, a lesbian, and a white South African living in post-apartheid era; and ironically, as David has earlier remarked "it was not they who produced her: perhaps history had the larger share" (*Di* 61). In the present order of things, "Petrus' house has become a reality. Grey and featureless, it stands on an eminence east of the old farmhouse; in the mornings, [David] guesses, it must cast a long shadow" (*Di* 197).⁴⁵ Petrus' colony has grown, establishing a farm on the tradition of the old system; Lucy has accepted to become part of his entourage. Deleuze and Guattari see marriage as an alliance of two families and it is through women that connections between men are established (180). When Petrus asks David for his daughter's hand, he is affirming the new order that has evolved in South Africa. He negotiates as an

equal partner over the body of a woman. Furthermore, all through the attack on Lucy, Petrus has been suspiciously absent; when he finally shows up, he is “wearing a suit too tight for him,” figuratively assuming a role that is not inherently his, the master and equal partner in an alien system, and as with the suit, the role has been handed down (*Di* 113). Inadvertently, Lucy finds herself cast in the unwelcome role of a farmer’s wife, a victim of a white-turned-black dominance. In *Dusklands*, Jacobus equates the Dutch girls in the old South Africa with property:

Dutch girls carry an aura of property with them. They are first of all property themselves: they bring not only so many pounds of white flesh but also so many morgen of land and so many head of cattle and so many servants, and then an army of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters (*D* 61).

Becoming a property of a man is what Lucy has so far shunned.⁴⁶ Coetzee describes what it means to be the farmer’s wife: “a farmer uses his wife’s body as a means to get himself unpaid labour: on her he will multiply himself, and each son she bears will in turn multiply the yield of his land”(*WW* 69). It is a pseudo-retreat into history where nothing has changed, and the new order, which is the substitute for the old, is once again unleashed on the body of the woman.

“Like a god” *Dusklands*:⁴⁷

Memmi stipulates that the egotistical nature of colonialism has inevitably caused its failure, but along the way, it “has polluted everything which it has touched. It has decayed the colonizer and destroyed the colonized” (155). This is made evident by Dawn’s downfall in *Dusklands*. A long-time propagator of the master and slave dialectic, which is an essential component of colonialism/imperialism, Dawn is utterly disfigured by the end of the novella. Likewise, the inconsistent practices of the above system contribute to the deformation of all involved. The Magistrate remarks on the contradiction that lies at the heart of an interrogator/official who is a representative of a system that

perpetuates violence. He tells the reader: “[i]t has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive” (*WFB* 8). This inconsistently backfires leaving the perpetrator with a split personality, a chasm that cannot be healed. When the Empire assigns Dawn to write a report on the war propaganda, he, instead, suggests a total obliteration of the enemy (*D* 29). In his introduction to Memmi’s book, Sartre describes how in his attempt to destroy the other, he ends up destroying himself:

It is the oppressor himself who restores, with his slightest gesture, the humanity he seeks to destroy; and, since he denies humanity in others, he regards it everywhere as his enemy. To handle this, the colonizer must assume the opaque rigidity and imperviousness of stone. In short, he must dehumanize himself, as well (24).

Similarly, when Dawn suggests a complete nullification of the other, in effect, he is asking for his own. The note he sticks on his superior’s door, calling for the complete annihilation of the enemy, and the stabbing of his son, result in Dawn’s being committed to an institution. Attwell considers the stabbing of the son but Dawn’s attempt at trying to break the chain of violence, which has thus devoured him (54).

On the other hand, Sartre notes that:

It is sufficient to observe that the Slave is the Truth of the Master. But this unilateral recognition is unequal and insufficient, for the truth of his self-certitude for the Master is a non-essential consciousness; therefore the Master is not certain of *being for himself* as truth. In order to attain this truth there is necessary “a moment in which the master does for himself what he does as regards the Other and when the slave does as regards the Other what he does for himself” (*BN* 213).

Sartre is referring to the Hegelian dialectic of master and slave, the master requiring the recognition by the slave for him to be; the truth of the master lies in the slave. Nevertheless, based on the inequality of the relationship, the slave having been turned into a sub-human cannot provide the master with any

gratification. What the master discovers in the slave is the destruction he himself has induced. Ultimately, what he sees is his own nihilism and humiliation. In similar fashion, Dawn has done nothing for the other except destroy him, and, in the process, has destroyed himself. Memmi believes:

The bond between the colonizer and colonized is thus destructive and creative. It destroys and re-creates the two partners of colonization into colonizer and colonized. One is disfigured into an oppressor, a partial, unpatriotic and treacherous being, worrying only about his privileges and their defense; the other, into an oppressed creature, whose development is broken and who compromises by his defeat (133).

As a result, both the oppressor and oppressed are tarnished. Dawn's abject image of the self is what he perceives when he looks outwards towards the slave and inwardly at himself. He tells the reader that, "[f]rom head to foot I am the subject of a revolting body" (*D* 7). Even his own habits are repulsive to him as well as to others (*D* 5). Consumed by what America and the Empire typify, he admits that they are partly the cause of his downfall. The myth that is America has been created in falsity, hence just as consuming. Moreover, Memmi considers that the "wilfully created" myth that is "spread by the colonizer" for the sole purpose of degradation "ends up being accepted and lived with to a certain extent by the colonized" (131). Furthermore, the mythical portrait that the colonizer has conjured up is reflected back at him; and the image he learns to incorporate inside of him every time he regards his creation, becomes the very object that destroys him. Krog writes:

A myth is a unit of imagination which makes it possible for a human being to accommodate two worlds. It reconciles the contradictions of these two worlds in a workable fashion and holds open the way between them. The two worlds are the inner and the outer world. Myth makes it possible to live with what you cannot endure (289).

Dawn is fully aware of the ruinous effect of a fabricated myth. Built on falsehood, it remains fragile and can easily be shattered. He is unable to consolidate the worlds of reality and myth. He tells us that his wife, “Marilyn’s great fear is that [he] will drag her out of the suburbs into the wilderness” (*D* 9). This emotion stems from the belief and the false notion that all is well in suburbia. This myth hypothesizes that America, the imperialist power, with its technological dominance, is impregnable and whole. Yet the decay that Dawn has felt lies dormant under its delicate exterior. In a conversation with his wife, Dawn tells us that:

She thinks that every deviation leads into wilderness. This is because she has a false conception of America. She cannot believe that America is big enough to contain its deviants. But America is bigger than all of us: I acknowledged that long before I began to say my say to Coetzee—America will swallow me, digest me, dissolve me in the tides of its blood (*D* 9).

In line with the American myth, his wife’s name is Marilyn, invoking the actress, Marilyn Monroe, the beauty icon of popular culture. The commercialization of Monroe as the sexual symbol of the West has transformed her into a fetish. Likewise, Dawn looks at his wife as a sexual object, a fetish to be devoured. He tells the reader:

[...] there blossomed in late February a nude pose of Marilyn herself. She reclines on a black satin Playboy sheet, her legs crossed (the razor spots come out clearly), her pubic beard on display, her neck and shoulders locked on the camera in an amateur’s bold rictus of concentration [...] Contrast the great fashion models with their message of impersonal mockery: Meat for your Master (*D* 13).

The cruelty of what the Empire stands for has turned Dawn into a perverse human being. He is unable to enjoy a normal relationship with his wife. The sexual act with her is completely repulsive to him; he looks at it more of a duty, and she, he claims, an “invasion and possession” (*D* 8).⁴⁸ No matter how he describes the act, Dawn sees sex with his wife as vile:

The fault is not mine. I do my duty. Whereas I cannot escape the suspicion that my wife is disengaged. Before the arrival of my seed her pouch yawns and falls back, leaving my betrayed representative gripped at its base, flailing its head in vain inside an immense cavern, at the very moment when above all else it craves to be rocked through its tantrum in a soft, firm, infinitely trustworthy grip. The word which at such moments flashes its tail across the heavens of my never quite extinguished consciousness is *evacuation*: my seed drips like urine into the futile sewers of Marilyn's reproductive ducts (*D* 8).

By using the word, *evacuation*, to describe his relationship with his wife, Dawn's concept of sex is fashioned by the colonial discourse; like the natives, women are viewed as soiled objects when touched, and can contaminate; and "[i]n the absence of male pleasure, sex is presented, here, as defilement" (Head 31).

Another aspect of colonialism Dawn exhibits is voyeurism, a quality he shares with Magda. On more than one occasion, Magda partakes in this exercise. One of the incidents is when she enquires of Anna about her relationship with her father: "What was it like with my father when the two of you spoke? Were you at last simply man and woman? Come, tell me, I want to know" (*IHC* 110). She perseveres in her questioning of Anna striving to get the intimate details of the encounter in order that she may re-enact the episode in her mind. Another time she pries into a doorway, conjuring up a scene where Hendrik and Anna are making love in front of her (*IHC* 83). Similarly, Head comments on the gratification that Dawn manifests when he is the voyeur:

The matter of visual control is an obvious additional component of the colonizing identity, expressed again in phallogentric terms, as, for example, when Dawn expresses a voyeuristic interest in seeing Marilyn through another man's eyes, because, as he admits, he is excited by 'new perspectives' (32).

By peeking at his wife, Dawn emphasizes the otherness of his wife. She becomes like the Vietnamese woman in one of the photos he cherishes and carries with him at all times (*D* 13). Sadistically, he finds the second photo, depicting sergeants holding severed heads very amusing. As violence is no longer shocking

or upsetting to him, he can equate the scene in the gruesome picture to a “mother with her son’s head in a sack, carrying it off like a small purchase from the supermarket” (*D* 16).

Dawn’s inability to differentiate normalcy from violence leads him to stab his own son, feeling no remorse (*D* 42). The war has destroyed him.⁴⁹ He narrates how “[s]ince February of 1965 their war has been living its life at [his] expense” eating away his manhood from inside (*D* 38). Inside of him, there now exists, “in the dead center of [his] body [...] a hideous mongol boy who stretches his limbs inside [his] hollow bones, gnaws [his] liver with his smiling teeth, voids his bilious filth into [his] systems, and will not go” (*D* 39). The hideous mongol boy within Dawn is the decadence of the Empire that has permeated his being, leaving him powerless. In Bhabha’s terms someone like Dawn is seen losing “his voice of command” and is no longer “fixed in the authoritative alignment of subjects”; he is unable to perpetuate “the production of terror and fear” (Bhabha 116). Dawn’s paranoia cannot be contained. His “epistemic framework [which] once encourage[d] a Manichean emphasis” is completely broken down (Attwell *JMCSAPW* 44). According to Bhabha when “[t]he symmetry of duality of self/other, inside/outside” becomes obliterated the person is “besieged by ‘the other scene’ of fixations and phantoms” (Bhabha 116). At the end of the novella, Dawn is doomed to live his life with the spectres of the actions that haunt him.

In the second novella of *Dusklands*, Jacobus, an explorer, armed with the various stereotypes and generalizations of the Empire, also contemplates stamping out the barbarians (*D* 61). Head comments that Jacobus:

[...] projects the impulses of the colonizer onto the colonized—specifically that of self-advancement through the consumption of the Other—and this supplies a continuing justification of violence, history as annihilation, one way or the other (41).

The consumption of the other is justified by the fixity of the native in a certain role by the colonizer: Hottentots locked in the present, bushman heartless, careless about their old, listless and unreliable, genetically born into slavery, etc ... (*D* 57, 58, 59, 60, 73-74). All these traits are mere pretexts to excuse himself

of the violence he inflicts on others and ultimately for his brutal invasion against the Namaquas. Furthermore, Jacobus is more concerned in administering the white man's "law" that he loses sight of the violence he is inflicting on others.⁵⁰ He takes revenge on the Namaquas because they have disobeyed the law in which he believes. Copjec observes that the pervert is always insisting on obeying the law to the letter (224). She adds: "the pervert [...] surrenders his *right* to jouissance in order to assume it as a *duty* that he had contracted to carry out" (Copjec 225). In addition, the status of a human being according to Jacobus' understanding is definitely determined by one's race.⁵¹ The white man sets the law. Memmi points out that racism is a proponent of colonialism: "Racism appears then, not as an incidental detail, but as a consubstantial part of colonialism. It is the highest expression of the colonial system and one of the most significant features of the colonialist" (118). One example is when Jacobus describes the Hottentots as knowing "nothing of penetration. For penetration you need blue eyes" (*D* 97).⁵²

The beliefs that have plagued the Magistrate, Lurie, and Dawn are the same ones that haunt Jacobus. In some respects, he is the most arrogant of the lot, at one stage even describing himself as a god, but what differentiates him slightly from the others is his persistent reliance on religion to excuse his actions (*D* 71). At this point, I would like to introduce the role of religion in the colonialist scheme. Religion has not only functioned as a tool in the hands of colonialism but has also aided the exploits and perpetuated the master and slave relationships. Jacobus considers himself an explorer and at the same time a missionary with divine power to bring light into darkness, a mere "tool of history," "a sequence of accidents" being dictated from above, encrusted with the white man's burden (*D* 106, 98).⁵³ Although he is fully aware of the material interests of the missionaries whose duty he claims are "scattering the seeds of civilization," he persists in his self-deceit as like the others he is afraid to look inwardly as "[e]ntombed in [the] coffer [his] heart too had lived in darkness all its life. [His] gut would dazzle if [he] pierced [himself]" (*D* 111, 78).⁵⁴ Coetzee views "missionaries [... as] no more than the front-line troops in a campaign of cultural imperialism hard to distinguish from economic and military imperialism" (*SS*

335). Memmi seconds this view. He remarks that “the church has greatly assisted the colonialist; backing his ventures, helping his conscience, contributing to the acceptance of colonization--even by the colonized” (116).

In *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*, a poignant scene presents itself in relation to the role of religious missions in southern Africa. Blanche/Bridget, a nun, presents to her sister Elizabeth the “old man with the stained teeth and the overalls and the uncertain English, introduced to her simply as Joseph,” and informs her that he has spent his whole life carving the crucifix, “the face of the tortured man” (*EC* 134-135).⁵⁵ Attridge rightly points out that the “fact that [Joseph] is known only by his first name in the mission hints at the persistence of racist attitudes among the devout nuns” (2004, 263). Probably named after Joseph in the Biblical story, the nuns have also decided to choose his vocation by the name they have selected for him. The cruelty exercised on Joseph does not lie in his vocation alone, but in what his job actually entails. Joseph’s whole life has been devoted to carving a religious symbol, initially alien to his culture; the cruelty lies in the fact that we are led to believe that he enjoys carving the same tortured image day-in day-out, although there are no longer any buyers for his little statues and crucifixes (*EC* 135). The nuns expect Joseph to be grateful to them, and as Blanche/Bridget justifies to her sister:⁵⁶

Joseph spent thirty years of his earthly existence representing, for the eyes of others certainly but principally for his own eyes, Our Saviour in his agony. Hour after hour, day after day, year after year, he imagined the agony and, with a fidelity you can behold for yourself, reproduced it, to the best of his ability [...] Which of us, I now ask, will Jesus be most gladdened to welcome into his kingdom: Joseph, with his wasted hands, or you, or me? (*EC* 138).

Not only should Joseph be thankful for the nuns for showing him the light in his life on earth, but also for securing him a place in heaven. Without them, he would never be granted salvation, for they hold the key to the pearly gate. As with colonialism, religion is often just as cruel and racist, immorally establishing a hierarchal order, those who believe in our gods and those who don’t, those who

embody the truth and those who should be instructed in it.⁵⁷ The god one believes in is always the righteous one; the other's god is invariably unethical and personifies evil.⁵⁸ Jacobus remarks sarcastically on the alienating effect and inappropriateness of an imposed religion. He comments regarding the Hottentot: "Put him in Christian clothes and he begins to cringe, his shoulders bend, his eyes shift, he cannot keep still in your presence but must incessantly twitch [...] He becomes a false creature [...] They have no integrity, they are actors" (*D* 65). For this reason, violence, against the non-believers, is not only warranted but also condoned, its perpetrators believing that divine power is on their side. Earlier on, Costello describes the reason for this assumption:

As long as we insist that we have access to an ethical universal to which other traditions are blind, and try to impose it on them by means of propaganda or even economic pressure, we are going to meet with resistance, and that resistance will be justified (*EC* 106).

Colonialism, exercising power through violence, technological dominance and religion, cannot be justified and these means are just as destructive to the master as to the slave. According to Memmi, "[t]he most serious blow suffered by the colonized is being removed from history and from the community" (135). The colonized does not step out of history alone. His obliterated history along with the nullification of his being is part of a cycle that encompasses the colonizer. The vacuum extends to annul the very system that has brought it into existence.

Conclusion

Early on in the chapter, I have examined how colonialism is but a vehicle for the territorial desire for capitalist expansion. In the process, what is built is the motherland and what is destroyed is the territory that is acquired. Deleuze and Guattari emphasize this point in *Anti-Oedipus* in which they see capitalism as building its centre at the expense of the periphery. As with capitalism, colonialism, which is constructed on the fruits of the subjugated human and appropriated land, perpetuated through acts of violence and sexual assault,

advocating the “immortality of the system,” is ultimately forced to deal with its own limitation (Deleuze & Guattari 380). Not only does it result in the destruction of the colonized and the colonizer alike, its haunting presence survives its cessation. It survives as a spectre, a continual reminder for the deformed of their humiliation at its hands, the emblem of slavery embedded in their psyche, nothing but “slaves commanding other slaves” (Deleuze & Guattari 276). Coetzee endorses this fact where the deformity incurred is in the inner of the human being:

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. All expressions of that inner life, no matter how intense, no matter how pierced with exultation or despair, suffer from the same stuntedness and deformity (*SJP* 2003).

Sartre describes a castration scene in the final pages of William Faulkner’s novel, *Light in August*, when:

The “‘good citizens’ have just hunted down the negro, Christmas, and have castrated him” and “Christmas is at the point of death” and the “explosion of the Other’s look in the world of the sadist causes the meaning and goal of sadism to collapse. The sadist discovers that it was *that freedom* which he wished to enslave, and at the same time realizes the futility of his efforts. Here once more, we are referred from the being-in-the-act-of-looking to the being-looked-at; we have not got out of the circle (*BN* 381-382).

No one escapes the circle. Memmi stresses the same point. He writes: “[the colonizer] will persist in degrading them [the colonized], he will act to devalue them, annihilate them. But he can never escape the cycle” (98). Relations that are based on a hierarchal order of being, be it, colonizer/colonized, master/slave, subject/object, man/woman would forever hold their subjects in chains. The only movement that is feasible in such situations, especially when saturation point is reached, is the reciprocation of the violence that is all consuming.

In Plato's "Simile of the Cave," the unchained prisoner who walks towards the light from darkness, gains knowledge and that not only proves to be illuminating for him, but, hypothetically, also enables him to distinguish between the truth and the untruth. Unfortunately, for Coetzee's heroes, the knowledge that they acquire from ascending to the upper world of light accentuates their destruction. The darkness and hollowness that subsist in their inner being is too deeply engraved to be removed, to grant them any such revelation. They remain prisoners to the blind systems that have formulated them, "their legs and necks being so fastened that they can only look straight ahead of them and cannot turn their heads," only permitted to reflect onto the shades that are before them on the wall (Plato 241). They will never be able to distinguish between the shadows on the wall and the reality that is outside—the pseudo reality that has festered inside of them has distorted their very being, forever enchained by its falsehood and overriding power.

¹ Gallagher states "[b]esides the elevation and consequent marginalization of women, the discourse of Afrikaner identity upholds several other patriarchal norms [a...] twisted emphasis on submission to authority in the form of humiliation" (91). The Afrikaner woman has to accept being humbled.

² Magistrate refers to role of interrogator (*WFB* 8).

³ Wood writes: "[f]irst, there is the appeal to greed [...]. Secondly, there is the appeal to benevolent paternalism: slavery is presented as a supportive and protective system for all enslaved blacks. Thirdly, there is the appeal to missionary zeal: slavery is set up as a Christianizing and civilizing process for mainland Africa. Fourthly, there is the appeal to comparative forms of enslavement: African slaves are presented as criminals in their homeland, or as already enslaved in a form of heathen slavery far worse than that of the Caribbean plantations. Fifthly, there is the appeal to the natural superiority of Europeans: blacks are presented as fundamentally different from whites, they are closer to animals, and require protection and inculcation into the benefits of a work ethic, being naturally idle" (143). Colonialism creates rules and various divisions in order to ensure a continual gain flow.

⁴ Krog quotes an Afrikaner who questions why evil should assume a human face (145). Some believe the blacker the face, the more evil it is.

⁵ In his discussion on Carlyle, Wood remarks on equating the black/oppressed with an animal: "[t]he crudest and most effective rhetorical gambit for dehumanization is animalization [...] That the black was, in Carlyle's imagination, wholly interchangeable with the horse [...] (*SEP* 368).

⁶ Young summarizes Deleuze and Guattari's concept of territorialisation: "[t]he first serves as a reminder that colonialism above all involves the physical appropriation of land, its capture for the cultivation of another culture. It thus foregrounds the fact that cultural colonization was not simply a discursive operation but a seizure of cultural (in all senses of the word) space [...] Each of these moments can be articulated with Deleuze and Guattari's definition of territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization as the dynamics of the colonial or imperial propagation of economic, cultural and social spatialization" (172).

⁷ In the *Madonna of Excelsior*, Zakes Mda explores this internal conflict: "[i]t was a battle that was raging within individual Afrikaner men. A battle between lust and loathing. A battle that the Afrikaner must win. The devil made the Afrikaner to covertly covet the black woman while publicly detesting her [...] The devil made him do it" (85).

⁸ The need to protect the white woman in South Africa is more urgent if the woman is English (Krebs 65).

⁹ Coetzee examines some of the early Dutch writings on the Hottentots who were not considered fully human, because of perceived idleness, considered one of the biggest sins. For more details, please refer to "Idleness in South," *White Writing* (12-35).

¹⁰ Governments worldwide concern themselves with laws on sexuality, permitting or prohibiting what an individual can or cannot do privately; religions have given themselves the exact rights.

¹¹ Krebs writes initially "blacks are hostile to whites, always waiting their chance to turn the tables on their "masters," especially sexually" (65). This is evident in *Disgrace*.

¹² Wood explains how by objectifying women, a woman becomes nothing but part of a codified commercial language (51). Likewise, Varadharajan states: "the mark of gender transforms women into objects of objects [...]" (12).

¹³ Ménan Du Plessis believes: "[w]hat seems questionable though, is his self-righteous accusation of the other: ironically, he seems merely to be transferring to Joll a sense of the guilt that is his own" (122).

¹⁴ Moses notes "Mandel teaches the magistrate a harsh lesson: the law does not delimit the use of power; rather, power ultimately defines the meaning of the law [...]" (119). The law has decided that the Magistrate is a native woman.

¹⁵ Penner remarks that "the barbarians are the Empire" and like the magistrate the "Empire must face its decadence alone [for] it has lost the means by which it defined itself as a superior, civilized culture" (76).

¹⁶ By making the Magistrate assume the feminine role, the tortures can enjoy more liberties. Women in captivity are sometimes labelled as prostitutes. This further demeans them and allows the torturers further indulgences. Krog cites a testimony of a female captive: "[a]nd when whatever you stood for was reduced to prostitution, unpaid

prostitution, the licence for sexual abuse was created. Then things happened that could not happen to a man. Your sexuality was used to strip away your dignity, to undermine your sense of self [...] ‘It is only when men in prisons are forced by sodomy to behave like women that they realize how it is to live with a constant awareness of your body and how it can be abused and ridiculed. Mthintso says a man who didn’t break under torture was respected by police [...] But a woman’s refusal to bow down would unleash the wrath of torturers’” (273).

¹⁷ Coetzee states: “Torture has exerted a dark fascination on many other South African writers [because...] relations in the torture room provide a metaphor, bare and extreme, for relations between authoritarianism and its victims. In the torture room, unlimited force is exerted upon the physical being of an individual in a twilight of legal illegality, with the purpose, if not of destroying him, then at least of destroying the kernel of resistance within him” (Coetzee 1986).

¹⁸ Krog quotes Meintjies: “[t]here is a lot of ambiguity surrounding sexual torture [...] ‘There is a hypothesis that the sexual torture of men is to induce sexual passivity and to abolish political power and potency, while the torture of women is the activation of sexuality. There is a lot of anger about women—because women do not have authority, but often they have a lot of power’” (277-278). Dressing the Magistrate in a woman’s frock, Mandel strips away the Magistrate’s authority and potency.

¹⁹ Coetzee states it is difficult “to inhabit the consciousness of an animal” (Interview with Engström). Coetzee compares the status of the disgraced human being to that of an animal in society. He scorns the fact we have developed “social and philosophical mechanisms” to kill animals; this also applies to humans in time of war. He wants animals to have a right to life. Likewise, humans should have a right to dignity.

²⁰ Krog cites a South African police statement in which dead children are referred to as dogs (295).

²¹ Lurie describes his “affair” with Melanie (*Di* 25).

²² Origen of Alexandria, who lived circa 185-254 AD, may have castrated himself as a form of martyrdom.

²³ Lacan compares de Sade and Kant. The former sees a “conjunction between the play of pain and the phenomena of beauty” while the latter does not see an involvement on the part of the object in its beauty (*EP* 261). Likewise, Melanie has been detached from her physical attributes, allowing Lurie to claim that her beauty is public property that can be used to elevate his sexual “suffering.”

²⁴ Kissack & Titlestad remark: “[t]hroughout his experiences of adversity, David sustains a quiet dignity, which is anchored in this sense of humility. It is a dignity that refuses to compromise on what he considers to be one of life’s most basic and animating features, the “rights of desire” [...]” (145).

²⁵ Tom Herron sees Lurie’s “racism [is not] marked by a virulent hatred of all black people [...] Rather, his racism emerges in his persistent zoomorphism, in which animal characteristics are projected, mainly but not exclusively, onto black people” (488).

²⁶ Marais describes Lurie as a monad who is “totally divorced from other beings and thus incapable of sympathizing with them” (2006). This is why Lurie cannot understand the implication of his actions.

²⁷ Cooper observes how Lurie: “entices [Melanie] with Italian food and Shakespeare, and the unspoken contract of seduction is held entirely within the rules of Western representation” (25).

²⁸ Desire is often condoned in a man while condemned in a woman, power vis-à-vis desire.

²⁹ Kochin observes: “[t]he new inverted order, in which blacks act as colonial exploiters of their former white overlords, would seem to offer no greater hope than the white racial colonialism it replaces” (6).

³⁰ Subconsciously, Magda desires what Hendrik is, stemming from the curiosity of the other and racial fantasies.

³¹ Sadism is conducted here, equating pleasure with pain.

³² Krog quotes Nomfundo Walaza [...] who observes that women “who have been raped know that if they talk about it in public they will lose something again—privacy, maybe respect” (277).

³³ Marais remarks: “Lurie’s explanation of the gang rape also explains his violation of Pollux. In wishing them “harm” (107) and in finally striking Pollux, he retaliates for the rapists’ sexual attack on Lucy and does so in their terms or, rather, to use his argument, the terms of history. By vengefully opposing the black men, he places himself in a position that has been defined against the one they occupy. That is, he occupies an already-given position, one that has been inscribed in the political dynamic of South African culture by the discourse of race which, in his reading, informed the rape of Lucy. In seeking to avenge Lucy, Lurie is located by the rapists’ location in this discourse. His relationship with them is determined by the discursively-constructed opposition of race and, when he strikes Pollux, history thus speaks through him too” (2006, 81). Characters are incapable of shedding the past, thus remaining in the cycle of violence.

³⁴ In Achmat Dangor’s *Bitter Fruit*, Sadrodien reflects: “[t]here are certain things people do not forget, or forgive. Rape is one of them. In ancient times, conquerors destroyed the will of those whom they conquered by impregnating the women. It is an ancient form of genocide [...] You conquer a nation by bastardizing its children” (Dangor 204).

³⁵ Kochin writes by “organizing the rape, Petrus asserts his permanence in the land against Lucy’s transience” (6).

³⁶ Kochin sees the “new inverted order, in which blacks act as colonial exploiters of their former white overlords, [... offers] no greater hope than the white racial colonialism it replaces” (6). Wearing the father’s clothes, Hendrik is allegorically stepping into the system.

³⁷ Following her rape, Lurie tries to impress upon his daughter that Petrus and his friends are trying to turn her into their slave (*Di* 159).

³⁸ Memmi writes: “[t]he colonized’s devaluation thus extends to everything that concerns him: to his land, which is ugly, unbeatably hot, amazingly cold, evil smelling; such discouraging geography that it condemns him to contempt and poverty, to eternal dependence” (111). Only after the colonizer arrives that the colonized begins to complain about his land in the same way he has seen the colonizer fault it.

³⁹ In South Africa, the white settlers have cultivated the land, and farming is an important source for the South African economy. The Magistrate’s comment is addressing a universal principle: settlers who are reluctant to part with illegally appropriated land tend to leave a wasteland behind.

⁴⁰ The system of *kibbutzim*, initially set up by European Jews when they settled in Palestine, was not solely a system to create communal settlements, but was a way of establishing a connection between people and an alien occupied land.

⁴¹ Although one of the claims of the Zionists who settled in Palestine was that they made the desert bloom, on leaving the Gaza Strip, the settlers, not only, demolished all the houses and infrastructure, but also uprooted the trees. Please refer to *BBC TV News*. BBC 24 Hours, UK. 23 Aug. 2005.

⁴² Even though the colonized has regained his ancestral land, the link between the individual and the land has been severed due to occupation. Negligence ensues as it takes years for the relationship between land and its native owner to be re-established. History has ceased to develop in a chronological way and another has been imposed breaking the chronology.

⁴³ Cooper writes: “[a]t various points [...], Lurie describes the attackers as “visitors;” the biblical ideas of visitation and annunciation combine with the diegetical sense of the ghost as visitor—arrhythmic frequenter—to situate the spiritual text of *Disgrace* in a mythopoeic framework [...]”(30). This uncanny connection between rapist and visitor, introduces a spectre-like quality. Are they the spectres who have come to haunt the perpetrators?

⁴⁴ Marais suggests: “after Lucy’s rape, Lurie begins to find it possible to sympathize with Melanie’s father” which is not altogether true (77). During his visit to Melanie’s family, he is imagining a threesome between the daughters and himself, unaware of the pain he has caused.

⁴⁵ Lurie has never accepted Petrus and his family as neighbours, too close for comfort. Their proximity is like sharing a house with strangers (*Di* 127). Kochin states: “[w]hites, out of guilt, treat black settlers such as Petrus unilaterally as neighbors, no matter how unneighborly the black settlers’ conduct, and perhaps this white guilt is justified. Petrus, for his part, is perfectly ready to manipulate this guilt as well”(7).

⁴⁶ In *Bitter Fruit*, Lydia states rape has made her the property of the rapist, living a shadow of a life (*Dangor* 17).

⁴⁷ Jacobus describes himself (*D* 71).

⁴⁸ Nussbaum writes: “[t]he female body is seen as a filthy zone of stickiness, sliminess, and pollution--disgusting to males because it is the evidence of the male’s own embodiment, animality, and mortality” (137).

⁴⁹ Krog states oppressors are also victims who also feel shame: “[...] Benzien was a victim of his inhumane working conditions, Kotze says. He was a good cop at Murder and Robbery. But he was so good that he was moved to Security where he had to create these torture methods to fulfil the expectations about him. This destroyed his whole sense of self” (116). Krog adds: that when Benzien’s “wife called [... to ask] Benzien what was wrong, he kept on saying: ‘I cannot tell you—I’m too ashamed.’ [...] Benzien suffers from a severe form of self-loathing”(116).

⁵⁰ Varadharajan sees the colonialist as “the quintessential bureaucrat [... and for him] colonization is a job like any other [...] to follow orders as best he can” (103).

⁵¹ Krog states: “[r]ace was meant to define the identity of the privileged, ethnicity the identity of the oppressed; race was urban, ethnicity rural” (171).

⁵² Head remarks here: “Coetzee [... is introducing] a hint of Aryan domination into the theme of the visual control” (37).

⁵³ In February 1899, Rudyard Kipling wrote his poem “The White Man’s Burden: the United States and the Philippine Islands” inciting the USA to expand its empire. The same attitude prevails with Jacobus Coetzee, who believes by usurping the land he is spreading civilization.

⁵⁴ Head states: “at the height of his humiliation, Jacobus retains his false sense of himself as an emissary of civilization” (39).

⁵⁵ Van der Hoven sees in Joseph a troubling figure “as in all cases of abjection, he inhabits a space where meaning threatens to collapse” (9).

⁵⁶ Incidentally, the name Bridget is derived from Celtic word, Brighid, which means strength, and also is a mythological Celtic goddess of fire and poetry. Blanche, the feminine of Blanc, means white or blank!

⁵⁷ The Afrikaner believed that “God has given South Africa to the Afrikaner” (Krog 90). In Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*, General Erasmus says: “this country was empty before our people arrived. *Everything, everything* you see, *we* built up from nothing. This is our place given to us by God [...] Even the apples we brought to this country” (124). Ironically, the apples later on in the novel smell sour (Behr 179). Likewise, the Zionist settlers believed that God granted them Palestine.

⁵⁸ Pinter refers to this belief: “God is good. God is great. God is good. My God is good. Bin Laden’s God is bad. His is a bad God. Saddam’s God was bad, except he didn’t have one. He was a barbarian. We are not barbarians” (Pinter).

Chapter 4:

"Ah for youth!" Ah for Immortality:"¹

That is no country for old men. The young
In one another's arms, birds in the trees,
--Those dying generations—at their song
[...]
An aged man is but a paltry thing,
A tattered coat upon a stick, (Yeats 163).

He sighs. The young in one another's arms, heedless,
engrossed in the sensual music. No country, this, for old
men. He seems to be spending a lot of time sighing.
Regret: a regrettable note on which to go out (*Di* 190).

Towards the end of *Disgrace*, David Lurie is heard echoing the words of W.B. Yeats poem "Sailing to Byzantium." The poem depicts an old man's utter feeling of dejection when juxtaposed against youth and the vibrancy of nature. These sentiments reflect Lurie's situation. Burdened with his advancing years along with accumulated regret at a life not fully realized, he can only sigh as he ponders his own exit. The Coetzeean character struggles with ageing. De Beauvoir views old age as an image that we are obliged to live by but "incapable of realizing" (335). This becomes more burdensome when confronted with a society that considers the "aged person [as] no more than a corpse under suspended sentence" (De Beauvoir 244). In "Illness as Metaphor," Sontag writes: "dying has come to be regarded in advanced industrial societies [...] a shameful, unnatural event" (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/8298>). In Coetzee's novels, the inability to accept does not stem from a fear of death but the senselessness of life itself, the inevitable humiliation of the years, the dwindling resources challenging the very being of the individual, and a hope for a dignified exit at the end of it all.

Adorno argues to think death is always the same "is as abstract as it is untrue. The manner of people's coming to terms with death varies all the way into their physical side, along with the concrete conditions of their dying" (*ND* 371). In Coetzee's novels, situations vary but certain weariness towards the act of dying is shared by all. Their individual impending deaths are private matters yet the

apprehension towards dying is common to all, each fearing that death can only accentuate the humiliation they have thus far encountered. Adorno further speculates:

At a final stage, in despair, death itself becomes property. Its metaphysical uplifting relieves us of its experience. Our current death metaphysics is nothing but society's impotent solace for the fact that social change has robbed men of what was once said to make death bearable for them, of the feeling of its epic unity with a full life (*ND* 369).

Towards the end, humans believe that they can symbolically possess death, make it bearable, as it evolves into the only reality that remains. All through their lives and as they grow older, they have survived with an overbearing sense that they have been robbed of a life, making the process of ageing the more difficult to endure. The guilt of not having lived a life to the full or not having been able to make any sense of it becomes more of a burden with age. They find that they are unable to hold on to the little resources that are left. Death itself is no longer the property of the individual as Adorno states, but evolves into an uncontrollable alien act that holds in its folds additional shame and further estrangement from society. Instead of feeling gratification towards having lived, they are confronted with an awkward dying body that provides them with no comfort. Death provides no consolation either. In an interview with Dutch Television, Coetzee says: "I can't say that I think of death as consoling" (<http://lnk.in/4rah>). What Coetzee's characters are faced with is an abject picture of the self that grows uglier with time, a sense of humiliation and shame resulting from that image. Furthermore, the less than perfect bodies of their aged selves are very disturbing. Unwillingly, they try to forget the images of their more attractive younger bodies. There is no consolation as they are unable to mourn earlier selves and the few dreams they indulge in provide them with only specters of episodes that they would have preferred to forget.

In this chapter, I would like to discuss how ageing for the Coetzeean characters adds another dimension to the overall humiliation experienced in their lives, progressing to occupy centre stage, as it dominates the later novels. I will also

discuss what the process actually entails for the characters as they try to hold death at bay, as they dread that it will be just as humiliating as the life that they have led. For this particular chapter, I will make use of a number of theorists I find relevant to Coetzee's treatise of ageing, even though each one approaches the subject from a different perspective. I will draw on Adorno's debate on death, Kristeva's theory of abjection, which I expand on to include the masculine as well as the feminine, Agamben's discussion of the human being at his minimalist stage, and Beauvoir's study of old age, which is basically socio-economical in nature. I will also refer to Rose's concern over the perfect body in Coetzee's work in her essay, "The Body of Evil." My treatment of the novels will be chronological. I will begin with *Age of Iron*, which I feel is a good transition from the third chapter, as it parallels the destruction of the state and its citizens at the end of the apartheid era and the ageing dying body of the individual. Here, I will look into the role of illness and the impending death of its heroine as a metaphor for a plagued country and a diseased body toying with the idea of death, a mingling of the private and the public. The other three novels to be considered are *The Master of Petersburg*, *Disgrace*, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* and *Slow Man*.

"Death is the only truth left" *Age of Iron*:²

My existence from day to day has become a matter of averting my eyes, of cringing. Death is the only truth left. Death is what I cannot bear to think. At every moment when I am thinking of something else, I am not thinking death, am not thinking of the truth (*AI* 26).

Elizabeth Curren leaves Dr. Syfret's clinic with the knowledge that the truth she has to face is that she is dying of cancer with no possibility of cure or treatment. Averting her eyes is the one thing she is capable of in the face of her impending death. Turning her eyes away is not only a futile exercise bringing her no relief but also useless in the presence of death which surrounds her from all sides. She is but a dying woman marking her remaining days in a country sinking into ruin.

This period in history compels Curren to become a witness to some troubled times in a nation that is no longer familiar. The apartheid system is on its last leg; the state is on the brink of civil war. Violence and death are the only realities that linger. As she lives by herself, she has to tackle the truth alone, her only daughter having immigrated. On her return from the doctor's clinic, Curren finds a homeless man at her doorstep, a messenger perhaps or a premonition of death. On seeing him, she describes her reaction: "[f]or a while I stood staring down on him, staring and smelling. A visitor, visiting himself on me on this of all days" (AI 4). Her choice of preposition, "on" following the verb "visit" evokes an uncanny kind of visitor, an apparition that somehow superimposes itself. As per the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the formal use of the verb visit with the preposition on or upon means "to cause damage to a place or to harm a person." The *OED*, however, has several definitions for the same verb: an archaic form of the word means to "come to (persons) in order to judge of their state or condition;" while another suggests "[t]o come to (persons) in order to observe or examine conduct or disposition; to make trial of; to subject to test or scrutiny." Moreover, a third meaning implies that the action is "in order to comfort or benefit" or "[t]o afflict or distress with sickness, poverty, or the like."

A few lines later Curren describes her dreaded news as a form of "reconnaissance" and her unexpected visit as an "annunciation." Curren is not quite sure what to make of that annunciation. Is Vercueil, as with the archaic meaning of the verb 'visit', someone to give a verdict on her state following the diagnosis of her illness; is he the one who will pronounce the judgement on her; has he come to comfort her or to afflict her with further pain? Alternatively, is he merely the *Vercueil* to watch over her during her old age, this period of transition when she waits "for nothing, paging idly through the store of memories" (AI 25). After all, she "did not choose him. He chose [...her]" (AI 12). When she sees him from the landing entering her study rummaging through her belongings and papers, she forsakes the idea that he may have been an angel: she tells us he is "[n]ot an angel, certainly. An insect, rather, emerging from behind the baseboards when the house is in darkness to forage for crumbs" (AI 14). Yet, part of her yearns for him to be an angel, a messenger who will deliver at once the

letter she is in the process of writing to her daughter and herself painlessly into the other life. Nevertheless, Curren speculates whether angels still exist or is this also a prerogative of a bygone era:

What chance is there [...] of finding my own angel to bring home and succour? None, I think. Perhaps in the countryside there are still one or two sitting against milestones in the heat of the sun, dozing, waiting for what chance will bring. Perhaps in the squatter camps. But not in Mill Street, not in the suburbs. The suburbs, deserted by the angels. When a ragged stranger comes knocking at the door he is never anything but a derelict, an alcoholic, a lost soul (*AI* 14).

Vercueil cannot be an angel as the person who shows up at her doorstep is in some ways her alter ego. His image reciprocates her ageing/decomposing body. When she looks into his green eyes, she sees herself in him. She tells her daughter that she has written six pages on an anonymous man precisely because he is and is not her (*AI* 9). Angels do not appear to an ageing person riddled with shame, but to helpless squatters. What is reflected back at her is the ageing image of her body and her tired soul. She equates the fight posed by the deteriorating state of her ailing body to land warding off the carrion birds, the “scavengers of Cape Town” (*AI* 5). The scavengers metamorphose into humans as she compares the carrions to the homeless in Cape Town “whose number never dwindles” and who unlike her “go bare and feel no cold. [...] sleep outdoors and do not sicken” (*AI* 5). She continues to depict them as “[c]leaners-up after the feast. Flies, dry-winged, glazen-eyed, pitiless. [... Her] heirs” (*AI* 5). Curren’s diseased body can only have insects for its successors.

Kristeva states that the abject “lies outside, beyond the set, and does not seem to agree to the [...master’s] rules of the game. And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (*PH* 2). Challenge is initially introduced as a collapse between the essence of the self and other, the “breaking down of a world that has erased its borders” (*PH* 4). Furthermore, Kristeva states that:

The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us (*PH* 4).

Seeing the corpse is not only upsetting but it also breaks the existing barriers between subject and object, the human and the animal and death and life. With its presence, death encroaches on life, a harsh reminder of our mortality. Nussbaum explains that a buffer of quasi-humans is needed to “stand between us and our own animality, then we are one step further away from being animal and mortal ourselves” (107). Kristeva’s corpse does not respect any borders and hence disturbs any preset order. In the case of Curren, the corpse metaphorically presents itself in the form of the cancer that is spreading within her body. The barrier between health and illness has been erased. Kristeva adds that abjection is “immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles,” adjectives fitting for describing cancer. Sontag notes:

The controlling metaphors in descriptions of cancer are not, in fact, drawn from economics but from the language of warfare. Thus cancer cells do not simply multiply; they are "invasive." [...] Cancer cells "colonize" from the original tumor to far sites in the body. [...] Treatment also has a military flavor. Radiotherapy uses the metaphors of aerial warfare; patients are "bombarded" with toxic rays. And chemotherapy is chemical warfare, using poisons (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/8283>).

A foreign assault on the diseased body makes it no longer familiar. On a number of occasions Curren talks of herself as if referring to another; one of the most poignant images is the one she describes herself as a “crone crouched over a boy, her hands sticky with his blood: a vile image” (*AI* 64). The body becomes an alien matter with rules of its own, over which the master has lost control; it evolves into the other. It represents the abject that the self begins to resent. As the body is no longer familiar, Curren tries to overcome this estrangement in writing through the letter she composes to her daughter. Kristeva states that two

options present themselves when facing “the truth of the intolerable,” “displacement through denial” or “sublimation” (*PH* 129). Curren chooses the latter. By writing, she hopes to transcend the reality of her dying body, an option which Rose does not consider possible for the Coetzeean protagonist (2003, 128).

Cancer itself is a chronic illness and Coetzee’s choosing to inflict his character with it is not altogether random. It can function as an analogy to life itself, which is painful yet one is obliged to go through with it. The process is agonizing and ends in death. The cancer gnawing at her decaying body can also be viewed as a metaphor for the ills of the decomposing society she witnesses before her. Sontag remarks: “[i]llnesses have always been used as metaphors to express a sense of what was wrong socially” (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/8266>). Curren compares her ailing body to the ills pervading the society around her. Curren’s cancer is real and so are the upheavals that are happening in her country. Her body signifies the dying state. I believe that Curren’s body is in effect mirroring the situation of a system that has well extended its limit and is currently witnessing its own demise. The embodied guilt stemming from her country’s cruel history becomes another reason for her suffering.

Like Magda, Curren begins to view her body in a fragmented state. Curren’s ailing body in the fragmentary state she envisions functions as an allegory of a failed whole. By sectionalizing her body, Curren has inadvertently contributed to the shattered image she has of herself, a form of self-mutilation that can only add to her shame. Consequently, the state of her body is unsalvageable psychologically or physically, indirectly mimicking the prevailing situation in her country. In her letter, she paints a dismal picture of what the country and its people have been undergoing; the collapse is on more than one level:

It is the roaming gangs I fear, the sullen-mouthed boys, rapacious as sharks, on whom the first shade of the prison house is already beginning to close. Children scorning childhood, the time of wonder, the growing time of the soul. Their souls, their organs of wonder, stunted, petrified. And on the other side of the great divide their white-cousins soul-stunted too, spinning themselves tighter into their sleepy cocoons (*AI* 7).

No growth or progress is possible as a sense of community is absent. Communities, living parallel lives, fearful of one another remain. Curren at once ponders the chaos plaguing her homeland and the justification behind the illness that is devouring her internally. She describes herself:

I am hollow, I am a shell. To each of us fate sends the right disease. Mine a disease that eats me out from inside. Were I to be opened up they would find me hollow as a doll, a doll with a crab sitting inside licking its lips, dazed by the flood of light (*AI* 112).

She senses that inside of her lies an alien body, devouring her from within. She wonders if the ravenous cancer is the price she has to pay for crimes committed by others. On another occasion, Curren is heard questioning if her malady is due to some sin or an injustice she has committed or the debt she has incurred for having been privileged in earlier times; and now it is the time of reckoning. She is no longer entitled to pass judgements; instead, she awaits the verdicts that will be passed on her in due course. She tells us that it is “Florence [her maid, who] is the judge [...]. The court belongs to Florence; it is I who pass under review” (*AI* 142). In an attempted dialogue with Florence’s son, she tells him:

You know I am sick. Do you know what is wrong with me? I have cancer, I have cancer from the accumulations of shame I have endured in my life. That is how cancer comes about: from self-loathing the body turns malignant and begins to eat away at itself (*AI* 145).

The body Curren is referring to is not merely her physical body but her country’s. In her mind, the two become intermingled. The accumulated shame stems from having not voiced a stance on the events that have happened in her country. Guilty of her silence, she begins to despise her body, claiming that the cancer is but a manifestation of this guilt. Sontag writes: “[i]llness as a metaphor for political disorder is one of the oldest notions of political philosophy. If it is plausible to compare the *polis* to an organism, then it is plausible to compare civil disorder to illness” (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/8266>). This is exactly what Curren is attempting to do, an endeavour at understanding why she has been

chosen to be a victim of a deadly disease. She even queries whether the cancer has been sent by Saturn, identified in mythology as the Greek god Cronus, an antiquity god ruling over the golden age. She comments:

The sickness that now eats at me is dry, bloodless, slow and cold, sent by Saturn. There is something about it that does not bear thinking of. To have fallen pregnant with these growths, these cold, obscene swellings; to have carried and carried this brood beyond any natural term, unable to bear them, unable to state their hunger: children inside me eating more every day, not growing but bloating, toothed, clawed, forever cold and ravenous (*AI* 54).

Could Saturn be taking revenge on her for having lived through better times, or alternatively is it the Saturn who is associated with the melancholy that plagues her in old age, reminding her of the shame that she has to endure for having been privileged in the past. Walter Benjamin examines the link between Saturn and melancholy:

Like melancholy, Saturn too, this spirit of contradictions, endows the soul, on the one hand, with sloth and dullness, on the other, with the power of intelligence and contemplation; like melancholy, Saturn also constantly threatens those who are subject to him [...] with the dangers of depression or manic ecstasy (*TOGTD* 149).

Saturn has undoubtedly endowed Curren with the ability for analyzing the metaphor that connects her dying body with the moribund state of her country. The greater awareness makes her, however, more predisposed to the ills that are at once internal and external. Having lived in the Age of Innocence, in:

[...] a time before [...her daughter's] time, when, passing down the street on a hot Saturday afternoon, you might hear, faint but dogged from a front parlor, the maiden of the household groping among the keys for that yearned-for, elusive resonance. Days of charm and sorrow and mystery too! Days of Innocence! (*AI* 24).

Graham Huggan sees a mythological aspect to the events in the novel, which allows Curren to withdraw partially from a dying world. He writes:

The dialectical forces of history are reassimilated within a universal design of myth; an apocalyptic Age of Iron in which 'men shall give their praise to violence and the doer of evil' allows Mrs Curren to justify her own withdrawal from a 'dying' world, to legitimate her retreat into an imagined past, and to sanction her condemnation of the 'senseless violence' of civil war (Huggan 198).

But as the "Age of Iron is characterised by disease and death, by deception as well as violence; its abandonment to vice, [...] is by no means certain whether death is to be followed by rebirth: whether the Myth of Five Ages constitutes a degenerative sequence or a regenerative cycle" (Huggan 196-197). I do not speculate a rebirth; instead, a continual regression towards minimalism. Nevertheless, what is certain is that having inadvertently ignored the plight of her country and having lived in a bygone era and having failed to love "the unlovable," Curren feels her malady is directly correlated to the ills of South Africa (*AI* 136). She tells Vercueil:

A crime was committed long ago. How long ago? I do not know. But longer ago than 1916, certainly. So long ago that I was born into it. It is part of my inheritance. It is part of me, I am part of it. Like every crime it had its price. That price, I used to think, would have to be paid in shame: in a life of shame and a shameful death, unlamented, in an obscure corner. I accepted that. I did not try to set myself apart. Though it was not a crime I asked to be committed, it was committed in my name (*AI* 164).

Fiona Probyn argues that "Elizabeth sees her cancer as not only a personal indictment but also as a (projected) public event; a broader sign of South Africa's "illness" in the wake of apartheid" (*CEJMC* 215). Huggan views the Age of Iron as a transitional phase "in which she and her contemporaries are to be forcibly supplanted, sacrificed for the greater good of the emergent nation" (200). I feel the sacrifice is long overdue and they are now settling the account. I would also

argue that Curren's guilt although partially due to a historical crime over which she has had no control, is also the private feeling of being "[n]ot properly born: a liminal creature, unable to breathe in water, that lacks the courage to leave the sea behind and become a dweller on land" (*AI* 139). By leaving the sea, she has to confront living and with it comes disgrace. The advancement of the years has paradoxically brought her more awareness and shame. Curren is conscious of the latter and describes the compromise that is needed in order to survive the times: "[p]erhaps [she] should simply accept that that is how one must live from now on: in a state of shame" (*AI* 86).³ She adds: "[t]here is something degrading about the way it all ends—degrading not only to us but to the idea we have of ourselves, of humankind" (*AI* 140).

Ageing brings about physical deterioration and diminishing faculties. Having no control over either process is what Curren finds most disconcerting. Comparing the condition of her ailing body to the state of her country makes the whole process a bit more acceptable, introducing a sense of resignation. Sartre explores the notion of shame that arises from one's recognition of one's degraded state due to a loss of autonomy:

Pure shame is not a feeling of being this or that guilty object but in general of being an object; that is, of recognizing myself in this degraded, fixed, and dependent being which I am for the Other. Shame is the feeling of an original fall, not because of the fact that I may have committed this or that particular fault but simply that I have "fallen" into the world in the midst of things and that I need the mediation of the Other in order to be what I am (265).

The ageing body along with its diminishing faculties forces the human being to depend on others which is humiliating for the Coetzian character who usually exists on the fringe of society. Nussbaum sees that in "shame, one feels inadequate, lacking some desired type of completeness or perfection. But of course one must then have already judged this is a type of completeness or perfection that one rightly ought to have" (184). The perfection that the Coetzian character seeks is to be able to live in dignity and not to depend on others for

survival; old age and illness deny them this privilege. The loss of the earlier perfect or not so perfect yet youthful self is disturbing in more than one respect. The characters are conscious of the image they project onto a world that favours youth and alienates the aged. Moreover, debility that comes with age introduces a need for dependence on others, which they find disturbing. Gradually, however, compromise infiltrates their lives, not only forcing them to subsist at the mercy of others but also to accept standards that are less than perfect.

The easiest way to deal with the ageing body is to fragment it and look at it in segments and not as a whole. In this manner, one can project the abject on that particular part, at once alienating oneself from the contemptible humiliating image of degradation. Equally, however, the sectioning of the body makes the ritual of mourning very difficult. Inability to mourn can culminate in the incapacity to live or to die. Durrant describes the implication of this failure:

While successful mourning is a movement of transcendence that allows the soul or spirit of the dead a kind of secular afterlife in the memory of the living, unsuccessful mourning is the failure to move beyond the corpse, beyond the fact of physical death. While successful mourning is a movement of idealization in which the dead are abstracted into a memory, unsuccessful mourning incorporates the dead as a foreign body, as a material trace (*PNWM* 31).

Curren is incapable of mourning her ailing body, and hence her country. The suffering forbids her from putting either to rest. Mourning provides a sense of closure and a possibility of moving on. She fails. The letter is an unsuccessful attempt at mourning both states. Inability to mourn does not grant her the aptitude needed for the transcendence of the evil that is all consuming. She remains in limbo, clinging to the memory of her mother's body, as a form of affirmation that she has once existed. She recounts:

I bring it forward now for you to see—why I cling so tightly to the memory of my mother. For if she did not give me life, no one did. I cling not just to the memory of her but to her herself, to her body, to my birth from her body into the world (*AI* 110).

De Beauvoir writes that the reason the aged turn back to their childhood is that they are possessed by it: “[s]ince it has never ceased to dwell in them, they recognize themselves in their childhood”—they fail to identify with their ageing body (414). The Age of Innocence, representing Curren’s childhood, has been usurped by the Age of Iron, which is characterized by evil, the diseased dying body itself a reflection of such times.⁴

Rose argues that the Coetzeean protagonist considers the dying body the ultimate evil, “that no ablution or supplication can save” (2003, 127).⁵ In addition, at the beginning of her essay, Rose states that evil “is a moveable feast. It has the strange characteristic of being at once an absolute and something far closer to what linguistics calls a ‘shifter’” (2003, 115). The ageing/dying body is the ultimate evil, which “[n]o one wants to wear” (2003, 117). Rose suggests that Coetzee rejects the ageing body, as it is less than the ideal. The body is evil simply because of the shame it has brought onto the individual. Consequently, someone like Curren can only try to shift the evil from the whole to the parts: her hand is no longer a hand but a hook and her legs evolve into clumsy ugly stilts she has to take with her at night (*AI* 12-13). The allegation of evil no longer stems from within. It has now shifted and imposed on the fragments occupying the periphery. At them, one can throw the blame and condemnation. In this manner, one aspires to fight it, as it is no longer a central part. By making it the other, one hopes it can be eradicated. Rose writes that when one accuses “someone of evil, history disappears” (2003, 116). By failing to understand the reason behind the evil, one is therefore seen as corrupting and manipulating history. Another history is written, outside of the self. Similarly, when accusation is thrown at an alienated segment, reality may change. The repulsion that is caused by the ageing body can somehow be made less poignant; “[o]bscenity [which the ageing body represents] must remain off-stage” (Rose 2003, 120).

Unfortunately, there is no recourse; the ageing/dying body comes back to haunt Curren during her days and insomniac nights. She depicts the hospital’s wards that she passes through on her way to visit Bheki’s friend as the “house of shadow and suffering which [... one] must pass on the way to death” (*AI* 69-70).

The novel begins with her walking through an alley, once alive with children now embodies death “where windblown leaves pile up and rot” (*AI* 3). Even the afterlife is depicted in her thoughts as “a great crowded bus on its way from nowhere to nowhere” (*AI* 30). Both are suspended zones. Sombrely, she is now projecting death on everything she sees; the words that once have aided her in “[g]iving voice to the dead” are now drops fashioned by her ageing body (*AI* 192, 9). Her one embrace with Vercueil emits the vapours of death, a cold and sterile caress where there is “no warmth to be had” (198). They are held in an embrace that evokes death. Likewise, the raging civil war and all its ills defer any normalcy that is to be had in the country. The future is but a continual deferral of death.

“I died but my death failed to arrive” *The Master of Petersburg*:⁶

This is death, death coming before its time, come not to overwhelm him and devour him but simply to be with him. It is like a dog that has taken up residence with him, a big grey dog, blind and deaf and stupid and immovable (*TMP* 52).

The feeling of being continuously accompanied by death is a condition that haunts the protagonist, Fyodor Mikhailovich Dostoevsky, in Coetzee’s novel, *The Master of Petersburg*.⁷ Set in Russia, the novel partially draws on real aspects of Dostoevsky’s life and ōuvres, specifically *The Devils*.⁸ The novel begins with the Russian author’s return to St. Petersburg following the mysterious death of his stepson on October 1869, after a long self-imposed exile. The event assumes larger implications than the mere death of a student or even a stepson; more importantly, it becomes the reminder of his own mortality. Following his arrival, he comments:

Since the news came of his son’s death, something has been ebbing out of him that he thinks of as firmness. I am

the one who is dead, he thinks; or rather, I died but my death failed to arrive [...] He is being carried by dead water, a dead stream (TMP 19-20).

Dostoevsky not only embodies all the anxiety and trepidation that are exhibited by the ageing Coetzeean character but also demonstrates the specifics that are peculiar to the male hero as opposed to the female heroine, a point I will be addressing, namely in the section on *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*. Furthermore, I will argue that the epilepsy, which has plagued the real and the fictive Dostoevsky, is employed by Coetzee in this case not only to mirror the ills of a country as in *Age of Iron*, but also to question the evil that accompanies the process of writing. I will look closely into the implication of ageing on the ailing Dostoevsky, the man and the author, along with his inability to mourn plus the manner in which he conducts himself when confronted with the ravages of time.

Rachel Lawlan writes that “Coetzee’s Fyodor is a hybrid creature, a construction containing these recurrent preoccupations of Dostoevsky combined with a certain interpretation of Dostoevsky’s character of identity” (144). The anxieties that haunt Dostoevsky in this novel reflect those of an ageing author, concern over the diminishing capability of writing and the demonic aspect of the writing process. Stephen Watson sees the diabolic at the heart of the writing exercise:

Dramatised through another of Coetzee’s minutely realised theatres of cruelty, *The Master of Petersburg* is a meditation--imbued with the passion of the guilt-ridden, the despairing, the damned--of the diabolism that can lie at the heart of the creative process itself (49).

The writing process becomes more difficult with age both mentally and physically. He describes his physical state: “[s]tiff shoulders humped over the writing-table, and the ache of a heart slow to move. A tortoise heart” (TMP 153). This hinders Dostoevsky from creativity and he begins searching for a muse. At one stage, Dostoevsky equates the demonic with the youthful energy that he no longer possesses but sees in others, such as Nechaev (TMP 111). The demons that haunt the old Dostoevsky become more evil with the passage of time. In

addition, the tension that exists between old and young, is for him a continual struggle, “a war: the old against the young, the young against the old” (*TMP* 247). The apprehension between the old and the young, “the children against those who are not children,” is evident in all the parent/child relationships that exist in Coetzee’s novels (*TMP* 63).⁹ Both Pavel’s and Dostoevsky’s accounts of the relationship expose the hostility that has existed between them all along. The story Dostoevsky chooses to remember from his time in exile in Siberia is of a man who has violated and strangled his own daughter (*TMP* 124-125). Dostoevsky’s observation on the convict’s story is in line with the struggle he sees between generations, especially pertaining to fathers and children. He comments: “[f]athers devouring children, raising them well in order to eat them like delicacies afterwards” (*TMP* 125).

Even Pavel’s corpse strikes a discord with him, evoking the death that is inside of him; he comments how: “[h]e is intensely aware of the youthful body beside his, no doubt strong with a wiry, untiring kind of strength” (*TMP* 118-119). The threat of the youthful corpse makes him want to “grasp him about the waist and tip him over the edge into the void” (*TMP* 119). It is death inside of him that he wants to throw over the edge--“death, only death [...] a metaphor for nothing [as death] is death” (*TMP* 118). For Kristeva, the presence of a corpse is a testimonial of what one has had to “thrust aside in order to live” (*PH* 3). Dostoevsky’s need to thrust the corpse over the edge is his need to expel the encroachment of death onto his life, to rid himself of what is abject within. The abject within him is embodied by Thanatos, the irrational death instinct he cannot shed in favour of Eros. Freud tells us that the instincts “operate against the purpose of the other instincts, which leads, by reason of their function, to death; and this fact indicates that there is an opposition between them and the other instincts [...] It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm” (*XVII* 40-41). Moreover, expulsing the corpse can be viewed as a form of self-preservation. Adorno finds the need to self-preserve problematic. He writes:

The only trouble with self-preservation is that we cannot help suspecting the life to which it attaches us of turning

into something that makes us shudder: into a specter, a piece of the world of ghosts, which our waking consciousness perceives to be non-existent. The guilt of a life [...] will strangle other life [...] [T]his guilt is irreconcilable with being (*ND* 364).

The remorse arises from being alive in the midst of death. For Dostoevsky, blame becomes more pertinent when his ageing living body is juxtaposed against the dead youthful body of his stepson. At the same time, Pavel's dying accentuates the presence of the invisible spectre of death. Accepting the spectre of death is akin to identifying with an invisible presence. By identifying with the invisible, one risks becoming undetectable, as one oscillates between the worlds of death and life, which is but an ineffectual attempt at holding on to life. Dostoevsky's sexual exploits become part of this fluctuation between the life and death instincts, and a vain endeavour at self-preservation. His existence becomes that of a ghost, standing at the platform unable to recognize himself (*TMP* 116, 119). His relationship with Anna, in the proximity of her daughter, is a feeble effort at reasserting his youth. However, it can also be seen as another attempt at annihilating his sexual drives to ascertain the death that is within, for the guilt manifested by the death of his stepson is all consuming, turning him into "a ghost, an angry, abandoned spirit" (*TMP* 116).

Dostoevsky may vacillate between both instincts but ultimately his descent into the underworld is what triumphs. During their first encounter, Anna and Dostoevsky "spend their night together in his son's room [...] and it excites him too that they should be doing such fiery, dangerous work with the child asleep in the next room" (*TMP* 56). This act is an allusion to Stavorgin's confession in *The Devils*, added as an appendix in later publications; in it Nikolai writes that he purposely leaves the door open when he makes love to one of his mistresses, the maid, so that Matryosha, the daughter of the lodgers in the next room witnesses (Dostoyevsky 683). A more direct reference to this episode is made at the end of *The Master of Petersburg*, as Coetzee's Dostoevsky begins writing *The Devils*. He scribbles: "[t]hroughout, he is aware of the door open a crack, and the child watching. His pleasure is acute; it communicates itself to the girl; never before have they experienced such dark sweetness" (*TMP* 244).¹⁰ The operative word

here is the adjective “dark.” Having the girl next door not only juxtaposes youth with old age but also introduces the demonic aspect of Dostoevsky’s character. His lovemaking, “the foretaste of death,” as with his descent into the underworld, is but a dive into the diabolic world that at once draws and torments him, for according to him “[w]e live most intensely while we are falling” (*TMP* 63, 121). In the early pages of the novel, whilst in the cemetery, he reveals a desire to “take this woman [Anna] by the arm, drag her behind the gatekeeper’s hut, lift her dress, couple with her” (*TMP* 11). The juxtaposition of the living and the dead induces desire, resulting in an association of coitus with death. One of the lovemaking scenes clearly depicts this notion along with emphasizing the decaying fragmented body:

They make love as though under sentence of death, self-absorbed, purposeful. There are moments when he cannot say which of them is which, which the man, which the woman, when they are skeletons, assemblages of bone and ligament pressed one into the other, mouth to mouth, eye to eye, ribs interlocked, leg-boned intertwined (*TMP* 225).

The very fact that he chooses to refer to the bodies in a segmentary anatomical fashion is somewhat unappealing. His body along with the corresponding body are no longer whole but viewed as fragments, on which he can project his own abjection. The sections become the other that exists in parallel to the whole and not an extension of it. As with Curren, the segment can be detached from the whole, absorbing part of the ugliness that lies within. Alternatively, as Anna suggests her body becomes the “vehicle” to be used “enroute to [her] child”—an empty phial through which he searches for his lost youth (*TMP* 85, 231). The affirmation of sexual prowess is a favoured attempt by older men to try to delay the onset of ageing. However, his failing capabilities nag him as he remarks:

He is conscious of his age; in his voice he hears no trace of the erotic edge that women would once upon a time respond to. Instead there is something to which he does not care to give a name. A cracked instrument, a voice that has undergone its second breaking (*TMP* 55).

The “cracked instrument,” with its phallic resonance, must aid him in maintaining part of his youth, affirming his *raison d’être*. The abject dying body becomes more acceptable to its owner if especially desired by a much younger other. In this instant, however, the attempt to establish a link with the child is akin to his using the mother in order to reach his dead stepson. On one occasion, he tells us: “through her, he passes into darkness and into the waters where his son floats among the other drowned,” a simultaneous attempt at life and death (*TMP* 58). His wanting to connect with his son presents a further complexity. He has not come to mourn his stepson, as he claims, but himself. For this reason, he is unable to mourn either. He has long neglected his stepson, moving him from “school to school” in spite of his promise not to abandon him (*TMP* 5, 15). In some ways, he tries to expulse his own soul and replace it by that of young Pavel. Subliminally, the demonic element is at play, exchanging his despairing soul with that of a young man, in Dorian Gray fashion.¹¹ Marais views Anna’s role as both “an inspiration and an exorcism, with Anna Sergeyevna occupying the dual role of muse and exorcist” (1996, 85). Gary Adelman perceives Dostoevsky’s visit to Petersburg in itself a search for a muse; to be able to mourn Pavel is to be able to write. He hopes that the muse will awaken the voices that are inside of him. He remarks:

Ostensibly, Dostoyevsky has come to Petersburg to grieve: but, subconsciously, he also is searching for a constellation of events and emotions that will lead to his next novel. Pavel, all along, will be that occasion, grieving for Pavel, a means of getting Dostoyevsky into furious possession by the Muse [...] (Adelman 353).

Possession takes on various forms: the demons that populate his brain during a seizure and the devil he wants to be possessed by, in order to regain his abilities and youth. He defines the devil as “the instant at the onset of the climax when the soul is twisted out of the body and begins its downward spiral into oblivion” (*TMP* 230). Rose questions if “the ultimate evil [is] then a dying body that no ablution or supplication can save” (127). The ageing body’s functions are a source of nausea and repulsion. On numerous times, he dons Pavel’s “white suit.

Though the jacket is loose and the trousers too long [...],” in order that he may camouflage his decadent body and possess the soul of a younger man, a quest to reach out for the muse (*TMP* 19). From the moment he visits Pavel’s room, he not only steps into the domain of his dead son, but also partially usurps the role of the latter. As he suffers one of his seizures, he reflects: “being alive is, at this moment, a kind of nausea. [For this reason he] wants to be dead. More than that: to be extinguished, annihilated” (*TMP* 16-17). Shulevitz remarks that “[o]ld age is for Coetzee what nausea was for Sartre: our defining condition, the necessary horror that grants us access to a moral existence” (<http://lnk.in/3wr4>). The latter is invariably accompanied by the feeling of guilt; here, it is born of a life-long neglect for a stepson, an inability to mourn the person whom he has never known and the fact that he is still alive. The guilt that becomes embedded within him transforms into mourning turned inwards at himself, for his diminishing faculties and abject body. To flee, Dostoevsky alludes to a dive into the underworld, which is reminiscent of Orpheus’ descent as “he gets up and stumbles to the door [...] finds a staircase and descends, but loses the way to the alley” (*TMP* 105). He fails to obey the rule of not glancing back and is condemned to the world of Hades (*TMP* 54). His descent into the underworld is in search for a body to mourn, be it Pavel’s or his own.

As with Kristeva’s corpse, the weary body becomes “the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life” (Kristeva *PH* 4). He tells us that the “face in the mirror” that is projected back at him “is the face of a stranger from the past. Already I was old” (*TMP* 9). Kristeva states:

I experience abjection only if an Other has settled in place and instead of what will be “me.” Not at all an other with whom I identify and incorporate, but an Other who precedes and possesses me, and through such possession causes me to be (*PH* 10).

The “me” for Coetzee is an earlier more desirable younger self. The other that imposes itself in its place is the deteriorating self-loathing being. For Kristeva the abject lies with the maternal while with Coetzee it lies with what the being has to become, irrespective of the gender. The living and the dead, the aged and

the young, exist along parallel lines, two opposing worlds clearly defined, forbidden to mingle. When he is in the company of a young person, he is not only engulfed by the feeling of the other but also with the ugliness of the image, of his ageing self. The author tells us that:

In Matryona's company he is keenly aware that his clothes have begun to smell, that his skin is dry and flaky, that the dental plates he wears click when he talks. His haemorrhoids, too, cause him endless discomfort. The iron constitution that took him through Siberia is beginning to crack; and the spectacle of decay must be all the more distasteful to a child, herself finical about cleanliness, in whose eyes he has supplanted a being of godlike strength and beauty. When her playmates ask about the funereal visitor who refuses to pack his belongings and leave, what, he wonders, does she reply (*TMP* 66-67).¹²

An embodiment of death, he is incapable of departing. At best, the ageing process has to be tolerated in order that one may regain some of the lost youth.

Earlier, I have examined how Curren's body in its dying state is an epitome of the ills that are troubling her nation. The same notion resurfaces in *The Master of Petersburg*, where Dostoevsky's ageing-epileptic body mirrors the tribulations of his motherland, Russia. In a conversation with his landlady and lover, Anna, he tells her:

But when I talk about saving myself from hurt, when I talk about why I am here, I do not mean here in this apartment or in Petersburg. I mean that I am not here in Russia in this time of ours to live a life free of pain. I am required to live—what shall I call? -- a Russian life: a life inside Russia, or with Russia inside me, and whatever Russia means. It is not a fate I can evade (*TMP* 221).

The turmoil that is at the heart of Russia inhabits the inside of his being, making it impossible to escape. A parallel is once again drawn between the illness within the body and the ills within the state. The evil that resides in Nechaev and his nihilist movement is compared to the demons that populate his mind, the same implication being of the ageing afflicted body mirroring the evil residing in the

country. On more than one occasion, Dostoevsky is seen referring to his epilepsy as: “the emblematic sickness of the age. The madness is in him and he is in the madness; they think each other; what they call each other, whether madness or epilepsy or vengeance or the spirit of the age, is of no consequence” (*TMP* 235). Marais extends the sickness to include writing, “Through applying the story to the artist and the artistic process itself, Coetzee suggests that Dostoevsky and his work are not immune to the “sickness” of Russia. Both are a part of Russia and are therefore also “sick” ” (1996, 85). As with South Africa, the *ancien régime* in Russia is failing, destroyed from the inside and plagued by the evil manifested by the nihilists movement, led by Nechaev, whom Dostoevsky describes as “the Mongol left behind in the Russian soul after the greatest nihilist of all has withdrawn into the wastes of Asia” (*TMP* 60). Such a revolutionary “has no interests, no feelings, no attachments, not even a name [...] In the depths of his being he has cut all links with the civil order, with law and morality. He continues to exist in society only in order to destroy it” (*TMP* 60-61). The evil, prevalent in the society, is compared to the demons/seizures that Dostoevsky feels are residing in his head.

Marais states that “Coetzee’s application of the story of the Gadarene swine to Dostoevsky’s artistic response to nihilism emerges when this character is described as shaking ‘his head as if to rid it of a plague of devils’” (1996, 85). The reference to the Biblical story in *The Devils* occurs when the ailing Verkhovensky demands that Ulitin quote him the Biblical story in *St. Luke*:

And there was an herd of many swine feeding on the mountain: and they besought him that he would suffer them enter into them. And he suffered them. Then went the devils out of the man, and entered into the swine: and the herd ran violently down a steep place into the lake, and were choked (Dostoyevsky 647).

In *The Bible*, the man is cured of the devils plaguing him in contrast to Dostoevsky who cannot shake off the epileptic seizures reminding him of the possession that has taken hold on him. In lieu of exorcising the demons, he has opened up the door for the arrivant, as can be inferred from the following:

It takes him no more than ten minutes to write the scene, with not a word blotted. In the final version it would have to be fuller, but for present purposes this is enough. He gets up, leaving the two pages open on the table.

It is an assault upon the innocence of a child. It is an act for which he can expect no forgiveness. With it he has crossed the threshold. Now God must speak, now God dare no longer remains silent. To corrupt a child is to force God (*TMP* 249).

Rose states that evil “is tempting because the devil, however despicable to the sanguine mind, takes on the aura of a god” (2003, 123). For Dostoevsky to be able to challenge God, he has to assume the role of an equal, the devil. In effect, he has left himself exposed to further possession. In the last page of the novel, he no longer recognizes himself: if he “were to look in a mirror now, he would not be surprised if another face were to loom up, staring back blindly at him” for he has lost his place in his soul (*TMP* 250, 249). He tells us that this may be great price to pay, an allusion to Matroyona’s telling Nechaev that they “pay him thousands of roubles to write books and he keeps it all for himself” (*TMP* 157). Consequently, to create again he has to sell his soul, although it “seems to him a great price to pay” (*TMP* 250). He reiterates what the girl tells him, but the quote uncannily is attributed to the dead Matroyona in *The Devils* who has committed suicide and not to the Matroyona in Coetzee’s novel who is still alive. The threshold between life and death, age and youth has been erased. Ultimately, Coetzee’s Dostoevsky has allowed the possession of demons to take hold of him, succumbing to them, thus betraying everyone, trading his soul in order that he may write again.

Once again, he wears Pavel’s suit, but this time “the face [that] is revealed, [is] the ox-face of Baal” (*TMP* 238). Baal is the Canaan god of fertility who in later myths assumes the role of the god of rain. When Baal defeats Yam, the sea god, and expands his sovereign power on a larger realm, he no longer recognizes the authority of the god Mot, god of death, the desert and the underworld. In order to challenge him, Mot invites Baal “to his abode in order to taste his own fare, mud. Terrified and unable to avoid the dreadful summons to the land of the dead, Baal coupled with a calf in order to strengthen himself for the impending

ordeal, and then set out. El and the other gods donned funeral garments poured ashes on their heads, and mutilated their limbs” (Cotterell <http://lnk.in/3wq7>). It is for this reason that the face reflected in the mirror is foreign to Dostoevsky; the face belongs to the ox-faced Baal who challenges the god of death. For a brief moment, the aged Dostoevsky triumphs over his old body with its failing capabilities as he begins to write *The Devils*, but having “to give his soul in return” what he has gained “tastes like gall” (TMC 250). As with Baal, he concedes defeat to the god of the underworld, Mot (TMC 250).

“I am a dead person” *Disgrace*:¹³

The demons do not pass him by. He has nightmares of his own in which he wallows in a bed of blood, or, panting, shouting soundlessly, runs from the man with the face like a hawk, like a Benin mask, like Thoth (*Di* 121).

As with Dostoevsky Lurie has his own demons with which he has to contend. What separates him from the face that is often portrayed wearing the head of an ibis is the mask. In Egyptian mythology, Thoth is the patron of knowledge and the inventor of writing. More importantly, he is the divine record keeper and the mediator between the worlds of the dead and the living. Having written *The Book of the Dead*, Thoth is assigned to question the souls of the deceased. Mortality not only haunts Lurie in his waking hours but also in his sleep. He runs from the record keeper, unwilling to concede to death, reluctant to be questioned over the deeds in his life. For Kimberely Wedeven Segall, the figure of Thoth represents “an early precursor of Lurie’s sense of guilt in the figure of the judge. Symbolically the traumatic sublime changes a figure of female oppression and a figure of fear into the spectre of judgement” (44).

Lurie obsesses over the spectre of judgement, death and the implication of growing old. In this section, I will be addressing how ageing coupled with a sense of alienation intensify the protagonist’s indignity, and what the diminishing faculties and the decaying body represent specifically for the Coetzean male. Heyns sees shame as constructed on the unavoidable aspect of death: “The shame

of it, the disgrace of dying: that is what renders, in this universe, all plots perverse, in that they are all constructed on that one great unavoidable certainty” death (63). Swales, however, sees shame as emerging if “efficiency is disturbed” (15). I believe that the predominating factor that gives rise to shame in Coetzee is the ageing body.

Rose states:

Coetzee’s occupation with the ageing dying body gives us the other face—or underside—of transcendence. It suggests that the issue, in *Disgrace* but not only in *Disgrace*, is not just one of the moral turpitude but also of physical turpitude, a turpitude of the body (2003, 128).

Coetzee has often associated the ageing body with abjectness. Lurie affirms this fact: “[a]fter a certain age one is simply no longer appealing, and that’s that. One just has to buckle down and live out the rest of one’s life. Serve one’s time” (*Di* 67).¹⁴ To equate living with serving time suggests that a crime has been committed. The crime arises from the ageing body that needs to be veiled and not flaunted. Not only is the body no longer desired but it also becomes a source of humiliation and shame. Nussbaum writes that “[s]hame causes hiding; it is also a way in which people hide aspects of their humanity from themselves” (296). At the beginning of the novel, Lurie is only subconsciously aware of his ageing physique. As events unfold, the issue comes to the forefront. Following the rape of Lucy and the attack on him, he begins to feel the ravages of time:

A grey mood is settling on him [...] For the first time he has a taste of what it will be like to be an old man, tired to the bone, without hopes, without desires, indifferent to the future. Slumped on a plastic chair amid the stench of chicken feathers and rotting apples, he feels his interest in the world draining from him drop by drop (*Di* 107).

Prior to the attack, the issue of ageing did not affect him that much. Pamela Cooper describes him as a “Beckettian tramp, hairless and disfigured after the attack, Lurie re-finds himself--and, by extension, the particular codes of white South African manhood that he represents--as a figure of bathos” (35). The

aggression against him has not only accentuated his fall from grace but has also made him confront his physical decline. Prior to the attack, Lurie has resorted to camouflaging this decline by sexual exploits, hoping for a partial shrouding of the decaying body. When his ex-wife, Rosalind, attempts to point out to him that his ageing body is unattractive, especially to a young person, he fails to comprehend the concept fully. She even tries to make him understand why the affair with Melanie is not only stupid but also ugly:

Am I allowed to tell you how stupid it looks?

No, you are not.

I will anyway. Stupid, and ugly too. I don't know what you do about sex and I don't want to know, but this is not the way to go about it. You're what—fifty-two? Do you think a young girl finds any pleasure in going to bed with a man of that age? Do you think she finds it good to watch you in the middle of your ... (*Di* 43-44).

Although he remains silent, he begins to see the logic behind her argument. He thinks, “perhaps she has a point. Perhaps it is the right of the young to be protected from the sight of their elders in the throes of passion. That is what whores are for, after all: to put up with the ecstasies of the unlovely” (*Di* 44). With Melanie, he is not hindered in imposing the ‘unlovely’ on her, persuading himself he has the right to her body; when she questions his motive for seducing her, he tells her she has to submit to his desire “[b]ecause 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” (*Di* 16). He refuses to acknowledge that he is forcing himself on her. He deludes himself by blaming the whole episode on Eros, the god of love. Hence, he tries to persuade himself that he has been “a servant of Eros” and it is “a god who acted through” him (*Di* 89). Freud sees the “libido of our sexual instincts would coincide with the Eros of the poets and philosophers which holds all living things together” (*XVIII* 50). By emphasizing the libidinal aspect of his character, Lurie is not only alluding to the god of love who dictates his actions but is also suggesting that his sexual innuendos are a form of self-preservation. Through them, he struggles against Thanatos. Lurie is not exactly selective in choosing with whom he has an affair, wives of colleagues simply

because they are there. Soraya, the prostitute, is a convenience, an object of desire until he sees her as a mother, “flanked by two children,” not the exotic Soraya at the door of no. 113 of Windsor Mansions (*Di* 6, 1).

The secretary, Dawn, who is closer to him in age, reminds him of his own abject body; not only does she repulse him but also the aura that emanates from her incites him to think of castrating himself like Origen. He is prompted to say, “ageing is not a graceful business. A clearing of the decks, at least, so that one can turn one’s mind to the proper business of the old: preparing to die” (*Di* 9). Adorno argues that to “the aging who perceive the signs of their debility, the fact that they must die seems rather like an accident caused by their own physis” (*ND* 370). To grow old becomes like an accident, suggesting a transient state rather than a new reality. At least, this is what he hopes. For Lurie, debility comes in the form of diminished sexual ability, which translates into not being able to choose a partner as young as Melanie is. Through Melanie, he can resurrect his youthful good looks, his earlier image of himself. He tells the reader:

His childhood was spent in a family of women. As mother, aunts, sisters fell away, they were replaced in due course by mistresses, wives, a daughter. The company of women made of him a lover of women and, to an extent, a womanizer. With his height, his good bones, his olive skin, his flowing hair, he would always count on a degree of magnetism. If he looked at a woman in a certain way, with a certain intent, she would return his look, he could rely on that [...]. Then one day it all ended. Without warning his powers fled. Glances that would once have responded to his slid over, past through him. Overnight he became a ghost (*Di* 7).

To contend his ghostly presence, he tries to revive the sexual appeal he claims to have once enjoyed. The above description contrasts with what he tells the reader after he picks up a prostitute, “younger than Melanie” from the road side (*Di* 194). He describes himself as not “a bad man but not good either. Not cold but not hot, even at his hottest” and when he “burns” he does not “sing” (*Di* 195, 170). Following his disgrace and hiding at his daughter’s farm, his choices

become limited; Bev Shaw who runs an animal shelter clinic is the only available alternative. His first impression of her is unflattering. He describes her as “a dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck” adding that he “does not like women who make no effort to be attractive” (*Di* 72). An aspect of his character he refuses to change as his “mind has become a refuge for old thoughts, idle, indigent, with nowhere else to go” (*Di* 72). Few pages later, he presents us with another physical description of Bev: “[h]er hair is a mass of little curls. [...] The veins on her ears are visible as a filigree of red and purple. The veins of her nose too. And then a chin that comes straight out of her chest, like a pouter pigeon’s. As an ensemble, remarkably unattractive” (*Di* 81-82). Up to the time of the attack, Lurie does not fully see the effects of age on himself. After the incident, he buys a hat to conceal his wounds, “a hat to keep off the sun, and to a degree, to hide his face. He is trying to get used to looking odd, worse than odd, repulsive—one of those sorry creatures whom children gawk at in the street” (*Di* 120). He is not attempting to hide the wounds, but is instead “trying to get used to looking odd,” or even *old*, accepting of the old visage that stares back at him from the mirror and out of people’s eyes. In spite of it all, he is quick to reveal what he finds abject in women and specifically in Bev. This does not deter him from ‘sleeping’ with her; and ‘her’ evolves into a Bev, the generic term of all the women who are past the age that is deemed desirable by him (*Di* 149). He adds that after “the sweet young flesh of Melanie Isaacs, this is what [he has] come to, this and even less than this” (*Di* 150). He depicts the intercourse between Bev and himself as a “congress he can at least say that he does his duty. Without passion but without distaste either. So that in the end Bev Shaw can feel pleased with herself” (*Di* 150). Attwell considers Lurie’s affair with Bev an act of charity, offering him a glimpse into a world “outside his state of disgrace” (2002, 339). I do not believe that the relationship with Bev has enlightened Lurie in any way. His attitude towards Bev and other females remains very stereotyped. He selects Bev simply because she is available. His working at the clinic is what eventually offers him an insight into a different world, and that comes from the rapport he develops with the dogs,

and not with fellow beings. I am more inclined to accept Cooper's interpretation of the episode. She writes:

By having sex with Bev, in the operating room where she destroys animals, Lurie seals his movement from desire to dissolution. Gently but decisively, just as she prepared the mutilated old goat, Bev prepares Lurie for his rendezvous with death (Cooper 36).

Sarcastically, Lurie himself compares Bev after the episode to Emma Bovary, but quickly relents, correctly depicting her as poor; in my opinion, she is poor because she has consented to sleep with a man who despises her and who considers his action a form of benevolence. Nevertheless, according to his premise, if she is to be considered "poor, he [then] is bankrupt" (*Di* 150). The reason for feeling bankrupt is that in his belief a man who sleeps with a Bev can no longer embody the attributes of youth. Lurie tells us that he is entertaining the thought of composing an opera on Byron. The opera he plans to write is based in Italy, involving a love triangle between a Byron who "has begun to long for a quiet retirement; failing that, for apotheosis, for death," Teresa who ignites "no spark in him" and his passionate mistress "Contessa Guiccioli" (*Di* 180). Throughout Lurie alludes to Byron whose personality he wishes to embody.¹⁵ His image of himself is that of a lover, forever young and desired. His actual picture confirms another reality, a failed academic, husband and lover. Regret begins to haunt him as time and the imminence of death weigh heavily upon him. He becomes lost in a past he has once known and a future from which the odour of death emanates.

Agamben describes how when the flow of culture is disturbed, all reference becomes senseless. He states:

[...] when a culture loses its means of transmission, man is deprived of reference points and finds himself wedged between, on the one hand, a past that incessantly accumulates behind him and oppresses him with the multiplicity of its now-indecipherable contents, and on the other hand a future that he does not yet possess and that

does not throw any light on his struggle with the past (*MWC* 108).

Lurie has no future to possess, as his culture, in apartheid South Africa, is no longer valid; instead, he is at best “obscure and growing obscurer. A figure from the margins of history” (*Di* 167). Agamben further elaborates on this disruption of culture and the void that it creates within the individual: “[s]uspended in the void between old and new, past and future, man is projected into time as into something alien that incessantly eludes him and still drags him forward, but without allowing him to find his ground in it” (*MWC* 108). Lurie cannot find his ground in the new South Africa. The attack has emphasized the loss that has evolved within him, the position of the privileged citizen. It has shattered all that he has once thought sacred. The attackers have forced him to look into the mirror, and ultimately at himself. Lucy’s pregnancy further compels him to look inwardly. He is forced to accept the role of a grandfather, which he resents simply because he may lose the little allure he thinks he still possesses. He is quick to reveal his worry: “[w]hat pretty girl can he expect to be wooed into bed with a grandfather?” (*Di* 217).¹⁶

The reflection that the attackers have left him with is hauntingly ugly, a further attribute to the gloomy state that is brought about by ageing. On seeing his deteriorating condition, Rosalind warns him that he is likely to “end up as one of those sad men who poke around in rubbish bins,” (*Di* 189). Freud argues:

The melancholic displays something else besides which is lacking in mourning—an extraordinary diminution in his self-regard, an impoverishment of his ego on a grand scale. In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself (*XIV* 246).

Emptiness and a humbled ego have not only reduced Lurie into an old man anxious about dying but also into a hollow melancholic man whose “soul, suspended in the dark, [is] bitter gall, hiding,” from itself, unable to mourn as in his heart dwells “a vague sadness” (*Di* 124, 127).¹⁷ His ego has been shattered.

Similar to the dogs that “flatten their ears, [and] droop their tails, as if they too feel the disgrace of dying” Lurie is disgraced at once by his own actions and by

the humiliation that has become part of his life (*Di* 143). At the end of the novel, he sacrifices the crippled dog/lamb that he has grown fond of; in this metonymical act, a part of him is also given up. He learns to accept the humiliation that is much a part of life as it is of death. Nevertheless, reconciliation with the changes within him remains elusive. As with Curren and Dostoevsky, he is left suspended between a past that is no longer viable and an allusive future, offering no redemption.

***“A Wasted Chance” Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons & Slow Man:*¹⁸**

The humiliations have no limit (*EC* 152)

Humiliation resulting from ageing becomes more potent in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*. A few years older than the other characters, the effects of age on Costello are introduced to us in the opening pages. In this novel, Coetzee examines the implication that age has on the human being in general and on the ageing writer in particular. The failings that accompany the writing process have been addressed earlier on in *The Master of Petersburg*. However, the author develops the thesis further with his creation of the character, Elizabeth Costello, a woman of nearly sixty-seven years, in *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*. The very person resurfaces a year later in the short story “As a Woman Grows Older” and as a septuagenarian in *Slow Man*, a novel printed in 2005. In this section, I will be studying the effects of age tracing the character of Elizabeth Costello through the three œuvres in which I hope to prove the older the woman gets, the more humiliating life becomes. As a large section of the novel is through her son’s perspective, I will begin my discussion with his comment on her declining years. I will then look at the different impact ageing poses for the female vis-à-vis the male protagonist. Moreover, I will show how in *Slow Man*, Costello attempts to narrow the gender gap in issues related to ageing. I will also look at the character of Paul Rayment who exhibits the humiliation caused by an ageing

process that has crept in prematurely, enhanced by the disfigurement that is a result of an accident.

In addition, I demonstrate how salvation for Coetzee is not something one attains in the after-life or on the point of dying, but is a continual testing of the ageing protagonist as s/he strives to counteract the humiliation of old age. Nussbaum stipulates: “humiliation is understood as a particularly damaging insult to the person’s human dignity” (204). The sense of disgrace that the ageing Coetzeean figure undergoes is namely due to the ageing process and the character’s inability to stop this overwhelming process of decomposition; therefore, maintaining dignity becomes a very arduous task. To the character, everything begins to represent the abject; the body itself becomes dissociated from the soul, at best fragmented, an embarrassment. The failing faculties contribute to the decline of the human being and to her/his overriding sense of inadequacy. An evasion of humanity is what becomes unequivocally desirable, especially in the case of Rayment. Costello does not evade human contact, although interaction with others has become very disconcerting.

The opening pages of *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* introduce us to a frail sixty-eight year old novelist on the lecture circuit, an exercise she finds cumbersome and “a great ordeal” “for no good reason” (EC 3). Her own son is compelled to accompany her on these lectures; he tells the reader it is out of love:

He cannot imagine her getting through this trial without him at her side. He stands by her because he is her son, her loving son. But he is on the point of becoming – distasteful word—her trainer.

He thinks of her as a seal, an old, tired circus seal. One more time she must heave herself up on the tub, one more time show that she can balance the ball on her nose. Up to him to coax her, put heart in her, get her through the performance (EC 3).

John perceives his mother as an old woman putting on a hackneyed performance in front of a reluctant audience. He would be much happier if she were to retire and become “an ordinary old woman living an ordinary woman’s life” (EC 83). The show must go on for Costello; to stop performing is to succumb to old age

and ultimately death. She persists in accepting invitations to lectures, in spite of her deteriorating physique. One method of counteracting the effects of age on her body is to keep her mind alive through the talks. Her writing ability has begun to fail her; the one novel of which she is renowned is “The House on Eccles Street [published in] (1969)” [when she was 41 years old], whose main character is Marion Bloom, wife of Leopold Bloom, principal character of another novel, *Ulysses* (1992), by James Joyce” (EC 1). She has written many novels, but being famous only for this particular novel makes her feel “frozen in the achievements of her youth” (EC 161). As the novel progresses, the reader follows Costello’s worsening state through the eyes of her son John. In her study of old age, De Beauvoir states that the “aged person comes to feel he is old by means of others, and without having experienced important changes” (325). The Coetzee character is also concerned about the other’s gaze, as s/he grows older. Costello expects to be shunned by others because of her age. John notes how his mother’s hair has slowly gone from black to grey to “entirely white; her shoulders stoop; her flesh has grown flabby” (EC 59). As his mother’s failing capabilities at times embarrass John, he tries to persuade Susan Moebius, his mother’s radio interviewer that “there is something special about [his] mother—that is what draws you to her—yet when you meet her she turns out to be just an ordinary old woman” (EC 28). On the other hand, when confronted by his wife’s continual questioning on his mother’s conduct, he is quick to justify the behaviour with “[s]he’s old, she’s my mother” (EC 83, 81). John is deluding himself. The person he aspires to convince is himself, to reconcile the shame that his ageing mother brings and appease the mortality within him. He resents being present at her lectures as he “does not want to hear his mother talking about death” (EC 63).

Adorno states that:

As the subjects live less, death grows more precipitous, more terrifying. The fact that it literally turns them into things makes them aware of reification, their permanent death and the form of their relations that is partly their fault (ND 370).

To be turned into an object is at once frightening and humiliating. Death is the reality from which we cannot escape. For Rose, when we dodge mortality we are affirming evil. She claims, “every time fiction enters the world of evil, it is our own death that we escape” (2003, 126). Coetzee’s fiction is not evading mortality; it is more concerned with the possibility of humiliation caused by the dying act. Writing is a distraction from and an encounter with death. Fiction allows us to confront and provides a venue for some form of permanence. Coetzee himself questions whether art works are “pathetic attempts to live on after we die” (Coetzee <http://lnk.in/4rah>). The concerns that Costello has over death are not issues of fear of the actual act, but an anxiety over the dignity of the event. Her contention with Paul West lies in his claim of understanding “the suffering and death of those pitiful men! [To her, their] last hours belong to them alone, they are not ours to enter and possess” (*EC* 174). Adding a numerical number to death, simply by counting to the n power, “[t]wenty million, six million, three million, a hundred thousand” may not allow us to escape our own death, but is an attempt at making it tolerable, in the sense that it loses its value, becoming a negligible event in a field of plenty. This is the reason why Costello insists that each death is both sacred and important in itself. By turning death into a consumable, a production line, it loses its value and dignity. To Costello, “[d]eath is a private matter,” that should not be scrutinized or subjected to humiliation (*EC* 174). Furthermore, a “good death is one that takes place far away, where the mortal residue is disposed of by strangers, by people in the death business” (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>). She is anxious “to die well” (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>). Rose summarizes this concept in her discussion of the American taboo on death: “[a]bove all a body must not be seen to die. Bodies that fail and fall” (2003, 129). The same sentiment is echoed by Rayment following his accident and amputation of his leg; to him people who die quietly and in dignity are heroes:

His mind is full of stories of people who bring about their own end [...] Heroes all of them, unsung, unlauded. I am resolved not to be any trouble. The only matter they cannot take care of is the body they leave behind, the

mound of flesh that, after a day or two, will begin to stink (*SM* 13).

Youthful John prefers to remain insensitive to the issue of death, which to Costello is of paramount importance. He adds that “he has a strong sense that her audience—which consists, after all, mainly of young people—wants death-talk even less” (*EC* 63). His mother’s perceived insensitivity can only cause him further embarrassment.

Nussbaum states that:

Embarrassment, by contrast, is usually a lighter matter than shame. Like the emotion of shame, it is a subjective emotional state. Unlike most cases of shame, it may be momentary, temporary, and inconsequential. [...] Embarrassment typically deals with a feature of one’s social situation, which may be, and often is, relatively short-lived, and not closely connected to important personal values (204).

The awkwardness that John senses in the company of his mother is in line with the above depiction. It is temporary and only bothers him when he is in her company. Even at his university, his colleagues fail to make the link between the two. John’s justification is: “[b]ecause Costello is his mother’s maiden name, and because he has never seen any reason to broadcast his connection with her, it was not known at the time of the invitation that Elizabeth Costello, the Australian writer, had a family connection in the Appleton community” (*EC* 60). John claims the reason he has never revealed the relationship with Elizabeth is “because he prefers to make his own way in the world” and not because he is ashamed of her (*EC* 60). De Beauvoir writes: “the younger man looks upon the ancient as a caricature of himself” (246). This necessitates the breaking of the connecting bond (246-247). To John, Elizabeth is a reminder of his own mortality and a source of embarrassment. Frequently, he comments on her dishevelment, “the blue costume, the greasy hair” (*EC* 4). He is proud of her if she remains a novelist whose books he enjoys reading, and, failing that, he “would have preferred that state of affairs [unknown family connection] to continue” (*EC* 60). On the way to the airport, John is unable to confront his

mother's questions on the nature of evil and the sense of alienation that has taken hold of her life. His only consoling words to the "tearful face" as he "inhales the smell of cold cream, of old flesh. 'There, there,' he whispers in her ear. 'There, there. It will soon be over'" (*EC* 115). This particular trip, the agony of not being understood, the overwhelming sense of estrangement and the discomfort of old age along with the abject state of the body will soon be over for Elizabeth, her son reassures her. In his statement, the deployment of the word "over" is very ambiguous. The uncomfortable episode at the university and his mother's visit are "over" once she boards the plane. He can then relegate her to memory; she can become just an ordinary old woman. The "over" for her has various implications. Will her life be over soon? Alternatively, is the "over" referring to the taxing issues that are plaguing her mind?

Nothing is "over" for Costello. The more time that passes the more she becomes victimized by her ailing body. Her mental faculties have not weakened with age; on the contrary, they have become sharper. What diminishes, however, is her tact and tolerance. During her visit to attend Blanche's honorary degree graduation ceremony, she explicitly explains how in old age there is no room for hypocrisy.¹⁹ She tells the reader that:

She and Blanche were never truly close; she has no wish, now that they have passed beyond being women of a certain age to being, frankly, old women, to have to listen in on Blanche's bedtime prayers or see what fashion of underwear the Sisters of Marian Order go in for (*EC* 117).

Candour and bluntness are traits that have become sharper with the advancement of the years. Earlier on, whilst evoking Kafka's story about Red Peter, she insists that her drawing on it is not for the purpose of allegory; "it means what it says" (*EC* 62). She adds, "I say what I mean. I am an old woman. I do not have the time any longer to say things I do not mean" (*EC* 62). Old age brings with it a certain kind of impatience, urgency and vocal rejection to what one finds unacceptable; it also prompts a questioning of everything that has once been sacred and an overwhelming sense of uncertainty. She has even begun to employ terminology she has never done before, as she tells her son, "[w]hat I find eerie,

as I grow older [...] is that I hear issuing from my lips words I once upon a time used to hear old people say and swore I would never say myself" (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>).²⁰ Her own beliefs have also become disputable (*EC* 19-20). Costello is also alluding to the nature of the novel; ultimately, the letter is composed of words that provide entertainment and is not necessarily an upholder of truth. Therefore, convictions once held and written have been scrutinized. Nothing is what it appears to be. Even her own ideas become suspect. She tells us:

She is not sure, as she listens to her own voice, whether she believes any longer in what she is saying. Ideas like these must have had some grip on her when years ago she wrote them down, but after so many repetitions they have taken on a worn, unconvincing air. On the other hand, she no longer believes very strongly in belief (*EC* 39).

Not having belief is the obstacle that renders her passing the gate impossible. In the final chapter, the "white-haired woman, [...], suitcase in hand, descends from the bus" and enquires if she is allowed to pass through the gate (*EC* 193). Retracing the steps of Kafka's man in "Before the Law," Elizabeth finds herself suspended before the gate, negotiating with a doorkeeper, unable to proceed unless she can "make a statement" (*EC* 193). Nevertheless, sceptical of her beliefs, Costello "can do an imitation of belief" as the certainty of believing has long escaped her (*EC* 194). The suitcase she carries functions as a parable of a past that somehow lingers on but is no longer relevant. "[H]er black suitcase [is] always beside her (containing what?—she can no longer remember)" (*EC* 195). Earlier on, she describes the past as a "history, and what is history but a story made of air that we tell ourselves" (*EC* 38). Once the air evaporates, the remaining beliefs are ones we once may have held "buried in our heart [...] [b]uried even from ourselves" (*EC* 214). Elizabeth remarks how "[h]istory has lost her voice. Clio, the one who once upon a time used to strike her lyre and sing of the doings of great men, has become infirm, infirm and frivolous, like the silliest sort of old woman" (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>). She even hypothesizes that old age does not allow too much solemnity. In a

conversation with John, she tells him, "I am too old to be serious" (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>). The advantages privileging youth are withdrawn slowly with age. One is no longer allowed to assume any entitlement to them, a dreary fact with which one has to contend.

Christine Overall sees ageing as one of the identities that are "socially constructed" at both "the individual and the social levels" (126, 130). Overall's premise is because "[p]eople do not acquire the physical, psychological, and intellectual markers of aging at the same rates, and the rate of aging is strongly reflective of social context" (130). Yet, beyond a certain age, certain people begin to impose a preconceived idea on the old, irrespective of the physical reality of the latter, and expect of them a certain performance. Consequently, Costello slowly begins to embody the abject image that her son and society have of her. This not only makes her sensitive to the ageing process within her body, but also to the old, she encounters along the way. Invariably, her first assessment of people is related to age. Egudu, in spite of his age, "is still a fine figure of a man;" the Russian entertainer who looks older in real light; the elderly judges, the nuns and "the panel of old men in their crows' robes" are but reminders of her own mortality (*EC* 37, 54, 198, 142, 209). Ultimately, Costello is projecting her own perception of the self onto others, as the issue of ageing becomes more sensitive with time.

Her sympathetic identification with the victims of the Nazi camps is essentially one of a shameful body as it relates to another that is not granted any respect. She tells us:

If there were a mirror on the back of this door instead of just a hook, if she were to take off her clothes and kneel before it, she, with her sagging breasts and knobbly hips, would look much like the women in those intimate, over-intimate photographs from the European war [...] She has a feeling for those dead sisters, and for the men too who died at the hands of butchermen, men old and ugly enough to be her brothers. She does not like to see her sisters and brothers humiliated, in ways it is so easy to humiliate the old, by making them strip, for example, taking away their dentures, making fun of their private parts (*EC* 178).

In his studies of the camps, Agamben depicts both the inhumane state that the prisoner has been reduced to and the “third realm” s/he has to inhabit. Agamben uses the term *Muselmann* to describe the lowest form of existence for the camp dweller.²¹ He writes:

The *Muselmann* is an indefinite being to whom not only humanity and non-humanity, but also vegetative existence and relation, physiology and ethics, medicine and politics, and life and death continuously pass through each other. This is why the *Muselmann*'s “third realm” is the perfect cipher of the camp, the non-place in which all the disciplinary barriers are destroyed and all embankments flooded (*RATWTA* 48).

The gate becomes the suspended non-place in which Costello exists. She describes her state as “alive inside that contradiction, dead and alive at the same time” (*EC* 77). Not belonging to either world alienates Costello, the disoriented “old woman,” further (*EC* 160). In the camps, Agamben adds that the “*Muselmann* has [...] moved into a zone of the human where not only help but also dignity and self-respect have become useless” (*RATWTA* 63). De Beauvoir observes that in “the death-camps they [the old] were the first to be chosen for slaughter” (247).

The confusion that has come to punctuate Costello's life forces her in the zone between the living and the dead, where nothing of the old system still applies. It is not only her beliefs that are no longer relevant but also that overbearing sense of being sidelined by the young. The feeling of inadequacy drives a wedge between her and others, and demanding help is yet another shameful enterprise.²² Even her children's offer to help her strikes her as an insult; instead she prefers to seek help from “good people in Melbourne trained to deal with old folk” (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>). In this manner, she is paying for services and not requesting help. To seek help is a compromise on dignity. Ageing leaves her in no man's land with the shameful burden of a decomposing body. She has glimpsed into such indignity earlier in her life during her visit to Phillips in hospital. She narrates her story with Phillips in a letter she writes to her sister. She explains:

Mr Phillips kept to himself because he had had an operation, a laryngectomy. It left him with a hole through which he was supposed to speak, with the aid of a prosthesis. But he was ashamed of the unsightly, raw-looking hole in his throat, and therefore withdrew from public sight [...] At best he could produce a kind of croaking. It must have been deeply humiliating for such a ladies' man (*EC* 146).

To elevate some of his humiliation, Costello decides to give him, the "old bag of bones waiting to be carted away," a sexual favour (*EC* 151). When she is confronted with "pubic hair that has turned grey," she is rather shocked but realizes that this will also be her fate (*EC* 152). The smell of the old man, the smell of death, lurks in the room, as she tries to breathe life into him. On the threshold between life and death, Phillips' dignity is already compromised.²³ As with Agamben's camps, "the dignity offended [...] is not that of life but rather of death" (*RATWTA* 70). By exhibiting her body to Phillips, she has attained for a brief moment a sense of immortality. Posing allows her entry into the world of gods. She writes in her letter, "[a]s I sat there I was not myself, or not just myself. Through me a goddess was manifesting herself, Aphrodite or Hera or perhaps even Artemis. I was of the immortals" (*EC* 149). Inadvertently, by stripping, Costello has juxtaposed the youthful body against the ageing body, underlining the indignity brought upon by the deteriorating body.

At this point, I would like to introduce the gender related concept of ageing.²⁴ On more than one occasion in his oeuvre, Coetzee insinuates that the ageing female body is less acceptable than that of the male; therefore, female desire is best kept under wraps. Although, Costello reflects on meeting Egudu, an ex-lover, that she has "mellowed as she has grown older," she remains jealous of the fact that Egudu is still "in touch with life's energies" and of his affair with the Russian performer (*EC* 37, 53, 57).²⁵ The jealousy she exhibits is not specifically related to the affair, but to the fact that life tends to be more favourable in issues of desire when the concerned are old men rather than women. When the dog sniffs Costello, Rayment is unable to imagine her as anything but "an asexual being" (*SM* 194).²⁶ On more than one occasion, Rayment is seen passing unfavourable remarks on Costello's body: blue-veined, clammy skin, patches of

pink scalp, colourless and featureless (*SM* 84, 93, 160). An ageing feminine body is best hidden. Thomas Walz states:

For older women, there is the “Norman Rockwell” portrait of the benevolent grandmother, a modernized version of Whistler’s mother, with beautiful, healthy grandchildren feeding off her attention. Implicit in this portrait is a woman who is assumed to have outgrown her “reproductive” sexuality so that she now devotes her life to the care of others. Quite opposite is the “bag lady” image, a crone with a grocery cart filled with her belongings, wearing a soiled, tattered dress, dumpsterdiving for cans. This is hardly a portrait of a woman who is someone’s sexual partner (100).

The favoured image for a woman Costello’s age is one of a low-profile grandmother. Furthermore, her homeless status in *Slow Man* introduces the unsavoury “bag lady” concept. In Costello’s mind, as old is often qualified with ugly, and the obscene ageing body needs to be concealed from view; “she no longer likes to see herself in the mirror, since it puts her in mind of death. Ugly things she prefers wrapped up and stored away in a drawer” (*EC* 179). In spite of this, she resents being stereotyped as old (*EC* 179). In the short story, she attempts to justify to her son the reason for not accepting the offer to move in with them. The rationale is simple; she cannot accept the juxtaposition of the ageing body, even in the role of the grandmother, with that of youth. She tells him:

They [his children] may love [her moving in] while they are nine and six. They will not love it so much when they are fifteen and twelve and bring friends home and Grandma is shuffling around the kitchen in her slippers, mumbling to herself and clacking her dentures and perhaps not smelling good (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>).

Equating ugliness with evil causes her to shun old age and malady. When she visits Blanche, she is reluctant to visit the hospital for “she cannot bear to look any more: the stick limbs, the bloated bellies, the great impassive eyes of children

wasting away, beyond cure, beyond care” because she is “too old to withstand these sights, too old and weak” (*EC* 133, 134). Her old body fails her, as she no longer has control over it; these sights will make her cry. She later begins to qualify herself in the short story, as “the one who cries” (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>). The ageing body is nothing but a “lumbering monster” she has to “look after” and confront daily. Identifying the body as the other is in line with Curren’s fragmentation of her ailing body. The body becomes the other that shames and needs to be hidden from the I/subject which according to Rose is “never evil”; hence the other becomes the ‘you’ which is evil (2003, 117). Rose adds that “the term ‘evil’ perversely mimics the first person pronoun in reverse [which no] one wants to wear” (2003, 117). The ageing, deteriorating and obscene body evolves into the other that no one wants to don, more and more alienated from the self and nothing but an embarrassment.

2: *Slow Man*:

The “blow” that hits Paul Rayment in the opening line results in a disfigurement that at once ages and shames the protagonist (*SM* 1). As with the attack on Lurie in *Disgrace*, the accident forces Paul to look inwardly at an existence that has survived on the periphery of society. Rayment exhibits the characteristics of an old person prior to the accident.²⁷ His earlier life reflects that of a prematurely inflexible aged man, a creature of habit. De Beauvoir studies this characteristic in older people where in order to regain some power over their life, they adamantly hold on to certain idiosyncrasies that provide “the old person with a kind of ontological security [..., a] shield against anxiety” (521). His circumscribed existence and rejection of what is new are traits that are usually seen in much older people. Ward Just stipulates that for “Rayment, one chance after another has come and gone, some seized, most not. And when enough chances have come and gone, it can seem altogether wiser to maintain things as they are” (<http://lnk.in/3wqf>). It is only after the accident that Paul begins to feel the effect of this lost opportunity. He compares his new life to a “circumscribed life,” not worthy of living (*SM* 26). Paul has always led a

cloistered existence, but has only become aware of it post the accident. Siddhartha Deb summarizes Paul's previous life:

Rayment is a former photographer, a divorced, childless solitary long out of touch with the world. He has a computer but no internet connection, and a collection of 19th-century photographs of Australian immigrants but no awareness of digital photography.

He has always preferred being left to his own devices but the modern world, having first crippled him, now demands to be let in as a care-giver (<http://lnk.in/3wq9>).

Resentment towards change in modern society accentuates the chasm between him and the young. Overall suggests that technology not only further alienates the aged but also adds to the disability that society has placed on the categorized individuals:

[...] people who are 'getting on in years' are subjected to explicitly disabling behavior, practices, and policies in cultures that are set up primarily to serve the goals and plans of those with a relatively lower number of years lived, and whose features have not been picked out as impaired. Thus, for example, the increasing speed of modern culture, the multiple demands of communication technologies, and the pressure to be competitive, to get ahead, and to earn more money are features of Western society in the twenty-first century that have the effect of adding to the social disablement that older people experience (131).

Paul has rejected technology throughout his life. His preference has been to the original black, grey and white world of photography; and "he began to lose interest in photography: first when colour took over, then when it became plain that the old magic of light-sensitive emulsions was waning" (*SM* 65). He has shied away from photography when the process of creation is influenced by a technology he refuses to surrender to and understand. His reluctance to have an internet connection is both an animosity towards technical advances and an attempt at protecting his solitary self. He cherishes his old collection of photographs, a milieu in which he is most comfortable, and which he plans to

donate to the State Library, hoping that his name will be put on the collection, granting him some form of immortality (*SM* 49). Following the accident, his own mortality has come to occupy centre stage, as he has begun to regret not having had any children; he describes himself as no longer a man but a “ghost of a man looking back in regret on time not well used” (*SM* 34). In order that he may neutralize the feeling of loss, he tries to impose himself on the family of his nurse by offering himself as godfather to her children. Eagleton views “Rayment’s love for Marijuana, while authentic enough, takes the form of paternal fantasies of protecting her and her family” (1917).

Prior to the incident, Paul has lived a quiet life, preparing for a comfortable old age in the solitude to which he has grown accustomed. He reflects on his earlier life:

In the old days, the days before the accident, he did not have what he called a gloomy temperament. He might have been solitary, but only as certain male animals are solitary. There was always more than enough to keep him occupied. He took out books from the library, he went to the cinema; he cooked for himself, he even baked his own bread; he did not own a car but rode a bicycle or walked (*SM* 25).

The impairment has compelled him to accept a life of immobility and further seclusion.²⁸ Benjamin Markovits is surprised that Paul in “his previous, four-limbed existence [...] had anywhere to get on a bicycle” (<http://www.newstatesman.com/200509120044>). Eagleton, meanwhile, considers him as “crippled enough already. He is a kind of spiritual amputee who has been “missing himself” all his life, adrift between life and death” (1917). Even his pendulum-like existence, which is devoid of interest, is under scrutiny. A judgement has been passed additionally over the worthiness of his very existence, as following the accident the label that he is made to wear is one of disability and old age, two qualities that are hardly favoured by modern society. Overall writes that:

In Western societies, thanks to ableism and ageism, it is taken to be self-evident that lives with so-called impairments, and lives that are elderly, are of lesser value than lives without so-called impairments or lives that are youthful. These lives are even considered, in some cases, not worth living (131).

In a conversation with Marijana's child, he remarks silently "he was not awarded" a "reconstructed leg" because he "was too old for it, not worth the trouble and expense" (*SM* 55). Earlier on in the novel, Marijana makes a similar comment: "'Reconstruction,' she says, 'very difficult surgery, very difficult. For years, in and out hospital. For, you know, old patients they don't like it to make reconstruction. Only for young. What's the point, eh? What's the point?'" (*SM* 29).²⁹ On which he reflects: "[s]he puts him among the old, those whom there is no point in saving—saving the knee-joint, saving the life" (*SM* 29). Coetzee is offering a critique of a society that believes that saving the elderly is not worthwhile. Up to this point, Paul has probably never considered himself old. The young assume it is in their prerogative to determine whose life is worth living. By being old and disabled, Paul is not only stigmatized into a certain role but also evolves into a victim of the "social practices and institutions [... which] reinforce negative values that make rather ordinary characteristics of some human beings into liabilities and stigmata" (Overall 131). Once a human being is marked by a certain abnormal characteristic, s/he is no longer considered a complete being but becomes a quasi-human who has lost all cognitive and physical attributes. Rejecting this kind of treatment is what prompts Paul to fire Sheena, the nurse Mrs. Putts has recommended for having "worked with amputees before" (*SM* 22). Unfortunately, Sheena fails to treat Paul as an adult; instead, she views him "like one of a different species," thus resorting to infantile language with him: "[s]he calls the bedpan the potty; she calls his penis his willie. Halfway through a sponge bath, before dealing with the stump, she pauses and puts on a baby voice" (De Beauvoir 244, *SM* 23-24). Overall writes:

Moreover, ableism and ageism are intertwined in malignantly effective ways that result in disrespect, reduction of autonomy, and the disregard of the rights of

those targeted. First, those who are rendered disabled may be inappropriately treated as if they were either significantly older or significantly younger than is the norm for behavior toward non-disabled people with the same number of years lived. That is, they are treated as if they were in a state of decline stereotypically associated with aging, or they are treated paternalistically, as if having a disability necessarily reduces the person's competence and autonomy to the level of a child (131).

This Paul finds not only annoying but also very humiliating. His post-accident physique is already causing him a great deal of shame. To be regarded as an infant accentuates his embarrassment. Even the physiotherapist Madeleine “treats old people consigned to her care as if they were children—not very clever, somewhat morose, somewhat sluggish children in need of being bucked up” (*SM* 60). The experience with the physiotherapist has granted him entry into the “zone of humiliation; it is his new home; he will never leave it; best to shut up, best to accept” (*SM* 61).

As it is enforced acceptance proves to be an arduous affair. The stump has become a reality he has to face on a daily basis, a continual reminder of his inability to resume his earlier life. As with Curren, he resorts to fragmenting his body. Instead of a stump, he decides to label his amputated leg as *le jambon*, a term that defines the leg as the other by setting up a buffer zone between reality and fiction: “*Le jambon* keeps it at a nice, contemptuous distance” (*SM* 29). Paul adamantly refuses to be fitted with prosthesis. His rejection arises from not wanting to satisfy a society, which is much more comfortable with someone who appears to be normal.³⁰ His stump offends them; society expects him to either accept the false limb or conceal himself from humanity. His stump is akin to Kristeva's corpse, which impertinently allows an infringement of death upon life.

The stump has contributed to both the feeling of rejection and hatred he entertains towards his body. “When nakedness cannot be helped, [Paul] averts his eyes so that [Marijana] will see he does not see her seeing him” (*SM* 32). He adds: “[w]hatever love he might once have had for his body is long gone. He has no interest in fixing it up, returning it to some ideal efficiency. The man he used to be is just a memory, and a memory fading fast” (*SM* 32). Paul perceives his

body an inanimate thing that is fixable. His sense of being no longer lies within his body, but within his soul; as for the rest “it is just a sack of blood and bones that he is forced to carry around” (*SM* 32). In spite of the awkwardness of his body, he resents becoming an object of charity or accepting others’ beliefs. When Margaret tries to persuade him that there is nothing shameful in having lost a leg, and suggests resuming their old relationship, he resents her offer as he “does not care to become the object of any woman’s sexual charity” (*SM* 38). The obscene “unlovely new body of his” is worthy of concealment, to be hidden from the gaze of outsiders (*SM* 38). Paul is in the habit of covering “the bathroom mirror not just to save himself from the image of an ageing, ugly self. No: the twin imprisoned behind the glass he finds above all boring” (*SM* 164). The tedious image has been internalized. De Beauvoir describes how we try to reject the image that affronts us: “There is nothing that obliges us in our hearts to recognize ourselves in the frightening image that others provide us with. That is why it is possible to reject that image verbally and to refuse it by means of our behaviour” (328). Draping the mirrors with cloth is Paul’s method to dismiss the face that gazes at him from the mirror.

The ageing visage and the deformed body have added to the sense of indifference that has haunted him in life. Knowing that “people do die of indifference to the future,” he still chooses to shun humanity in order that he may not become a spectacle to be pitied or stared at (*SM* 58). The fear of being ridiculed is what prevents him from using the tricycle that Drago has designed.³¹ Unwittingly, he develops feelings for his caretaker Marijana. The “old man with knobbly fingers” confesses his love at the point when Costello enters his life, somewhat of a rude awakening (*SM* 78). Costello’s intrusion in his life at once functions as a reminder to him of his own mortality and an attempt at helping him out of his seclusion. Andrew Miller suggests that, “[b]etween them they try to work out a solution to his little imbroglio while gesturing at larger questions of what is necessary and permissible in life, particularly a life in its final quarter” (<http://lnk.in/3wqp>). Miller is presuming that Paul is attempting to find a solution to his confused state. Costello is keen to find a resolution to the character Paul Rayment in the novel she is struggling to write.³² Furthermore, Costello strives to

bring him out of his isolation. She endeavours to persuade him that he is not the only man who in the “autumn of his years” has fallen in love with a much younger woman (*SM* 82). Nonetheless, she attempts to impress upon him that his life is worthy of living; and it is best that he seize his chance as the “years go by as quickly as a wink” [...] (*SM* 99). “[L]osing a leg is not a tragedy. On the contrary, losing a leg is comic” (*SM* 99). Unless Paul is willing to cross the threshold, he will remain in limbo, “unable to grow” (*SM* 112). Ultimately, if Paul remains resentful to the idea of change in his life, Costello will never be able to finish the novel she is writing about him. She wants him to be a central figure while he prefers to remain one of the minor characters. She orders him to live “like a hero,” to be “a main character. Otherwise what is life for” (*SM* 229). Success in converting Paul into a central figure correlates with her attempt at resurrecting some of the glory she has enjoyed earlier on as a novelist. Otherwise, they will remain “moping, like tramps in Beckett, [...], wasting time, being wasted by time” (*SM* 141).

Certain privileges are lost with age, but Costello urges Paul to rescue what is left. She suggests that the only kind of sexual relationship that is allowed is one that involves payment: “[n]o more free love” (*SM* 152). This right belongs to the young. The tension that exists between the generations presents itself once again in this novel. The two worlds exist in parallel, each existing at the expense of the other. Earlier on in the novel, Rayment comments that perhaps this is the wisdom of the world. He echoes: “[d]own with the old, make way for the new” (*SM* 20). When surrounded by youth, the elderly in Coetzee become very uncomfortable. Shulevitz remarks: “[t]here is no justice in the ability of youth to shame age, and yet it's a fundamental fact of the embodied life” (<http://lnk.in/3wr4>). For Coetzee, the young invariably eclipse the old; and there is no justice to be had in this vindictive practice. When Drago moves in with him, Paul feels he is being pushed away (*SM* 180). The scene with Marijana's daughter Ljuba is reminiscent of the one between Dostoevsky and Matroyona (*TMP* 66-67). Here, “[f]rom an arm's length away Ljuba is staring straight at him. There is no mistaking the severity of that gaze. Here he is, old and ugly and hairy and half naked and no doubt to her angelic nostrils smelly” (*SM* 187-188). Once again, self-

consciousness prevails as he projects his own thoughts on the child. Old, smelly and ugly are three words often associated with one another in Coetzee's work. In the presence of youth, Paul becomes invisible; he thinks when he expects some consideration from Drago and his friend Shaun, "a shutter falls" ignoring him, as to them he "might as well be a stick of furniture" (*SM* 181).³³ When he discovers what Drago and his friend have done with one of his treasured originals, he feels "desecration [...] most of all: the dead made fun of by a couple of cocky, irreverent youths" (*SM* 218).³⁴ Once again, the dignity that is offended is that of death and not of life, the stolen photography but a symbol of the dead.³⁵ For Coetzee, humiliation in life guarantees disgrace in death. The characters sense that if they are unable to resolve the humiliation in their lives, they can only expect further shame when they die. The trend has always been one of dwindling resources. Living metamorphoses into a continual struggle against indignity. At one stage in the novel, a fall immobilizes him as he tries to reach the bathroom, confirming that degradation has become "part of life, part of growing old" (*SM* 214).

In spite of the burden of age, Paul has tried to fill the "all-devouring hole" that is inside him with a love for the Croatian woman, a love that he compares to his love for a possibly non-existent God (*SM* 187). Costello, alternatively, hopes to persuade him that his love is nothing but an unrealisable dream:

Where else in the world, at this later stage, are you going to find affection, you ugly old man? Yes, I am familiar with that word too, ugly. We are both of us ugly, Paul, old and ugly [...] It never wanes in us, that yearning. But the beauty of all the world does not want any of us (*SM* 236).

Costello tries to impress upon Paul that they are both equally abject beings, a feckless attempt at narrowing the gap that exists between the perceptions of the sexes. Paul may be conscious of the blemish he causes on the canvas of beauty and youth, yet is unable to compromise and accept Costello's offer. They both long for youth and immortality, conceding that it will always remain an unattainable goal (*SM* 261). "Ah for youth! Ah for immortality" sighs Costello, and Paul emulates her sigh half a page later "ah for youth!" (*SM* 261-262). Their

sighs, however, are worlds apart. Hers is a form of acceptance while his stems from regret. To compensate for the lost years, Costello has sought companionship in her autumn years, while Paul has selected to continue living in seclusion, rejecting her offer, uncompromising on love.

Conclusion:

I am—yet what I am none cares or knows,
My friends forsake me like a memory lost;
I am the self-consumer of my woes,
They rise and vanish in oblivions host,
Like shadows in love – frenzied stifled throes
And yet I am, and live like vapours tost
(Wright, Clare 272-273)

Costello quotes the first three lines of the above stanza to Paul urging him to look at his missing leg as “a sign, or symbol or symptom” and not end up like the poet John Clare, a consumer of his woes (*SM* 229-230). She cautions him against the indifference of humanity, warning him that self-pity can only consume the self from within. Retreating into the self does not stem from self-pity but from a desire to shun the humanity that has shamed him and others in Coetzee’s novels. The humiliation that has intensified with age, has robbed the characters of their dignity. In the short story, Costello, reiterates: “What is left for me? I am the one who cries” (*AAWGO* <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/16872>). These sentences uttered by Elizabeth Costello sum up the circumstance of the ageing Coetzeean character.

When Paul confronts his own death, he discovers that his whole existence is merely “frivolous [which] is not a bad word to sum him up” (*SM* 19). At this particular moment, Paul has been allowed a glimpse into a symbolic gate, reminiscent of Costello’s, only to realize the futility of his whole existence; no one will advise him to put his “soul in order” for no one is interested in checking “deathbed accountings that ascent to the skies” (*SM* 19). He will exit, leaving “no trace behind,” a mere “wasted chance” (*SM* 19). Once again, the Coetzeean

protagonist draws on a dog's life to emphasise the fickleness and triviality of human existence. Paul recounts the story of his pet dog in Lourdes that was put down within minutes by his father's shotgun when it developed distemper (*SM* 44). A simple promise of, "je m'en occupe" has been delivered in seconds.

I have attempted in this chapter to prove how ageing for the Coetzean character is not merely the process of growing old, or a resentment of the abject decomposing body, but a continual struggle against the loss of individual dignity, believing that society cannot accept the less than perfect being. Self-consciousness intensifies with age adding to the alienation of the characters; and to live surrounded by a vibrant young culture only accentuates the feeling of being inadequate. Certain societies are pre-disposed to favour the young causing a certain prejudice against the old to arise. The ageing body with its failing faculties needs to be hidden from sight, as it can only add to the humiliation of its owner. As with death, the ageing process is an individual private matter which each has to confront in solitude. In a conversation with Lucy, Lurie suggests that to start again from scratch is akin to starting with nothing, with no dignity, simply "like a dog" (*Di* 205). This option may be viable for Lucy, but not for the aged in Coetzee. Regardless of their individual conditions, they merely persevere like Beckett's tramps aspiring to retain some of their fading dignity, in the hope that death "which cannot be called death" is not as distressing and humiliating as the lives they have so far led (Agamben *RAWA* 70). Ultimately, it is the last battle against humiliation.

¹ *SM* 261.

² *AI* (26).

³ Aristotle states: "[s]hame in fact is not the emotion of a good man, because it is felt when we do ill" [Furthermore] "we commend a modest youth, but nobody would commend an older man for being shamefaced, for we think that he should not do things calculated to make him feel like that" (*E* 136). Curren feels shamed because she should have known better.

⁴ De Beauvoir sees the escape into childhood a form of self-transcendence that which "comes up against death [...] The old person attempts to give his existence a foundation by taking over his birth or at least his earliest years" (414).

⁵ Rose's comparison of the dying body in Coetzee with the body prepared for martyrdom is somewhat misleading and problematic. She quotes the document that was allegedly written by Mohammed Atta, one of the suspected suicide bombers in the September 11th incident. For argument's sake, let us assume that both the document and the instructions for the preparation of the suicidal body, as per the rules of Islam, are accurately described by Rose. However, an association between the concept and implication of the suicide bomber's body with the dying body in Coetzee is erroneous. The body of the suicide bomber is prepared in its best form, complete in anticipation of meeting its maker; it does not represent evil. In Islam a martyr's body does not undergo ablution. The body is sacrificed in a perfect state, hence the occupation with detail, a form of transcendence favouring the soul over the flesh, hoping for oneness with the Supreme Being. Coetzee's aging body is evil, not inherently, but because of what it has become to denote and the consequence of its decomposition. With time, the image is broken down and fragmented by its owner, a result of the alienation that has occurred between self and body.

⁶ *TMP* (19).

⁷ I will refer to the real personage as Dostoyevsky.

⁸ Attridge comments: "[w]ell-known aspects of Dostoevsky's biography feature in the novel, such as his gambling and his epilepsy. And the tortured spirals of self-doubt, [...] that occupy so much of the protagonist's mental world are familiar from Dostoevsky's fiction and letters" (*JMCER* 117).

⁹ Curren is reluctant to call her daughter; instead, she writes her a letter as she finds direct confrontation with her daughter hard. The relationship between Lurie and Lucy is very strained.

¹⁰ Richard Restak writes certain enquiries into the TLE [Temporal lobe epilepsy] have revealed some patients exhibit sexual disorders, including "fetishism, transvestic fetishism, sadomasochism, pedophilia, frotteurism and voyeurism" (<http://www.psychiatrytimes.com/p950927.html>). Perhaps this explains the partial need for Dostoevsky to feel the child nearby during the episodes of love-making with her mother. Coetzee's Dostoevsky does not attempt to hide his lust after Matryona: "[h]e stares at her with what can only be nakedness" (*TMP* 24).

¹¹ Walz writes: "[t]he Dorian factor was suggested in a July 1890 *Lippicott's Magazine* feature story entitled *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The author was Oscar Wilde. A central theme in the story is that "youth is the only thing worth having." In many ways a young country such as the United States has focused its attention on its youth: youth being a sign of change, vigor, and energy. The consequence of this attitude has been the unintended effect of a devaluing of the aged" (109).

¹² Onto Matryona's psyche, he projects his ugly image.

¹³ *Di* (161).

¹⁴ When Anne Suskind asked Coetzee what he missed about South Africa, he mentioned the university campus where old and young mix; in his answer, he associates handsome with young (Interview 2001).

¹⁵ Cooper considers the opera a tragedy (35).

¹⁶ Isidore Diala sees “[g]randfatherhood [...] a terror since it implies the defeat of time, and old age is a threat to the gratification of sensuality [...] Lurie’s drive towards sensuality is an anxious affirmation of life and self-worth [...] Lucy’s pregnancy can elicit from Lurie only intimations of mortality” (59).

¹⁷ Cooper writes: “[t]he recurring reference to termites [...] emphasizes Lurie as a hollow man in ‘the haunted house that is modern South Africa’” (26).

¹⁸ *SM* (19).

¹⁹ De Beauvoir remarks: “old people, rejected by society, find that the rejection works in their favour, since they no longer have to trouble about pleasing” (542). Costello feels that having reached a certain age, (deemed undesirable by others), she is entitled to do what she believes in.

²⁰ In “A House in Spain,” the protagonist also reflects: “[a]s he gets older he finds himself growing more and more crabby about language, about slack usage, declining standards” (*AHS* 159).

²¹ For the use of the term *Muselmann*, please refer to Agamben’s *Remnants of Auschwitz: the Witness and the Archive* (45).

²² She feels ashamed when the sailor “half carr[ies] her, as if she were an old old woman” (*EC* 55).

²³ The opening paragraph introduces another threshold: “[t]here is first of all the problem of the opening, namely, how to get us from where we are, which is, as yet, nowhere, to the far bank” (*EC* 1). The threshold refers to the problem of writing and functions as an allegory for Costello’s suspension at the gate.

²⁴ In an endnote, Overall quotes Kathryn Pauly Morgan: “[h]ere is where sexism intersects with ageism, since a youthful appearance is more highly valued in women, and hence is more desperately sought by them [...] youthfulness and femininity alike can be achieved by means of “the knife” [...] (136).

²⁵ Margaret Lenta sees Costello’s past passion for Egudu as symbolically entering his text (111).

²⁶ De Beauvoir writes this “comes from the fact that socially men, whatever their age, are subjects, and women are objects, relative beings” (387). De Beauvoir adds the aged woman “is even less attractive to men than old men are to women [...]” (387).

²⁷ Similarly, in *Youth*, the narrator says: “[o]n the throng on the sidewalks, most are young people. Strictly speaking he is their contemporary, but he does not feel like that. He feels middle-aged, prematurely middle-aged [...]” (*Y* 56).

²⁸ Rayment is continuously asking why me. De Beauvoir writes the “aged person looks upon himself as the victim of fate, of society and one of those around him” (530).

²⁹ Eagleton writes: “Rayment refuses a prosthesis, and his author’s literary style has no need of such elaborately artificial aids either” (1917).

³⁰ Overall states ““anyone who has trouble keeping up is, in effect, rendered impaired and expected to compensate as much as possible. Individuals with these socially conferred impairments are often expected to try to act so as to compensate for the impairments [...]” (133).

³¹ Rayment reflects: “[h]ow the bystanders will smile! Smile and laugh and whistle: *Good on you, grandpa*” (SM 256).

³² Miano suggests Rayment is the dog that Costello finds towards the end of the novel (<http://lnk.in/3wqk>).

³³ Envy of youth surfaces in “A House in Spain:” “[w]hat [...] if his own crabbiness expresses not what he tells himself [...] but on the contrary [...] envy, the envy of a man grown too old, too rigid, to ever fall in love again?” (AHS 159).

³⁴ De Beauvoir sees youth’s mockery of the old sadistic (246-247).

³⁵ His anger at the stolen photograph is because it represents a part of him. Drago has attacked Rayment in his very being. De Beauvoir states: “[t]hanks to his possessions the old person assures himself of his identity against those who claim to see him as nothing but an object” (523).

Chapter Five:

At the Gate

He asked God a question—Will you save me?—and God gave him an answer. God said: No. God said: Die.

[...]

He said to God: If you love me, save me. If you are there, save me. But there was only silence (*TMP* 75).

In a conversation with Matryosha, Dostoevsky tries metaphorically to elucidate the rationale behind the death of Pavel. The child is unable to comprehend how someone as young as Pavel and whom she perceives as good dies for no conceivable reason. The child is incapable of understanding the divine power that dictates the universal rules. From a child's perspective, Pavel is a decent human being; his death is unjustified. Her very questioning of fairness is a sentiment shared by the majority of Coetzee's characters, becoming more pressing with the advancement of the years. In the previous chapter, I have discussed what growing old represents for the ageing Coetzee protagonist. Here, I will look in depth at the concept of waiting that becomes more insistent as the figures age. As with Elizabeth Costello, at the gate, most find themselves in a state of limbo, unable to understand the reason for ending up in that position; at once, they seek redemption for sins they have not committed and from a power they cannot comprehend. They want to be saved, but remain unable to find a saviour who can offer any deliverance from their misapprehended purgatorial existence. Their search for a Messiah is not necessarily religious in nature. Some may have had religious upbringing, but are not particularly believers in religion per se. Although, they tend to be sceptical regarding the presence of a god, at times they search for signs that a greater power is at play. Religion is more of a tradition they have inherited rather than a doctrine they believe in. Their language is permeated by words that have religious connotations, such as confession, evil, salvation, etc... The belief has become diluted but the ritual remains.

The concept of a Messiah or saviour has long existed in the history of humankind. It can be found in the majority of old and modern religions. The Pharaohs, for instance, have for the most part considered the ruler as a deity, whose role is similar to that of the saviour.¹ The responsibility of the ruler is not simply to govern; his functions include the saving of humanity from injustice and bringing peace and prosperity to the land. The early Egyptians' myth of the saviour stems from the role the Nile has played in their lives. The water of the Nile is what gives and denies life. Its power is akin to that of a god. The need for a Messiah is the early human's way to try to explain the catastrophes caused by nature, which are viewed as essentially demonic, condemning and mysterious. The fear of the unknown becomes the power that is never seen yet controls the fate of the human and the land itself. A Messiah is required to counteract the power of evil, spread protection, stability and provide redemption. The birth of a Messiah is often accompanied by miraculous and unexplained phenomena, the event itself being virtually identical in a number of religions.² The Coetzee protagonist may not be particularly religious; nonetheless, s/he finds her/himself waiting in a purgatorial state in the same way a religious person does. A religious person may endure the hardships that life may bring in the hope that s/he may find redemption at the end of it all. The Coetzee character is unable to explain the force that rules the universe, yet seeks some form of deliverance. Essentially, his view of the world is bleak and wonders whether a redeemer can lift the veil of blindness. What transpires is waiting, which is akin to the Derridean notion of empty Messianism. Derrida states:

The messianic, including its revolutionary forms (and the messianic is always revolutionary, it has to be), would be urgency, imminence but, irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation. One may always take the quasi-atheistic dryness of the messianic to be the condition of the religions of the Book, a desert that was not even theirs (but the earth is always borrowed, on loan from God, it is never possessed by the occupier, says precisely [*justement*] the Old Testament whose injunction one would also have to hear); one may always recognize there the arid soil in which grew, and passed away, the living figures of

all the messiahs, whether they were announced, recognized, or still awaited (*SOM* 168).³

Derrida is here referring to the persistent nature of the wait, even though one suspects that it is a fruitless exercise. Irrespective of where they wait, the locale symbolically becomes a desert-like location that is somehow borrowed. The Messiah whom they anticipate will always be the promise of the saviour who will rescue the human being from evil. The Messiah exists in the pledge of arriving and not in the actual act of arriving.⁴ Furthermore, the process of redemption is concurrent with suffering; one cannot exist without the other.⁵ Rose affirms this link when she discusses the role of Messianism in the Jewish religion. She writes that redemption “will not be realized without ruin and dread. For the vision to hold, there must be slaying and being slain,” and only then will justice occur (*TQZ* 6). Most believers accept this fact as part of faith, even if reluctantly, but the Coetzee protagonist challenges this belief. At the same time, the protagonists seek explanations, as they await a deferred Messiah, hoping for some form of salvation from their dreary situation even though the actual wait can only enhance their shame. Lingered further humiliates the individual. For one, the person feels that one has lost control over the present and ultimately the future, and becomes obliged to accept the rules imposed by this invisible power, which are not very coherent. Furthermore, when one concedes to an authority of an invisible nature and decides to acknowledge the rules, both the rules and the dictator of such rules remain elusive, as they exist through *not being*. This lack of presence contributes further to the shaming of the individual; having to question one’s belief in relation to this unseen power results in emptiness. In this chapter, I will study the concept of empty Messianism in relation to the ageing Coetzee protagonists as they at once reject and hope for a form of redemption namely in *The Master of Petersburg*, *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons* and *Slow Man*. For the most part, I will be drawing on Derrida’s discussion of the *arrivant* and on Messianism in his seminar, *Specters of Marx*, and I will be referring to Samuel Beckett’s two-act play *Waiting for Godot*.

Forcing the arrivant: *The Master of Petersburg*:

He is waiting for a sign, and he is betting (there is no grander word he dare use) that the dog is not the sign, is not the sign at all, is just a dog among many dogs howling in the night. But he knows too that as long as he tries by cunning to distinguish things that are things from things that are signs he will not be saved (*TMP* 83).

The search for signs from a supernatural power stems from the belief that a force larger than life is at play and in control of an individual's life. For Dostoevsky, it is the recognition of a power that he has so far denied existed. For a sceptic, conceding to an invisible power is in itself very humiliating for the individual. Moreover, feeling that one is obliged to search for signs from an authority that one has long shunned is in itself a humbling exercise. Kissack and Titlestad write that the "ethical currency" of the Coetzeean novel "has been embedded in a discourse that stresses the sinfulness of Man in relation to his Maker—the finitude of human mortality is obliged to acknowledge humbly its inferiority to the omniscience and omnipotence of the Divinity" (136). Likewise, by conceding, Dostoevsky aspires for some confirmation that not all has been in vain, especially at this stage in his life where writing itself has become a laborious task. Furthermore, the search for the signs is a quest for redemption that he hopes will elevate part of the suffering that he has undergone and still has to endure. However, this acknowledgement of a superior entity has its price. Dostoevsky not only has to recognize a power that is superior to him but also feels he has to admit to some guilt for being alive in contrast to his stepson who is dead. This notion has its roots in religion where God is the creator of life, the one who chooses who lives and dies; for being alive, one has to be grateful. This belief lingers on, as does the vocabulary one inherits or one is taught. Lawlan remarks that "*The Master of Petersburg* is a novel about guilt and the desire for grace—confession, absolution, and an end to guilt" (149). In *The Bible*, Jesus preaches to his followers "[h]appy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised" (Matthew 5). In effect, a Messiah condones and desires the humility of the servant; in exchange, redemption may be granted. In order for

Dostoevsky to get answers, to be able to compose again, he has to accept to become humble vis-à-vis this unknown power. As with the other Coetzeean characters, Dostoevsky hopes that by connecting to this power he will be able to comprehend and end the mental and physical anguish and the remorse that plague his life. Nussbaum rightly remarks: “notions of forgiveness and atonement are at home in the world of guilt” (241). Essentially, by seeking redemption, Dostoevsky is confessing to a crime of which he may not be guilty. Coetzee states:

Confession is one component in a sequence of transgression, confession, penitence, and absolution. Absolution means the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter, liberation from the oppression of the memory. Absolution in this sense is therefore the indispensable goal of all confession, sacramental and secular (*DP* 251-252).

By confessing to a crime he has not committed, Dostoevsky expects that there will be “a closing of the chapter” and a “liberation from the oppression” of both the memory and the guilt. Instead, he becomes more obsessed with his demons and uncanny visions. The narrator tells us that Dostoevsky’s “imagination is full of bearded men with glittering eyes who hide in dark passages” (*TMP* 84). His memories although “like wisps of smoke” are populated with visions “that come and go, swift ephemeral” (*TMP* 53). His visions are like phantoms haunting him as he loses “control of himself” (*TMP* 53).⁶ Henri Bergson states:

[...] all our past life is there, preserved even to the most infinitesimal details, and that we forget nothing and that all that we have felt, perceived, thought, willed, from the first awakening of our consciousness, survives indestructibly. But the memories which are preserved in these obscure depths are there in the state of invisible phantoms (37).

Bergson suggests these phantoms “aspire, perhaps, to the light” and that “a living and acting being [has] something else to do than to occupy [her/himself] with them” (*D* 37). Even though, Dostoevsky is on a conscious level not trying to occupy himself with them, they take on a new lease when they appear as

phantoms uncannily haunting him. On more than one occasion, Dostoevsky senses that he is not in command of his life. He remarks that, “what possesses him is not the tight-throated *douceur* of twenty years ago. Rather, he feels like a leaf or a seed drawn up into the highest windstream, carried dizzily above the oceans” (*TMP* 57). Being in control seems to be a trait that only youth possess. As with other attributes, it erodes with age leaving the person vulnerable to external influences. The ageing Dostoevsky is conscious of an unknown force that seems to be at play; and until Dostoevsky is able to decipher the signs, he will not be able to resume control over what is left of his life. In *Waiting for Godot*, Pozzo describes the illogical and unforeseeable events that govern the world. He says, “[...] but behind this veil of gentleness and peace night is charging (*vibrantly*) and will burst upon us (*snaps his fingers*) pop! like that! (*his inspiration leaves him*) just when we least expect it. (*Silence. Gloomily.*) That’s how it is on this bitch of an earth” (Beckett *WFG* 25). The illogical sequence of events accentuates the unfairness that exists. The invisible power that dictates the happenings does not seem to follow a just or a logical pattern. This undetectable force not only holds the individual in its chains but also adds to the humiliation that one faces by feeling helpless in its presence; this is felt more poignantly with age.

Derrida states that one “*does not know* if the expectation prepares the coming of the future-to-come or if it recalls the repetition of the same, the same thing as ghost” (*SOM*, 36). The Derridean wait carries in its folds the possibility of something better. For Coetzee, what one expects and waits for, in all likelihood, will be worse. Not knowing is what immerses Dostoevsky further in purgatory. On a number of occasions in the novel, he likens his search into the past, embodied by the search for his dead stepson, to Orpheus’ descent into the underworld. He waits for darkness to fall in order to open the door for the *arrivant*. He reflects as he tries to pronounce Pavel’s name, hoping to bring his son back to life:

He is trying to cast a spell. But over whom: over a ghost or over himself? He thinks of Orpheus walking backwards step by step, whispering the dead woman’s name, coaxing

her out of the entrails of hell; of the wife in graveclothes with the blind, dead eyes following him, holding out limp hands before her like a sleepwalker [...] the union of a soul with a name, the name it will carry into eternity. Barely breathing, he forms the syllables again: *Pavel* (TMP 5).

Intrinsically, Dostoevsky is surrendering to an invisible power, accepting its rules, in return for some form of deliverance. The reason for wanting to resurrect Pavel is the guilt he feels towards his stepson; the guilt is compounded with his sentiment that death should have selected him, the old man rather than Pavel, the young son. In his attempt at understanding the injustice that defines existence, he tries to conjure up Pavel's ghost, hoping that the latter can aid in saving him. When he first enters his son's room, he attempts to become the medium through which he can summon up the spectre: "He lifts the suitcase on to the bed. Neatly folded on top is a white cotton suit. He presses his forehead to it. Faintly the smell of his son comes to him. He breathes in deeply, again and again, thinking his ghost, entering me" (TMP 3-4). Derrida states that a "ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back" (SOM 99). This is the belief that Dostoevsky tries to uphold. He places his old body as the median through which the young body of Pavel can be resurrected. By accepting the ghost will always make a comeback, Dostoevsky is essentially rejecting the idea of death, or at least until he is partially granted redemption. Pavel's ghost fails to materialize and he begins to search for signs that would aid him in reaching out to the arrivant or the Messiah who will offer salvation. He even imagines that he hears the wind call out his name. The narrator tells us:

He enters sleep, as he enters sleep each night, with the intent of finding his way to Pavel. But on this night, he is woken—almost at once, it seems—by a voice, thin to the point of being disembodied, calling from the street below. *Isaev!* the voice calls, over and over, patiently (TMP 79).

Realizing that "it is not a human call at all [...] but] a wail of a dog" he tries to persuade himself that the wailing of the dog is one of the signs he has to decipher in order that he and his son can be saved. Perhaps the howling of the dog is an

announcement similar to the thief of the night that comes unexpectedly. The narrator describes the event:

The dog howls again. No hint of empty plains and silver light: a dog, not a wolf; a dog, not his son [...] If he expects his son to come as thief in the night, and listens only for the call of the thief, he will never see him. If he expects his son to speak in the voice of the unexpected, he will never hear him. As long as he expects what he does not expect, what he does not expect will not come (*TMP* 80).

The above text is an allegory to the Biblical story in which Jesus explains the Second Coming to his disciples. In the messianic tradition, the times that foresee the emergence of the redeemer are troubled ones. Jesus describes them: "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places" (Matthew 24: 6-7). The calamitous times resemble Dostoevsky's Russia and his own inner demonic struggle. Yet, as he echoes the Messiah's words, he tries to persuade himself that redemption will only come when one least expects it. It will crawl like the thief of the night, similar to the Second Coming, "the day of the Lord [which...] cometh as a thief in the night" (Thessalonians 5:2). Unspecified rules and times govern the coming of the saviour, and to echo Pozzo's words, it will burst upon us when we least expect it (Beckett *WFG* 25). Attridge writes the "cry of the dog, however, is not the unexpected [...but] the event that interrupts the order of the familiar and unfamiliar with absolute heterogeneity" (*JMCER* 122).

Disruption is another method to explain the unexplainable. Similarly, Dostoevsky can only search for signs in order to pacify his anguish and this implies being receptive to all in case he misses the real one. Derrida finds in the empty wait of Messianism a possibility of hope. By opening the door to the arrivant, what arrives could bring with it good tidings. Here, Dostoevsky is keeping the door ajar. Therefore, he searches for the howling dog to rescue him. He enquires whether he is destined to spend the rest of his days "peering into the

eyes of dogs and beggars” (TMP 81). He then alludes to the possibility that the Messiah may reside within him as he questions “[w]hy me? he thinks as he hurries away. Why should I bear all the world’s burdens?” (TMP 81). He wonders whether Pavel’s death can in effect lead to his reformation, the road to his salvation (TMP 81). The interpretation of the signs continues to elude him and once again, he asks: “[i]s the dog the thing he must release and take with him and feed and cherish, or is it the filthy, drunken beggar in his tattered coat under the bridge?” (TMP 82). Although he realizes the absurdity of the situation, something inside of him nudges him and tells him that:

Pavel will not be saved till he has freed the dog and brought it into his bed, brought *the least thing*, the beggarmen and the beggarwomen too, and much else he does not yet know of; and even then there will be no certainty (TMP 82).

To encompass all that is living, including humanity is not enough for being redeemed. If Dostoevsky accepts the rules of the Messiah, opens the door to the arrivant, there is no certainty that he will be saved. For Dostoevsky, Pavel’s salvation is akin to his own, and is necessary for ridding himself of the demons that plague him. His salvation is at once invoking the ghost of Pavel and the presence of the saviour. Gerald Gaylard sees in the act of trying to bring about Pavel’s ghost a further entanglement:

This allegorical writer, Dostoevsky, tries to raise a ghost but finds himself possessed by this very process, his own bedevilled need to find truth and authority. He cannot tell Pavel’s story, the story of the new, for he has not lived it and instead of finding the truth, he finds himself in a “labyrinth of history” (92).

When Dostoevsky tries to enter Pavel’s past, he does not only risk being caught by a history that it is not his, but becomes, to use Derrida’s term, “out-of-joint” with his own life. Derrida stresses that when Hamlet tries to invite the spectre he “could never know the peace of a ‘good ending,’” simply because Hamlet is “out of joint” (SOM 29). Redemption chooses its subject and time; there is no logic to

its workings. Even if the spectre materializes, Dostoevsky will not know if this opens up the door for salvation or further condemnation. Derrida adds, “[i]t is a proper characteristic of the specter, that no one can be sure if by returning it testifies to a living past or to a living future, for the *revenant* may already mark the promised return of the specter of living being” (*SOM* 99). By its apparition, the spectre may be unveiling torments of a past without providing any deliverance for the future.⁷

Attridge is uncertain as to whose ghost Dostoevsky is waiting for. He remarks:

Dostoevsky, in the novel, does know that he is waiting for some kind of ghost, the ghost of a rumour? [F]or a ghost? At one point his attempt to summon up his son’s image (in place of Nechaev’s) is described as “conjuring.” But it is the living he becomes entangled with, the living who seem to be given the task of bringing Pavel back, back to where he in fact never was, united with his father (*JMCER* 121).

In reality, Dostoevsky is not so much interested in bringing Pavel back, as he has never had him. The invoking of the ghost is a feeble attempt at forcing the saviour to appear. Ultimately, Dostoevsky is certain his wait is an empty one, but his opening up to the ghost is a final attempt at self-redemption. Derrida sees the “specter [...as] not only the carnal apparition of the spirit, its phenomenal body, its fallen and guilty body, [but] it is also the impatient and nostalgic waiting for a redemption” (*SOM* 136). Attridge considers the entire novel as a novel of waiting, “waiting without any clear sense of what would constitute the longed-for arrival” (*JMCER* 120).⁸ Dostoevsky is in effect caught in a labyrinth of waiting, waiting for the interrogation to end, waiting for permission to leave Russia, waiting for his writing capability to return and waiting for the saviour who is unlikely to appear.⁹ Paradoxically, although he is certain that the saviour will not appear, he still feels that he needs to “bet on everyone, every beggar, every mangy dog; only thus will [...he] be sure that the One, the true son, the thief in the night, will not slip through the net” (*TMP* 84).

In spite of his scepticism, Dostoevsky does not give up hope of trying to find redemption. He explains to Matryosha that God has refused to take any action when Pavel requested it:

He said to God: If you love me, save me. If you are there, save me. But there was silence. Then he said: I know you are there, I know you hear me. I will wager my life that you will save me. And still God said nothing [...] I am going to make my wager –now! And he threw down his wager. And God did not appear. God did not intervene (TMP 75).

Once again, Dostoevsky feels that God has betrayed him, and the *arrivant* has failed to materialize.¹⁰ One of the manifestations of betrayal is an overpowering incapacity to write which evolves into an inability to think. The narrator tells us:

He cannot write, he cannot think.
He cannot think, *therefore what?* He has not forgotten the thief in the night. If he is to be saved, it will be by the thief in the night, for whom he must unwaveringly be on watch. Yet the thief will not come till the household has forgotten him and fallen asleep. The householder may not watch and wake without cease, otherwise the parable will not be fulfilled (TMP 236).

The need for salvation becomes more piercing. He insists, “God must save, God has no other way. Yet to trap God thus in a net of reason is a provocation and a blasphemy” (TMP 236). Failing to get any attention from God, he decides to gamble with the Almighty, otherwise he will rot in his “old labyrinth” (TMP 237). He justifies his action through the negligence of God: “He gambles because God does not speak. He gambles to make God speak. But to make God speak in the turn of a card is blasphemy. Only when God is silent does God speak. When God seems to speak God does not speak” (TMP 237).¹¹ In spite of his gamble, God will not speak to him; the Messiah will not arrive. Dostoevsky has to seek salvation from other parts. He tells us that in God’s eyes he and Nechaev are one, “sparrows of equal weight” (TMP 238). There is no logic as to who will be saved.

By opening the door to the *arrivant* in the form of Pavel’s spirit, Dostoevsky is exposing himself to being “out of joint.” The life he is trying to resurrect does not belong to him and the ghost that may or may not appear does not reside in his temporal time. In his comment, Derrida adds to “be out ‘out of joint’, whether it

be present Being or present time, can do harm and do evil, it is no doubt the very possibility of evil" (*SOM* 29). However, if one does not open up this possibility, one does not know, "there remains, perhaps, beyond good and evil, only the necessity of the worst" (Derrida *SOM* 29). In his desperation, Dostoevsky attempts to force the arrivant, and this for Derrida could be catastrophic. In order to write again Dostoevsky can either embody the character of Judas or simply sell himself to the devil.¹² Having lost the ability to write is the ultimate form of humiliation for the author, Dostoevsky. An aspect of his life over which he has once enjoyed control, he now feels completely helpless. He summarizes his current life as a transaction between him and an external force: "I pay and I sell: that is my life, sell the lives of those around me. Sell everyone. A Yakovlev trading in lives [...] Sold Pavel alive and will now sell the Pavel inside me, if I can find a way" (*TMP* 222). Ultimately, having "betrayed everyone" the person he sells is himself leaving him with "no taste at all in his mouth, just as there is no weight on his heart. His heart, in fact, feels quite empty" (*TMP* 250). He has given up his soul as he waits for the Messiah; he may be able to start scribbling but his life remains one "without honour" qualified by "treachery without limit; confession without end" (*TMP* 222).

To be alive is to be able to die: *Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons*:

I believe in what does not bother to believe in me (*EC* 218).

She believed in life: will she take that as the last word on her, her epitaph? Her whole inclination is to protest [...] She is not here to win an argument, she is here to win a pass, a passage (*EC* 219).

At the end of the novel, Costello finds herself in a form of purgatory paying penance for something she does not understand, implored to state beliefs that may not exist. Having to declare her views becomes an exercise she is incapable of doing, and as with the other Coetzean characters finds herself waiting for a form

of salvation out of a situation that she fails to comprehend. At the same time, Costello senses that she is being victimized by an unforeseen power over which she exerts no control. This state of limbo is akin to Dostoevsky's situation of continually waiting. Both writers are victims of a dwindling writing capability and forces that compel them to create. The two are also under scrutiny for their roles as authors. Costello and Dostoevsky call into question the role of the author and the possibility that the creative process itself is in some way demonic. When Dostoevsky is asked about the kind of books he writes, he says, "the answer he should have given: 'I write perversions of the truth. I choose the crooked road and take children into dark places. I follow the dance of the pen'" (*TMP* 236). Dostoevsky is not only suggesting that writing and evil are somewhat intermingled but is also alluding to a presence of an uncanny controlling influence over his work. Costello echoes a similar sentiment: "There are many things that it is like, this storytelling business. One of them [...] is a bottle with a genie in it. When the storyteller opens the bottle, the genie is released into the world, and it costs all hell to get him back in again" (*EC* 167). Once again, what is implied is the writer's partial control over the exercise of creation. Consequently, being creators of the text, they have partially usurped the role of God. Costello is quick to add that the genie could also be a devil. She says: "[a] genie or a devil. While she has less and less idea what it could mean to believe in God, about the devil she has no doubt. The devil is everywhere under the skin of things, searching for a way into the light" (*EC* 167). Simply by jotting down letters on a page, a window opens up allowing the entry of evil, the devil into light, leading to an excessive feeling of guilt, and redemption is sought to alleviate this burden. When the judges beleaguer Costello with the need to produce a statement, she reads these words:

I am a writer and what I write is what I hear, I am a secretary of the invisible, one of many secretaries over the ages. That is my calling: dictation secretary. It is not for me to interrogate, to judge what is given me. I merely write down the words and then test them, test their soundness, to make sure I have heard right (*EC* 199).

In her answer, two major concerns on the subject of writing are addressed. By claiming, she is merely a vehicle through which words travel, Costello is insinuating that the creative process itself is controlled by an undetectable power, perhaps even a muse. Implying that she does not exercise full control over what she produces, Costello is at the dictates of a force that exists beyond her. The writing process itself is scrutinized.

Costello is questioned by the panel over the prejudices that may taint her writing, and how much sensitivity she holds towards humankind. She replies:

I am open to all voices, not just the voices of the murdered and the violated [...] If it is their murderers and violators who choose to summon me instead, to use me and speak through me, I will not close my ears to them, I will not judge them.

You will speak for murderers?

I will.

You do not judge between the murderer and his victim? Is that what it is to be a secretary: to write down whatever you are told? To be bankrupt of conscience? (EC 204).

She remains silent in the face of this accusation. Does being a writer involve having a conscience?¹³ Is being open to all voices a step towards redemption? F.R. Anknernsmit rightly comments, “[...] as befits someone on the threshold between life and death, Elizabeth Costello finds herself compelled to give an account, or a moral justification, of her life *as a writer*” (94). This is reminiscent of Dostoevsky’s wondering whether he has to embrace the whole of humanity in order that he may be redeemed (TMP 81). On the other hand, stating that she is simply the “secretary of the invisible,” is an attempt to lessen the impact of guilt that disturbs her life.¹⁴ Choosing to be invisible, Costello is aspiring to become beyond judgement, beyond guilt and therefore not obliged to seek redemption. The invisible recalls a spectral quality that is at once haunting and present in its absence. Derrida defines the spectre as:

[...] the *frequency* of a certain visibility. But the visibility of the invisible. And visibility, by its essence, is not seen, which is why it remains *epekeina tes ousias*, beyond the phenomenon or beyond being. The specter is also, among

other things, what one imagines, what one thinks one sees and which one projects—on an imaginary screen where there is nothing to see (*SOM* 100-101).

By seeking anonymity, Costello essays at becoming a non-entity, with “nothing to see,” not subjected to an indefinable power. On the other hand, being the secretary of the invisible is a partial admittance that a larger power is at play, even though on various occasions she affirms that she does not believe in God. Anknensmit regards her description “a compromise between her unwillingness to state her beliefs and an obligation to do so” (95). I, however, see in her reluctance a form of negation of not wanting to state what she believes in so as not to become enslaved to the beliefs. When her judges interrogate her over her belief in God, she declines to answer saying it is “too intimate” (*EC* 205). In a conversation with her son, Elizabeth comments “[p]erhaps we invented gods so that we could put the blame on them” (*EC* 86). Paradoxically, later on, she wonders, “whether the gods will continue to believe in us, whether we can keep alive the last flicker of the flame that once used to burn in them” (*EC* 191). If gods are to continue to believe in us, they function as a confirmation of our own existence, and perhaps can offer the possibility for our salvation. It is worth noting then when Costello is giving her statement to the panel of judges, consisting of nine members, she is relieved to see the cleaner who sits on one of the benches. Costello reflects:

There are seven of them, not nine, one of them: a woman; she recognizes none of the faces. And the public benches are no longer empty. She has a spectator, a supporter: the cleaning woman, sitting by herself with a string bag on her lap (*EC* 215).

The cleaner’s presence is essential. As gods need humans for proof of their existence, humans similarly need gods for evidence of theirs. Furthermore, in the absence of gods and saviours, Costello requires an entity external to herself to verify her existence. The judges, who are part of this desert-like locale, are themselves closer to being unreal;¹⁵ the cleaner, although also possibly an illusion, provides a certain comfort for Costello, a momentary indication that she

exists. Her presence is a temporary relief. Having failed in obtaining salvation, Costello is left with the vision of what heaven might be. Costello describes this image:

A vision, an opening up, as the heavens are opened up by a rainbow when the rain stops falling. Does it suffice, for old folk, to have these visions now and again, these rainbows, as a comfort before the rain starts pelting, down again? Must one be too creaky to join the dance before one can see the pattern? (*EC* 192).

If the Messiah fails to materialize, does it suffice for the human being to have an apparition of what heaven may be? To Coetzee, heaven is a “sort of eternal peace” which we are unable to conceive (Interview <http://lnk.in/4rah>).

The judges who may or may not approve Costello’s statement in some ways parody the role of the Messiah who has been appointed by God who calls on “[...] all men everywhere to repent [... for he] has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained” (*Acts* 17:30, 31). Furthermore, Costello learns that records are continuously being kept (*EC* 223). Not only do they possess the power to allow or disallow entry but are also attentive to the daily actions of individuals. At face value, the judges’ request appears to be simple; state your beliefs and you are given permission to pass through the gate into the other side. Nonetheless, Costello struggles with her values. Costello’s reluctance to set down her beliefs in writing is akin to the embodiment of ideas by characters/speakers presented early on in the novel, where the narrator claims that “realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no autonomous existence, can exist only in things” (*EC* 9). Once the beliefs/ideas are written, they will embody their creator, or assimilate into the body of another, acquiring somewhat a haunting quality; the speaker utters the idea, the idea becomes an entity and then comes back to irk the speaker. Derrida suggests that:

Once ideas or thoughts (*Gedanke*) are detached from their substratum, one engenders some ghost by *giving them a body*. Not by returning to the living body from which ideas and thoughts have been torn loose, but by incarnating that latter in *another artifactual body, a prosthetic body, a*

ghost of spirit, one might say a ghost of the ghost, [...] (SOM 126).

Essentially, if Costello consents to documenting her beliefs, she risks the chance that her beliefs will come back in a ghostly fashion, rigid and resistant to change. It is worth noting that her roommate referred to the statement of belief as a confession, once more implying an inherent guilt (EC 212). Coetzee speculates:

[...] that the project of confession when the subject is at a heightened level of self-awareness and open to self-doubt raises intricate and, on the face of it, intractable problems regarding truthfulness, problems whose common factor seems to be a regression to infinity of self-awareness and self-doubt (DP 274).

By insisting that Costello writes down her statement of belief, she loses the little beliefs she has once enjoyed. The statement assumes the form of a confession, which accentuates the feeling of loss within.¹⁶ Therefore, she becomes more isolated, immersed further and further in self-doubt, anchored in this deserted space. In *Waiting for Godot*, Estragon and Vladimir find themselves on a country road, with no explanation as to how they have ended up in this desolate place. Likewise, Costello is symbolically on a road. In theory, a road is supposed to link two places, a place one has come from and another to which one is going. We are told that Costello “descends from the bus” and “makes her way to the gate” (EC 193). We will never know from where the bus has come; assuming she crosses the gate, will she be heading anywhere? Estragon and Vladimir amble on a road that has no starting or ending point. They are incapable of going anywhere. In all likelihood, Costello has come on “a great crowded bus on its way from nowhere to nowhere” (AI 30). Consequently, she is forced to wait for a saviour to rescue her from this quandary. Derrida’s depiction of the desert-like messianism, characterised by a lack of content and without an identifiable Messiah, is the very situation in which Costello finds herself (Derrida SOM 28). She waits at the gate “without knowing the messianic” in this abysmal desert (Derrida SOM 28).

Crossing the gate becomes more urgent, even though she does not know what lies in store for her as she fails to produce what the judges have demanded. She asks the man at the desk if she is allowed to “just glance through [...] to see if it is worth all this trouble” (EC 195). She is allowed a “millimetre, two millimetres” from which she has been able to deduce, “[d]espite her unbelief” that “what lay beyond this door fashioned of teak and brass” is a light that “is not unimaginable at all. It is merely brilliant, more brilliant perhaps than the varieties of light she has known hitherto” (EC 196). The radiance of the light evokes the supernatural. The man suggests that now that she has glimpsed into this numinous light, she is expected to try harder. Nevertheless, she remarks: “if the afterlife turns out to be nothing but hocus-pocus, a simulation from beginning to end, why does the simulation fail so consistently, not just by a hair’s breadth [...] but by a hand’s breath?” (EC 209). In a TV interview, Coetzee describes how in the term afterlife lies a paradox as we are driven by a will to live while at the same time in it lays the recognition of death which may provide eternal peace; the “drive towards death” is “just as real as the drive to live” (Coetzee <http://lnk.in/4rah>). Costello’s gate epitomizes this paradox, and she needs to go beyond the gate. Irrespective of what might lie ahead, Costello needs to accept the dictates of the judges in order that she may be redeemed; she is not given a choice to do otherwise. Essentially, the man impresses upon Costello the need to try harder to please the omnipotent power that may grant her permission to cross the gate, the assumption being, that even though she is not a believer, a certain force dictates the events in her life. According to this man, the invisible presence is what will lead her to redemption. Dostoevsky searches for a saviour, gambles with God, but Costello has to manipulate words in order that the greater authority accords her some reprieve. Otherwise, she lingers on “not so much in purgatory as in a kind of literary theme park, set up to divert her while she waits, with actors made up to look like writers” (EC 208).

She wonders whether her old judges can be of some assistance and release her from “the *mise en scène* into which she has been hurdled so” (EC 209). The prospect of her spending the rest of her life “idling the daytime hours away on the square and retiring at nightfall to lie in the smell of someone else’s sweat” is not

appealing (EC 210). As with Dostoevsky, Costello is unable to decipher the signs. She even marvels at the idea of taking up novel writing again, assuming that this exercise could be the solution (EC 210). In essence, she is searching for one form of belief, an outlet for a tormented spirit, a freeing “of the soul [...] imprisoned in a shell” (EC 78). This will not be realized, as along with other Coetzean figures she remains suspended in a purgatory not of her making, in “streets that already have the air of streets about to be forgotten” (EC 31). Costello remarks earlier on in the novel that the future is “after all, but a structure of hopes and expectations [...]. Its residence is in the mind; it has no reality” (EC 38). Likewise, the Messiah who is expected to appear will forever reside in the mind. Costello notes:

We do not possess a shared story of the future. The creation of the past seems to exhaust our collective creative energies. Compared with our fiction of the past, our fiction of the future is a sketchy, bloodless affair, as visions of heaven tend to be. Of heaven and even of hell (EC 38).

The image of the future is just as blurry as the arrival of the Messiah. Ultimately, Costello will never know if redemption is possible, as she questions: “*Is that what we are, all of us: petitioners awaiting our respective judgements, some new, some, the ones I call locals, long enough here to have settled down, settled in, becomes part of the scenery?*” (EC 208). Costello, in all likelihood will become part of the scenery, similar to Beckett’s Estragon and Vladimir who continue to wait by their tree on a country road. The endless wait becomes the only reality to which she is entitled. She wonders if the exercise of being alive is “to be able to die” (EC 211). But as she is not saved, waiting for a Godot who will always definitely come tomorrow, the only remaining certainty is the waiting, suspended and beyond the gate is a vision of “a desert of sand and stone [stretching like the old dog] to infinity” (EC 224). Her one cry, “*God save me!*” resounds in emptiness, leaving her stranded, with “the anagram GOD-DOG” that cannot be trusted (EC 215). Dostoevsky’s suspicion of the dog’s presence as being a sign

from the saviour is once again contemplated here by Costello, but quickly rejected as being merely a phantom of literature.

Door to future is locked: *Slow Man*:

VLADIMIR: You work for Mr. Godot?
BOY: Yes, sir.
VLADIMIR: What do you do?
BOY: I mind the goats, sir.
VLADIMIR: Is he good to you?
BOY: Yes, sir.
VLADIMIR: He doesn't beat you?
BOY: No, sir, not me.
VLADIMIR: Whom does he beat?
BOY: He beats my brother, sir.
VLADIMIR: Ah, you have a brother?
BOY: Yes, sir.
VLADIMIR: What does he do?
BOY: He minds the sheep, sir.
VLADIMIR: And why doesn't he beat you?
BOY: I don't know, sir
(Beckett *WFG* 33).

This dialogue indicates that certain actions are applied indiscriminately, independent of the fact that one may be deserving or responsible for them. The boy will never know why Godot chooses to beat his brother and not him. Punishment is administered erratically for no good reason at all. The same sentiment is echoed throughout *Slow Man*. Rayment suggests, "Fate deals you a hand, and you play the hand you are dealt. You do not whine, you do not complain" (*SM* 53).¹⁷ Rayment is partially referring to the accident that left him without a limb. He is unable to understand why he has been the target. On a number of occasions, he questions "who did this to [...him]" and "[w]hat is this fate that has befallen [...him]" (*SM* 15, 4). The implication being that one is not in control of events that occur in one's life, but is instead at the mercy of a greater power. The feeling of helplessness that accompanies Rayment is similar to the one that haunts the lives of the other Coetzean figures. D.J. Taylor states:

Coetzee's characters are similarly detached, rootless to the point of vagrancy, their dilemmas, though real enough, existing in such isolation from any kind of wider world that the result is curiously abstract, as if his true interest lay less in people than the writing of sophisticated parables of the human condition (<http://lnk.in/3wr7>).

Rayment personifies the humiliating powerlessness of the Coetzean protagonist, especially in his inability to understand the haphazard nature of justice. In a conversation with Costello, he refers to a figure from history that he says is his model, one he would prefer to emulate rather than God. Simply by trying to understand how justice is delivered, Rayment prefers the consistency of a person who can only administer injustice. He tells Costello:

Surely it is not up to me to play God, separating the sheep from the goats, dismissing the false stories, preserving the true. If I have a model, it is not God, it is the Abbé of Cîteaux, the notorious one, the Frenchman, the one who said to the soldiers in his pastoral care, *Slay them all—God will know who are His* (SM 202-203).

Rayment is referring to the massacre of the Cathars on 22nd, July 1209, in Béziers near Languedoc, when the Cistercian abbot-commander gave orders to kill everyone in the monastery and the churches, friend and foe, and when asked how he could recognize a Cathar from a Catholic, he said God will be able to recognize his own. The assumption being is that God will not only be choosing whom he wants to save but is also expected to save those who believe in him. Once again, salvation is indiscriminate. Vladimir obsesses over the Biblical story of the two thieves and how “[o]ne is supposed to have been saved and the other [...] damned” (Beckett *WFG* 9). Vladimir is also concerned why only one of the Evangelists mentions the story. Not only is Vladimir alluding to the injustice that surrounds this tale, but is also wondering as to why “[t]he [s]aviour [...] wouldn't save them “from death” (Beckett *WFG* 9). The entire concept of salvation is questioned. Moreover, if the saviour is the son of God, why does God not save his own and why does he allow his own son to be crucified?

After his accident, Rayment is not interested in seeking redemption in a conventional way; he does not feel that he needs to be forgiven for a life lived, but instead for a life not lived.¹⁸ What irks him about the incident is why he, the non-entity, has been chosen for such a fate. He wishes that his life would be over. To him, “there is no future, the door to the future has been closed and locked” (*SM* 12-13). Nonetheless, the only option that remains is for him to wait. Derrida sees in this form of waiting which resembles a despairing form of messianism “a curious taste of death” (*SOM* 169). For post-accident Rayment, the taste of death becomes more poignant. In some respects, the accident has made him stop and examine the life lived so far. His main concern lies in the fact that his life has been uneventful; he has been a non-entity, “[s]liding through the world [...] attracting no attention” living a “frivolous” life (*SM* 19). Having lived a nondescript life, having produced no heir, he is troubled that once he is dead, no one will be there to judge him; even “the Great Judge of All” will not pass a judgement on someone who has been missing all his life (*SM* 19). The accident has impressed upon him that his life has thus far been a “wasted chance” (*SM* 19). The redemption he seeks is either a quick anonymous death or a chance to undo certain aspects from his past. He has come to realize that unless he acts, he will “leave no trace behind” (*SM* 19). He remarks that even to think that one will be informed as to what will happen is itself ludicrous:

How he had strained, that day on Magill Road, to attend
the word of the gods, tapped out on their occult typewriter!
Looking back, he can only smile. How quaint, how
positively antique, to believe one will be advised, when the
time comes, to put one’s soul in order. What beings could
possibly be left, in what corner of the universe, interested
in checking all the deathbed accountings that ascend the
skies, debits in the one column, credits in the other? (*SM*
19).

Rayment is alluding to the human expectation that an unforeseen power is both interested in what occurs with humans and documents events of these lives. He tries to persuade himself that the accident must have happened for a reason, in spite of the realization there is never a logical explanation to events that occur. If

gods are responsible for his misfortune, then in some ways he has been chosen, increasing his chances of being saved. Rayment fluctuates between the desire of wanting to be privileged and the urge to remain nameless leading a cloistered existence, “single, solitary [and] alone” (*SM* 9). At times, he even contemplates the possibility that losing a leg in itself could be a form of marking. The narrator tells us:

Of course he is not a special case. People lose limbs or the use of limbs every day. History is full of one-armed sailors and chairbound inventors; of blind poets and mad kings too. But in his case the case seems to have marked off past from future with such uncommon cleanness that it gives new meaning to the word *new*. By the sign of this cut let a new life commence (*SM* 26).

Eagleton suggests: “[p]erhaps, then, that nasty crash on the road, as in classical tragedy, was the seed of a mysterious renewal [...] and he ends the novel by refusing to settle for anything less than love” (1918). I do not see the accident as a “seed for renewal” but a forced confrontation of his life thus far. Furthermore, not accepting Costello’s offer at the end of the novel stems from the reluctance to change anything in his life, which symbolically entails accepting salvation from her.¹⁹ Nonetheless, if we are to accept the premise that the missing leg may be a sign for something better, post-accident Rayment appears more melancholic, continuously pondering death. He questions:

Has he given up? Does he want to die? Is that what it comes down to? No. The question is false [...] He does not *want* death because he does not *want* anything. But if it so happens that Wayne Blight bumps into him a second time [...] he will make sure he does not save himself (*SM* 26-27).

The assumption is that Rayment is in control of his life, and can actually choose if he wants to be saved. He is deluding himself as throughout the novel he sees himself as the non-performer in his life. Realizing that he is always on the periphery, Rayment remarks:

The greatest of all secrets may just have unveiled itself to him. There is a second world that exists side by side with the first, unsuspected. One chugs along in the first for a certain length of time; then the angel of death arrives in the person of Wayne Blight or someone like him. For an instant, for an aeon, time stops; one tumbles down a dark hole. Then, hey presto, one emerges into a second world *identical with the first*, where time resumes and the action proceeds...(SM 122).

The two worlds represent his uneventful past life and the chance of an eventful future, if he chooses to act. Following the accident, regret at not having had children weighs heavily on him.²⁰ He tries to create another reality for himself by offering to become the godfather of Marijana's children and contributing to the education of her son Drago.²¹ In effect, Rayment is trying to persuade himself he is still in control and can salvage what remains.²² This hypothesis is false. Following the accident, the doctors have not even consulted him on the treatment they wish to pursue. They have decided that he is too old for any constructive surgery, taking it upon themselves to amputate his leg. Ironically, his saviours have not found it worthwhile to try and fully save him (SM 7). Had he been a young man, they would probably have considered it (SM 7). In some respect, his doctors are playing God; someone at his age is not worthy of the full medical treatment, he can spend whatever remaining days he has left with a prosthesis. His saviours are not interested in saving the person that Rayment has been, but in half saving the human that they feel they have granted life, but on their own terms.²³

At this point, I would like to discuss the roles that are played in the novel by Costello, Marijana and the dark lady; I would like to argue that these roles at once carry in their folds the prospect and failure of salvation. In their various ways, Costello, Marijana and the dark woman briefly assume a certain messianic quality. Rayment is impressed with the professionalism of Marijana, and considers her one "of the better things that has happened to him" (SM 33). Having fallen in love with her, he is unable to fault her and hopes that through her he can finally achieve some form of redemption. Rayment's opinion on Marijana is biased as it is prejudiced by his feelings towards her. All his life, he

has been sidelined, but with her care, he has come to realize that he “is no spirit being as yet, but a man of some kind” (SM 33). Even though he views himself as “the ghost of a man looking back in regret,” Marijana has provided him with some hope (SM 34). Nevertheless, and in spite of her professionalism, certain actions of Marijana expose an insensitive person who looks at Rayment simply as a job she has been paid to do. In his search for redemption, he chooses to read more into Marijana, choosing to excuse her lack of professionalism as in the times she fails to show up and does not even call him to inform him. The one instance he calls her asking her for help following his fall in the bathroom, she comes and resentfully tells him that this is not an emergency (SM 211). Rayment explains that his “spirits rise, [...his] spirits fall, they are no longer under [...his] control. As a result [...he] become[s] attached to the first woman to cross [...his] path, the first sympathetic woman” (SM 209). Rayment falls in love with Marijana simply because at this stage in his life she mimics the role of a saviour. Rayment ponders over the recent events that have taken place:

Therefore behind the chaos of appearance a divine logic is at work! Wayne Blight comes out of nowhere to smash his leg to a pulp, *therefore* months later he collapses in the shower, *therefore* this scene becomes possible: a man of sixty caught more or less rigid in bed, shivering intermittently, spouting philosophy to his nurse, spouting love (SM 210-211).

Rayment deludes himself that a divine force is at play, the force that has sent Marijana to redeem him.

His other possible saviour is Costello. She, on the other hand, is a visitation who imposes herself on him, claiming that she has come to rescue him from his gloomy state.²⁴ Costello holds on to the claim that she has been sent to him and he himself has asked for her (SM 85). In some ways, this uncannily suggests that she is some sort of spectre that has been recalled to life. She has earlier stated that she “is not in command of what comes to” her. We also learn early on in the novel that Costello is homeless; the drifting itself carries in its folds a ghostly quality (SM 81). As with Derrida’s definition of ghost, Costello evolves into “the deferred spirit [with] the promise or calculation of an expiation” whom Rayment

has subconsciously invited to help him expiate his end (*SOM* 136). Costello has frequently denied being a ghost and emphasized that she is a real human being, an “old woman who scribbles away, page after page, day after day” (*SM* 81, 233).²⁵ Miano suggests that both “Elizabeth and Paul are two spirits imprisoned in a literary afterlife or some sort of mythical purgatory” (<http://lnk.in/3wqk>). They become joined in this purgatory simply because Costello forces herself on a man whom she does not know and in a text that is not her own. Her presence functions like a ghost in Coetzee’s novels. Derrida states that “a ghost never dies, it remains always to come and to come-back” (*SOM* 99). Costello evolves into the *revenant* that haunts the latter part of Coetzee’s fiction. Rayment’s and her wait for salvation become one, as Costello tries to join their fate by offering him a “[c]ompassionate marriage” (*SM* 232). His reaction echoes the one post his accident. He questions Costello: “[w]hy, of all the many people in the world, me?” the implication being that he has been selected by an invisible power (*SM* 232). Moreover, he adds, “I am dross, Elizabeth, base metal. I am not redeemable. I am of no use to you, to anyone, of no value. Too pale, too cold, too frightened” (*SM* 232-233). A few lines later, he doubts if she is real, wondering if he has actually died and she is “the shade assigned to welcome [...him] to the afterlife” (*SM* 233). Furthermore, how “can he be the missing piece when all his life he has been missing himself?” (*SM* 237) If Costello needs him as a form of confirmation to her own existence, he is unable to oblige.

Costello remains silent when he turns to her for help during their visit to the Jokić home (*SM* 247). As with the saviour, she is inconsistent in her choice of help. Instead, she leans back “eyes shut, abstracted” shutting off the world and more importantly Rayment (*SM* 247). Earlier on in the novel, Costello takes it upon herself to schedule a paid sexual encounter between him and the dark lady. Costello insists that, throughout the act, he remains blindfolded, an act, which borders on the ritualized (*SM* 113). The scene with the dark lady is rather sinister, and her whole presence awry. This staging of the scene with props, which Costello insists upon, adds an element of the unreal to the whole episode, the dark lady assuming a ghostly dimension. Furthermore, how is Rayment to ascertain that this is the lady he has seen earlier in the hospital elevator?

Rayment and the reader have been assured by Costello that it is the same person, but the whole incident is very suspicious. Along with the others, Rayment has had to toy with the idea that Costello may have been his redeemer, but once again, this assumption proves false, just as empty as the Messiah for whom he waits.

Rayment may be receptive to the various “saviours” that appear in his life. Yet, he continues to be torn between the invisible power that he suspects is in control of his life and the scepticism that it actually exists. In fact, like the others he fluctuates between the worlds of belief and disbelief, between the desires to be redeemed and ignored. At the end, Rayment opts for waiting, unredeemable, rejecting Costello’s offer, for in his *vision* of the gate, St Paul allows him entry “in the house [...that has] room for all, even for the stupid lonely sheep” (*SM* 34).

Conclusion:

I fear the gods no longer have time for us, whether to love us on the one hand or to punish us on the other (*SM* 190).

Rayment is certain that at the end of the waiting, no one will be there to redeem or punish him. There will also be no one to offer explanations as to why he has suffered an accident that left him an invalid, why the non-entity that has never hurt anyone has been selected for a fate that he does not deserve. The emptiness, the “vast, all-devouring hole” that leaves him hollow at the core, is but a reflection of the void that engulfs him (*SM* 187). Yet by declining Costello’s offer, he leaves the door open for the arrivant in the hope that something good may arise. Coetzee’s figures may not be believers in a structured religion, yet at times, they feel victimized by forces that are beyond their comprehension. These powers haunt them like spectres, with a suggestion of salvation, but ultimately they discard them, leaving them suspended waiting, alone, in a place symbolically as barren as the road on which Estragon and Vladimir continue to wait. In their lives, the past will never die.

In one of her conversations, Costello comments on rats. She says:

Rats haven't surrendered. They fight back. They form themselves into underground units in our sewers. They aren't winning, but they aren't losing either. To say nothing of the insects and the microbia. They may beat us yet. They will certainly outlast us (*EC* 105).

Maud Ellmann interestingly considers rats as representatives of a past that refuses to die. She states: "the fact that rats date back to the origins of human history makes them particularly threatening to modernism, because they come to stand for the resurgence of the undead past" (Ellmann 60). A past that refuses to die continuously haunts and paralyzes. Coetzee's protagonists wait on the fringes hoping to be let in. Derrida states the messianic wait demands salvation and justice beyond the law (*SOM* 167). Coetzeean characters expect no less. Nevertheless, invariably what they are left with is an agonizing senseless wait, offering them neither salvation nor justice.

In this chapter, I have tried to demonstrate the various ways in which three Coetzeean protagonists struggle with the issue of salvation in a world that they find both unjust and undecipherable. They seek redemption in their different ways, but their quest for a saviour is aborted as soon as it is sought, leaving them stranded on a threshold between life and death, unable to proceed or retract. What is beyond the gate will remain on the other side, as they accept that their lives are no better than that of dogs, a Kafkaesque existence to which they allude.

Sartre states:

Everything happens as if the world, man, and man-in-the-world succeeded in realizing only a missing God. Everything happens therefore as if the in-itself and the for-itself were presented in a state of disintegration in relation to an ideal synthesis (541).

As they are caught between the "drive towards death" and "the drive to live," the only certainty that remains for the Coetzeean protagonists is the incessant wait for a Messiah or a promise from a missing god, to deliver them from this fate (Coetzee <http://lnk.in/4rah>). This offers a glimpse of hope for those who cannot go on but continue to go on (Beckett *MMDU* 414).

¹ Mahmoud Al-Baker discusses how the necessity for water and ambiguity towards nature is what prompted people to create gods in the East. Believing that the gods are givers of life/water, certain rituals such as chants and dances were created as requests/prayers to the gods (*GSFR* 14).

² The accounts that we have of the births of Buddha, Christ, Krishna and Zarathustra are very similar. Nature reacts in a mysterious way signalling the birth of an infant. Invariably the mother is a virgin. The infant's role as redeemer of humanity is made clear at birth. One of the accounts of Krishna's birth states that he is the son of the virgin, Devaki, who has undergone birth in a cave during which a great star illumined the sky, emitting a dazzling light. A similar glare has accompanied the birth of Buddha and at the time of his birth, the blind have been able to see, the mute to talk, the deaf to hear, etc The same event repeats itself with the birth of Zarathustra, and as with Buddha the child speaks at birth saying he is the master of the world (Mahdi 59, 61, 72-74). The birth of Jesus replicates the previous ones.

³ I will be referring to *Spectres of Marx* as *SOM*.

⁴ Although Derrida's messianic wait refers to the Old Testament version, the concept of the Messiah exists in most religions. In Christianity, it is the Second Coming; in certain Islamic sects, such as Shiism, it is the awaited Mahdi, the missing 12th Imam whose return "[...] will mark the end of the world as we know it and the start of a new and perfect one" (Taheri). Mahdi's disappearance is inline with an earlier legend, Ishtar's descent into the underworld in search of Tammuz. In Hinduism, it is Krishna's 10th and final coming, which will rescue the human race.

⁵ Ortwin De Graef sees disgrace itself a form of obligation and not merely a mourning of grace "in the hope of redemption" (328). The characters find disgrace inevitable, but they never give up hope in trying to seek salvation. Lurie, who is disgraced by his own action, still strives for some redemption. Kossew sees that "through his acceptance of responsibility for easing their passage to death David finds a kind of grace for himself and the dogs [...]" (160).

⁶ In *Devil's Valley*, Oom Lukas says: "[b]ut the problem with yesterday is it never stays down, you got to keep stamping on it" (Brink 286-287). Likewise, in Coetzee, the past can never be subdued, it returns repeatedly to haunt us.

⁷ Diala feels in order for Lurie to survive in the new South Africa he has to undergo purgation in the form of a sacrifice (59). The ritual at the end of the novel highlights this point.

⁸ Attridge writes even though Dostoevsky is "mourning his stepson Pavel [...]" he does not have to stay in St. Petersburg for that; there is something that he is waiting for [...]" (*JMCER* 120).

⁹ Attridge links Pavel's appearance with the writing process itself: "Writing as passion. Pavel comes, finally, not with a ghost's embrace but as the ghostliness of writing, of letting words come, of giving them the initiative" (*JMCER* 127).

¹⁰ Attridge describes the various betrayals: “[b]etrayal of the political utopianism [...], betrayal of the innocence of childhood, betrayal of the obligations of the fatherhood [...].” (*JMCER* 132).

¹¹ Lawlan writes: “Fyodor’s attempts to “make God speak” mirror Coetzee’s own desire for grace, and both end in a sense of betrayal” (153).

¹² Gaylard sees: “*The Master of Petersburg* discloses the mechanics of the publishing industry as Dostoevsky/Coetzee realizes that he is one of the ‘spiders’ (p.184) who live off others under the onslaught of Nechaev’s question: ‘Isn’t it time you tried to *share* the existence of the oppressed instead of sitting at home and writing about them and counting your money?’(p.186)” (91). Coetzee is often alluding to the evil aspect of the writing process.

¹³ Anknernsmit writes: “[t]he historian and the novelist should never allow their beliefs—their moral and political values—to interfere with their account of the world” (95). Costello confirms this as she reflects: “[I]ike history, the novel is thus an exercise in making the past coherent. Like history, it explores the respective contributions of character and circumstance to forming the present” (*EC* 39).

¹⁴ Anknernsmit hints perhaps the lecture circuit is what adds to Costello’s guilt: “[T]here is something indisputably Kafkaesque about the conference circuit, where the discrepancy between what one might expect from the intellectual competition of so many intelligent and highly educated persons, and the meaningless and hopeless *dialogues des sourds* so sadly resulting from it, fills the attendee with frustration and despair” (94).

¹⁵ When she first meets the judges, Costello expects something surreal. She reflects: “[u]nder the black robes she half expects them to be creatures out of Grandville: crocodile, ass, raven, deathwatch beetle. But no, they are of her kind, her phylum. Even their faces are human” (*EC* 198).

¹⁶ The struggle is one with authenticity. Yeoh writes: “[t]he narrator’s vain struggle for authentic self-narration is *The Unnamable*’s basic concern: “I know it’s not I, that’s all I know, I say I, knowing it’s not I, I am far, far [...]” (404). Coetzee’s conclusion in the essay that “the self cannot tell the truth of itself to itself without the possibility of self-deception” is a precise, if inconspicuous, reworking of Beckett’s “I say I, knowing it’s not I” (338). Similarly, Costello will never be able to document her beliefs without a degree of deception. If the pronoun ‘I’ is under scrutiny for authenticity, the beliefs of the ‘I’ will always be questionable.

¹⁷ Agamben describes how the law to which Kafka refers is lacking in content and how “a distracted knock on the door can mark the start of uncontrollable trials” (*HSSPBL* 52). Agamben is alluding to the illogical aspect of the law. In *Slow Man* the law of the divine is just as arbitrary.

¹⁸ Only in an imagined conversation with St Paul at the gate does Rayment understand life (*SM* 34).

¹⁹ When the disciples ask Jesus about the Second Coming, he warns them of the anti-Christ. The passage in *The Bible* states: “[...] Take heed lest any man deceive you: For

many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many" (*Mark* 13: 5-8).

²⁰ Mary Sharnic sees that his yearning for children is but a desire for "immortality beyond his collection of historical photographs" (<http://lnk.in/3wr3>). It is more of a desire for some meaning to his life.

²¹ Miller sees Rayment's suggestion an "incursion [which] takes the form of an extravagant offer to pay for the private education of Marijana's eldest son [...] Love is ennobling, or if not love exactly, then a certain animal neediness" (<http://lnk.in/3wqp>).

²² Eagleton writes: "[c]an Rayment really make ethical decisions, or is he already rigorously scripted by his author? [...] Perhaps, like characters in fiction, we have freedom to act, but only within the severe limits set upon us" (1918).

²³ Robert MacFarlane writes, "[w]e come to realise that Coetzee is scrutinising the concept of "care": the ethics of a responsibility that is not reciprocal" (<http://lnk.in/3wqh>).

²⁴ Markovits suggests a "realist will find it difficult to give narrative shape to misery [...] By introducing the novelist to the story, Coetzee can discuss the shortcomings in his account of a man trapped in a body and life that no longer give him pleasure" (<http://lnk.in/56uq>). Costello's entry allows some form of distancing. Being able to share in Rayment's "feeling of hopelessness," she understands Rayment's predicament and her own.

²⁵ Costello is no more real than any character in any given book. But she comes back to usurp a story that is not hers.

Conclusion

There is something degrading about the way it all ends—degrading not only to us but to the idea we have of ourselves, of humankind. People lying in dark bedrooms, in their own mess, helpless. People lying in hedges in the rain (*AI* 140).

For J.M. Coetzee, life generally ends in a degrading manner. Individually, the characters struggle against humiliation only to lose the fight as an impending death brings about further disgrace. In Coetzee's world, as with Beckett's, the human being is essentially doomed, and living is a constant battle against disgrace. The world of the characters becomes one of dwindling resources defined by minimalism, unscrupulously stripping away their very being, humiliating them further. Coetzee writes: "Beckett was an artist possessed by a vision of life without consolation or dignity or promise of grace, in the face of which our only duty--inexplicable and futile of attainment, but a duty nonetheless--is not to lie to ourselves" (Coetzee *IW* 172). Likewise, Coetzee is unwilling to ignore a world that to him is as desolate as Beckett's and humbling to the human being. He is a witness to its beauty but one should not turn one's back on what is ugly (Coetzee <http://lnk.in/4rah>).¹ Unjust political systems, be they apartheid, colonialism, or dictatorships can only contribute to a stripping away of dignity. In Coetzee, apartheid and colonialism are used as examples of bad government, worsening an already dreary human situation. Coetzee's vision of the human race is a bleak one. His novels address the implication of what it is to be human and in his dominant vision to be human is to feel alienated and shamed. The Coetzeean character is mostly an outsider, choosing to live alone. The feeble attempts at a twosome comprise dysfunctional pairs [like Beckett's couples], Curren/Vercueil, Lurie/Bev, Elizabeth/Paul. This contrasts sharply with other South African literature, which places more emphasis on communities and is more concerned with issues of apartheid and race relations, as in the works of other South African writers, such as Behr, Dangor, Mda and Wicomb.

In my thesis, I have discussed the factors that have contributed to the humiliation of the protagonists. My first chapter has addressed how cruelty is

exercised through language, leading to the destruction of all concerned. In the second chapter, I have shown how patriarchal language alienates and marginalises the female, leaving her doubly disgraced by a system that has rendered her an object. Thirdly, I have tackled the issue of master and slave relationships and the resulting injustice for the oppressed individuals and the destruction of the oppressor. In my fourth chapter, I have demonstrated how old age erodes a sense of pride as individuals witness the deterioration of their bodies, leaving them frail and marginalized by societies they no longer recognize. Their sense of alienation accentuates the melancholy within as they begin to at once internalize the ills of society and project their own ills onto the world. Alienation evolves to include their very bodies. My final chapter investigates the concept of empty Messianism as the characters wait for a saviour who never comes.

Coetzee's characters are strangers in their societies. The feeling of alienation is not restricted to being out of place but is an inherent quality. To address this emptiness, I have chosen an approach that is not strictly postcolonial. A postcolonial reading of Coetzee is valid but not sufficient as it tries to position suffering in a purely postcolonial context. This ignores the treatment of postmodern anguish that pervades Coetzee's work. In her Cassal Lecture, Elisabeth Roudinesco uses the term "penseur des lumières sombres" to describe Freud (<http://lnk.in/58ek>). Freud recognizes the evil that resides within civilization in spite of its claim to righteousness. Colonialism, a result of the European Enlightenment movement, which began in the 18th century, was partly a manifestation of such a belief, although as a project it failed. Denying that evil could be inherent or that a human is capable of grave injustice culminates in projecting evil on the other. Colonialism and apartheid are but mediums through which cruelty manifested itself. For Coetzee and Freud, the barbarian can dwell in the self and cruelty is a symptom of this evil.

In *Slow Man*, Costello recounts an anecdote:

'By the bank of a swollen stream,' she says, 'Sinbad comes upon an old man. "I am old and weak," says the old man. "Carry me to the other side and Allah will bless you." Being a good-hearted fellow, Sinbad lifts the old man onto his shoulders and wades across the stream. But when they

reach the other side, the old man refuses to climb down. Indeed, he tightens his legs around Sinbad's neck until Sinbad feels himself choking. "Now you are my slave," says the old man, "who must do my bidding in all things" (*SM* 128-129).

Costello reminds Rayment of this parable when he asks her to leave (*SM* 128). When he enquires if she is claiming to be in control of his life, she is elusive in her answer. Rayment is quick to stress he is not under her control. Rayment may not be under the control of Costello, yet Costello is alluding to a greater power at play. Like all the Coetzeean characters, Rayment is a slave to a life that holds him in its chains and offers nothing but an increasing sense of disgrace and the prospect of an end that is just as degrading.

In one of his essays, Coetzee compares life to a theatre. He writes:

One kind of actor, recognizing that he is in a play, will go on playing nevertheless; another kind of actor, shocked to find he is participating in an illusion, will try to step off the stage and out of the play. The second actor is mistaken. For there is nothing outside the theater, no alternative life one can join instead. The show is, so to speak, the only show in town. All one can do is to go on playing one's part, though perhaps with a new awareness, a comic awareness (*GO* 15).

There is no chance of exit. The awareness that one cannot step down at one's own will does not bring the Coetzeean figures any form of comic relief, but further enslavement and shame. Coetzee remarks: "In the popular mind [Beckett's] name is associated with the mysterious Godot who may or may not come but for whom we wait anyhow, passing the time as best we can. In this he seemed to define the mood of an age" (Coetzee *IW* 172). Beckett, undoubtedly, has defined a mood of an age, a mood that has been carried through Coetzee's novels in which pessimism and no hope of salvation prevail.

In conclusion, I would like to add that Coetzee's recently published novel, *Diary of a Bad Year*, which unfortunately I have not been able to include in my chapters, highlights concerns I have discussed in my thesis. The novel is sectioned in two then three parts, consisting of essays and a narrative both written

by the protagonist, JC, and later interjected by young Anya, over whom he obsesses and then employs to type his arguments. Unlike Coetzee's previous novels, a certain relationship emerges between the paired characters, here the ageing writer and his typist. Moreover, JC shares some of Coetzee's traits. This fictitious alter ego has strong opinions to make on various topics, including totalitarian democracy that does not allow "for politics outside" itself, governments sanctioning torture yet actively subverting "laws and conventions proscribing torture" and how actions that humiliate and dishonour individuals invoke murderous acts (*DMY* 15, 39, 40). In the tradition of the earlier novels, JC is a melancholic ageing man, suffering from deteriorating health, preoccupied with death, looking back regretfully at his life, apprehensively anticipating an afterworld that is "sad and subdued" (*DBY* 159). Like the others, JC is waiting, but his Godot may still arrive in a form of a "promise" made by Anya, the unsuitable "messenger," the "metaphysical ache" who may be willing to extend a hand at the gate, to conduct him to his death (*DBY* 227, 60-61, 7).

¹ In the Dutch Television interview, Coetzee talked about the beauty of Diaz Beach, but in this case appreciating the beauty of the place was never innocent as for years people turned their backs on the ugly political situation that prevailed (<http://lnk.in/4rah>).

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