

**EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTION OF WHITE  
MALE IDENTITY IN SELECTED NOVELS  
BY J.M. COETZEE**

by

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## SUMMARY

Coetzee's own experience of living in apartheid South Africa provides the backdrop for novels infused with sardonic irony and rich metaphoric systems. In modes of metafiction that emphasize the destructive and violent nature of language, he optimizes his unique oeuvre to interrogate global, national and domestic power relations. This dissertation relies on psychoanalytical theories that examine microstructures of power within the individual, and in his domestic domain. Each of Coetzee's chief protagonists carries a secret related to a dysfunctional mother/son relationship. This hampers their psychosocial dynamics, their masculinity and sexuality. As they respectively strive toward an elusive new life they confront patriarchal power structures that speak on behalf of individuals, '[whose] descent into powerlessness [is] voluntary' (Coetzee 2007: 4-5). Coetzee's constructed white males perform their several identity roles in milieux that span divergent phases of colonial history. His critique points to white patriarchal hegemonic ideological discourses that bespeak the self/other dichotomy in a postcolonial world where the language of dominance supports an oppressive status quo.

## KEY TERMS

**White male identity** construction and performance; **colonialism**, its legacy in South Africa/America; **violence**, violation and abuse; **victims** and perpetrators; **social taboos**; **patriarchal** hegemonic ideological discourses as the language of dominance; **mothers** in society/relationship with sons; **myths**, history, culture and religion; **psychoanalytical theories**: Klein, Freud, transference; **Coetzee oeuvre**, narration, style, *autre*-biography.

## PREFACE

I bring to this study my own experience of being a white South African woman of European descent. At a subliminal level, I am aware, no doubt like most white immigrants that I am in South Africa as an uneasy guest. In 1967 I left England, the country of my birth, with my parents and brothers. I arrived in South Africa unschooled not only in the country's politics, but in life. My parents brought their children to South Africa because they were, in J.M. Coetzee's words, 'on an island that [was] shortly to be turned to cinders!' (*Youth* 2002: 85) At the height of Cold War politics, the American war machine relied on strategic military bases in England to offset the threat posed by Russia and its Eastern Block allies. On both sides, nuclear armaments were poised, ready for deployment. In his memoirs, my father speaks of American aircraft (bombers) taking off every night—destination Moscow. According to him, the pilots were instructed to abort their mission/s only *if* they were instructed to return to base. Not surprisingly, my parents were fearful of the future; the imminent threat of nuclear war; annihilation.

Unbeknown to my family, revolution was brewing in apartheid South Africa. Black resistance to the curfew and pass-book systems was growing. On 21 March 1960 mass demonstrations were staged by the Pan African Congress. This resulted in the Sharpeville massacre. According to white journalist Humphrey Tyler, who was an eyewitness, police opened fire without warning, injuring more than two hundred Africans of whom sixty-eight died. Within days of this incident: 'the pass laws were suspended; a mad white farmer shot Hendrik Verwoerd in the face; the government mobilized troops and declared a state of emergency' (Tyler 1995: 12-18).

An offshoot of the white dilemma was a government initiative to boost the number of white residents in South Africa. European couples with children were targeted for immigration to South Africa. Though my parents detested apartheid politics, they seized the opportunity to leave England. The criteria for acceptance were: a pure

white bloodline; no history of political subversion; no criminal record; no evidence of tuberculosis. Immigrants were lured by emotive promises: free passage, instant employment, free housing, free education and “nine hours of sunshine a day”. The picture was indeed rosy.

Of course, the immigration system was a farce. The photographs we submitted for scrutiny passed the “whiteness” test and our mandatory x-rays proved our good health. For the rest, my father lied. As secretary of the Transport and General Worker’s Union for the Port of London, my father had, over the years, become an impressive orator. Incitement to strike was his forte. His politics were to the extreme left; his preferred newspaper was *The Daily Worker*. He read the communist paper and he was a member of the communist party. In addition, he had a minor, though nonetheless significant, police record. Seemingly, the bureaucrats turned a blind eye to his lies, his subversive politics and his petty crime.

Clearly, my family did not qualify for permanent residence in South Africa, but we were white, so what the heck. How could the apartheid government disbar my father, when its own criminal activities were heinous and despicable? Coetzee’s understated sarcasm in *Youth* penetrates the heart of this discrepancy in a country where: ‘every excess committed under the influence of liquor is looked on indulgently. Farmers [could] flog their labourers to death as long as they [were] drunk when they [did] so’ (2002: 29). My first employer was a *ware* Boer, the stereotypical Afrikaner patriarch who religiously said his prayers morning and night and grace at the family meal. He, like my father, drank too much, but he, unlike my father, suffered from a perpetual *babelas* (hangover). In rages akin to those described in *Boyhood*, he would attack “the black boys” who were actually men—kick them, punch them, swear at them, curse them, demoralize them. I had never experienced such hatred. It was palpable and I was afraid. I felt ashamed and guilty that I allowed it to happen. But I was a powerless young woman from England. He was my ‘*baas*’ as well as theirs. His power over me began with the distortion of my name—Jacka-I[I]ne not **Jacqueline**.

Before long, he asked me to work late. The raping started when I was barely seventeen.

My own sense of dislocation and displacement is reflected in *Youth*: 'Elinor and her twin sister [who is, ironically, named Jacqueline] were born in England; they were brought to South Africa at the age of fifteen' (2002: 4). Like Coetzee's characters in *Youth*, I am still suffering from a sense of being alien. I too am a direct and indirect victim of colonialism: abused in the past, disabled in the present and fearful of the unknown future. As a naive fifteen-year-old arriving in Cape Town harbour, I was surprised to find that crane-drivers were not white. What do children know about politics, wars and discrimination? Why should children question their parents' judgment? In a state of innocence we are guided by them into situations over which we have no control; situations that have far-reaching psychosocial repercussions.

Coetzee's fiction crystallizes my own feelings of being violated, my complacency, complicity, shame, guilt and embarrassment. White is not all right. Three of Coetzee's semi-autobiographical novels: *Dusklands* (1974), *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997) and *Youth* (2002) focus on the dilemma of individual white males whose lives are shaped by those who exercise power. Coetzee addresses pertinent home truths that shock on the one hand and enlighten on the other. The respective protagonists in this trilogy are striving toward a Utopian new life, an idealistic endeavour which replicates my parents' desire to find a new life in South Africa. Early European pioneers were little different. To avoid prejudice and persecution, they fled their homelands in search of a new and better life in territories all over the world. However, the progeny of white Europeans who planted their roots in South Africa have in the twenty-first century come to a socio-political-cultural crossroads. Displaced white Euro-African males are currently seeking a new life beyond apartheid. Many are pulling up roots and rerouting themselves to other post-colonies such as Australia. This entails developing a new consciousness in terms of

personal and national identity. Abandoning one's homeland and all that is familiar is a gut-wrenching experience.

Why then are whites finding it necessary to turn away from post-apartheid South Africa? One of the reasons is that collective group-identity/identities such as: white, black, English, Afrikaner, no longer provide/s a conciliatory umbrella that shields the fragile individual psyche from undesirable realities. My own truth is that individual torments, fears, anxieties and emotions cannot be represented en masse, either for blacks, whites or both. Group allegiance that rests on skin colour, language, religion, cultural and traditional customs fails the individual whose unique identity/identities is/are partly genetic, partly moulded from personal feelings, emotions, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, reactions to, and experiences of, living in the world. The synthesis of DNA with life's eventualities, expectations and disappointments, comes together in memory and nostalgia. Here the photographs of the mind—visual and perceived, good and bad—hide themselves deep in the subconscious, waiting to be resurrected at any moment. These are memories that come without warning; they are inescapable, indestructible and most often, indisputable.

In Coetzee's three semi-autobiographical novels, each of his chief protagonists attempts to escape from the prison of his mind. However, intimate memories and dark secrets rise up at will to paralyse their psyches and to bring them face to face with the geneses of their own individual and intensely personal stories in history. My personal experience has brought me into an intimate relationship with Coetzee's oeuvre and his protagonists, who like me, find that the memory most difficult to shake off is the memory of abuse—lost innocence. Severing one's roots is shown to be nigh impossible because the past is etched onto the psyche. I have lived in South Africa for more than forty years and I am still trying to cast off attachments: family, friends, place-as-home, childhood memories and unique experiences. At the same time, I love South Africa beyond words. Who and what am I then? English, British, African? Do I qualify as a hybrid or am I just borrowing my identity as a South African? And will I

choose to go back to the European motherland if black South Africa fails me as an individual?

The end of legalized racism in 1994 saw the rise of an African Nationalism born out of the armed struggle. Three hundred years of subjugation, stigmatization and marginalization came to an end and from the hatred of the past forgiveness came in the form of Nelson Mandela. South Africa was lauded by the world for its peaceful transition from police state to democracy and the idea of a ‘Rainbow Nation’ was born. Though the white man is ‘Proudly South African’, he is no longer the measure of all things—quite the reverse. The advent of black governance with its socialist reforms, affirmative action—a pro-black quota-system in the workplace, in sport, in national and global politics—its land claims initiative, legalization of union-led strikes, declining educational system, corruption, crime and nepotism in the highest echelons of power, has irrevocably changed the face of South African life. The emergence of a black middle class, the virtual disappearance of Afrikaans from the national agenda and the adoption of English as the preferred lingua franca, has left the white Afrikaner in particular, precariously poised between the old regime and the new. Traditional black languages have replaced white patriarchal hegemonic ideological discourses while Afro-cosmopolitanism and new ethnicities have imprinted an indelible stamp on the evolving social fabric.

What does this mean for the previously advantaged white South African patriarch who finds that he is looking back at an irreconcilable racially inequitable past, from a present that cannot guarantee a future that is anything but uncertain? The black government is making no promises to the displaced white man and highly qualified whites are becoming increasingly unemployable. To date, the brain-drain has claimed doctors, surgeons, lawyers, educators and accountants in their droves. J. M. Coetzee has similarly abandoned the South Africa of his birth. He became an Australian citizen in March 2006. Be that as it may, personal experience tells me that ‘the scrap of paper’ (Coetzee 1997: 31) marking his citizenship does nothing to suppress his

sense of being ‘alone in all that vastness’ (Coetzee *ibid.*). The individual is forever ‘alone’ in his physical, spiritual, psychological and emotional journey through life. Coetzee and the characters he writes into existence exemplify the problems associated with being a white South African male subject in history. The author’s own struggle with finding a place for himself in the past, present and future provides the structural foundation for his prose fiction.

Diaspora and hybridization are not new to South Africans. Both phenomena continue as society transforms. However, the ongoing process of change does not necessarily appease white South Africans who find themselves on shaky ground, bereaved by the loss of the past. Coetzee’s protagonists: Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee and John Coetzee are bred out of loss and violation. Fear of attachment is endemic to them, so they refrain from forming reciprocal relationships that have the potential to end in loss.

Those white South Africans who have decided to stay, or who have no means to leave, continue to contemplate their nebulous future in a country where ‘what disturbs [them] most [is] the realization that [their] dreams of a new, open progressive society after apartheid were false: the nasty white men in power [have] merely been replaced with nasty black men’ (Du Preez 2004: 264).



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

**Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,  
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,  
And then is heard no more.**

—William Shakespeare (*Macbeth*: V.v. 25-29)

This dissertation is concerned with the abuse of power and the ways in which that power impacts on the lives of powerless individuals. J.M. Coetzee's oeuvre produces postmodernist texts that write themselves into and out of the postcolonial context. Three of Coetzee's novels: *Dusklands* (1974), *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997) and *Youth* (2002)<sup>1</sup> interrogate the ways in which white male identity is constructed in response to, and because of, personal and domestic, societal and political, national and global hierarchical power structures. The protagonists portrayed in these texts are representatives of colonialism's capitalist quest for territorial expansion. Colonialism and its legacy are evident in the characters' situational milieux and in terms of J.M. Coetzee's experience/s of being a white South African. Coetzee clearly understands the implications of living in South Africa at a time when legalized racism infused every fibre of the social fabric. This understanding underpins his indictment of colonial and postcolonial relations. However, he does not confine his interrogation of prejudicial patriarchal power structures to the South African context. Rather, he takes the reader into cold hard England and to an America embroiled in the horrors of the Vietnam War. Coetzee's protagonists: Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee and John Coetzee—both the boy and the youth—strive endlessly to overcome powers that dictate to a large extent, the parameters of their fictional lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this dissertation I will denote these three texts with their titles: *Dusklands*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* followed by the relevant page number. This will ensure the flow of my argument and prevent confusion.

Coetzee employs the genre of fiction to expose the insidious nature of language in books that employ innovative modes of narration. This device provides the vehicle for his surreptitious critique of language as the driving force behind patriarchal hegemonic ideological discourses. Furthermore, he highlights the duplicitous nature of historical records – both visual and written, that emerge as subjective interpretations of past events. Linguistic formulations with their subversive codes of symbolic and semiotic signification are exposed as destructive and violent. In order to better understand Coetzee's appropriation of language in the abovementioned novels, my exploration of the protagonists' identities will operate in, and around, Freud's theory of Transference. I have selected this psychoanalytical approach to the novels because it instigates a two way conversation that flows between the characters' minds and my own. Interesting insights emerge as Coetzee opens up the machinations of his characters' minds. At the same time, my conversation with the texts leads me to pertinent socio-political issues that influence the way/s in which Dawn, Jacobus and John perform a diverse range of psychosocial identities. From the outset I wish to reiterate the fictional nature of the characters and the texts. My intuitive response to these works of fiction does not in any way attempt to denigrate or to compromise J.M. Coetzee.

The aforementioned novels exemplify the psychological dilemma of those who seize power without authority as well as those who are subsumed by that power. Coetzee captures the anxieties and timelessness of the human condition and he dramatizes the notion of performativity as an intrinsic component of identity. In 1948, a minority white government was voted into power. From then until 1994, this dispensation wielded absolute power in what was recognizably a police state. Under the white minority apartheid government, rigid censorship attempted to curb the potential power of artistic creativity. South African writers from both sides of the racial divide were affected by this persecution. State censors were well aware that writers could incite violence, mobilize the masses, and spawn rebellion. J.M. Coetzee was one such writer. He was born in Cape Town in 1940 and published his first novel *Dusklands* in

1974, a year that was to become a watershed in the history of literary, artistic creativity in South Africa.

By the mid-1970s, South African whites were reliving their fear/s of the black peril – *die swartgevaar*. The weight of history, complicated by the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960 (Tyler 1995: 12), the Soweto Revolt of June 1976 (Attwell 1991: 33), and the unaccounted-for death of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko while in police custody (*Rand Daily Mail*, September 14, 1977), incited the masses and drew world attention to the magnitude of South Africa's problems. The 1975 Publications Act of the Republic of South Africa prohibited freedom of speech (Coetzee 1992: 315)<sup>2</sup> and was designed to quell the voice/s of dissenting local writers. Broadcasts by the government controlled SABC and all print media were manipulated to 'protect' whites from adverse news reports on the black revolution that was brewing all over the country (Du Preez 2004: 138-147). Ruthless censorship laws, it was claimed, were introduced to '[protect] security, welfare, peace and good order' (Ibid.).

In *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, Coetzee intuits: 'The very fact that certain topics are forbidden creates an unnatural concentration upon them' (1992: 300) and in *Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship* (1996), 'Writing does not flourish under censorship'. I argue, however, that the machinations of censorship suited a writer like Coetzee. I say this because he avoids direct confrontation with the power structures he professes to deplore. As a result of this tendency, he has been repeatedly criticized for abdicating political responsibility. Outspokenness evades him both in his writing and on a personal level. Ex-colleagues describe him as a 'quiet ... reclusive [man] ... of almost monkish self-discipline ... [who in] more than a decade laugh[ed] just once' (Cowley 1999 in Price 2000: 1).

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<sup>2</sup> This reference is to *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. I make frequent references to this text throughout my dissertation. Though I may quote Coetzee as the author, I wish to point out that David Attwell is the editor. The book is referenced in full in the Bibliography on page 151.

Nonetheless, in *Age of Iron* (1991) Coetzee uses two memorable slogans of the period: ‘liberation before freedom’ (62) and ‘freedom or death’ (149) (both references in Attwell 1991: 154). The slogan that haunted the white minority during the ensuing States of Emergency and the government’s strategy of Total Onslaught was “One settler, one bullet”. From the 1970s onward police brutality, white militarism, and black activism fuelled already explosive race relations. Metaphorically and thematically, violence pervades Coetzee’s fiction. Here I cite the brutal weapon and rape imagery in both parts of *Dusklands* (1974); the pitiful slave-animal-like underdog in *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983); the tortured girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980); bloodshed, brutality and disease in *Age of Iron* (1991); the sexually deprived daughter of a sheep farmer in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and prostitution and rape in *Disgrace* (1999). Coetzee leaves a covert question mark hanging over implied axes of power in texts where there is always a plurality of meanings suggested, but never resolved.

J.M. Coetzee uses the genre of fiction to express the nebulous position of the white man who performs his several identity roles in postcolonial milieux. Coetzee grew up in one such post colony. His South Africa was on the one hand his place of birth, and on the other, a potential war-zone. Though Coetzee was a relative latecomer to the fraternity of South African writers in terms of the effectiveness of his political voice, he imprints the turbulent dynamics of a postcolonial, socio-cultural landscape tainted with violence, racial hatred and inequality, onto the pages of his fiction. In diverse contexts he constructs a range of white male identity roles that respond to the societies that shape them. As he unravels complex issues relating to agency and authority, land and blood, custom and culture, tradition and language, localized white identities either conform to, or pull against dominant ethno-socio-geopolitical ideologies. Historically, South Africa’s people have been moulded by semiotic, symbolic and semantic sign systems that operate in physical space and time. Their ‘stories’ have been recorded as history by those who speak the language of domination.

Coetzee's fiction draws attention to the duplicitous nature of language. In *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, Coetzee states that 'All autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography' (1992: 391). This statement blurs the boundaries between autobiography and fiction, and places the reader in the space between conjecture and biographical truth/s. Unlike the genre of fiction, where stories and characters are accepted as contrived, autobiography deals with factual accounts of the author's life. Coetzee's respective narrators and/or protagonists in the three novels cited for exploration are, despite their association with their creator's life, fictional. Nevertheless, Coetzee's career as a writer, his need to justify the form of the novel itself, his position as a dislocated white South African male subject writing against the history he represents, and his rootedness in that history, are at the heart of his fiction. Though it is John Coetzee, the protagonist of *Boyhood*, who takes it upon himself 'to do the thinking ... [to] keep ... all the books, all the people, [and] all the stories ... in his head' (1997: 166), it is John Coetzee, the author, who resurrects pertinent childhood memories in semi-autobiographical texts that offer their author a means of self-therapy-as-writing.

Although the aforementioned trilogy suggests his relationship to, and with, the characters he portrays, Coetzee's ability to mislead cannot be underestimated. The fiction is pregnant with contradictions, ambiguities and anomalies. For instance, he manipulates language by displacing generic autobiography in favour of *autre*-biography, a term he coined in *Doubling the Point* (1992: 394). By replacing the prefix *auto*- with *autre*- he opens up a textual-spatial moment of difference. Consequently, he differs from contemporary auto-biographers who ostensibly tell their readers biographical truths. Coetzee's insistence on doctoring the generic terminology for the genre, points to the difference between his portrayal of biographical data and that of other auto-biographers. The tenet of differentness is frequently expressed by the fictional/biographical John Coetzee. Though he wants to be 'a normal boy' (*Boyhood*: 7) ... '[he] hates normal people' (78). The boy—John Coetzee—believes he has 'something special about him' (*Boyhood*: 17, 165).

Considering the time span that elapsed between the events portrayed in *Boyhood*, and the writing of the novel, it is obvious to the reader that this ‘specialness’ is J.M. Coetzee’s talent for writing. It is this feeling of being special that makes John different—other. According to Donald Vanouse, ‘[Coetzee] depicts the past self—both the “boy” and the “youth” – as *autre*, an unknown other who is a continuing presence or a haunting, unresolved problem’ (2002: 1).

Post-Freudian theorist Julia Kristeva explicates this otherness of the self: ‘the “self” ... [is] a shifting illusion ... so poised and dense ... [that it] no longer exists ... [but] shows itself to be a strange land of borders and otherness ceaselessly constructed and deconstructed’ (1991: 191). In *Boyhood* and *Youth*, *autre*-biography empowers J.M. Coetzee to recollect and reconstruct past selves without recourse to apology or regret. This technique heightens the twin novels’ sense of immediacy and simultaneously dissociates the young John Coetzee from the mature writer as self. By refusing to articulate the authorial “I” Coetzee develops a relationship between the omniscient narrator who speaks on his behalf, the protagonist who is one of his ‘selves’ and the reader who is looking for meaning. For the first eighty-seven pages of *Boyhood*, the character remains unnamed. This places a layer of insulation between the author, and his memories of an earlier self. In his *autre*-biography, Coetzee parades selected memories before his readers without accepting responsibility for the ethno-socio-political transactions his fiction projects.

By weaving memories into his stories, he writes himself into and out of the subject-positions he portrays. His characters: Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee and John Coetzee are pseudo representatives of the colonial impulse. Their respective identity/identities is/are constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed in juxtaposition with colonialism and capitalist driven imperialism, the colony being a geographic area held for strategic, political and economic advantage. Each protagonist expresses in biographical-historical time, a particular range of white masculinities that strive to meet the demands of their given paradigmatic contexts. Political power, whether



domestic, national or global, is an insidious presence in the novels. Coetzee's covert and overt allusion to the subversive nature of linguistic formulae heightens the tension between imagined characters and the fictive stories that give them life. Ironically, the personal struggle that each of the characters enacts, is stymied by the language that traps them in their respective stories. Though the notion of a new life sustains them, the attainment of this ideal continues to elude them. Consequently, their inability to transcend their circumstances undermines their masculinity.

Identity is a social construct that cannot exist independently of language. In Lacanian terms, nothing exists outside of language. As I will show in the following chapters, sign systems pervade infant psyches, even in utero. These signs are indoctrinated, internalized and accepted as cultural truths. Not surprisingly, codes of signification determine psychosocial traditions, political, ethnic, religious and cultural strategies, for attaching value and meaning to objects, including human lives. In terms of Bourdieu's 'habitus' or the field in which human interactions take place, the relationship between the self and its others is always connected to the accumulation of capital (read as capitalism). Berger and Luckmann argue that: 'everyday face-to-face experiences are constantly being subjected to a process of objectification, sedimentation and accumulation. This means that experiences are detached from their contexts in the form of symbols that become the stock of knowledge of any given culture' (1976: ..). Effectively, the interiorization of language, as the barometer of selfhood and/or otherness, hinges on the acceptance of hegemonic power structures that stratify society according to discriminatory ideologies. In this situation, both sides of the socio-political divide accept the status quo, as normal. The natural superior self classifies, marginalizes, stigmatizes and categorizes human beings according to the dictates of its own capitalist aims.

Coetzee's white male protagonists are not exempt from the ways in which discourse/discourses function in the 'habitus'. Each of the characters is born into pre-existing linguistic codes of signification that determine how, why and where they

play out their psychosocial identity roles. Dawn, Jacobus and John however, are cast both in, and out, of the symbolic order. These are displaced subjects who fail, in their own ways, to form self-gratifying reciprocal relationships. None of these characters personifies the archetypal patriarchal self. Even Jacobus, who on the face of it exemplifies the prototypical white male, is ultimately revealed as deficient. Sexual dysfunction leads to a sense of isolation and being alien. This results in the performance of identity roles that are in conflict with societal norms, and outside of mainstream society. What is more, the characters are inherently fearful, anxious, sensitive and vulnerable; their psyches are driven by shame and guilt.

I demand, as does Coetzee, the reasons for the characters' negative emotions. What type of power relations render them misfits? Why does Coetzee deprive them of enduring loving relationships? Why does he instigate a personal inward journey for each of them? What are they looking for and what do they find? These questions will be answered fully in the chapters that discuss the relevant protagonist. For the present, suffice it to say that the more isolated the characters become from those who inhabit their fictional world/ worlds, the more they strive to locate a psychological state of safety from which to explore their respective psychosocial inadequacies. In so doing, Dawn, Jacobus and John are led into levels of consciousness where intimately guarded secrets have been obscured. Painful childhood memories, bouts of nostalgic reverie, dreams and fantasies, recover sites of emotional trauma, lost innocence, violence and violation. As the novels unravel, Coetzee's white males confront their personal demons. These demons revolve around the abuse of power in inter-personal domestic familial relationships, as well as in society at large. Coetzee uses the violated family home as a microcosm for greater global society, where self-serving politicians lust for power and control. In journeying toward self revelation, the characters' fragile ego and identity boundaries break down.

In this dissertation I aim to explore the psychosis/psychoses and/or neurosis/neuroses of Coetzee's respective protagonists as they perform complex and ambiguous identity

roles in divergent historical epochs. A single chapter will be devoted to each character. Because John Coetzee appears in *Boyhood* and *Youth* there will be an overlapping and blurring of boundaries between the boy and the youth. I will introduce relevant psychoanalytical, literary and historical theories/references to substantiate my findings where necessary. These will be denoted at the appropriate time. This Introduction clarifies Coetzee's stylistic conventions and his own precarious position in South Africa's racist colonial history. In addition, I will examine the discrepancies between the characters' conflicting inner and outer selves, and the reasons why their individual beliefs and perceptions, wills and desires, clash with the societies they represent. Outwardly, each character shields his site/s of emotional cognition from others. Moreover, gaining entry to the "in group" is made more difficult by societal trends in dress and fashion—discursive and/or visual. Because society apportions value to these material trends, they are important indices of the way/s that Coetzee's white males identify, or disidentify with, the dictates and expectations of society.

The remainder of this Introduction will focus on Coetzee's oeuvre. In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*, Derek Attridge argues that reading Coetzee 'entails opening oneself to the unpredictable, the future, the other, and thereby accepting the responsibility laid upon one by the work's singularity and difference' (2004: 111). Most importantly, Attridge contends that 'Coetzee's texts can not be "read off" by the reader as a series of facts hitherto un-revealed. [Rather], something ... emerges in the telling ... [and] it can be experienced *only in the reading*. The text does not *refer to* the truth; it produces it' (2004: 145). Coetzee shifts any notion of meaning or moral judgment from his narrator-in-history (who is not J.M. Coetzee) to the reader who derives a unique set of meanings according to his/her own moral and ethical principles. No doubt my own experience/s of being an English-speaking white female South African of British descent will influence the way/s in which I derive meaning from Coetzee's texts.

My reading of Coetzee relies to a large extent on the two way transference of information. This methodology provides pertinent insights into Coetzee's meticulous plots and subplots, where infinite layers of subversive subtexts and countless propositions offer no resolution or catharsis. As I pointed out on page one, Coetzee's personal experiences in apartheid South Africa, cold unwelcoming England and capitalist America provide the landscapes for the novels. The metaphor of violence in its most heinous forms pervades the trilogy. Race, class, gender and sexual relations are prominent thematic concerns in settings that stretch from eighteenth-century South Africa to late-1960s – early-1970s America. Displaced subjects in postcolonial spaces express, at a subliminal level, the quintessential psychosis of whiteness; its concomitant strengths and weaknesses. Coetzee employs a rich though economic lexicon to articulate his critique. Metaphor, simile, hyperbole, sarcasm, oxymoron, black humour, cutting irony and anticlimactic understatement impose a cynical framework around the texts.

Regina Janes articulates the effect of Coetzee's scepticism: 'we are, like it or not, taken over and moved along, penetrated, irritated, and turned against both inner and outer selves, layers separating, pulling apart' (1997: 103-121). Despite this, clever wordplay is employed to achieve a comedic irony. For instance, the third-person narrator in *Youth* claims that: 'Misery is [John's] element. He is at home in misery ... [and] if misery were to be abolished he would not know what to do with himself' (*Youth*: 65). Indeed, John's circumstances depict misery. Yet, despite evidence of this, 'In misery he is still top of the class. ... Like a fish in water ... who does not sense within himself the slightest disposition to crack under the weight of misery' (Ibid.). The humour rests on John's naiveté. This is reinforced by a string of clichés: 'Once upon a time ... innocent child ... the only yardstick ... put him in his place ... not by a long chalk ... top of the class' (Ibid.). The 'once upon a time' construction where everyone 'lives happily ever after' is juxtaposed with the (mis-)construction of the simile. Colloquially, the 'fish' should be out of water. Simultaneously, there is a clash between storybook fantasy and everyday language. This draws attention to the

impossibility of ‘reality’ for the fictional John. Moreover, his desire for a perfect life is phantasmal. He would like the tests and trials of the world he inhabits, to be simple. But in the novel, ‘he is faced with real life where there are not even examinations to fall back on’ (Ibid.). The character cannot pass the tests of ‘real life’ because he is nothing more than a string of signifying symbols; words on the page; expressions of artistic creativity. What is more, the obvious correlation between John and the author can only be represented in, and by the same code/s of signification that invent him and/or the author.

In many ways, Coetzee’s writing turns back on itself. Like Beckett, he achieves ‘a “formalization or stylization of auto-destruction”’ (Coetzee [1973] 1992: 45). Technically, the text is ‘*nothing but* a destructive commentary upon itself’ (Ibid.). With Coetzee, as with Beckett, language is everything. Covert yet innovative linguistic formulae place the ills of imperialist discourses under the spotlight. However, Coetzee refrains from narrative verisimilitude and offers no regret for his political and/or postcolonial circumstances. He takes his own twin identities—an English speaker from an Afrikaner family—and his sense of ethno-psycho-socio-cultural in-betweenness, and weaves that understanding into multilayered colonial/imperialist textual relations. Experience and circumstances are synthesized into self-reflexive prose fiction: ‘if [he] were to commit [him] self body and soul to some fiction or other, [he] would [not] choose any fiction but [his] own’ (*Dusklands*: 10) [and] ... ‘the only story he will admit is the story of himself’ (*Boyhood*: 161). Above all else, Coetzee is a self-professed storyteller whose succinct style of writing provides a unique indictment of colonial history. As a doctor of linguistics, he attempts to fulfil his ‘own need to justify the novel form itself ... [as well as] its need for rich metaphoric systems and diverse typologies of character’ (Coetzee 1988: 145). According to Simon Bennett, ‘What is both most deeply yearned for and most deeply dreaded—love and—tenderness—is represented in storytelling, but represented at a safe distance and overlaid with enough cynicism, indifference and nastiness to be almost completely disguised’ (1985: 143).

Bennett's assumption fits Coetzee's oeuvre perfectly. J.M. Coetzee employs an oscillating 'middle-voice' (Coetzee 1992: 94; Probyn 2002: 2) to distance himself from the events he describes. The use of this mechanism allows horrific incidents and experiences to be portrayed in a manner unimpeded by sentiment. Though Coetzee is consciously 'doing the writing' (Coetzee *ibid.*), the act of writing is neither active nor passive, but is poised somewhere in between. Following the tradition of Beckett, he employs the metatextual/metafictive device to address the reader, whose presence he takes for granted. This technique disrupts the two way conversation between the narrator and the reader. On the one hand, the reader is persuaded to focus more definitively on what the controlling narrative voice is saying, suggesting or implying. On the other, there is a sense that the omniscient Coetzee is placing his characters on trial before a reading jury. The reader, not the author, narrator/s or protagonists, is asked to deliver a verdict. Coetzee's haunting presence is merely felt; he is never the judge. Attridge argues that 'Coetzee's technique ... [denies] the reader any ethical guidance from an authoritative voice or valorizing metalanguage. We are left to make the difficult judgments ourselves' (2004: 7).

Coetzee relies on lexical precision to articulate a textual web of antithetical propositions. There are clues upon clues, silences and omissions, but never resolution. Metatextual nuances operate in the close transferential relationship to ensure the reader's active participation in the creative process. Because the 'neurons in [Coetzee's] brain are ... firing more or less infallibly' (*Youth*: 168), his fiction, and all his writing, is highly intellectual. This demands a response that leaves no 'stone' (*Dusklands*: 95, *Boyhood*: 10, *Youth*: 116) unturned. Coetzee frequently repeats, and/or reworks his lean lexical constructions in tight syntactical structures that reinforce his critique. For the reader, the cliché: 'repetition is the mother of learning' comes to mind. Furthermore, Coetzee is a slippery writer who habitually visits the intertext. Allusions to literary masters abound in texts that frequently 'borrow' from the greats. This is part of his style: 'the image is not my own' (*Dusklands*: 37). By employing this technique, he aligns himself with white Europe, and posits his own

writing in the tradition of the European literary canon. This is one of the many ‘tricks authors perform’ (Ibid.).

Coetzee’s oeuvre is impossible to categorize because he does not adhere to a singular theoretical framework. Attwell describes his work as ‘a form of post-modern metafiction that declines the cult of the merely relativist and artful’ (1991: 1), while Balcomb argues that Coetzee’s oeuvre blurs any singular theoretical approach. In his view ‘[it is] “post-modern” (*sic*), “poststructural”, “postcolonial”, “post historical” and “post ideological”’ (2005: 1).

Though his fiction initially appears to be cold, unemotional and matter of fact, it is inlaid with emotional sensitivity and vulnerability. It is self-reflexive, literary and moral and in the tradition of Flaubert, it defuses its own ethic. Coetzee’s inimitable word games insist on the reader’s vigilance. He destabilizes language-as-power as he interrogates white hegemonic patriarchal discourses that qualify and perpetuate the domination of one group over another. The legacy of language and its popular myths cannot be separated from linguistic representations of colonialism and its history. Pain, violence and human degradation abound in language that controls and shapes history.

In the South African context, a one-sided white colonial history has been presented as truth in the language of domination. White power depended on its own discourses to demarcate social boundaries: white as superior; black (coloured) as inferior. European cultural practices were fortified by longstanding myths that underpinned religious and political ideologies. Capitalist imperialism, traditionally and historically, perpetuates its own self-serving myths. This is evident in the ‘empty land myth’ that encouraged early white Euro-Protestant émigrés to follow blind faith to South Africa where they would inherit their God-given Promised Land. Though the myth of divine destiny was founded in misinterpreted Bible tracts, white immigrants arrived at the Cape of

Good Hope bent on claiming their idealistic Utopia. Such are the myths at the matrix of colonialism and its quest for territorial expansionism.

Coetzee is the progeny of European immigrants who settled in South Africa. Though he was born into white privilege, ‘black guilt chuckl[es] through [his] veins’ (*Youth*: 48). He cannot *un*-write a history that breeds shame and guilt, so, he *re*-writes his own version of history in fiction that turns recorded history back on itself. His displaced white male protagonists come to the texts with their creator’s sense of disillusionment with the South Africa of his birth. J.M. Coetzee himself embodies the exodus of white South Africans who are currently flocking to post colonies such as Australia, New Zealand and Canada: “‘I must get *out before it is too late*’” (*Youth*: 39). As I mentioned in the Preface, Coetzee became an Australian citizen in March 2006. Despite this, he and his characters are irrevocably rooted in South Africa and its past. Emotional and psychological attachment to one’s own country cannot simply be erased. The past and the individual’s place in that past are etched onto the body’s senses, inscribed with the history of blood. Memory/memories is/are stored as graphic images in the mind. Personal experience tells me that Coetzee’s innate attachment to South Africa will never allow him to relinquish the country that persists in not relinquishing him.

Coetzee re-members, revisits and rewrites the ills of imperialism by interrogating how the paradigmatic circumstances one is born into affect the production and performance of identity as a social construct. In his latest novel *Diary of a Bad Year*, he addresses the powerlessness of the individual in society:

It is hardly in our power to change the form of the state and impossible to abolish it because, vis-à-vis the state, we are precisely, powerless (2007: 3).  
 ... Every account of the origins of the state starts from the premise that “we” – not we the readers but some generic we so wide as to exclude no one – participate in its coming into being. But the fact is that the only “we” we know – ourselves and the people close to us – are born into the state; and our forebears too were born onto the state as far back as we can trace. The state is always there before we are. (How far back can we trace? In African thought



the consensus is that after the seventh generation we can no longer distinguish between history and myth.) (2007: 3).

In the novels cited for scrutiny, Coetzee juxtaposes the ineffectual individual whose participation in society is rooted in the ‘myth of the founding state [and whose] descent into powerlessness is voluntary’ (Ibid.).

As a subject born into a space that operates according to ‘history and myth’ Coetzee replaces his own powerless in society with subversive writing. The writing itself is a political act. For Coetzee however, the act of writing is therapeutic because it fulfils his individual need to address the past from his own subject position. His own experience of the ‘state’ and its laws infuses the stories that he remembers and writes. Memories from the past: ‘lie like a weight’ (119) on the psyches of his white male protagonists who struggle with persistent feelings of shame and guilt. The underlying reason/s for these feelings is complex. Coetzee situates Dawn, Jacobus and John in contexts where they gain insight/s into their own past/s, and the way/s in which past experiences impact their lives. Each protagonist has an intrinsic desire to re-inhabit the mind and body of an earlier self – an inner child who can explicate the present. This endeavour proves to be dangerous inasmuch as it brings to light dark intimate secrets that are best forgotten. In *Dusklands*, Coetzee probes the depths of consciousness in passages of introspective self-reflection, where sense perceptions, thought processes, emotions and feelings unfold. Moreover, stream-of-consciousness narration and the use of interior monologues provide the mechanism that triggers sexual desires, dreams, nightmares and fantasies that exhume social taboos. These taboos are themselves based in myth and legend. What is more, the implications of social deviance that imposes violence and violation on unsuspecting children impede the all three characters’ sexual drives. Each of them embarks on an inward journey to establish the genesis of his dysfunctional sexuality/masculinity. In doing so, an intricate web of interrelated blood relations comes to the fore. This gives rise to a nagging sense that “‘*Things are rarely as they seem*’” (*Youth*: 10).

Although Coetzee recollects the ‘people [and] ... the stories’ (*Boyhood*: 166) from his childhood, he seeks no personal contrition, forgiveness or absolution for his own complicity in South Africa’s racist history. Nonetheless, religious tropes are a recurring feature in the trilogy. Coetzee’s pointed critique of Afrikaner Christian Nationalism is extended to incorporate the British, whose missionizing ethos masked capitalist greed. Enlightened European émigrés felt duty-bound to ‘separate light [white Christian] from darkness [black heathen] ... to rule over all the earth, and over its creatures [bestial indigenes]’ (*Holy Bible NIV 1984: Genesis 1:26*). This was ‘the South Africa of the old days when Eden was still possible’ (*Youth*: 137). In the Bible however, Eden provides the landscape for original sin and man’s fall from God’s grace. Innocence was lost and mankind was cast out into the world. Ashamed, ‘they made coverings for themselves’ (*NIV 1984: Genesis 3:7*) to hide their nakedness. With deviance and defiance came violence: ‘Cain [*Kain*] *Boyhood*: 120] attacked his brother Abel and killed him’ (*ibid.* 4:8). Right from the ‘Beginning’ (*ibid.* 1: 1) religion and violence have gone hand in hand.

Coetzee intuits: “[a]bsolution means the end of the episode, the closing of the chapter, the liberation from the memory ... [and] [t]he truth about the self that will bring an end to the quest for the source within the self [of] that-which-is-wrong” (*Doubling*: 252-253). However, the book of life cannot be summarily closed because self-knowledge does not necessarily achieve closure:

[There] are ... two things about him, two things that are really one thing, the thing that is right about him and the thing that is wrong about him at the same time. This thing that is two things means that he will not die, no matter what; but does it also mean that he will not live? (*Boyhood*: 113)

The lingering presence of this ‘thing’ in the present impedes the closing of a chapter in the past. According to Freud, the suppression of this ‘thing’ leads to a psychopathology characterized by *neurotic anxieties* which manifest as *realistic fear*; *moral fear* – deriving from feelings of shame and guilt and fear of punishment; *neurotic fear* – a sense of being overwhelmed, loss of control and rationality. When

ego wishes, desires and ideals come into conflict, the superego (conscience) mediates the conflict as it strives for justice. As a result of psychological disharmony, the mind's defence mechanisms come into play by denying reality. At the same time: 'repression engages in an act of willed forgetting: *isolation* strips emotion from a difficult memory or threatening impulse: *introjection* attempts to address emotional difficulty, and *rationalization* operates on cognitive distortion that makes events less threatening' (Boeree 2006 [Freud 1856-1939])<sup>3</sup>. Dawn, Jacobus and John exhibit Freudian neuroses whereby the self splits against itself. The 'thing/s' buried in the characters' subconscious and/or the unconscious are at the 'heart' of their individual psychopathologies. Dawn articulates this tenet in *Dusklands*: 'the heart that holds my secret ... [is] lapped in dark blood ... [and] will not die (1974: 48). This is Coetzee's strategy for throwing down the gauntlet: 'will you [the reader] win ... [my dark secret]?' (ibid.),

The textual dark secret/s referred to here, are trapped in the characters' psyches. What is more, Coetzee is the metaphorical prison keeper; his tight lexical constructions are the key/s that unlock/s the protagonists' fictive psychological, prison cells. However, despite the availability of these covert textual keys, psychological 'liberation [and] ... the closing of the chapter' (*Dusklands*: 48) evades all of the respective characters. This is because memories – both good and bad, family customs and well established cultural traditions, insist on nostalgic reveries: 'stories [of] ... old times on the farm. They reminisce ... they like to be nostalgic' (*Boyhood*: 82). Because the past is a place of safety inasmuch as it is static: 'he wants everything to be as it was in the past' (Ibid.), transcendence remains elusive. Digging up the past is uncomfortable and emotionally debilitating. Yet, Coetzee insists on the unmasking of his characters, despite their subconscious resistance to the exposure of their dysfunctional psychosocial identity roles. The question is: "Are Coetzee's white male protagonists, perpetrators of history, or are they the victims"?

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<sup>3</sup> Boeree's article is referenced in the Bibliography. There are no page numbers available.

In diverse and innovative modes of narration, the novels draw on the psyches of subjects whose individual beliefs, perceptions, wills and desires, clash with the societies they represent. Dawn and Jacobus are subject-narrators in history while John Coetzee's character, is narrated by an unknown third person who speaks on his behalf, in the present tense. Narrativity provides the conduit between the protagonists' minds and the reader. This offers insights into the myriad identity roles the characters perform. Frontiers in the novels are not merely geopolitical but psychological and socio-cultural. Even though Coetzee is most comfortable on the periphery of his texts, his abstract presence makes itself felt. While he controls and manipulates the minds and lives of his protagonists, the respective narrators articulate innumerable propositions and possibilities. Dawn, Jacobus and John's fictional lives express concerns with social prejudices. At the same time, their own moods, attitudes, anxieties, fears, desires, events and experiences are everywhere laid bare. As subliminal, conscious and unconscious thought processes come to light, they filter through the senses of the reader who is invited to search for covert nuances and covert nuggets of fictional 'truth.'

Beyond the purview of Coetzee's narrative voices, is a metaphorical camera lens: 'then click ... you are free of the South ... then as you move further north, click, you are in a second zone of destiny' (*Dusklands*: 109); '[the] ... bad art of the photographer.... [captures a] picture ... caught in a frozen moment by a freezing eye' (ibid. 13). This all-seeing eye represents the white discoverer's patriarchal gaze: 'the eye reading the landscape ... [where] the innocent interior transforms itself in a flash' (ibid. 66-77). From his place of safety, Coetzee establishes the tensions that undermine psychosocial dynamics in the postcolonial world. Though one can escape physical sites of contention, memory and its memories linger on as pictures in the mind: '[the] hooded gaze of ... faces ... loom before [his] inward eye ... ghost[s] [are] ... locked into the empty-dream-space of [his] head' (*Dusklands*: 34). Metaphorically, the mind's eye exposes and develops these pictures and brings them from the 'darkroom' of Coetzee's South Africa into the light of narrative

prose. Moreover, Dawn's photographs (*Dusklands*: 10) provide a haunting reminder that pictures depicting colonial history, must be examined if those responsible for that history, hope to, or feel the need to, make restitution.

The twin novellas in *Dusklands* engage with temporal-spatial moments in colonial history. In the first novella, *The Vietnam Project*, Coetzee depicts mid to late twentieth century America, whose anti-communist aggression plays out in the South East Asian theatre of war. Eugene Dawn is, like all white Americans, the progeny of European immigrants. He is a reluctant participant in Cold War politics (as is John Coetzee in *Youth*). Dawn works for the Department of Defense (*sic*) and is writing a report rooted in propagandist myth. In addition, America's patriarchal military bureaucracy exudes a class prejudice that alienates Dawn from its inner circle. At the same time, his underdeveloped psychological defence mechanisms render him psychosexually dysfunctional. He decries the atrocities in Vietnam and fails to identify with America's blasé approach to the brutal 'war-story of television ... [where images of] napalm bombings [are flaunted]' (*Dusklands*: 27-29) as flagrantly as commercial products. Persuasive capitalist consumerism with its ideological and idealistic promise of the elusive 'American Dream' confronts Dawn at every turn. Not surprisingly, his personal reality is infused with movie-star glamour, glossy magazines and advertising. While his model wife imitates the desirable stereotype, Dawn 'emerge[s] from the pages of *Vogue* trembling with powerlessness' (*Dusklands*: 13). He tries to escape the violence that informs 'the world which embarrasses and alienates [him]' (16) but he slides 'utterly out of control' (42). Successful adult, male identity roles perpetually evade him. However, clues in the text point to a pre-existing, pre-oedipal neurosis which undermines the dynamics of his psychosocial/sexual world. The neurosis that informs his range of masculinities is nourished by unconscious erotic desires that manifest in dreams and fantasies. Consequently, he is brought face to face with his inner self and the secrets that underpin his psyche.

While Dawn's historical moment is written into the 'evening lands' (*Dusklands*: 7) of colonial discourses, the narcissistic Euro-African white elephant-hunter Jacobus Coetzee is portrayed in the 'dawn' of colonial enterprise on the frontier/s of South Africa's north-western Cape. Jacobus epitomizes the white patriarchal Afrikaner Boer: '[he] rode like a god through a world only partly named, differentiating and bringing [it] into existence' (*Dusklands*: 116). He is a one of a kind social type – the prototypical Afrikaner patriarch. Jacobus is egotistical, self-righteous, self-absorbed, self-referential, selfish and indifferent to those whom he perceives as inferior and bestial: 'The Bushman is a different creature, a wild animal with an animal's soul' (58). This imagery reinforces the fallacious Eurocentric myth – that benighted Africa is/was inhabited by animalistic heathens. Jacobus refers to them as 'Heartless ... baboons' (Ibid.). However, as a reprehensible agent of the colonial impulse, Jacobus is the one exposed as heartless and sadomasochist. He lusts after power, superiority and authority and takes for granted his patriarchal status. Consequently, he embodies brutish imperialism at its worst. Without compunction he enslaves, abuses and cruelly murders the inferior disposable other. Jacobus and Dawn are cast at opposite poles on the continuum of colonial history – eighteenth century South Africa and twentieth century America.

Yet, despite the two centuries that separate them they are united by the author's use of 'parody' (Attwell 1991: 49). Jacobus's story is a third-hand translation of an original archival document. Each time the tale is translated its credibility as a record of history as truth is diluted. The subjective manipulation of historical documents parodies the unreliability of Dawn's photographic images which are susceptible to indiscriminate alteration. History, like fiction, is undependable and subjective in its presentation of 'truth'. Dawn's visual images are politically subversive because they synthesize the art of photography with photography as history. Both photography as art history and creative writing as history are open to subjective distortion. This in turn, points to their veiled political power.

Eugene Dawn is modelled on the more mature J. M. Coetzee who moved from London to Texas where he completed his doctoral thesis on Beckett. Dawn performs his several identities in the context of white patriarchal Eurocentric America. Jacobus Coetzee is depicted as a ‘great grandson of Dirk Coetzee, a burgher who emigrated from Holland to the Cape’ (*Dusklands*: 108); an antecedent of the South African Coetzee bloodline. Dawn and Jacobus are tied to each other and to the author by their common European roots. Furthermore, Coetzee foregrounds his surname in *Dusklands*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* which signals the importance of names as an integral part of identity construction.

While these two characters perform in the opening and closing acts of Coetzee’s trilogy, John Coetzee—the boy and the youth—occupies the middle years in the space/s between the twin novellas in *Dusklands*. In historical physical time, Jacobus’s story predates Dawn’s. John is tied to Jacobus’s South Africa by birth; to Dawn’s America by choice. Conjointly, the characters represent an imagined day in history: Jacobus’s dawn; John’s journey from dawn to dusk; Eugene’s dusk. Each character struggles to transcend the demons of history and each of them seeks a new life beyond the fiction that imprisons them.

Though these protagonists are shaped by patriarchal, dictatorial white ideological discourses, the most profound acts of violence and violation occur in the sanctity of the family home. Accordingly, individuals emerge as victims of those who wield power over them. In the South African context, paternalism is at the matrix of white Afrikaner identity because lineage underpins the foundation of Afrikaner cultural tradition. However, with the exception of Jacobus Coetzee, who most often conforms to the stereotype, Coetzee casts his fictional white males outside of the patriarchal mould. He undermines the centrality of the revered white patriarch by developing the characters’ psychological and emotional bondage to their mothers. This leads to the construction of fragmented identity roles in terms of masculinity and sexuality.

Consequently, mother and son relationships are crucial to unravelling the range of identity roles that Coetzee portrays.

With Coetzee nothing is incidental or coincidental. By centring ‘mothers’ he upstages the all-powerful white patriarch who denigrates women as well as people of colour. Good and bad mothers are juxtaposed with abstract, often absent father figures. However, the violent father figure is still representative of imperialism. Gaps, silences and omissions in the texts, allude to important clues. Relational and experiential violence in intimate mother and child situations parodies Coetzee’s relationship with South Africa as Mother Nature/Mother Earth: ‘he loves every stone of it, every bush, every blade of grass, loves the birds ... that gather as dusk falls’ (*Boyhood*: 80). His love of this mother is juxtaposed with the antagonistic relationship he has with his real/fictional mother—Vera Coetzee. Moreover, the sad lot of Mother Africa’s indigenous children comes to the fore. These are children and adults whose human potential is negated by aggressive white masters driven by capitalist greed. Coetzee expands the motif of ‘mothers’ covertly and overtly as he interrogates different types of maternal roles. Connotative mother-figures infuse his textual fabric/s: ‘mother tongue’, ‘motherland’, ‘Mother Africa’, ‘motherfucker’, ‘Mother of God’, ‘mother as parent’, ‘mother as servant’, ‘mother as place’, ‘motherless’, ‘[s]mother’, ‘substitute/ surrogate mother’, ‘grandmother’, ‘mother love’, ‘mother as labourer’, ‘Mammy as mother’. Eugene Dawn states: ‘We are all somebody’s sons’ (*Dusklands*: 7). A metaphorical umbilicus connects Coetzee’s textual sons to their textual mothers. This vessel silently carries the history of lineage and the consequences of blood. Accordingly, blood and motherhood are inseparable from the postcolonial canvas. These then, are the twin demons of Coetzee’s fictional history.



## CHAPTER TWO

### THE COLONIAL LEGACY

**‘So, we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past’.**

—F. Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

The ‘fresh green breast of the new world that flowered once for Dutch sailors’ eyes’ (1926: 171) in Fitzgerald’s America no doubt parallels the first image/s of Table Mountain that met the eyes of European immigrants when they arrived at the Cape of Good Hope in the mid-seventeenth century: ‘At the first sight ... new life gushed into my heart’ (*Dusklands*: 99). Fitzgerald’s Jay Gatsby, like the first settlers in the Cape, believed in mythic destiny. The chief protagonist in Fitzgerald’s novel invents an identity that smacks of prestige, riches and success. His intention is to gain entry into the high-class echelons of 1920s American society. He emulates their socio-cultural behaviour: ‘there is no behaviour (*sic*) that cannot be learned’ (*Dusklands*: 2) but he is barred from their priggish inner circle because he lacks their old school class and breeding. This is tantamount to the prejudice and discrimination expressed toward Eugene Dawn in *Dusklands* and John Coetzee in *Youth*. South Africa’s prejudice and discrimination were based on different criteria.

White colonial history spawned a society that was eventually to be segregated by race. In a society stratified according to skin-colour, white European settlers asserted their superiority and authority. Patriarchal power structures relied on misplaced scripture to qualify their white founding myth. Ardent Calvinists used patriarchal hegemonic white discourses to reinforce the myth that preached divine destiny in *their* newly acquired Promised Land. Representatives of Enlightened Europe flocked to places far and wide as they strove to free themselves from political tyranny and religious persecution. Paradoxically, they inflicted tyranny, and persecuted the aboriginal peoples they encountered during their colonial conquest. Wherever they went they found it necessary to rely on the ‘gun and its metaphors’ (*Dusklands*: 17).

Not surprisingly violence, militarism, colonialism and capitalist imperialism are inextricably linked. Coetzee uses understatement to criticize this phenomenon: ‘The United States increased its White (*sic*) population geometrically and checked its native population growth so effectively that by 1870 there were fewer Indians than ever before’ (*Dusklands*: 112). When ‘the gun ... arrived [in South Africa] ... the native tribes [were] doomed not only because the gun [would] kill them in large numbers but because the yearning for it [would] alienate them from the wilderness’ (*Dusklands*: 80). The arrival of the white man and his weapons led to subjugation, decimation and exploitation of defenceless indigenous tribes.

In my Introduction I noted that white imperialists premised their right to live and reign in annexed territories on colonialist myths. Coetzee undermines the foundation of this assumption:

There [is] an awareness on both sides that [white] people ... with their pianos and violins [emblems of European culture] are here on this ... earth ... on the shakiest of pretexts ... [where] the ground beneath [their] feet is soaked with blood and the vast backward depth of history rings with shouts of anger (*Youth*: 17).

This “awareness” that the “other” is aware of what colonialism and imperialism mean to native tribes, causes anxiety for the white alien. Coetzee’s own experience of this feeling of being alien is articulated in the psychological make-up of his constructed white males. The repercussions of colonialism run far deeper than the donning of diverse social masks, or the performing of identities that offer entrance to the “in group”. By probing the psyches of his Eurocentric archetypical males, he discursively unravels the nexus of geopolitical/socio-racial political tension. This occurs when the characters engage in self-evaluation, self-criticism, self-discovery and self-rationalization. As a result of this process they respectively emerge as ‘... endless discourse[s] of character, the self reading the self in all infinity’ (*Dusklands*: 38). If and when the rationalized self recognizes its self and that self’s relationship to its imagined reality, only then can it attach human value to the self and its others. If the signifying self fails to rationalize his socially constructed identity or the way/s in

which his world identifies and/or defines him, the potential for rediscovering himself diminishes exponentially. This is ‘the voice of the doubting self, the voice of Rene Descartes driving his wedge between the self in the world and the self who contemplates that self’ (*Dusklands*: 20). The characters under the spotlight in this dissertation respectively embody the Cartesian ‘doubting self’.

For the purposes of this, and the following chapters, I will examine the ways in which Coetzee’s fictive white males attempt to synthesise their vacillating socio-fictive identities with their respective situational experience/s of colonialism and its quest to extend imperialist authority. In the Introduction, I discussed various aspects of Coetzee’s style, the linguistic devices he employs to optimize the power of his critique and I explicated the historical foundation for my exploration and analysis of selected novels. The trilogy that provides the trajectory for my argument in this dissertation falls under the broad umbrella of ‘*autre*/autobiography’<sup>4</sup>. These works take the form of two novellas in *Dusklands* (1974) and two more recent sequential novels: *Boyhood* (1998) and *Youth* (2003).

In my opinion, these three novels best address the dilemma of South African white males, who perform tentative identity roles in uncertain times. The respective characters perform in diverse geopolitical social milieux where they confront individual experiences, of what it means to be a white male of European descent, in given moments of colonial history. Though the epochs presented in the trilogy are diverse, cohesion is achieved by the connectedness of the characters with one another and with their author. Coetzee establishes continuity by synthesizing fictionality, narrativity and historicity in fictions that frequently parallel, but do not equal, his own life experiences. His mode of interrogating the axes of power is surreptitious and covert. Nevertheless, each of his characters expresses a unique response to the will of the ‘state’ (*Diary of a Bad Year*: 1-3). Ironically, global and national political power,

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<sup>4</sup> I will at times substitute the terms *autre*-biography and *autre*-biographical with autobiography, autobiographical and/or semi-autobiographical.

seeps into the personal and individual domestic sanctuary, where violence and violation infiltrate intimate familial relations. According to Judith Butler, ‘the distinction between the personal and the political or between the private and public is itself a fiction designed to support an oppressive status quo. Our most personal acts are in fact, continually being scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies’ (in Felluga 2006)<sup>5</sup>. Not surprisingly, Dawn, Jacobus and John undergo psychological, physical, emotional and spiritual crises in contexts where they have little or no recourse to change the shape of society. The transferential relationship affords the respective characters a place of safety from which I will explore the genesis of their individual failings.

Even though Coetzee’s life experiences frame the novels, he opines in *Doubling the Point* that:

Autobiography involves interplay between the push into the future ... and a resistance. Part of that resistance is psychic, but in part an automatism built into language: the tendency of words to call up other words, to fall into patterns that keep propagating themselves (1992: 18).

The ‘essential truth about the self ... is not just a revelation of what has been known all along by the author but kept secret for reasons of guilt and shame’ (Attridge 2004: 145). What I am saying here, is that auto- and/or *autre*-biography can never claim to tell the whole truth. Coetzee chooses *autre*-biographical fiction because it depicts *only* selected memories and events that have no definitive parameters. In view of his well documented reclusive nature it is unlikely that Coetzee would divulge his innermost deep, dark and emotionally charged secrets. The secrets that I expose in the following chapters, therefore, are as fictional as the characters who own them.

Despite the contrived nature of fictional characters per se, there still exists a corollary of pertinent biographical details between the real and the imagined. Certain incidents and/or time frames in the novels suggest parallels with significant events in J.M.

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<sup>5</sup> Felluga’s article is sourced from the internet. No page numbers appear on the document.

Coetzee's life. Like the author, the fictional schoolboy, John Coetzee, lives in rural Worcester and later moves to Cape Town (*Boyhood*: 1-166). Coetzee recollects, through the naïve perceptions of a boy, the machinations of white South African society. At the same time, the protagonist performs the role of a politically powerless child who is born into a linguistically divided family. The aforementioned geographical setting for *Boyhood* operates in a post-World War II context where Afrikaner Christian Nationalists extolled the demise of the pro-British Smuts government. With the political ascendancy of Afrikanerdom came the implementation of legalized racism—the narrative of apartheid.

In the opening pages of *Youth* the boy has become a university student. He graduates and goes to London where he hopes to become a poet. When J.M. Coetzee graduated from the University of Cape Town he moved to London where, as an aspirant poet/writer, he worked as a computer programmer. A further correspondence with the author's life emerges from the youth's reading of Ford Madox Ford for his MA. Furthermore, Coetzee was exposed to South Africa's one-sided white history at school. However, it is in London that the fictional John discovers books about early European settlers and their experiences in South Africa: 'in the great, domed Reading Room ... [at] the British Museum (*Youth*: 136) he finds memoirs of visitors to the Cape like Dapper and Kolbe and Sparman and Barrow and Burchell, published in Holland or Germany or England two centuries ago' (137). This is a defining moment for the protagonist and for J.M.Coetzee who goes on to destabilize the fictional nature of history in *Dusklands*.

In 1965 Coetzee left London to take up a scholarship in the United States. There, he read for a PhD in linguistics at the University of Texas. After his graduation he became professor of literature at the State University of New York, Buffalo. During his stay in America, US atrocities in Vietnam escalated. It is against this backdrop that Eugene Dawn performs his several identity roles. In 1971, J.M. Coetzee returned to South Africa and published his first novel—*Dusklands*—in 1974. The book

comprises twin novellas that depict diverse socio-political milieux. Coetzee synthesizes his understanding of South Africa's turbulent racist history with his experiences in the United States. The result is a tenacious indictment of patriarchally ordered capitalist ideologies. The abuse of power in the given texts exists only in and because of the hegemonic patriarchal discourses that confirm the domination of one group over another.

This theme continues into the second novella where the white elephant hunter, Jacobus Coetzee, is a representative of European encroachment into Africa. He is cast as a direct ancestor of J.M. Coetzee who, in the eighteenth century, plays out his identity roles on the harsh frontier of the Cape colony. Jacobus is depicted as a stereotypical white Afrikaner Boer whose life betokens violence and violation; mastery and servitude; self and other; white and black; superior and inferior. In writing Jacobus's story (and Dawn's and John's), J.M. Coetzee elucidates the subjective nature of historical accounts of South African history. When the young John of *Youth* discovers, at the British Museum, gaps and omissions in the annals of colonial history, he contemplates writing a different version of that history:

The challenge he faces is purely a literary one: to write a book whose horizon of knowledge will be that of Burchell's time, the 1820s, yet whose response to the world around it will be alive in a way that Burchell, despite his energy and intelligence and curiosity and sang-froid, could not be because he was an Englishman in a foreign country, his mind half occupied with Pembrokeshire and the sisters he had left behind (*Youth* 138).

This quotation exemplifies Coetzee's cynical satire and his understated irony. His reading audience is of course aware that the retrospective 'challenge' in *Youth*, has already been fulfilled in *Dusklands*. This ironic discrepancy amplifies Coetzee's critique.

Clearly, the characters portrayed in *Dusklands*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* are interrelated by lineage or covert association with J.M. Coetzee. From the outset, Coetzee solicits a close reading of his prose because the Coetzee family heritage and its progeny are

immediately brought under the spotlight. This is evidenced in the first word uttered in *Dusklands*, which is ‘Coetzee’ (1). Why does the author do this? What is it he wants me to understand? The words of the text/s say: “Look at me, look through me, scrutinize me. Seek out ‘the dark self’ (*Dusklands*: 27). Unlock ‘the heart that holds my secret’ (48). Find out ‘what makes me tick’ (Ibid.). Examine me. Reveal the ‘secret that makes me desirable to you’ (Ibid.). Do you know ‘whose fault I am’? (49) These and other such questions will be addressed in an individual collaboration with the respective novels cited for analysis.

In this regard, I will test my assumptions concerning the way/s in which the legacy of white colonialism impacts the construction and performance of Coetzee’s fictional white males. My exploration of the different characters’ identities will be launched from a psychoanalytical platform that corroborates the theories of Freud, Lacan, Klein and others. Freud takes for granted the power of writing to govern the emotions of the reader:

In the main we adopt an unvarying passive attitude towards real experience and are subject to the influence of our physical environment. But the story-teller has a *peculiarly* directive power over us; by means of the moods he can put us into, he is able to guide the current of our emotions, to dam it up in one direction and make it flow in another, and he often obtains a great variety of effects from the same material’ (Freud, S. Freud, A. et al (eds.) (1953: ..).

Furthermore, Freud’s theory on transference and counter-transference suggests that a two way discourse flows between the narrator and the reader/analyst/interpreter. Issues of race, class, and gender relations, masculinity, colonialism, capitalism, Eurocentric imperialism, politics, violence, existential concerns with life and death, religion, custom and tradition, culture and blood, sexuality and its deviants, are brought to light. The transference of information, emotions and insights ‘... works in all relationships where the feelings that come from the “core” or the “real” self’s interactions with other people (real or invented) at other points in time ... [function] in a space where there is safety’ (Rothschild 1994, 1999, 2003: 1-2). In the typical Freudian equation, the reader as analyst asks questions of the text/s in order to

uncover subtextual information that may otherwise be concealed. This ““talking cure” depends on what is said ... in the exchange of transference speech’ (Belsey 2003: 26-27). Coetzee the author ‘is able to express him (self) and his feelings through the therapeutic experience of writing, while the mode/s of narration that he adopts enable/s him to maintain his place of ‘safety’ (Rothschild Ibid.).

The benefit/s of transference and counter-transference is/are that I am able to engage *with* Coetzee’s fictional characters from the perspective of a pre- and post-1994 white South Africa. Coetzee’s adroit narratology unlocks pertinent and controversial issues: ‘You are working in a novel [note the pun] and contentious field’ (*Dusklands*: 3). In the close transference space/s I will journey through levels of narrated consciousness into sites of cognition. Transference allows me to experience fictive psychological and physical encounters as a shared communication in which the characters’ thoughts and feelings mingle with my own. At the same time, Coetzee’s innovative modes of narration provide signposts that point to the respective protagonists’ dysfunctional masculinity/masculinities and/or sexuality. But why are Coetzee’s white males dysfunctional and what is he hoping to achieve by depicting them as such? It is self-evident that fictional personae are constructed in response to particular paradigmatic circumstances. However, Dawn, Jacobus and John express difference from their contemporaries. Though they wish to emulate normative self-gratifying masculinities, they are all unequal to the task/s.

Psychoanalysis is, according to Felluga, a discipline that ‘analyzes microstructures of power within the individual and within small-scale domestic environments’ (2006: ..). Lacan argues that ‘psychic processes are artificially constructed’ (Ibid.) in and by language. Both of these theories are relevant to Coetzee and his fiction. As I will show, Dawn, Jacobus and John are victims of abusive power in the domestic home. Violence and violation in mother/child relationships mirror the ‘hegemony of heteronormative standards that emerge as a continual repetition of acts’ (Butler in Felluga (Ibid.). Butler’s theory of ‘performativity’ rests on human performances that



are rehearsed and performed over and over again, while language reifies social scripts that propagate and disseminate the discourses of those in power. Coetzee's concern with language and how it operates in society is crucial to unravelling the given texts.

In conjunction with my psychoanalytical approach to understanding how white male identity is constructed in and by language, I will engage with the metaphysical aspect of Coetzee's metanarratives. I have already clarified the diverse geopolitical contexts that provide the backdrop for the novels. However, there emerges an insidious metaphysical presence in the texts, which covertly informs the psyches of the characters. Eugene Dawn 'bring[s] to ... light in blinding moment[s] of ascending meta-historical consciousness ... [the ways in which white capitalist imperialists] ... shape their own myths' (*Dusklands*: 26). The form and structure of the language used to maintain dominant white colonial myths is premised on race, class, and gender relations. Coetzee draws attention to various mythologies that have been invented and shaped by language. He covertly roots his *autre*-biographical stories in the ancient legend of the child-god Hermes. Though this is never explicitly mentioned by the narrators, Hermes personifies idealized masculinity—a facet desired by the protagonists but never wholly attained.

Coetzee's subtle revelation of the Hermes myth is a facet that personifies the very essence of myth. In the metatextual creative process, Coetzee surreptitiously explores the subversive nature and pliability of language and myth/s. Reference/s to this tenet will be provided in the following chapters. For the time being, I will indicate the significance of the Hermes myth, which relates to the construction of masculinity *per se*. Hermes's personal attributes are embedded in all three texts. This mythological persona represents the boy-child son growing to maturity (John Coetzee *Youth*: 116); he is the god of skill in the use of speech and of eloquence; he uses cunning and guile in language in general, particularly in poetic language (J.M. Coetzee as author of the trilogy and the fictive translator of Jacobus's story; Dawn as biographer, mythographer and narrator; Coetzee the character as indoctrinator of propaganda;

Jacobus as story-teller; John as writer). He is a cattle thief (*Dusklands*: 91); wears golden sandals (*Youth*: 3) that carried him over land and sea (diasporas and displacement); is beardless in youth, bearded as an older man (*Youth*: 111); he is the god of boundaries (Jacobus Coetzee); consults the three sisters: ‘His father calls the three sister-mothers the three witches’ (*Boyhood*: 39); is the god of prudence: ‘a prudent decision’ (*Youth*: 151) and is endowed with shrewdness and sagacity. Furthermore, Hermes is believed to have invented the alphabet, numbers, astronomy, music, the cultivation of the olive tree (codes of signification; symbol/s of peace and forgiveness), weights and measures (justice/injustice). He is the interpreter of dreams; has the power to send refreshing sleep or take it away (*Boyhood*: 34, 81 *Youth*: 144); he travelled from place to place concluding treaties (European imperialist colonialists). He was the god of commerce, the source of wealth, the god of gain and riches (America – *Dusklands*: 7, 21, South Africa – *Dusklands*: 68, 108,); the inventor of sacrifices (religion). When travelling, he wore a hat with a broad brim (the Afrikaner stereotype – *Boyhood*: 106); he held Homer’s magic staff that opens and closes the eyes of mortals (the staff of Moses opening the Promised Land and closing the eyes of whites to their own prejudices). His powers were supernatural – he turned Khlone, who was a lazy nympe, into a tortoise: ‘[John] would rather live like a tortoise inside its shell’ (*Boyhood*: 162). Moreover, Europeans have historically labelled indigenous peoples as ‘lazy’. In *White Writing* however, Coetzee argues that ‘Hottentot idleness ... [is no different to] Boer idleness’ (Coetzee 1988: 14, 31). Hermes is known to have turned Agrauros to stone: ‘Before him, as she advances, everything turns to stone’ (*Boyhood*: 113):

[A]n icy chill seeped through her limbs, the blood paled [blood relations and the pun on pale, meaning white blood] in her veins – she did not try to speak [Jacobus’s Hottentot mother], nor had she tried, was way still left for words. Her throat, mouth, lips were hardened into stone; and there, a lifeless statue she remained, nor was it white, but with her dark thoughts stained [‘the blood has soaked through to the mattress, leaving a huge, uneven stain’ (*Youth*: 129)]. Such was the punishment that Hermes gave for her wicked words and will [Coetzee’s characters are punished for the acts of their mothers]. Then leaving Athens, Pallas’s fabled [recognition that the myth is a story] land, he made his way to heaven on beating wings [‘he has no space to beat his

wings’] (*Dusklands*: 48) [and] (Ovid *Metamorphosis* 2. 708 in *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology*).

Coetzee distorts the Hermes myth to fit his own stories. This technique shows how language implies certain premises without explicit representation of those premises.

The reliability of language, myths and/or stories in history is shown to be unstable. It is fundamentally flawed inasmuch as it is nurtured in ‘misrepresentations of the truth’ (*New Oxford Dictionary of English* 2001: 1225). In the novels cited for scrutiny, myths and/or history are shown to be duplicitous and interchangeable:

The account hitherto received as definitive is the work of another man, a Castle hack who heard out Coetzee’s story with the impatience of a bureaucrat and jotted down a hasty précis for the Governor’s desk. It records only such information as might be thought to have value to the Company (*Dusklands*: 108).

Coetzee is concerned with ‘the ways in which myths operate in human society’ (*Dusklands*: 4). However, unlike the ‘Castle hack’ (ibid: 108), ‘[he] is not ... contemplating ... forgery ... [because] ... he has no training as an historian’ (*Youth*: 138-139). Despite his lack of credentials he nevertheless, creates fictional history/histories that reflect moments in “real”, recorded history. Let it be noted that “real” history is not the truth. Fictionality, narrativity and historicity<sup>6</sup> converge at the core of Coetzee’s criticism, where a passive middle-voice refuses the ‘reader ... the comfort of authorial judgment’ (Attridge 2004: 143). If ‘anyone is to take responsibility for judgments ... it is the *reader* [who] is ... implicated in the ethical web spun by the work’ (Ibid.).

In the trilogy cited for exploration, Coetzee criticizes the diverse ways that imperialist violence underpins the process of transforming alien territories into effective pinions of white supremacy. Metaphorically, patriarchal white rhetoric is at the matrix of Coetzee’s ‘assembled props’ (*Dusklands*: 15). Here, ‘assembled’ connotes the constructed nature of language and the codes of signification embedded in that

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<sup>6</sup> I acknowledge that this terminology is borrowed from Attwell.

language. The term ‘props’, suggests on the one hand, accoutrements and/or notions used to imply certain assumptions in theatrical performance/s. On the other, it points to a support system for the phenomenon of language. On page thirty I referred to Judith Butler’s theory on performativity. Accordingly, identity construction is rooted in this theory. On yet another level, identity itself, which is no more than a language based construct of artifice, can be seen as a ‘prop’ that bolsters the individual’s ongoing struggle for recognition and acceptance.

According to Lacan nothing pre-exists language. Not surprisingly, the semiotic and symbolic sign systems comprising language indoctrinate falsehoods in the form of propaganda and/or myth. In order to sustain white dominance in the theatre of colonial conquest, hegemonic patriarchal discourses were interiorized by people on both sides of the racial divide. Berger and Luckmann suggest, that ‘socially-assigned [white] identities’ (in Balcomb 2005: 5) in colonial terms were accepted as normal because the ‘internalization of the processes necessary to create [and maintain] a socially-objectivated world’ (Berger and Luckmann in Balcomb *ibid.*) were never contested. Consequently, the juxtaposition of white patriarchs with their opposite other, gave European immigrants a misplaced sense of superiority. In 1948, Jean-Paul Sartre said, “Here are black men standing looking at us, and I hope that you – like me, will feel the shock of having been seen”. It was a case of ‘if you will prove yourself ... you will prove us too’ (*Dusklands*: 17).

Coetzee addresses, colonial and postcolonial hegemonic discourses that have historically relied on self/other polarities. His own ability to manipulate and play with language cannot be over stressed: ‘Coetzee made his name in game theory’ (*Dusklands*: 32). By highlighting the pliability of language he reinforces the many ways in which self-serving political power, lives in language. Coetzee’s overriding linguistic creativity reveals his intuitive understanding of the machinations of the human mind. His texts are multilayered, ingenuous word games that weave themselves into subtext upon subtext. Words and paragraphs are immersed in

theoretical, philosophical, and intellectual debate/s concerning the unavailability of truth. Analysis of Coetzee's texts 'entails opening oneself to the unpredictable, the future, the other, and thereby accepting the responsibility laid upon one by the work's singularity and difference' (Attridge 2004: 111).

Coetzee's relationship to writing and storytelling operates in what Attwell calls 'situational metafiction' (1991:21). Here the narrative is reflexive inasmuch as it highlights the 'conditions of meaning in culture' (Ibid). As a displaced white South African subject involved in his country's history, Coetzee brings his own experience of writing in, and against that history, to the stories he portrays. In the tradition of Beckett, Coetzee's narratives juxtapose historicity and fictionality in texts where 'There is no clash, no conflict, just the flow of a voice telling a story, a flow continually checked by doubts and scruples, its pace fitted exactly to the pace of his own mind' (*Youth*: 155).

Coetzee constantly challenges his readers to assess these 'doubts and scruples' by looking beyond the text/s to a place/space where the foibles of whiteness can be found in 'the neat script-strings that issue from [his] pen' (*Dusklands*: 6). However, he implies more than what appears on the page. Subtextual silences and omissions work at a subliminal level to convey the inconsistencies of "real" history. In the transference exchange it soon becomes clear that Coetzee's syntactical fabrications are already in the process of deconstructing themselves. Vigilance on the part of the reader is imperative. According to Attridge, representations of "truth" come to light 'in the reading' (2004: 145). It is the experience of engaging *with* a 'story in the telling' (Attridge *ibid.*) that enables the reader to sift out untruths that perform as truths: 'the myths of a tribe are the fictions it coins to maintain its powers' (*Dusklands*: 12-14). Coetzee unveils the destructive nature of longstanding myths: 'This is ... the unfortunate tyranny of method over subject' (*Dusklands*: 36).

As I will show in my respective analyses of Coetzee's white male protagonists in *Dusklands*, *Boyhood* and *Youth*, they are interrelated by their direct association with J.M. Coetzee. In addition, the author draws attention to his own genealogy by introducing the name 'Coetzee' into the given novels. Why does he do this? What is it about that name that warrants such close attention? This will be explicated with particular reference to the author's ancestor, Jacobus Coetzee and the boy/man, John Coetzee in *Boyhood* and *Youth*. Coetzee instigates ongoing academic debate by inviting his readers into a covert question and answer type quotidian. The interplay between text, author, narrator and reader operates well in the transferential relationship. It is there that the identity/identities of the characters come/s to the fore.

In *Dusklands* the chief protagonists perform their identity/identities in divergent historical contexts that are connected by the device of parody:

[Both] replicate historical documents. In Part I the parodied documents are the work of what Chomsky in the context of Vietnam called the "backroom boys", the military bureaucrats and planners in corporations allied to the Defense (*sic*) Department. In Part II, the parodied documents are drawn from the archives of colonial expansion published by the Van Riebeeck Society in South Africa', (Attwell 1991: 44- 46).

This achieves cohesion. Consequently, Dawn and Jacobus embody the colonial legacy of aggression and violence; they are representatives of 'Enlightened Europe and the ascendancy of scientific rationalization, and they are both guilty of the same solipsism, narcissism and philosophical idealism that can be seen explicitly in terms of the colonist's failure to engage in reciprocal relationships' (Attwell *ibid.*).

Despite the two centuries that separate Dawn and Jacobus, they both represent the impetus of capitalist greed. On the face of it, they have little in common, but closer investigation shows that their respective places in the world have been determined by violent patriarchal hegemonic discourses. This is true of South Africa and America. Jacobus's heritage is Dutch. Dawn's ancestry is not denoted in the text but like Jacobus, his roots are in European stock. All white South Africans and all white

Americans are implicated in the phenomenon of colonial conquest. Dawn and Jacobus are trapped in, and projected beyond, the histories they represent. Individually however, their respective psyches respond in different ways to the precariousness of their individual situations. The most pertinent distinguishing difference between them is their level/s of psychological resilience to the events that unfold; their success or failure in the attainment of power through violence.

In *Boyhood* and *Youth*, Coetzee portrays contemporary white South African males whose lives are directly affected by the advent and dissolution of apartheid politics. The novels illustrate individual and group dynamics that influence the ways white men adopt roles that identify or disidentify them, with prevailing societal demands. These demands revolve around religion, sex-role and gender beliefs, stereotypes, politics and occupation. Broadly speaking, identity is not an inherent facet of human behaviour, but a dynamic multilayered mask of artifice that is reflexive rather than conscious. In the crisis of alterity, the construction of conciliatory identities is largely dependant on socially demarcated boundaries, and learned patterns of behaviour. These patterns generally include preferences and prejudices as well as appearance ideals<sup>7</sup>: ‘... people ... do not dress properly or look after their appearance’ (*Dusklands*: 45) ... ‘What if Oscar Wilde is right and there is no deeper truth than appearance?’ (*Youth*: 116).

In order to fit into society we need to act according to society’s expectations regarding dress, social status, race, gender orientation and group affiliation. The following four chapters will examine Coetzee’s semi-autobiographical trilogy, to establish diverse criteria that determine how and why specific emotions and perceptions influence the ways in which his constructed white males perform their given identity roles. As I will show, individual will and desire is often in conflict with societies that attempt to shape and mould people according to the greater political agenda. Freudian commentators ‘generally agree that anxiety shields the individual

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<sup>7</sup> Though I am unaware of the source of this construction, I acknowledge that it is not my own.

from rational investigation' (Heath: 2002: ..). Freud also isolates 'four main emotions that revolve around self-identification: guilt, narcissism, jealousy and pride' (Ibid.). These feelings function in the 'subconscious – personal to individual, and in the unconscious – what is general to humanity (external reality)' (Ibid.). In the ensuing exploration I will explicate 'relational aspects of who the person/protagonist is [and how] will and desire, mind, feelings and emotions' (Ibid.) either conform to, or pull against the dictates of society.



## CHAPTER THREE

### WHOSE FAULT AM I?

#### *DUSKLANDS: THE VIETNAM PROJECT*

**No one can describe  
Me the way I am  
No one can enter my brain  
At least no mortal man**

**So if you say you know me,  
Please sir, look again,  
For no-one knows who I am but me  
And then, do I really?<sup>8</sup>**

Understanding the functions and feelings projected by Coetzee's characters is crucial to discovering 'what makes [them] tick' (*Dusklands*: 48). Unlike Jacobus Coetzee who seems impervious to the violent hegemonic rhetoric that informs and produces him as a being in history, Eugene Dawn is patently aware of the words that form him and dictate his behaviour. The novella, set against an America in the throes of war in Vietnam, traces Dawn's gradual psychological breakdown. He is unable to make sense of, relate to, and/or rationalize the place he occupies in a world driven by the United States propaganda/war machine. Attwell refers to Dawn as 'a subject abandoning itself to the necessities of history' (1991: 44). However, the protagonist believes that he has 'a duty toward history that cannot wait' (*Dusklands*: 29). As the events of the novella unfold it becomes increasingly clear that Dawn cannot fulfil his 'duty'. This is because he acts out his several identity roles in a duplicitous socio-political environment. On the one hand, he is 'rooted in the evening-lands' (6) of colonial history, on the other, he finds himself in an era that marks the beginning of a new phase of political history for the United States.

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<sup>8</sup> This poem is the work of an unnamed student quoted by J.M. Broughton (1981) in *The Divided Self in Adolescence* (see Louw et al 1995: 13-32).

Dawn is a 'native of California' (*Dusklands*: 35). This aligns him with the global west and the western states of America. His moments of 'creative spasm' (6) come early in the morning, when he is 'facing east into the rising sun' (*Ibid.*). This revelation places South East Asia in the global context and draws attention to Dawn's own rootedness in the capitalist west. Roots are a pertinent thematic concern. In Dawn's worldview, America's underlying root-value system/s is/are 'rott[ing]' (30). As an individual, he sees that America's desire to root out communism and terrorism is motivated by a 'deeply-rooted ... universal myth [that is] difficult to combat' (24). Above all, Dawn's 'rotting roots' signify his inability to perform the identity of a fully-fledged adult male.

He is depicted as an inferior in the 'D.O.D' (*Dusklands*: 3) at a time when east and west symbolize opposing poles on the democracy/communism continuum. Dawn's 'contribution to Coetzee's New Life Project' (1) achieves stalemate when Coetzee (the character) 'blight[s] the fruit of a year's work' (3). Coetzee's priggish class/rank discrimination is seen as petty when compared with the enormity of U.S. military might in Vietnam. There the 'blighting' is that of a mega power raining 'aleotric missiles' (29) on those perceived as a communist threat. Here, the concept of 'new life' does not exist beyond a present filled with terror. The Vietnamese 'stand in a dying landscape' (*Ibid.*). However, at the western pole of this political continuum American society is safely wrapped up in a world of capitalist consumerism. White American citizens are the progeny of early pioneers who abandoned Europe to tame the 'wild west' and chase after the elusive myth of the American Dream. U.S. imperialism in Vietnam, therefore, parodies European colonial expansionism in South Africa.

For one who feels as inferior as Dawn, recognition is the all-important social marker that he craves: 'I need his approval' (*Dusklands*: 5). However, Dawn's contribution to the 'New Life Project' (1) is demeaned by Coetzee (his superior). Furthermore, Coetzee establishes Dawn's subordinate position by alienating him from his own

‘superior’ class. He sees Dawn’s report as ‘... an attack on their whole class’ (*Dusklands*: 3). America’s powerful military bureaucracy rejects Dawn’s attempts to join its ranks and he remains the inferior other. Class- and not racial-prejudice is the criteria for excluding Dawn in the workplace. He is seen as ‘a near-academic’ (*Ibid.*), one who must submit to a bigoted bureaucratic fraternity that reeks of imperial paternalism.

The forces of power at work here prohibit Dawn’s development both in the military field and as a human being. These forces are fuelled by patriarchal hegemonic discourses that substantiate propaganda and ‘mythography’ (*Dusklands*: 25). Coetzee, Dawn’s superior, is a master of persuasion: ‘...“So what I would like you to do ... is to set about revising the *tone* of your argument ... rewrite your proposals so the military can entertain them without losing self-respect”’ (3). Mutual self-respect is not extended to include Dawn, and Coetzee continues: ““Let me suggest, therefore, some kind of introduction in which you explain in words of one syllable the kind of procedure you follow—how myths operate in human society, how signs are exchanged, and so forth; with lots of examples and for God’s sake no footnotes’ (4). In the absence of academic etiquette and meticulous referencing, Dawn’s report is exposed as a subjective work of fiction, an unreliable source of knowledge that is tantamount to propaganda.

Coetzee’s comments disturb Dawn and undermine his confidence. Unlike Coetzee, Dawn ‘think[s] that an alphabetical ordering of the world will in the end turn out to be superior to the other orderings people have tried’ (self/other, white/black, master/slave) (*Dusklands*: 30). Yet despite his inherent sense of insecurity, Dawn desires control. This manifests itself in obsessive-compulsive disorder: ‘my nature is orderly (44) ... [I] must make extracts, check references, compile lists’ (6). He needs to be able to reference his own reality, a reality that ‘would give the reader a clear sense of the complex natural reality in whose midst [he] now ... is’ (37). Here ‘the reader’ (*Ibid.*) is drawn into Dawn’s double sense of fictive reality where he/she ‘...

might ... [be] able to detect portents or tendencies ... invisible to the author' (but not to the reader) (46). Early in the novella, Coetzee's metanarrative insists on the reader's presence and demands a discursive reciprocal response.

J.M. Coetzee is constantly signposting issues that demand attention. When Dawn confesses to his omission of 'three dull pages' (*Dusklands*: 21) for example, the reliability and authenticity of his 'essay on Vietnam' (47), and his 'single biography' (Ibid.) are destabilized. Documents, their authors, their narrative voices and their syntactical word games are exposed as fallible. The 'authority' (15) of these texts 'will [not in the end] be binding' (46) even though the words can be 'see[n] in black and white' (Ibid.). What this means for Dawn and his social identity is that he cannot write him self into a history that deconstructs itself as the novel evolves. Moreover, his 'liberating creative act' (4) leaves him 'un-liberated' (38) because it is 'bound in a [physical and psychological] prison of flesh' (47).

As a subject in history Dawn is inadequate to challenge the axes of power because the myth-makers' supremacy is irrevocable. For Dawn, this authority is an 'America [who] is bigger than all of us' (*Dusklands*: 9). His instinct tells him that 'America will swallow [him], digest [him], [and] dissolve [him] into the tides of its blood' (Ibid.). America is the 'father [who] exhorts his children to patriotic sacrifice, in times of peace to greater production' (21). The textual Coetzee is the embodiment of American capitalist greed; the personification of America as devouring monster. He is 'the kind [of man] that eats steak' (2) and it is no coincidence that Dawn visualizes himself as 'dead meat', much like the bodies of the 'non-significant dead [in Vietnam]' (23). The character feels as though he is 'being eaten out' (29) by America and her military emissaries. They have a will of iron that is reflected in 'pieces of metal, buckles and badges' (41) as well as in the obvious allusions to America's military might in the 'Indo-China Theater (*sic*) of war' (26).

America's deviance does not escape Dawn or the reader: 'in the true myth of America ... the deviant [is] all those who no longer feel the authentic American destiny crackling within them and stiffening their marrow. Only the strong can hold course through history's doldrums' (*Dusklands*: 9). Dawn is certainly not counted as one of the strong. In his white patriarchal world his weakness is reflected in his insignificance and invisibility. These inadequacies are starkly juxtaposed with 'the father [America and her agents] [who] is authority, infallibility, ubiquity ... a power that ... commands' (21). Dawn knows that the 'punishment for falling into the father's hands is to be eaten alive' (25). This is the America whose territorial conquest/s is/are made in the name of "democracy", "freedom", "liberty", and "equality".

In the transferenceal exchange these ideals are read as: "defy communism at any cost". Misplaced patriotism, displayed as legislated terrorism, pays no heed to the 'napalm strikes that are presented as a war-story of television' (*Dusklands*: 27). Eugene Dawn is distressed by 'the voice of the father' (44) and he does not want to think about Vietnam because he 'becomes disturbed and loses ground' (*Ibid.*). Vietnam, 'like everything else is inside him' (14). He claims that he has 'never in [his] heart ... been a conformist' (9). However, his heart and his psyche are at loggerheads. In a contradiction typical of Coetzee: 'Disobedience does not come easily [to him]' (3-4). When the 'father-voice [exerts its] power over him' (*Ibid.*) he is simply too inconsequential to disobey. Dawn's psychosocial identity is being devoured by the machinations of western capitalism. Like the Vietcong he is 'Meat for [his] Master' (13).

How does this sense of being consumed affect Dawn? Though he sees himself as 'someone of no mean value ...' (*Dusklands*: 45), this completely contradicts the character who 'pick[s] his way through dogshit (*sic*) on [every] iron day' (8). As the subject-narrator peels away Dawn's layers of consciousness, it becomes clear that his psyche is infused with disgusting excremental images. The 'dogshit' metaphor is

amplified in the metavisual: ‘twenty-four pictures of [dead] human bodies’ (10). This suggests a waste of human life. Furthermore, Dawn’s ‘seed drips like urine into the futile sewers of Marilyn’s reproductive ducts’ (*Dusklands*: 8) – a waste of time, a waste of his genes as well as the obvious excremental waste. Moreover, he ‘finds mastication a disgusting process [and his] body voids all nutriment half-digested’ (11). At night, he is only ‘fit for shallow bilious sleep’ (15). Bile represents ‘the worm of guilt’ that sees the ‘hideous mongol boy ... inside [him] ... gnaw[ing] [his] liver [as it] voids bilious filth into [his own]’ (17-24). Metaphorical stinking excrement spills into Dawn’s psyche. Not surprisingly, he imagines his heart as ‘the ball in the toilet cistern’ (48).

Dawn identifies with the ‘dogshit’ and constructs his identity around it. This self-negation is in juxtaposition to American consumerism and materialism, facets that are synonymous with the metaphor of devouring and consumption. Contemporary trends in ‘provincial America’ (*Dusklands*: 15) are manifest in film and advertising: ‘movie[s]’ (41) ... ‘Right Guard’ ... ‘Volkswagen’ ... ‘magazine[s]’ ... ‘Sunsilk’ ... ‘Coca-Cola’ (33). Dawn’s wife shares her name with Marilyn Monroe, and constructs her identity according to socially-designated appearance ideals. Dawn however, is her opposite. His identity profile is not that of the archetypal all-star American superhero. Rather, his social identity is alien to the milieu he inhabits and he emerges from the ‘pages of ‘Vogue’ trembling with powerlessness’ (13).

Unlike his contemporaries, Dawn does not look to glossy magazines for fulfilment. He prefers introspective escapism and fantasy. Consequently, ‘comic books ... books of all kinds [where fantasy and not reality] ... Enthralled [him] once to monsters bound into the boots, belts, masks, costumes of their heroic individualism’ (*Dusklands*: 32). Notwithstanding the obvious allusion to performativity here, this quotation lays the foundation for Dawn’s dream fantasies. His mind drifts easily into the realm of mythology. He, ‘[is] now become Herakles roasting in his poisoned shirt. ... Herakles burns forever. There are significances in these stories ... clues ...’ (26).

He has ‘become addicted to violent and pervasive fantasies’ (9). However, in Dawn’s fantasy, the Greek mythological encounter between Hydra and Hercules is reversed and the ‘tyrant father [is rendered] sterile (impotence and sterility are mythologically indistinguishable)’ (Ibid.). This sterility transforms ‘his [father’s] kingdom [and his own] ... [into Eliot’s] waste land’ (Ibid.).

Dawn cannot cope either with his own wasted creativity or the ‘wasteland’ of America, because his identity, as a white patriarchal-type, is socially-lacking. Like the ‘tyrant-father’ (*Dusklands*: 26) of his fantasy, he too is impotent. He professes: ‘the fault is not mine’ (8) but satisfying coitus evades him. Dawn’s experience is an ‘unsatisfying genital connection’ (10). ‘... before the arrival of [his] seed, her pouch [his wife’s] yawns, falls back, leaving [his] betrayed representative gripped at its base, flailing its head in vain’ (8). Moreover, images of ‘[the] pregnant black girl ... anesthetize (*sic*) [his] most powerful erections and leave him plying grimly ... with the dimmest epidermal sheath’ (10-11). Superficial connubial intimacy is portrayed as yet another poorly performed component of Dawn’s identity. In the ‘familiar flood of disgrace’ he asks “Did you come?” – “No, but it was lovely” (12). Marilyn’s orgasms rest with herself, ‘she is by character a masturbator who needs steady mechanical friction’ (Ibid.).

Her husband’s sexual gratification, conversely, is perverse. In the safety of his private world, he accesses pornography. He is ‘[the shameful] pornographer, doomed to be an upstart hero’ (*Dusklands*: 14). There is a picture of ‘[a] one-time linebacker ... copulating with a Vietnamese woman [who is] possibly even a child. ... [the sergeant] lifts the woman on his erect penis ... to show his strength’ (13). Such ‘encounter[s] [are] full of delicious shame ... [as he] uncover[s] the photographs ... [he] tremble[s] ... sweat[s], [his] blood pounds ... if they arouse [him] like this ... “surely” [he] whispers to [him] self, “I am a man and these images of phantoms a subject fit for men!”’ (15) Later, this misrepresentation of his masculinity is displaced

when he admits ‘I know and I know and I know what it is that has eaten away my manhood from inside’ (38).

Dawn’s sexuality and his masculinity are exposed as dysfunctional. He cannot compete with the all-star American phallus that represents white patriarchal ‘provincial America’ (*Dusklands*: 15). The metaphoric phallus associated with the brutality of colonialism’s imperial conquest and its penetration into alien territories does not belong to Dawn. His penis is ‘a little battery-driven probe’ (10). The American soldiers in Vietnam, conversely,, ‘force [them] selves deeper than [they] had ever gone before into their women’ (18). In Vietnam ‘non-verbal techniques’ (23) emerge as the universal phallic language. Dawn’s impotency is reflected in global, national and domestic physical and psychological textual space/s.

This protagonist has an inherent desire to realize a mature, adult male identity. He cannot achieve this because he constructs and performs identity roles that do not concur with the words that filter through his consciousness. Such ideation results in contradictions between what he professes to believe, and the actions he performs: ‘I have never been a coward ... [but] I am a little cowed’ (*Dusklands*: 31, 47). Not surprisingly, his ‘high hopes for an integrated future’ (2) are utopian and unrealistic. This is because he fails to rationalize the sign-systems that pervade all aspects of his life. His character marks difference or otherness, ‘what am I doing in these people’s lives?’ (33) Dawn’s psyche is trapped somewhere between what he perceives as the archetypal patriarchal white male and its/his exact opposite. In this state of liminality he is willingly subservient. What makes him this way?

He is by his own admission ‘infect[ed] with guilty feelings that show themselves in nervous symptoms’ (*Dusklands*: 48). No doubt the nature of his job is causative in his compulsion to ‘subdu[e] [the] spasms in the various parts of his body’ (5). However, this alone does not account for his inability to construct masculine identity roles that offer self affirmation. All of Dawn’s identity roles are constructed as



passive and ineffectual. He is the child-god Hermes who craves nurturing and affirmation, '[he] would prefer love to ... hatred' (5). Psychologically, he has not dealt with the mystical traditions of Hermes but has buried painful childhood experiences deep in his unconscious. He needs someone to take responsibility for him: 'My name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that ... Whose fault [am] I?' (1, 48). In order to reconstruct himself as an adult male, he needs to re-member and re-experience the psychological wounds that have scarred his mind. For this reason, he is not only constructed as a character-in-history, but a character with a history: 'an individual with a name and a history' (23).

Although his name is pertinent to the cohesion of the novel as a whole, in his dream/s 'it is [ironically] never dawn' (*Dusklands*: 34). Before he can wake up to a new sunrise, he must unravel the 'dawn' (birth and childhood) of his life. Accordingly, the subject-narrator embarks on an inward journey that takes Dawn to his most personal state/s of consciousness. There he revisits the demons of his childhood. However, the inner-self/selves that emerge, is/are caught up in an intricate web of issues that prevent him from developing the functional and integrated masculinity/masculinities, that he so desires. As his conscious and unconscious thought processes shed light on his psychosocial inadequacies, events relating to his childhood and to his parents, become increasingly significant.

Dawn imagines himself as an 'excluded orphan' (*Dusklands*: 34). Despite this, he has a father who 'is away being a soldier ... [and an estranged] mother' (49). As 'a child [he] used to dress up in [his] soldier uniform with a pistol at his hip' (45). The dressing up/soldier/ pistol imagery not only expands the pertinence of masquerade and performativity, but it signifies the relevance of appearance as an important paradigmatic social indicator. Moreover, masks conceal underlying incongruities, while the ever-present metaphor of violence in the text is reinforced. These images do not, however, apply to Dawn who is at heart a coward. Instead, they spawn feelings of guilt and ineptitude. He wonders if he 'would have freed himself if [he] had been a

[real] soldier boy and trod upon the Vietnam of [his] scholarly fantasy?’ (38)  
 However, Dawn’s Vietnam is only ‘a discourse of the war [where the real] men of action’ (Ibid.) are performing manly acts for the ‘televised war’ (29). Virile young white American men are also portrayed in ‘the photographs [he carries]... in one of those oldfashioned (*sic*) briefcases’ (8). Notwithstanding the allusion here to Dawn’s outdated appearance ideals, this draws attention to the notion of photography-as-art. Like written records, photographs perform as a relevant source of historical documentation. They too are vulnerable to injudicious editing and/or translation. But Dawn ‘is not in the picture-faking-side of propaganda’ (13).

I shift my focus now to the masculinity and sexuality that evade Dawn. Why does Coetzee portray a white male who is anything less than the embodiment of the omnipotent phallic patriarch? I argue that Dawn’s absentee father has left an indelible imprint on his son’s psyche. Without a male role-model and father-figure to nurture him, Dawn’s childhood has been blighted by a domineering mother who has made him her ‘whipping boy’ (*Dusklands*: 8). His ‘irrational behavior’ (*sic*) (38), emanates from his confusion over role model ideals and/or separation anxiety. On the one hand he looks to the ‘Leader, [as] father of the country’ (21), on the other, he looks to a biological father who is present in name only. Ironically, the fallible unreachable father figure in the text mirrors Dawn’s own inadequacy as a masculine role model for his son Martin. Despite the fact that he has fathered ‘Marilyn’s child’ (8), he ‘has asserted his inviolability’ (Ibid.). Ever the master of word games, Coetzee’s lexis points to violation with its obvious allusion to sexual abuse. In his state of psychological decline Dawn cannot replicate the mature mythological Hermes who is the epitome of masculinity: strong, powerful and life affirming; one who takes great pride in his son. Rather, Coetzee reverses the father/child relationship and Dawn emerges as the ‘immature’ child-father.

Parenthood is a key metaphor in the linguistic patterning of the novel. Mother/child, love-hate relationships are a recurring thematic concern. Dawn, Jacobus and the

fictive John in *Boyhood* and *Youth*, all have alienating mother-son relationships. This appears to be a very personal motif for J.M. Coetzee. But why is the parent-child relationship depicted as antagonistic? Melanie Klein's research suggests that:

From the earliest stages ... infant[s] begin to search for symbols in order to relieve [themselves] of painful experiences (hunger, colic, discomfort). The conflicts and persecution in phantasy, [relate] to primal objects (i.e. (*sic*) the mother's body) then promote a search for new, conflict-free relationships with substitute objects (symbols) (Glover 2006: 6).

Klein also believed that:

development of the individual was dependent on the resolution of anxiety, and that phantasy and instinctual life were inseparable, bound up with introjective and projective mechanisms, together with the love and hate impulses, ... which were operative from the very start of life. During the earliest phase of infancy, the child engages in an unconscious phantasy of orally incorporating an object [the breast] (introjection) and expelling an object [or having the breast withdrawn] (projection) [which is] closely bound up with the infant's capacity to project emotions (love and hate) on to the mother, making her into a good, as well as a hostile, dangerous object' (Ibid.: 10-11).

It is clear that Dawn wants to detach himself from his punishing mother. To achieve this, '[He] will have to transfer [his] attachments to new objects' (*Dusklands*: 43). Moreover, 'where Freud believed that the unconscious phantasies are primarily manifested in dream-life' (Glover *ibid.*): 'the empty dream-space of one's head ... drawing [him] on and on into [the] phantom world' (*Dusklands*: 34), Klein introduced the idea that they not only form the very structure of all dreams, but underlie both the form and content of thinking, perception and creativity' (Glover *ibid.*). Dawn, and the biography he is writing within the novella, epitomize this notion: 'I am a thinker ... I am ... a creative person' (*Dusklands*: 1) [and] ... 'I have an intuitive understanding' (8).

Paradoxically, the intuition that Dawn claims to possess is 'an intuitive understanding of women [for whom] he feels no sympathy' (*Dusklands*: 8). He fears and alienates the opposite sex instinctively. In order to overcome this problem, he must 'confront life a second time' (new life) (49). This can only be achieved once he unlocks 'the heart that holds [his] secret' (48). Buried in his psyche is the key that will open his

subconscious and unconscious mind/s. As the subject narrator travels into the far recesses of his cognitive lacunae, bizarre images cloud his thinking. He imagines ‘a mother with her son’s head in a sack, carrying it off like a small purchase from the supermarket’ (16). Such grotesque images seep from his vaulted ‘core’ (2) into his psyche. Try as he may to ‘fashion a core for [him] self [he believes that] people [like him] who doubt themselves have no core’ (Ibid.). Psychosocial feelings of inadequacy permeate his being. These are temporarily relieved by ‘Black humour’ (Abrahams 1981: 168) ‘[when] he giggles’ (*Dusklands*: 16) at the grotesque image. However, ‘the small purchase’ (*Dusklands*: 2) represents the kind of love that ‘buys one off’ or ‘buys love’. It also depicts the child as having no value to his mother. He is a commodity representative of capitalism and consumerism. Furthermore, Dawn’s laughter is not ‘the childish laughter that still echoes in [his] ears’ (44). Rather, it is the reaction of a man unable to cope with the psychological chaos that represents his life.

The subject narrator purposefully dissociates the “I” of the narrative from the estranged mother who metaphorically decapitates him. His mind and body no longer function together. She is, the ‘Mother (whom [he has] not hitherto mentioned) ... spreading her vampire wings for the night’ (*Dusklands*: 49). Evidently, Dawn’s desire to be in the ‘downiest of nests under the most coaxing of nurses (which in American-English implies breastfeeding, by the nurse/mother)’ (1) is idealistic rather than experiential. Nevertheless, as dark childhood memories float in and out of his consciousness, he becomes increasingly introspective. He does not want to look at ‘yesterday’s words ... [where] things irredeemable in the world embarrass and alienate [him]’ (13, 16).

Yet despite this, he wonders: ‘How ... one [can] explain injuring one’s own child, one’s own flesh and blood?’ (*Dusklands*: 44) The novella portrays Dawn as the parent who injures his son Martin. However, in the transferential flow of information, it becomes clear that this episode is a re-enactment of Dawn’s experience of

victimization as a child. Dawn, rather than Martin, emerges as the ‘injur[ed] child’ (Ibid.). It is his mother who injures ‘[her] own flesh and blood’ (Ibid.). By injuring his own son, Dawn exercises his subliminal desire for revenge. Moreover, in the transference of thoughts, feelings and emotions, the lexis intimates that Dawn has been abused by more than one member of his family: “‘Father Makes Merry with Children’ (13) ... ‘the uncle ... confides he has taken a liking to [him] ... [and] would not like to see [him] hurt ... it is no disgrace’ (14). The implied repetition of sexual abuse here, sustains the metaphor of violence that permeates all three texts. At the same time, it draws attention to the tenet of power and powerlessness; victim and perpetrator.

Previously, I introduced Klein’s theory on ‘introjection’ and ‘projection’. (Glover 2006). From the outset of the novella, Dawn declares his need for maternal nurturing: ‘I need coddling. I am an egg that must lie in the downiest of nests under the most coaxing of nurses before my bald, uncompromising shell cracks and my shy secret life emerges’ (*Dusklands*: 1). In the transference equation, the reader occupies the place of coaxing surrogate nurse. What Dawn does not want from his nurse is a relationship that withholds and denies his instinctive need for physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual fulfilment. In Kleinian terms, the mother and her breasts are inseparable from the umbilicus that ties her son to her. A quotation from *Boyhood* illustrates the inextricable psychological association that a boy has with his mother:

His very first memory ... is of her white breasts. He suspects he must have hurt them when he was a baby, beaten them with his fists, otherwise she would not deny them to him so pointedly (*Boyhood*: 35).

By denying her breasts, she becomes the punishing, ‘hostile, dangerous mother’ (Glover *ibid.*).

Dawn remains connected to his mother by a discursive metaphorical umbilicus. This makes his mother the object of his attachment. His sexual and social impotence show that he is not the same as other boys/men. As a result of this he flounders; he

feels as though he does ‘not exist’ (*Dusklands*: 32). In order to ‘pull [him] self together [he must negotiate the] poison which is eating [him]’ (27); a poison that reinforces his self-identification with ‘dogshit’. What is this poison and where does it come from? Metaphorically, it represents the lifeblood and nutrients that flow through the umbilical cord to a growing embryo. Pertinent in utero imagery is manifest in flashbacks that transport Dawn to the darkness of his mother’s womb:

First the enveloping skull, then a sac, an amnion: moving, I feel the slip-slop of passive [he has no control] liquids; at night the moon draws faint tides [a twenty-eight day cycle resonant of menstruation and the reproductive system] from ear to ear. There I seem to be taking place (*Dusklands*: 30).

The amniotic fluid imagery is sustained: ‘like a pale stunned deep-sea fish I float, seep into the grayest (*sic*) centres of memory and drown in reveries of love and hatred [good breast/bad breast] ... the organs of my abdomen ... and of course the heart, squelching against one another like unborn octuplets ... [the] parasite starfish ... (*Dusklands*: 7) ... [which]... kicks and flails’ (41-42) as it is born into the world. In addition, Coetzee puns on the word ‘coddling’; a ‘codling’ is a baby fish. However, the water is ironically a ‘frozen sea’ (14). Subliminally, consciously and unconsciously, Dawn negotiates the potency of this phantasmal umbilical cord. If it is severed the egg will crack and the foetus (Dawn and his new life) will be birthed into chaos. Moreover, in his attachment to his mother ‘[he has] no space to beat his wings’ (32). His mother, in contrast to her son ‘is spreading her vampire wings for the night’ (48). By flying away she deprives him of the metaphorical breast milk that sustains his outer and inner selves.

The promise of a new life separate from his mother continually evades him. Apart from the language that writes/narrates him, he is her ‘fault’ (*Dusklands*: 49). Primarily, Dawn is the ‘egg’ hatched by J.M. Coetzee’s creative mind. This ‘egg’ signifies the birth of Dawn as a figure in literary history, but it is also the ‘story’ (6) told by Dawn in his ‘single biography’ (47). Although he is a character born into the text, he fails to grow into, and to perform the identity of, a convincing adult-male. In his delusional state he believes that ‘Thirty-three is the mythologically correct age for

cutting ties' (36). This covert allusion to Christ's crucifixion (Luke 3: 23) amplifies the metaphysical aspect of the novella. At the same time, 'cutting' is symbolic of: the sword that pierced Christ's side; the 'cutting of ties' which is a recurring thematic concern in the trilogy; repeated acts of violence. Furthermore, Dawn's mother is covertly juxtaposed with the Virgin Mary, who, in the Catholic Church is revered as the Mother of God. Moreover, Mary's metaphysical Immaculate Conception cannot be emulated in the physical world. However, it can be emulated in the literary world by J.M. Coetzee, who gives birth to his fictional characters. In addition, the 'perfect' scriptural relationship between Mary and her Son is juxtaposed with imperfections in Dawn's relationship with his textual mother.

The character clearly suffers psychological adversity as a result of his mother's inequities. Consequently, he is trapped in a state of stasis between boyhood and manhood. Evidently, Dawn cannot compete with his patriarchal contemporaries. Nor can he perform as an agent of the omnipotent phallic 'father-voice' (21). Coetzee juxtaposes the controlling voice of Dawn's mother, with the controlling voice of the patriarchal white father. Effectively, Dawn's sense of identity-as-being is compromised by those who vie for power over his life.

Not surprisingly, Dawn's psychosis deteriorates. The more irrational his world becomes the more he moves away from reality. He retreats deeper and deeper into the space/places of his mind that house his latent inner child. There he tries to 'reconstruct [himself] in the role of ... ruined boy' (*Dusklands*: 10). Dawn's earlier boy-self is a 'dark self [that] strives toward humiliation and turmoil, the bright self toward obedience and order. The dark self sickens the bright self with self doubts and qualms ... [he] is the patent struggle of the intellect against blood' (27). No matter how hard he tries he cannot resonate or justify the ways that his mother-as-blood negatively impacts his psychological equilibrium.

In terms of the Freudian idiom, Dawn the child is ‘powerless to take the mother he desires from his father-rival’ (*Dusklands*: 25). This powerlessness derives from his inability to move beyond what Lacan defines as the mirror stage of human development. Instead of identifying with the Lacanian self-reflection, all the child can see is a ‘face mortif[ied] in the ... mirror’ (36). His ‘oval mirror on the wall’ (37) does not reflect his reality but ‘the air of a real world through the looking-glass’ (Ibid.). Dawn’s inability to achieve separation from his mother in childhood resurrects itself when he is a young adult. He suffers ‘pubertal collapse’ (2) because he cannot make the transition from boy to man. His failure stems from his inability to satiate his Oedipal-desires and fantasies. This leads to a conflict between his physical development and his psychosexual need to perform adequate masculinities. Before he can identify with the patriarchal society he contends with, and/or constructs a convincing masculine identity, he must deconstruct his self. Only when he achieves this, will he be in a position to ‘re-construct ... [that self]’ (10).

Failure then, is a prominent feature of Dawn’s identity/identities. Broadly speaking, Dawn’s attempts at constructing and deconstructing socially acceptable identity roles, operate according to a cause and effect dynamic. Nothing in his life provides hope for ‘an integrated future’ (*Dusklands*: 2). He has: ‘a treacherous wife [just like his mother], an unhappy home [and] unsympathetic superiors’ (29). Moreover, his attempts at heroism are subverted because he is inept at ‘learn[ing] [manly] behavior (*sic*) (Ibid.). This results in ‘[self-] hatred’ (7). At the same time, he presents symptoms of ‘depression’ (4) which make him ‘morbid’ (17). As the ‘sober edge of reality’ (15) slides into the phantasmal, his latent hidden secrets begin to emerge. On a positive note, he thinks that: ‘to believe in secrets is to believe the cheery doctrine that hidden in the labyrinth of the memory lies an explanation for the haphazard present’ (10).

His fleeting optimism is shortlived and his attempts to explicate himself in the present indefinite are in vain. The intricate web of secrets and fantasies that underpin his



psychosis, are remnants from a past intimately related to his estranged mother. The subject narrator offers clues concerning Dawn's psychotic excursions into the phantasmal. To find out 'who's fault he is' (*Dusklands*: 48), the key to the text, vis-à-vis narrativity, must unlock 'the heart that holds his secret ... something closed and wet and black ... Sealed in [his] chest of treasures, lapped in dark blood, it tramps around and will not die' (48). While his 'random dreaming' (49) offers him little explication for his psychosis ... 'It is a great help to ... record [his] dreams ... about women [who are] important to [his] cure' (*Ibid.*). His heart is inextricably linked to his mother; she is the 'secret that makes him strong' (48). Interrupted sleep brings up 'the cool sensation of a thigh against [his] thigh' (49). The sensation 'brings a smile [to his] lips' (*Ibid.*), but this is his "shame".

In his delusional state he tries to justify this sense of shame: 'children will not grow up if they are treated like children' (*Dusklands*: 35) ... 'all faults of character are faults of upbringing' (44). Clearly, his psychosis is rooted in a disturbed childhood. He must confront 'the past and work gradually toward the present' (*Ibid.*) if his mental health is to improve. There 'is still [his] entire childhood to work through before [he] can get to the bottom of [his] story' (48). However, his dreams produce only fragmented images of his childhood; images in which he is not 'a plump and happy child asleep in the sleep of contentment' (40) at his mother's breast. Rather he is the Kleinian punished child: 'I am punished therefore I am guilty' (24). This is why he is compelled to bury the past: '[he] place[s] the finished chapters [of his childhood] in their little casket ... without looking back' (13).

When his dreams eventually 'facilitate recall' (*Dusklands*: 49) he manages to 'go back' (*Ibid.*). Hidden in 'the [dark secret is] that [which] is so desirable to [me the reader]' (48). This secret shields Dawn's fear of his incestuous Oedipal-mother. Like Oedipus in the ancient myth, Dawn is a socio-political failure and similarly goes into exile: 'Before I can be allowed to leave [the institution] I must come to terms with my crime' (44). Moreover, Oedipus suffers a plague upon his kingdom. Dawn's

‘kingdom, no longer fertilized becomes a waste land’ (26). In an unnatural relationship: ‘... the only copulas ... [are] between subject-[mother] and [her] object-[son]’ (17). Not surprisingly, ‘the scheming of mother and sons is thus endless’ (26). The allegorical function of the Oedipus myth is to signpost the taboo of incest:

It has all come down to this (I ease myself in and tell over the clear functional words): my bed, my window, my door, my walls, my room [repetition of the possessive pronoun]. These words I love [mother-son]. I sit them on my lap to burnish and fondle [‘turning [him] into a doll’ (33) she is the puppeteer]. They are beloved to me, each one, and having arrived at them I vow not to lose them. They lay quiet under my hand [power and control]: they wink back at me [keep the secret safe], they glow for me, they are placid now that I am here [subdued]. They are my fruit, my grapes growing for me [the egg]. They are the stars in my tree [family]. Around them I dance my slow, fat, happy dance of union [the sex-act], around them and around. I live in them, and they in me [the secrets] (*Dusklands*: 43).

Price argues that: ‘After abuse, the victim’s view of self and the world can never be the same ... this childhood ... impacts on identity formation, sense of self and internal self, and object representations’ (1994: 22: 211-229). The device of allegory in the above quotation exposes the deceptive nature of language. The taboo of incest relates to the ancient Oedipus myth allegorized by Freud to illustrate his Oedipus-Complex theory. This particular example proves the durability of myths that are passed from one generation to another. Moreover, accuracy, agency and authority appear to play no part in their dissemination and nobody appears to take ultimate responsibility for their damaging effect in a world where language and violence go hand in hand.

It is for the sake of language that Dawn does not commit ‘suicide’ (*Dusklands*: 46). He cannot kill himself and/or his inner child without killing his secret, so he writes his story with the hope that readers will interpret the cause of his ‘guilty feelings’ (48). As the ‘data’ (47) in his ‘biography’ (*Ibid.*) emerge, his psychosis reaches the point where his ‘unpromising shell cracks [and his] shy secret self emerges’ (1). At this point, in the present definite, ‘Everything about [him] has a bracing air of reality’ (35). Uncharacteristically, he adopts an air of pride. Freud identifies this as an

emotion that revolves around self-identity. However, Dawn's 'exuberant spirit' (Ibid.) dissolves when 'the air of reality' is juxtaposed with a more tangible reality: '[He] is going to have to come to terms with the laundry' (37).

Before he is committed to the mental institution he fails at all attempts to construct socially viable identities. He is rejected by his colleagues, cannot satisfy his wife, he is a poor father, a felon and disturbed son. He even wonders whether he should have become an 'entomologist' (*Dusklands*: 36) instead of a writer. Once he is in the 'all-male institution' (43) the doctors encourage him to embark on 'the enterprise of exploring the self' (46). Dawn 'experiences his self as an envelope holding his body-parts together while inside it burns and burns' (32). When his 'reality is sharpest ... his assembled props feel like notions out of books' (15). Paradoxically, Dawn's 'reality' is a nomenclature. It is nothing more than a theatrical 'prop'; no more than a fictional construct in a book titled *Dusklands*. The character wants to 'fashion a core for [him] self, late though it be in life' (2), and on a conscious level, he knows that he 'must be prepared to stand up for [him] self' (Ibid.). However, what standing up for him self requires, is for him to assert his authority, masculinity and sexuality. Instead, Dawn, the cowardly boy-man emerges and the moment is lost: '[he] kneel[s] behind five-year-old Martin for protection and smiles to show that everything is all right ... [even though] the fruit-knife is in [Martin's] chest and [he] is utterly out of control' (42). At this point his psychological breakdown is complete.

He is institutionalized and takes on the identity of a patient who sees himself as the boy he used to be. This appears to be his only successful performance: 'They appreciate a patient like [me] ... ready and smiling at the door, teeth brushed, hair neat ... no trouble ... the model of friendly cooperation' (*Dusklands*: 45). The doctors 'soothe [him] ... [and give him] capsule[s]' (48). He is little different to the Vietnamese prisoners who are 'broken down with drugs and a little clever confusion' (17). However, he is not prepared to let the doctors find out 'what makes [him] tick ... [because] behind these walls with [his] doctors at hand, [he] is as strong as a

fortress and they know they cannot penetrate [him]' (*Dusklands*: 48). I sense that the indefinite pronoun here, includes all those who have power over him; those who dominate and control him: Coetzee, America, his wife, his mother, his absentee father, movies, magazines, sordid photographs, comics, books and myths; language. These are the ones who inject '(*poindre*, to pierce)' (6) excremental poison into his psyche. Understandably, '[he] is not impatient [let the pun not be overlooked] to get out' (49) because he is for the time being, safe enough to indulge in narcissistic introspection. In spite of this, he is aware that he will 'have to face [his demons], exorcise them while they are weak and [he] is strong' (*Ibid.*).

What he fails to see is that 'behind their young owl-glasses' (*Dusklands*: 47) the doctors have become the new controlling force in his life. Is this really the 'new ... second ... life' (49) Dawn wishes for, or is his identity as a patient merely another façade, another performance that will help to dissipate the sordid images that pervade his psyche? Can 'these doctors ... explicate [him]'? (47) The clue is in the narrative that writes him: 'I live in [the words] and they in me' (43). He is also the 'fault' (49) of the language that constructs him, the language that he writes in his *New Life Report* and in his biography, the language that interprets him and his identity/identities in the transferential relationship. Dawn's '[meta]fiction [which is his] own' (10) collides with J.M. Coetzee's novella in the intertext. Coetzee's clever word games, his tightly structured syntactical formulations laced with irony and metaphor, belie the glossy magazine society of Dawn's capitalist America.

Dawn's work is an 'exploration ... under the persistent pressure of [his] ... imagination' (*Dusklands*: 17). This endeavour becomes his 'reality' however misplaced or fictional that 'reality' is. The text highlights the intangibility of reality per se, and more particularly, the ways that society construes reality/realities that nurture dominant myths and counter-myths that historically favour the dominant group. Dawn and the identity roles he performs (or not) in a materialistic consumerist

society, reflect the violent nature of myths that are represented as, more often than not, incontestable truths.

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways that universal myths inform the psyche of Eugene Dawn. Coetzee's construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of the character's identity roles lay bare the subversive nature of language. Narrativity, fictionality and historicity collide with myths that maintain the hegemony of heteronormative standards, as their misrepresentations pass from one generation to another. In Coetzee's terms, 'A myth is true – that is to say, *operationally* true – insofar as it has predictive force ... [the] present study [Dawn's report, his biography, Coetzee's novel, my analysis] is one small example ... of modern revisionary counter-myth' (24).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### WHAT IS MY *OTHER* NAME?

#### *DUSKLANDS: THE NARRATIVE OF JACOBUS COETZEE*

**Mislike me not for my complexion,  
The shadowed livery of the burnished sun**

(James Fenimore Cooper: 1757)

In Chapter Three I discussed the first novella in *Dusklands*. There, Dawn's superior is portrayed as a white patriarch named Coetzee. While this character provides an obvious allusion to the Coetzee genealogy, the device links the twin novellas thematically. *The Vietnam Project* is cast during the time when J.M. Coetzee worked and studied in America. As the text moves through its transition into the second novella, Coetzee continues to 'weave [linguistic] fabrications' (*Dusklands*: 14) in and around the implication/s of hegemonic white patriarchal discursive myths that sustain militarism and capitalist-driven imperialism. The metafiction of colonization moves from Eugene Dawn who is 'rooted in the evening-lands' (6) of twentieth century colonial history, to the dawn of Eurocentric colonialism in eighteenth century South Africa. Dawn [re]writes his own fiction, at a time when America is reinventing its omnipotent political self. While America was fortifying its military power at that time, countries such as India were becoming independent from their colonial British masters. The same period saw the rise of African nationalism. Dawn's story depicts the dusk of colonial history; Jacobus's story comes out of the colonialist's dawn.

Unlike Dawn, Jacobus does not write his own story/fiction. Rather, the text is shown to be an interpretation of his story, one recorded on his behalf by a third-party employee 'at the Castle of Good Hope on the 18<sup>th</sup> November 1760' (*Dusklands*: 125). According to the translator of this/these historical record/s, the fictive Dr. S.J. Coetzee, father of the equally fictional J.M. Coetzee, published the first Afrikaans edition of Jacobus's story in 1951, approximately two hundred years after the events

he describes took place. The ‘*Translator’s Preface*’ (55), the ‘*Afterword*’ (108) and the ‘*Appendix*’ (123) comprise the ‘integral [English] translation’ (55) of all the aforementioned “versions” of the same story. This story is an allegedly factual account of an ‘early explorer of South Africa’ (Ibid.). The fictive J.M. Coetzee makes it clear that his own credentials are dubious, so Jacobus’s third-hand story is patently unreliable as a source of history.

Nevertheless, the fictional J.M. Coetzee authenticates his own ‘translation’ (Ibid.) from Afrikaans into English and proffers his indebtedness to: ‘Dr. P.K.E. van Joggum ... the Van Plettenberg Society and Mrs. M.J. Potgieter for [her] assistance [with] the typescript; and to the staff of the South African National Archives’ (Ibid.). His gratitude smacks of sincerity because of the formal condescending tone he adopts. At the same time he implies that these ‘assistants’ are qualified to validate historical documents. This technique gives the novella a sense of historical cohesion and continuation, even though it is misplaced.

The South African National Archives acts as custodian of “true” historical data. Yet according to Peter Knox-Shaw (1982: 26-38 in Attwell 1991: 56), the ‘Deposition’ (*Dusklands*: 123) is the only authentic historical document in the text. Moreover, it becomes apparent that the original document ‘... hitherto received as definitive is the work of another man’ (108), is only one version of the story. Jacobus Coetzee, the subject-narrator of his own story, is illiterate. He makes his mark: ‘[an] X ... *in* [the] *presence* [of] O.M. Bergh, Councillor and Secretary’ (125). Jacobus cannot read or write so the name that identifies him in society and also gives him a sense of his own identity is negated by the ‘X’ that substitutes the person for a symbolic sign. The subject-narrator-writer of each translation of Jacobus’s story: Dutch, Afrikaans and English, records a story in history that is already subjectively unreliable.

Be that as it may, it is no coincidence that the motif of unstable historical records is concretized when two different versions of Klauer’s death appear immediately after

one another. In the ‘first’ linguistically constructed death, Klawer ‘unaccountably missed a hippopotamus hole and lost his footing ... [he] was swept over the shallows [into] deep water [where] the violence of the current ... swept [him away] and [he] went to his death’ (*Dusklands*: 93-94). In the report of his second death, ‘fierce coughing brought him to his knees ... [and he became] paralyzed ... [His] master [who says], “Klawer, old friend ... things are going badly with you. But never fear, I will not desert you” (Ibid.) [then] trudged off’ (95), records Jacobus’s lying, uncaring nature as he leaves his servant to die alone.

Such inconsistencies undermine the pseudo documents that write Jacobus into history. Ostensibly, the documents are exposed as subjective representations of white pioneer history. Over and above history’s failure to record objective and/or accurate archival material, the text draws attention to its own culpability in the doctoring of existing records. Tacit innuendo is pregnant with irony that exposes the misappropriation of written accounts of history. These documents, especially in the South African context, record only what the writer deems necessary: a one-sided white history that obscures the history of indigenous peoples.

The indigenous peoples of Jacobus’s South Africa spoke a range of African languages. Coetzee stresses the way/s that these languages have been maligned: ‘Nama words [and people] [are] reduced ... to the standard Krönelein orthography’ (*Dusklands*: 55). Their language is ‘translated into corresponding, [but not equivalent] Kronlein verbal stems [because] ... the irony and moralism of forensic oratory, [is] uneasily translated into Nama’ (70). Here, the reader in the transferential relationship is confronted with moral and ethical questions concerning translation. In addition, oxymoron juxtaposes Enlightened Europe’s scientific rationale: ‘forensic’, with art: ‘oratory’ (Ibid.). While language is exposed as subversive and manipulative, this linguistic construction makes a distinction between artistic subjectivity and scientific objectivity.



The next document to be examined in the transference exchange is the 1951 edition of Jacobus's story which is translated from Dutch to Afrikaans. According to the translator, this document 'omit[s]' (*Dusklands*: 55) information. Suspicion is immediately cast over this edition. Dr. S. J. Coetzee's reconstituted rendition of mythic white history is repeatedly reinforced when this white Afrikaner lectures on the '*Relaas van Jacobus Coetzee Jantsoon*, at the University of Stellenbosch between 1934 and 1948' (Ibid.). His predominantly Afrikaans student base would have gladly accepted this version of their forebears' trials on the frontiers of their Promised Land. The premise accords perfectly with Calvinist thinking. Coincidentally (or not?), these lectures cease in 1948 with the rise of Afrikaans Nationalism and the advent of apartheid.

Having already destabilized the validity of historical records, the fictional J.M. Coetzee goes a step further. He reveals that he has taken the 'liberty' (*Dusklands*: 55) of adding extraneous information to his translation. The 'sole changes [he has] made [are] to restore two or three brief passages omitted from [his] father's edition' (Ibid.). This is clearly an intertextual link with the first novella: '[Eugene Dawn's report] omit[s] three dull pages of interface between intelligence and information services' (*Dusklands*: 21). It simultaneously brings to light the subjective nature of language in translation. According to the *New Oxford Dictionary of English* (2001: 1969) 'translation' is the transmutation of one language into another. By assigning and inscribing subjective meaning to his account of Jacobus's story, the fictive J.M. Coetzee breaks with professional ethics/etiquette. This establishes the foundation for ongoing debate concerning the unstable subjective nature of historical data. In addition, it exposes the arrogance of white patriarchs whose social identities empower them to distort such records.

As the second novella explores the intricacies of frontier life, the white subject narrator adopts the role of interlocutor between past and present. Jacobus assumes the *natural* identity of paternal master: 'They saw me as their father' (*Dusklands*: 64);

[their] ... 'Master' (88). Alone in his whiteness on the fringe/s of civilization he performs as 'tamer of the wild' (78) and takes pride in his adjunct identity/identities: 'elephant-hunter/adventurer' (61-62) ... 'land-owner and sheep-farmer' (99-100). The protagonist is much the same as the early Euro-Americans who underpin the first part of the novel. Colonial territorial expansionism in the South African context is unequivocally juxtaposed with its European counterpart in America:

We may in passing pause to glance with sorrow at the pusillanimous policy of the Company in regard to White colonization, with regret and puzzlement at the stasis of the Netherlands population during the eighteenth century (sloth? self-satisfaction?) ['seeing sloth as by now part of the "nature" of the Boer' (Coetzee 1988: 29)], and with wistful admiration at the growth of the United States, which in the same era increased its White population geometrically and checked its native population growth so effectively that by 1870 there were fewer Indians than ever before (*Dusklands*: 112).

Coetzee's metanarrative critique decries the use of language as a 'tool in the hands of history' (106). With this powerful implement white immigrants of predominantly Dutch descent marked their own difference by adopting a bastard Afro-Dutch language—Afrikaans (115). This cemented their allegiance to their new centre of existence and provided the praxis for ongoing racial discrimination. In 1948, South Africa was transformed into a racist police state. The oxymoron: 'we believe in justice but have never taken kindly to laws' (*Dusklands*: 109) exemplifies the self-righteous attitude of patriarchal whites and it makes a mockery of the excessively inhumane political dispensation that legalized segregation and discrimination based on race. Ironically, it is the unassuming Klawer whose moral principles seek 'justice' (69).

The introductory synopsis in *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* prepares the ground for a critical expose of white ideologies imported from Europe. Initially, the first person plural critique is merely implied by lexicographical structures that evoke a sense of equivalence. The syntax appears to rise and fall in a "they do this" and "we do that" scenario; 'as they come up ... we go down'; 'we pick up their way of life ... they pick up ours'; 'we are Christians, a folk with a destiny ... [they are] heathen[s]'

(57). This hint of equivalence is destabilized when the hard-headed Eurocentric white male asserts his authority over those whom he perceives as bestial objects endemic to benighted Africa.

When Jacobus encounters the ‘wild Hottentots’ (*Dusklands*: 65) he muses over the differences between these people and those he considers ‘tame Hottentots’ (Ibid.).

They have an:

Assurance pleasing to the eye ... Hottentot integrity ... [they] look you in the eye. It is a pretty thing to see, this confidence, for a change for one who has moved so long among the cunning and the cowardly, though based on an illusion of course, a delusion of strength, of equivalence ... they secure in their delusion, we in our strength (Ibid.).

Precisely who is ‘cunning and cowardly’ is not quite clear, but I believe the criticism is directed at Jacobus who embodies weakness of character and cowardice. This craven white man finds himself in a situation where his African adversary is met on equal terms. The ‘... mounted Hottentot rode forward matching his step to mine ... [we] breathed in unison, all living beings’ (Ibid.). This sense of parity disturbs Jacobus because he sees himself as naturally superior. He seeps into a subliminal state of consciousness where ‘a [recurring] inner debate (resist? submit?)’ (Ibid.) revolves around sordid images of uncivilized Africa. Eventually, he decides that ‘there [is] nothing left but to act ... so [he] perform[s] the only reorganization possible’ (67). He transforms his outer identity into one of confidence. This performance parallels that of the militaristic Coetzee in Part I. Jacobus’s rhetoric smacks of insincerity and condescension as he engages in the cultivated art of persuasion:

“[we bring] greetings of our great Captain whose abode is at the Cape ... I would be a liar if I carried back reports that [say you] ... are envious children who squabble over our gifts. For I know that the Namaqua are men of men, powerful, generous, blessed with great rulers ... we will respect what is yours, and you will respect what is mine [even though it is yours]” (*Dusklands*: 70).

With the aid of Klawer, ‘the old farm Hottentot ... the breed now dying’ (Ibid.)

Jacobus asserts tentative command of his situation. His ‘tame servants’ emerge as:

‘panic stricken ... unequal to [the] tactical dilemma ... slow-witted boys [not men] ... confused and abject’ (Ibid). His adversaries, on the other hand, are ‘placid ... adults [or not] ... who oppose both [Jacobus’s] leaderless head and [his] vulnerable flank’ (Ibid.). Realizing his predicament he steps up the role of friendly persuader, to white authoritarian. Thoughts of equivalence are cast aside as he reverts to his indoctrinated paternalistic Eurocentric mindset. According to his beliefs Hottentots are: ‘wild animal[s] ... like beasts ... [that] help themselves (steal) ... [are] like dogs ... cunning ... [cannibals who] took one alive... tied him over a fire and roasted him ... in his own fat ... they are listless and unreliable’ (57-61). Cannibalism equates with the capitalist idiom: “Dog eats dog”. Consequently, Jacobus is relentless in his exploitation of those he perceives as ‘born slaves’ (74). Robed in this identity he is able to indulge in narcissistic bouts of ego-stroking that fill him with self-pride.

The fundamental identity role played out by Jacobus is that of a displaced white Afrikaner; a farmer with a skewed, inherently Eurocentric notion that naturalizes his assumption of power over indigenous peoples. He is the antithesis of Dawn in that he is the primordial paternal archetype for later generations of white European settlers in South Africa. He is portrayed as the prototype of the Afrikaner Boer:

We picture him in his rough year-round working clothes and lionskin (*sic*) shoes, with his round-brimmed hat on his head and his whip sleeping in the crook of his arm, standing with watchful eye beside his wagon or on his stoep... Or we picture him ... seated of an evening with his family about a water-basin having the sweat of a day’s toil washed from his feet preparatory to evening prayers and connubium ... he strikes us a silent man [like J.M. Coetzee]. We have no contemporary portrait. Doubtless he was bearded (*Dusklands*: 109- 110).

This caricature brings comic relief to the far reaching controversy over the legitimacy of land rights in South Africa: ‘[for] the region through which Coetzee now passed was not virgin to the European eye’ (115). The above quotation also points to the rigidity of Afrikaans patriarchal culture. Although there is ‘no contemporary portrait’ (110) available, the depiction of Afrikaner traditions and their concomitant appearance ideals perfectly epitomizes the stereotypical white South African,

Afrikaans-speaking Boer. Generation after generation will ‘start with the axiom that people act identically if their self-interests are identical’ (32). Jacobus is just one of many who replicate the mould of this specific type of social identity.

Yet, on the volatile frontier, the protagonist is dislocated from ‘the markers of [his] own land’ (*Dusklands*: 100), and his reliance on western culture. Here, he finds himself in a state of lonely liminality where ‘the relation of master and savage is ... spatial’ (80). Jacobus is: ‘the invader of the wilderness’ (97), an alien in an unfamiliar African milieu where ‘they had never seen a white man’ (65). Not surprisingly, he ‘lose[s] [his] sense of boundaries ... [as] a consequence of space and solitude’ (78). This parodies Dawn’s psychosocial solitude and the loss of his ego-boundaries. In this state of isolation Jacobus’s closest companion is ‘the gun ... [his] last defence against isolation’ (79).

Unlike Dawn, who experiences the gun violence of war-torn Vietnam as a series of still and moving photographic images, Jacobus performs his identity/identities in and against the trials and adversities that operate in the theatre of colonial territorial expansionism. Dawn emerges as the product of imperialism, its myths and traditions. Jacobus, conversely, is producing and being produced by the brutal language of imperialist white colonial history. In their respective ways, Dawn and Jacobus reflect the magnitude of colonization in global terms.

Frontier life is permeated with ‘the gun and its metaphors’ (*Dusklands*: 17). At the ‘dawn’ of colonization: ‘weapons command [Jacobus’s] life’ (81) ... ‘the instrument of survival in the wild is the gun, but the need for it is metaphysical rather than physical’ (80). In contrast to European weapons, the ‘Bushman’s bow is really very weak’ (60). However, in an ironic discrepancy so typical of Coetzee, the subject-narrator informs us that ‘the gun is useless against ... otherness’ (*Ibid.*). Despite this, Jacobus is afraid of the Bushman who is ‘a good shot’ (62) ... [and also uses] ‘arrowheads coated in ... poison’ (119). Bravery is not commensurate with the

sangfroid identity that the protagonist projects. The self-righteous white man is exposed as a coward: '[the Bushman] is an easy shot in the back' (59). For him (the Bushman), 'you need two guns (61) [even though] a bullet is too good for a [him]' (60). Even so, the belligerent white elephant hunter marches through 'every territory [with his gun]' (60) ... making sure that the 'territory [is] cast loose from the past and bound to the future [of continued white domination]' (Ibid.). Paradoxically, Jacobus 'enjoy[s] killing; but ha[s] never taken it upon [him] self to be the one to pull the trigger' (106).

In addition to the prevalence of gun violence in Jacobus's story, images of 'stabbing' and 'piercing' (*Dusklands*: 1-44) pick up the motif found in *The Vietnam Project*. Farmers 'stab their [lambs'] eyes' (59). Dikkop: 'came at them with a knife' (62). Jacobus 'would have gladly expired in battle stabbed to the heart' (79) [and, in the] 'placid hand that lay beside [Plaatjie's] thigh was a knife' (88). Moreover, satirical irony ridicules Jacobus: 'the Hottentot ... bearer crept up and with a swing of his axe severed [the elephant's] Achilles tendon ... Coetzee now leisurely approached the beast and dispatched it with a shot behind the ear' (116-117). Later, however, Jacobus is exposed as a brutal murderer: 'Over them I pronounced sentence of death' (101). Coupled with the violence is a sense of militarism resonant of the American war machine in Dawn's story. There are 'troop[s]' (59, 76), 'soldier/s' (62, 102) and 'warlike signs' (64).

Violence is portrayed in a blow-by-blow dialogue. The subject narrator sensationalizes horrific events in an understated passive voice:

We [the inclusive first-person plural suggests joint culpability] descended on their camp at dawn the hour recommended by the classic writers [Jacobus is illiterate] on warfare ... A girl, a pretty child on her way to the stream with a pot on her head, she the only soul about. She heard our horses, looked up, whimpered and started to run, still balancing the pot, a considerable feat. A shot, one of the simple, matter-of-fact-kind I have always admired, took her between the shoulder blades and hurled her to the ground with the force of a horse's kick (*Dusklands*: 100).

The ‘balancing of the pot’ is an act counterpoised between life and death. Yet the syntactical formulation here juxtaposes the horror of killing with the mundane everyday chore of balancing. The murder is ‘matter-of-fact’ but the ‘balancing of the pot’ is a disproportionate ‘feat’ (Ibid.) Again, the reader is challenged to question the gross lack of moral justice for those driven by unbridled sadism.

Unmitigated violence does not end there. Jacobus watches as a: ‘bundle slid[es] to the ground and ... run[s]. It [is] a child, a big one. ... The Griqua ... chase[s] the child. [H]e trip[s] it and f[a]ll[s] upon it ... [he does] things to the child on the ground’ (*Dusklands*: 102). Rape and/or incest add to the already macabre depiction of senseless killing in a volatile milieu where anarchy reigns. This time however, the sadomasochistic subject-narrator shares with the reader, his perverted thoughts: ‘I could not think of any of the Hottentot girls I might want [sexually] except perhaps the girl who had fallen so straightforwardly to the first shot. One could always stroke oneself with an irony like that’ (Ibid.).

Ego-stroking is an integral component of Jacobus’s psychosocial identity. According to Freud this narcissism revolves around emotions of guilt and jealousy. Jacobus is, like Dawn, unable to form reciprocal relationships. Why else would he desire sexual intercourse with a dead woman? Misplaced desires go hand in hand with subconscious fears. In his repetitive ‘inner-debate’ (*Dusklands*: 65-66) he imagines ‘... the casual spear in the vitals ... ritual dismemberment’ (66). This imagery is tantamount to castration and the loss of his masculinity. Jacobus is cut off (no pun intended) from the European centre, the all-powerful white patriarchal phallus that performs in what Lacan calls the “Name of the Father”. In an attempt to overcome his inherent fears, insecurities and anxieties, Jacobus experiences psychological castration. Freud classifies the protagonist’s anxieties as: realistic – basic fear; moral – feelings of guilt, shame and fear of punishment; neurotic – fear of being overwhelmed resulting in loss of control.

To protect his sense of self, Jacobus's ego boundaries act as a defence mechanism. This occurs when the demands of his reality outweigh his ability to cope. In order to deal with social problems, the 'ego defence mechanism' (Boeree 2006: ..) causes denial of emotionally debilitating experiences and it blocks out reality. This blocking out may be achieved by distortion of reality, or a 'deliberate forgetting (repression)' (Ibid.) of unpleasant memories. The resulting psychosis also 'transforms unacceptable impulses such as sex, anger and fear into socially acceptable forms of identity (sublimation)' (Ibid.). When sexual, these impulses are more likely to produce a social identity that is driven by creativity: 'artist, photographer and/or writer' (Ibid.). However, these constructed identity/identities only mask underlying anxieties.

In attempting to conquer his fears, Jacobus must become more like his adversaries. More importantly, he needs to transform his desires into emotions that offer self-affirmation. This is difficult for one who fears castration. Freudian and Lacanian commentators identify this fear as 'castration anxiety' (Ibid.). It occurs during the developmental period in the psychosocial transitional period between desire for the Oedipus mother and recognition of the father's phallus as the ultimate representation of patriarchal law. Seemingly, Jacobus is, like Dawn, suffering the repercussions of 'pubertal collapse' (*Dusklands*: 2). His flawed sexual development complicates the pathogenesis of his psychosis/neurosis.

Sexually, Jacobus is dysfunctional. He derives his pleasure from 'watching ... mass coitus whether animals or slaves' (*Dusklands*: 86). Nothing, 'relieve[s] him more than ... [this] honest sexual frenzy' (Ibid.). On the one hand, this behaviour parodies that of Dawn as pornographer. On the other, this psychological perversion is connected to penile dysfunction. The lexis intimates that his penis is no more than 'two inches' (68) ... at most a 'four inch dangle' (95). This is, ironically, what Jacobus regards as his 'glorious manhood' (98). Klawer, conversely, has a 'long ... penis' (87) while the 'Hottentot men go [proudly] into death with an erection' (61).



The juxtaposition is significant because Jacobus does not meet the criteria for a sexually-functional adult male.

Jacobus relies on self-gratification: '[his] feet rub together in ecstasy, [his] thighs lay together like lovers [and his] arms embrace [his] chest' (96). In addition, the character's sexuality and masculinity are undermined, when his carbuncle becomes the focus of a 'frenzied sexual encounter' (86). Alone, he engages in 'gentle finger-stroking' (83) that initiates 'throbbing' (Ibid.). He shouts, "'Come, come!'" (85) But he has to make allowances 'for the posture of an adult male in the pride of his years' (89). The word 'pride' is in keeping with Jacobus's inclination toward self-glorification. After initial failure, he finally achieves 'climax after climax ... [as his] fingers [enjoy] a steady dribble of wet warmth ... such must be the gratifications of the damned' (89). His carbuncle has been metaphorically raped.

Aloneness and detachment are critical to Jacobus's self-identification. As I have already illustrated, his relations with women are unnatural to say the least. Unlike the white Afrikaner archetype who is the god of hearth and home and considers 'lineage' (Coetzee 1988: 109) as sacrosanct, Jacobus views white women as an encumbrance. This is clear from his use of: 'sober arithmetic' (*Dusklands*: 76) '[to] tot up the profit and the loss' (91) in a milieu where human flesh is measured as body capital:

Dutch girls carry an aura of property with them. They ... bring not only so many pounds of white flesh but also ... land ... cattle ... servants and ... an army of fathers ... mothers ... brothers and sisters. You lose your freedom ... in a system of property relations (61).

Paterfamilias is not for Jacobus even though his identity bears the stamp of white imperialist authoritarianism. The word 'army' in the above quotation reiterates the motif of white militarism as a means of controlling and exploiting the other. In congruence with his sexual perversion, Jacobus prefers the 'sexually misformed ... Bushman girls [despite] the noxious smell of [their] ... clefts' (*Dusklands*: 61, 82). Coetzee points out in *White Writing*, that 'early records about Hottentots ... [speak of the] peculiarities of ... their women[s'] pudenda' (1988: 13). Moreover, they are 'tied

to nothing ... free' (*Dusklands*: 61). Intercourse with a Bushman girl transforms the white man into 'Power itself. ... if you want profit out of [them] ... you must make them breed ... [they are] completely disposable' (57-61). It is interesting that the narrator uses the personal pronoun "you". Evidently, the concupiscent Boer "I", is not 'power' and/or not a 'breed[er]'?

Jacobus is, like Dawn, 'casting off attachments' (93), and he is similarly afraid of forming intra-personal bonds. Apart from minor evidence in the *Afterword* (*Dusklands*: 108) nothing is mentioned about his 'lineage' (Coetzee 1988: 86). The person/character who could shed light on Jacobus's background is Klawer, the faithful servant who 'lived at his elbow since he was a boy; [and] lived much the same outward life' (*Dusklands*: 80). Despite their lifelong friendship: "Klawer old friend" (94), the relationship appears to be based on little more than Jacobus's white mastery and Klawer's black condescension:

[Theirs is one of] those durable relations in which farmer and servant dance in slow parallel, through time, the farmer's son and the servant's son playing *dolosse* together in the yard, graduating with adulthood into the more austere relation of master and servant, the servant revolving about the master for the duration of his working life (*Dusklands*: 115).

Be that as it may, Jacobus knows there is something pure and solid about Klawer: 'Jan Klawer, Hottentot [has] a savage birthright' (81). Jacobus conversely, has only tenuous roots in a liminal place between Europe and Africa. The question is, "Does Jacobus have a birthright"? If he was born in South Africa does that make him an African and give him natural rights to the land? After all, early European settlers believed unequivocally in the myth of divine right and their natural entitlement to own and cultivate the land. Ownership of land went hand in hand with the exploitation of slaves who were looked upon as material assets. Land and servants passed automatically from Afrikaner patriarchs to their sons. As the subject narrator, Jacobus fails to mention the origins of his farm and/or his servant Klawer.

While authentic citizenship evades him, Jacobus falls prey to ‘the Hottentot sickness [which ironically] [is] only for Hottentots’ (*Dusklands*: 82). Coetzee reverses this ‘sickness’ as he points a critical finger at white European encroachment into South Africa: ‘[the] ‘Cape Hottentots, a debased people whose tribal organization collapsed forever under the onslaught of smallpox [imported from Europe] in 1713’ (117). Disease is physically and metaphorically at the core of frontier society. By contracting the ‘Hottentot sickness’ (82) Jacobus is becoming like them. However, the illness renders him prostrate, and for the first time, the façade of white supremacist is stripped bare as Jacobus’s dark core rises to the surface. Subconscious, unconscious and conscious images pervade his psyche as the phantoms of his past resurrect themselves in: ‘bad dreams’ (74) ... ‘demons’ ... ‘nightmares’ (81) and ‘omnipotent fantasies’ (82).

The phantasmal is experienced in hallucinations where witchcraft, magic and ‘Hottentot wizards’ (*Dusklands*: 75) come to haunt him. In his delirium these aberrations are materialized when the ‘witch woman [appears]’ (83). His conscious mind wanders into the subconscious and unconscious where he is ‘borne ... back into the past’ (Fitzgerald 1926: 172). There, he ‘meditate[s] and perhaps even dream[s] on the subject of dreams’ (78). When he is semi-lucid he confirms that ‘[his] secret [is still] buried within [him]’ (75). Secure in this knowledge he believes he ‘[can] not be touched’ (75). His reveries take him into ‘deep ... boyhood memor[ies]’ (75) where he ‘descend[s] into [an] hallucinated vision of [his] deceased mother’ (76). As he inhabit[s] the past again ... [he] ... send[s] [him] self out from the shrunken space of [his] bed to repossess [his] old world’ (77). Psychologically, he is facing emotionally debilitating situations and/or experiences that he has either ‘denied or deliberately forgotten [because his] ego defence mechanisms do not function normally’ (Freud in Boeree 2006: ..).

This mental state of weakness is accompanied by chronic diarrhoea. He ‘evacuate[s] his bowels ... heroically ... in a furious gush. [He] succeed[s] in fouling [his] own

bed [and] waft[s] in [his] own smells' (*Dusklands*: 74-75); [his] bowels heave fruitlessly [before] ... he finally expels them in acid gusts' (84); ... '[they] ... turn [to] water ... [in] ... a paroxysm of yellow ooze [that] drift[s] downstream' (89). Added to these debilitating symptoms, is the unavailability of 'civilized food' (88). Jacobus is unable to withstand 'hippopotamus meat' (84), so he is reduced to 'infant weakness' (Ibid.). It is Klawer's 'privilege, to empty [Jacobus's excrement] in the bushes' (82). Klawer's subservience is aligned with the 'Hottentot ... mother who scrubbed the floors and emptied the bucket and done (*sic*) as she was told until the day she died' (57). Moreover, the parallel status of the 'Hottentot mother' and the 'Hottentot man' destabilizes tribal custom. This tenet simultaneously exposes the extent to which the Hottentot man, who is treated like a boy, has been reduced to a life of servitude. Furthermore, it expresses the coercive nature of colonial white discourses.

Jacobus's psychological and physical decline is complicated by 'an eruption ... forming on [his] left buttock an inch or so from [his] anus ... an aftereffect (*sic*) of the unsavoury yellow soup that dribbled out of [him]' (*Dusklands*: 75). The 'swelling...is [a] bulb shooting pustular roots into [his] fertile flesh ... putrefying [his] backside' (82-83). His carbuncle is the manifestation of his inner self, one that is morally, spiritually, physically and psychologically decayed. This is 'the material basis of the malady of the master's soul' (81). What is more, this putrescence picks up the theme of excrement: 'dogshit' (*sic*) (8) found in the first novella of *Dusklands*. Now, the phantasmal yellow child who inhabits Dawn's body becomes pointedly significant to Jacobus's story:

A thing, a child ... once a baby squat and yellow whelmed in the dead center (*sic*) of [the] body, sucking ... blood, growing by ... waste ... a hideous mongol boy who gnaws [Dawn's] liver ... voids bilious filth into [his] systems and will not go' (39).

In the South African colonial arena, this yellow child represents the many slaves imported from Mauritius and Asia. At the same time, the colour yellow is associated with cowardice, and, the bile-secreting liver is Jacobus's 'favourite cut' (*Dusklands*:

100). Metaphorically, symbolically and physically Jacobus ingests the liver. In so doing he satiates his gluttony and identifies with his adversaries. In Freudian terms, he reverts to the oral stage of development through introjection. By ingesting the liver, he is eating the Hottentots who are: 'short and yellow' (*Dusklands*: 65), yellowish-brown' (117), 'tawny or yellow' (124). Symbolically, he devours those whom he fears. If they are inside him, he can keep them concealed. However, '[he continues to excrete the] yellow soup' (65), which juxtaposes his physical body with his troubled mind. The thematic excremental imagery sustains the metaphor of a diseased society and equates with the protagonist's psychosocial decline.

The natural extension of this line of thinking is to question why Jacobus wants to block out the 'yellow' people. Clues concerning skin colour abound. The subject-narrator tells us that: 'For penetration you need blue eyes' (*Dusklands*: 97). If Hottentots have 'black ... eyes' (117), what then is to be made of the hybrid Hottentot who has 'green eyes and red gums?' (116) Jacobus has: 'rough red-brown skin ... [with] rings of demarcation around [his] forearms and neck ... white shoulders...[and] white buttocks' (*Ibid.*). Underpinning the focus on skin colouration is a veiled intimation that Jacobus's world is not simply white and black, but a mixture of colours that results in different shades of brown. Records of interracial marriages in the eighteenth century are chronicled in archival material. However, on considering the unreliability of historical documents and the semi-literate way/s in which they were recorded, it appears that out-of-wedlock miscegenation produced hybrid children who were classified by the colour of their skins, not the 'colour' of their blood.

This revelation is of concern to the white Afrikaner whose privileged 'pure' white skin is an integral part of, and prerequisite to, individual and group identity. In 1914, the National Party published its Programme of Principles which declared: "In our attitude towards the Natives the fundamental principle is the supremacy of the European population in a spirit of Christian trusteeship, utterly rejecting every

attempt to mix the races” (Du Preez: 2004: 25). Yet, according to extensive research by Professors ‘J.A. Heese (1971) and H.F. Heese (1984) pure white Afrikaners never existed’ (Du Preez *ibid.*). The Professors Heese, argue that ‘Afrikaners have at least 7.2 per cent ‘non-white-blood in their veins’ (*Ibid.*). The question is, “What does this mean for Jacobus and the entire Coetzee line”?

The surname is at the core of Jacobus’s secret. As the ‘Narrator’ (*Dusklands*: 123) of his own story, he is aware that thoughts and feelings are being transferred from the story to the reader. He claims that his secret: ‘regresses infinitely before [my] probing finger’ (96), and that he can disappear into the ‘infinite corridors of [him] self’ (107). This is a ploy to hide ‘[him] self away’ (96) in a dark place where ‘[the] inner surface [of his body hides] from ... [its] exterior’ (*Ibid.*). He hopes that ‘if [he keeps] still long enough [I] will go away’ (*Ibid.*). Of course, this lexis ensures that I will not give up my exploration of ‘what makes [Jacobus] tick’ (48). Once Jacobus is debilitated by the ‘Hottentot sickness’ (82) he is no longer able to conceal his innermost thoughts, feelings and emotions. In his feverish state of liminality between bouts of sleep and wakefulness it becomes apparent that, ‘Entombed in its coffer ... [his] heart ha[s] lived in darkness all his life’ (78). Now, images of what is buried in his dark heart come to haunt him and his most intimate secret manifests itself in the flesh:

A child strayed into the hut and stood at my bedside pondering me. It had no nose or ears and both upper and lower fore-teeth jutted horizontally from its mouth [the gnawing teeth of the yellow boy]. Patches of skin had peeled from its face, hands, and legs, revealing a pink inner self in poor imitation of European colouring ... I told it it (*sic*) was a dream and ordered it not to touch me, upon which it ... left the hut on the balls of its feet. I crawled after it but it had vanished (*Dusklands*: 83).

Is this an illusion, hallucination or a dream? Or is the boy real? For that matter is anything in the story real? Or is this simply the reconstitution of myth, a ‘little fable’ (78) of history; the white man’s gargantuan lie that is starkly juxtaposed with ‘[the] alternative history’ (81) that is currently being written in South Africa?

On page nine in my Introduction, I quoted Attridge: ‘Coetzee’s texts can not be “read off” by the reader ... [they] can be experienced *only in the reading*’ (2004: 145). The many questions that evolve ‘in the reading’ of *Dusklands*, are as subjective as their answers. However, in the transference of information, it becomes increasingly clear, that Jacobus is haunted by his secret demon. When the fictional-real or the fictional-fictive ‘brown and pink child ... reappear[s] [he is] urinating by the door of the next hut’ (*Dusklands*: 87). This signifies two things: ‘the healing virtue of male urine’ (118) and Jacobus’s subconscious acceptance of the ‘Bushman pharmacopoeia’ (77). What is more, the yellow urine intersects with ‘pink (meaning white)’ and ‘brown’ to suggest mixed blood. When the child next appears to Jacobus, he is ‘clutching the apron of a noseless woman with a ladle in her hand ... she open[s] her mouth wide and point[s] into it’ (87). Jacobus shakes his ‘head’ in denial. Then: ‘out of her throat comes a rasping sound. She [begins] to advance on [him]. [He] turn[s] ... and [runs]’ (Ibid.). This is his identity as a coward.

As a white patriarchal Afrikaner, Jacobus has every reason to be afraid. This woman is not merely the mother of the ‘pink and brown child’ (*Dusklands*: 87). Rather, she is the incarnation of Jacobus’s real mother, a silent (she cannot use her voice) other, abused and violated by her white master. The woman portrays Jacobus’s ‘fucked-mother’; the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her white master. In addition, she is the phantom Kleinian mother, the one who’s ‘apron’ strings Jacobus cannot hold, the one whose metaphorical ‘ladle’ represents the nourishing breasts she denies him. The colour of these breasts is not white and by implication, her ‘pink and brown child’ (87) is Jacobus; the product of miscegenation.

As a being in history then, Jacobus is no more than an ‘imitation’ (*Dusklands*: 83) of the white Afrikaner male. In his state of delirium, he comes face to face with his latent inner child. The secret of course is that the child is not white. Yet, despite the fact that this shocking knowledge has been banished from his consciousness, it inhibits his ability to form reciprocal relationships. Jacobus wants no ‘attachments’

(61). Nor does he want to procreate. Furthermore, the ‘peeling’ layers of the ‘brown and pink’ inner child parallel the stripping of Jacobus’s troubled psyche. The stream-of-consciousness style of narration peels away layer upon layer of Jacobus’s skin-deep psychosocial identity. Moreover, Coetzee’s insidious portrayal of Jacobus’s Hottentot mother gives voice to the multitudes of silenced and subjected slaves whose white masters owned and controlled them. Jacobus is not only counterpoised between Europe and Africa, but between white and black. The memory of his silent mother is carried in his blood. For this reason he must silence his tainted inner child, deny its existence and rationalize his own whiteness by distorting the truth. In doing so, Jacobus confirms that language, particularly the language of white hegemonic patriarchal discourses, rests on falsehoods.

However, as fever sweeps his weak body and mind, Jacobus’s psychosis deepens. During this period of semi-consciousness he revisits his unsavoury past. He imagines:

lying on the small of his back with knees in the air ... [suffers] graded pain ...[and] with growing might [he] press[es], bearing down ... divided between pride in his offspring’s stubbornness and a prayer ... [still he stands] straddle-legged ... [readying] [him]self for labour anew (*Dusklands*: 89).

In resurrecting his ‘shame[ful]’ (*Dusklands*: 57) past, he journeys back to the time of his birth. Yet these images of childbirth are perverse because Jacobus is depicted as a mother in labour. The pain involved in the ritual of labour is psychological. It involves the subconscious and unconscious revivification of that which has been repressed and denied: the experience and memory of his sexual aggression toward his parents and all that has been banished from his consciousness (Freud). Jacobus’s *confinement* is also evident in his: ‘claustral despair ... [and his] womb of ice [where] ... beyond rage, beyond pain, beyond fear [he] withdraw[s] inside [him] self’ (91). In spite of his ability to retreat to a psychological place of safety, his hidden self is birthed into the world of knowledge. In the event, the linguistic/textual re-birthing process enables Jacobus, as well as the translators of his story and innumerable



academics, to unravel the protagonist's identity role/s and derive meaning. Not surprisingly, Jacobus begins to look at himself differently:

With what new eyes of knowledge, [he] wonder[s] would [he] see [him] self, now that [he] had been violated by the cackling heathen. Would [he] know [him] self better? ... See [him] self as others had seen [him] (*Dusklands*: 97).

Jacobus's second 'birth' indirectly liberates him. In the 'Name of the [Lacanian] Father' he enacts the role of oedipal mother, displaces the phallic father and successfully breaks the father's laws. However, this is only one psychological hurdle. There are far greater implications regarding his 'violation by ... the heathen' (Ibid.).

Even before Jacobus contracts the: 'Hottentot sickness' (82), re-members his past and metaphorically performs the act of childbirth, there are textual allusions to the character's childhood. Ever the arrogant, narcissistic, proud frontiersman, Jacobus brags of his ability to speak the Hottentot language, which he 'picked up at his nurse's knee' (66). Is this nurse his mother or a substitute mother? It would not have been unusual for a slave woman to wet nurse her master's white baby because it was the custom. The portrayal of Jacobus's socio-cultural identity/identities as: land-owner, farmer, elephant-hunter and master, confirm/confirms his white status. In the eighteenth century, skin colour, as in external appearance, determined race. This is a far cry from the 'bizarre tests' (Du Preez 2004: 30) implemented by the 'National Party government [during the] apartheid ... years' (Ibid.). In the 1950s, racial classification was determined by 'measur[ing] noses, cheekbones and lips' (Ibid.). More ridiculous still, was the 'pushing of a pencil into a person's hair – if it stay[ed] the hair [was] too curly to qualify the person ... as white' (Ibid.).

With this in mind, Jacobus's white skin must be taken as a superficial marker of Eurocentric privilege. On the one hand, a lack of melanin conceals the impurity (in terms of Afrikanerdom) of his blood. On the other, it brings to light the question of Jan Klaver's origins. Is he the bona fide Hottentot that Jacobus makes him out to be? Or is this simply a case of two brothers, one white the other non-white, both fathered

by a white Afrikaner and carried by the same Bushman mother? After all, the name Jan (as in van Riebeeck) is as common an Afrikaans name as Jacobus. The myth of pure white Afrikaansness is exposed as inherently flawed. Furthermore, Jacobus's position in his own story is continually compromised by subjective readers who formulate their own meanings as fictional truths. Consequently, the derivation of meaning makes a mockery of an Afrikaner group identity that premises its existence on the purity of white blood. According to J.M. Coetzee, the 'idea of blood as the locus of life and identity is as old as our civilization' (1988: 145). He explains this:

the poetics of blood rather than the politics of race ... [is] a quintessence of blood [that] flows from man to woman in sexual intercourse; the same blood courses through the living embryo as though the mother, bearing in it the microscopic determinants that decide whether the child shall have straight or curly hair, blue or brown eyes, a fair or dark skin (1988: 138).

In formulating my own assumptions regarding the 'colour' of Jacobus's blood, I have reached the opinion that his superior white identity roles are simply a masquerade.

In the close transferential relationship it becomes clear that Jacobus's white mastery over those he perceives as inferior is deeply ironic. His domination of the disempowered is necessarily extended to include his (Hottentot) nursing mother: '[he slides] into a dream in which a slow torrent of milk, warm and balmy [slides] down [his] eager throat' (*Dusklands*: 87). Klawer conversely, is punished for being the coloured inferior other. As Jacobus progresses toward recovery he wonders why 'the Hottentots ... had ...nursed [him]?' (97) In his arrogance, Jacobus, unlike the reader, is blind to the obvious: he is one of them. The Hottentots not only 'knew where he was from ... [but] they knew [that he was a] Bastard' (57).

Having said that, Jacobus Coetzee still takes for granted his race-determined master-slave relationship with Klawer (and others). This mentality 'conveys hierarchy as well as separateness' (Coetzee 1988: 131). Furthermore, their conjoint acceptance and interiorization of the status quo naturally places Klawer in a position of servitude:

This internalization of the inferior status [is] prepared for [Klawer] by the language he speaks—a language which, here more than anywhere else, declares itself to be the language of the other, the white and the master—is intimately linked to its own low self-esteem (Ibid.).

Not surprisingly, Jacobus ‘never ... heard raised ... in all his days ... [the] voice’ (*Dusklands*: 94) of Jan Klawer. The coloured man accepts his socially construed servitude and remains silent. This is the man who ‘[carries] Jacobus without murmur’ (93). Yet even though theirs is a relationship of mutual dependence, Jacobus is overjoyed when he is finally ‘alone [with] no Klawer to record [his life] ... no watching eyes and listening ears’ (95). Despite his ‘wet eyes ... [Jacobus] exult[s] like a young man whose mother ha[s] just died’ (Ibid.). The irony is that she has. This is why the subject narrator takes a devious twist and offers two different endings to Klawer’s life. The secret of Jacobus’s birth is carried in the genetic memory of his servant/brother’s blood. His ‘Hottentot’ mother must die with his ‘Hottentot’ brother so that Jacobus can continue a life of white superiority. Double death is therefore imperative if the dark secret of his impure heritage is to be finally overcome. Narrativity conveniently disposes of Klawer who is the only ‘true’ witness to the invented life of Jacobus Coetzee. This in itself draws attention to the fictional nature of a history that can be changed at the stroke of a writer’s pen.

Banished, is ‘the memory of [who he] was’ (*Dusklands*: 90) and he wonders if he ‘had simply [been] another accident (98) ... nothing but an occasion’ (91). Now, he is ‘free to initiate [him] self into the desert’ (95). In the spirit of capitalist-driven imperialism Jacobus ‘ha[s] spent wakeful nights computing the percentage of three score years and ten [analogous to his seventy days on the frontier] already devoured’ (106). These are days and years that he cannot retrieve. He tries to ‘find a place for the Hottentots in [his own] history’ (97) and in his ‘crazed ... [state of] freedom ... [he] composes [and sings] ‘a little ditty: *Hottentot, Hottentot, I am not a Hottentot*’ (Ibid.). Here, Coetzee employs consummate satirical irony—the secret is already out—Jacobus is a blood relative of the Hottentots.

As a character in history, Jacobus will never be free of this bondage because his story and/or his secret/s will be rediscovered and reinterpreted by J.M. Coetzee's reading audience. Just as surely as he and his identity/identities are limited to the narrative that speaks and writes him in translation after translation, he is trapped in a biological spatial moment in colonial history. My reading of Jacobus in the transferential relationship highlights the many flaws of his society. In addition, my 'probing finger' (*Dusklands*: 96) has brought Jacobus face to face with his psychological demons. However, Jacobus's dreams, nightmares, fantasies, desires and ideals will live on in his memory as photographs of the mind. The implications of his heritage are sealed in his blood.

Coetzee describes this predicament as: "black blood" hiding in "white blood" insofar as it threatens to erupt in the future throwing off the white disguise, thereby retrospectively revealing all the past white generations of its carriers as frauds, false creatures' (1988: 141). In a reversal of Jacobus's earlier insults, it is he and not the Bushman who is a 'false creature [and an] actor' (*Dusklands*: 65). He is the one 'living a Bushman life' (92); the one 'rubbing [his] skin with the body fat of dead beasts against a sun which humour[s] [him] to pink and red but would not [ironically] bring [him] to brown' (99). He has 'no guns' (91) and puts his faith in Bushman weapons, 'confident that [his] bow could keep [him] alive' (93). Moreover, his:

[r]etrogression from well set up elephant hunter to white-skinned Bushman [is] insignificant. What was lost was lost ... even the white skin could go ... perhaps [this is] the life of the white Bushman that ha[s] been hinting itself to [him] ... implicat[ing] [him] in a new life ... in whose story [he] would fill another book (Ibid.).

Despite this revelation, it is clear that Jacobus's performance of identity as a Bushman is merely superficial. This is confirmed in oxymoron: 'we were living Bushman lives. I repaired my shoes' (93). Here, this subtle figure of speech shows, on the one hand, that Jacobus is masquerading as a Bushman. On the other, it places Jacobus firmly in the European white patriarchal camp. He will not give up his

whiteness and all the privileges that entails. His “shoes”, set off another dimension to the trilogy. This will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Whether Jacobus is white or not, does not detract from the importance of his identity as a Coetzee. In the eighteenth century, half-literate Dutch clerks corrupted surnames on official documents: ‘Jacobus Janszoon Coetzee (Coetsee, Coetse) [as they] jotted down hasty précis for the Governor’s desk’ (*Dusklands*: 108). These misspelt surnames resurrect the Hermes myth that provides the underlying metaphysical and mythological intertext for *Dusklands*. Hermes’s surname was frequently misspelt on statues, doors and gates. Eventually, his surname came to be ‘Hegemonius’, a word remarkably similar to ‘hegemonic’ – the mythical, patriarchal, masculine substance of white colonial ideological discourses. Notwithstanding this connection to the significance of surnames, the two professors Heese (see page 75) checked ‘church and colonial records’ (Du Preez 2004:30) to establish the incidence of mixed blood borne by Afrikaans families professing to be ‘pure’ white. Their research identified more than one hundred common, Afrikaans surnames including Coetzee (*Ibid.*). While the surname gives the twin novellas a sense of continuity and cohesion, J.M. Coetzee’s *Afterword* (*Dusklands*: 108-121) satirically discredits the story told by Jacobus. He is depicted as: ‘an ancestor and one of the founder’s of our people, [who] ... offers the evidence of history to correct certain of the anti-heroic distortions that have been creeping into our conception of the great age of exploration’ (108). His tale is ‘full of incident though ... nevertheless somewhat of an historical irrelevance’ (121). The only reliable evidence points to the ongoing colonial legacy of the Coetzee family line, and who is to say that there are not many more Coetzee bastards in South Africa?

## CHAPTER FIVE

### IT'S NOT MY FAULT, I'M JUST A CHILD

#### *BOYHOOD: SCENES FROM PROVINCIAL LIFE*

The Coetzee gene pool manifests itself again in *Boyhood*. Published in 1997, the novel traces J.M. Coetzee's own childhood in rural Worcester (1948-1951), his family's return to Cape Town, and his senior years at St. Joseph's Catholic School for boys. Though recognizably autobiographical, *Boyhood* is far more complex than a retrospective blow-by-blow account of the author's life. Adopting such a myopic perspective would be naïve to say the least. Rather, the author writing in the late twentieth century conjures up selective memories of John Coetzee's childhood and early adulthood. What comes to light is the uncertainty and insecurity that informs the child's psyche as he struggles to make sense of his world and him self. He has: 'a sense of being alien (not alienated) [that] goes far back in his memories' (Coetzee 1992: 393). Whether or not this is the memory of 'blood' (Coetzee 1988: 146) is open to debate. However, Coetzee argues that every 'state that blood ... can be imagined to assume, in fact can be metaphorically correlated to a psycho-physical state of being ... the individual is simply a carrier of the life of the family ... the vehicle by which the gene perpetuates itself' (Ibid.).

As I illustrated in Chapter Three, the Coetzee genes carry an unsavoury history. John is the product of a racially divided society whose engine is driven by violence, inhumanity and white patriarchal imperialism. His colonial legacy is one of disjunction and disunity both in his immediate and extended family/families, and in society—domestic, national and international. J.M. Coetzee deliberately undermines the autobiographical nature of *Boyhood* by distancing the narrator of the story from the young John Coetzee's consciousness. He achieves this by employing a third person narrator whose commentary is in the present tense. As the narrator explores

the protagonist's innermost cognitive lacunae, he remains detached, matter of fact and non-judgmental. Moreover, the distancing narrative voice deflates any tendency on the part of the reader to assume that the author *is* the protagonist. Various stages of the child's development appear to negate any correlation between the celebrated academic, linguist, and writer, and the child protagonist. At other times the boy's keen intellect and his tendency toward introversion hint at his likeness to his [re]creator. Consequently, the boy's excellent though somewhat naïve mind opens a long-closed self-reflexive window into the author's life.

In *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (1992: 394), Coetzee coins the term 'autre-biography'. This terminology is most pertinent to the protagonist John Coetzee, in *Boyhood* and *Youth*. By replacing the generic prefix *auto-* with *autre-* Coetzee opens up a textual-spatial moment of difference. At the same time, distortion of the genre enables J.M. Coetzee to occupy space/s both in and out of the novels. His ability to doctor generic terminology in this way, suggests that documents are by nature subjective, and are readily disposed toward being tampered with. This reiterates the same theme/s found in *Dusklands*. Furthermore, *autre-biography* is the tool used to recollect and reconstruct past selves without recourse to apology or regret. This technique heightens the novels' sense of immediacy and simultaneously dissociates the young John Coetzee from the mature writer as self. By refusing to articulate the authorial "I" Coetzee develops a relationship between the omniscient narrator who speaks on his behalf, the protagonist who is one of his 'selves' and the reader who is looking for meaning. The narrator flaunts selected memories before readers without implicating J.M. Coetzee in the ethno-socio-sexual-class-political transactions the fiction projects. It is the identity of the fictional "he" that is aired in public and not the authorial "I".

John Coetzee in *Boyhood* is a paradox: 'at home he is an irascible despot, at school a lamb, meek and mild' (13). His mother bears the brunt of his tyranny: 'his rages against his mother are one of the things he has to keep a careful secret from the world

outside. Only the four of them know what torrents of scorn he pours upon her, how much like an inferior he treats her' (Ibid.). In the transferential relationship, the reader is drawn into the parent/child conflict. I take the standpoint of a third parent, one whose natural tendency is to make excuses for the child's dissonant behaviour. As I explore the nature of the boy I enter the space occupied by John's mother. I feel her anguish and the pain inflicted upon her by her firstborn. By adopting the role of a second mother, I allow my reading-self to be drawn into the psychopathology of both protagonists. On the one hand, I am, like Vera Coetzee, the 'dubious promoter and anxious protector' (12). On the other, this compassion is in juxtaposition with a desire to judge and reprimand John's defiant conduct. Consequently, by ensconcing myself in this maternal position, I become the target of his malice, insults and hatred. In the close transferential exchange of thoughts, feelings and perceptions, I sense that John's hatred is an attempt to repress and negate both the possibility and probability that he is capable of reciprocal love: '*Love*: a word he mouths with distaste' (121).

John's identity roles are many. At the start of the novel, his domestic sphere of influence is the family home in rural Worcester. The global backdrop is a post-World War II milieu infused with Cold War politics and a growing tendency toward the liberation of colonized peoples. In 1948 India gained independence from Britain. In South Africa conversely, imperialist white Afrikaner patriarchs were resisting such ideals. The right-wing D. F. Malan was voted into power by the post-World War II electorate. Thereafter, the face of South African society was irrevocably changed. The Afrikaner Nationalist Party implemented and entrenched into law, a policy of forced racial discrimination and segregation. Its name was apartheid. Under the umbrella of this regime, white patriarchal Afrikaner ideologies bespoke violence in every seam, pocket and fold of the social fabric. The self-determination and autonomy sought by Afrikaners for centuries had finally come to pass. Notwithstanding the obvious black/white, master/slave divide, the rural Afrikaners of Worcester had not forgotten their historical enmity with the British. The small town in the novel is dominated by white Afrikaans-speakers whose long-internalized



cultural impasse with the British is manifest in ‘the cruelty, pain and hatred raging beneath the everyday surface of things’ (*Boyhood*: 139).

The boy, John Coetzee is the progeny of early Euro-Dutch settlers in South Africa: ‘[his] remote ancestor [is] Jacobus Coetzee, floruit 1760’ (*Youth*: 3). John’s paradigmatic socio-cultural milieu, posits him at the crossroads of cultural expression. His home language is English, but his father is definitively, Afrikaans: ‘his accent has more than a trace of Afrikaans in it and he says ‘thutty’ for ‘thirty’’ (*Boyhood*: 106). Vera Coetzee, his mother, is the daughter of a Boer farmer: ‘Piet Wehmeyer ... and a German mother: Marie du Biel ... [yet] her English is faultless, particularly when she writes’ (*Ibid.*). At home and in the world, John’s fictional reality is bound up in conflicting and contradictory psychosocial dynamics:

[He] is a child from an Afrikaans background attending English-medium classes, at a time of raging Afrikaner nationalism, a time when laws were being concocted to prevent people of Afrikaans descent from bringing up their children to speak English, [which] provokes in him uneasy dreams of being hunted down and accused; by the age of twelve he has a well developed sense of social-marginality. (People of his parents’ kind are thundered at from the pulpit as *volksverraaiers*, traitors to the people. The truth is his parents aren’t traitors, they aren’t even particularly deracinated; they are merely, to their eternal credit, indifferent to the *volk* and its fate) (*Doubling the Point*: 393).

The machinations of Worcester’s pro-Afrikaner socio-political order overwhelm John. He feels as though he is singled out as a social misfit, and in many ways he is. As he attempts to adapt to his environment his psyche reflects unresolved anxieties that make him feel: ‘unnatural and shameful’ (*Boyhood*: 6), ‘set apart’ (7) [and] ‘isolated’ (11). The boy is swamped by fears both real and imagined. In Freudian terms these feelings stem from: ‘fear (realistic), feelings of shame, the fear of punishment and guilt (moral) and the fear of being overwhelmed (neurotic)’ (Boeree 2006: ..). John’s consciousness is at loggerheads with the world he inhabits and this disturbs him. For him the:

[V]ision of childhood ... depicted in the *Children’s Encyclopaedia* ... is completely alien to him [and the identity roles that he performs]. Nothing he experiences in Worcester, at home or at school, leads him to think that

childhood is anything but a time of gritting the teeth and enduring (*Boyhood*: 14).

His anxieties are wrapped up in relationships of love and hate. The boy does not conform to the dictates of the Freudian Oedipus Complex which is a natural part of childhood development. Rather, John's anxieties pull against Freud's theory on the resolution of instinctive drives. His identity-profile is more in keeping with Klein's "Oresteia Complex" which places its emphasis on: 'libido and aggression that are always contained within, and always refer to relationships with others ... these relationships, either real or imagined cause oral frustration (introjection and projection), which results in phantasies directed against the mother' (Alford 1990: 167-189). Kovel indicates that 'boys [such as John] who over-identify with their mothers in the absence of their fathers, become young men who suffer: confusion, anxiety, emotional chaos. Phantasmal matricide becomes the only way to achieve separation' (1981: 197-198).

These ideas complement Klein's and Freud's. However, 'Klein argues that the child's guilt manifests itself as aggression, yet at the same time expresses an innate desire to make amends, to repair the damaged object of his phantasy, and to identify with his mother's suffering in a profound way' (Alford 1990: 176). The following quotation corroborates this theory:

He yearns to be rid of her watchful attention. There may come a time when to achieve this he will have to assert himself, refuse her so brutally that with a shock she will have to step back and release him. Yet he has only to think of that moment, imagine her surprised look, feel her hurt, and he is overtaken with a rush of guilt. Then he will do anything to soften the blow: console her, promise he is not going away. Feeling her hurt, feeling it as intimately as if he were part of her, she of him, he knows he is in a trap and cannot get out. ... He blames her, he is cross with her, but he is ashamed of his ingratitude too. *Love*: this is what love really is, this cage in which he rushes back and forth ... like a poor bewildered baboon (*Boyhood*: 122).

The simile here suggests emotional and physical imprisonment. In *Dusklands*, Coetzee uses the same imagery: 'I would perish not of hunger but of the disease of

the spirit that drives the caged baboon to evacuate its entrails' (1974: 80). The implication is that South African society, both in the eighteenth and twentieth century, is diseased. Both societies reflect distorted Utopian ideologies; both are characterized by violent hegemonies that perpetuate inequitable race relations. As a child, John has no means of escape from the violence that pervades his life. This causes the boy cultural identity role anxiety and confusion. For him, love and hate occupy the same psychological space. By writing what is essentially an autobiography, J M Coetzee pours out [evacuates] painful memories from his past. At the same time, the baboon imagery recollects 'the memory of blood' (Coetzee 1988: 146). The 'Hottentots are heartless [without hearts they are technically incapable of love] as baboons' (*Dusklands*: 58). This confirms Coetzee's habit of slipping into the intertext, and points to cross-breeding between Hottentots and the Coetzee bloodline.

Whatever feelings the young John Coetzee expresses, they are always painful and intensely personal. Klein believed that the emotions of hate and aggression are as fundamental to mental life as love. John attempts to refute the love he instinctively feels for his mother, because he is afraid that its power will consume him. It is a part of his identity 'that accompanies him everywhere' (*Boyhood*: 125). As a coping mechanism, he professes to hate those he should love: 'He hates his father for seeing so clearly the chink in his armour' (13); 'Even before ... his father returned from the war, he had decided he was not going to like him ... [he] hates the way his father smells' (43); 'he is [his mother's] son not his father's ... he denies and detests [him]' (79); 'Since the day his father came back from the war they have fought, in a second war which his father has stood no chance of winning because he could never have foreseen how pitiless, how tenacious the enemy would be ... For seven years that war has ground on; today he has triumphed' (159-160).

Allusion to Freud's Oedipus complex is obvious. John sees his father as an adversary and competitor for the mother. At the same time, castration anxiety: the fear of being castrated by the father for loving his mother makes him shy away from the male penis

that reminds him of his own inability to penetrate his mother: 'he saw all three penises, his father's most clearly of all, pale and white. He remembers clearly how he resented being made to look at it' (*Boyhood*: 121). Klein intuitively feels that the child's repressed emotions are connected to his greed and desire to have all the glory, honour and approbation in the world: 'he wants [her love] as a sign, a proof, no more ... He keeps driving her into corners, demanding whom she loves more, him or his brother [or father]' (13). This stems from '[his] unlimited desire to possess his mother's [emotional and physical] riches and more; to scoop her out and suck her dry' (Alford 1990: 167-189).

John's phantasmal desires begin when he sucks his mother's lactating breasts: 'his very first memory ... is of her white breasts ... [but] she guards [them] carefully ... deny [ies] them to him. He suspects he must have hurt them when he was a baby ... otherwise she would not now deny them so pointedly, she who denies him nothing else' (35). He is torn between his 'fierce and angry emotion for his mother' (*Boyhood*: 122) and his desire to take her from his Oedipal father. For him, Vera Coetzee is Clytemnestra, the good and the bad mother. In denying her breasts she retains the power to reward or punish him. This is why he alienates her and makes her his enemy. His fearful imagination perceives her as hostile and malevolent. However, this stance hampers the process of integrating himself with the experiences of love and hate. Even though John's human passions are intense, fear stands in the way of his desire to love and care for others' (Alford 1990: 177-180).

Bewilderment, aggression and irrationality complicate John's transition from boy to man '[in] a world he has not yet found a way of entering: a world of sex and beating' (*Boyhood*: 6). He 'spends hours in the bathroom, examining himself in the mirror, not liking what he sees' (144):

Something is changing. He seems to be embarrassed all the time. He does not know where to direct his eyes, what to do with his hands, how to hold his body; what expression to wear on his face. Everyone is staring at him, judging

him, finding him wanting. He feels like a crab pulled out of its shell, pink and wounded and obscene (151).

Furthermore, he is aware of 'his difference from other boys [which he suspects] may be bound up with his mother and his unnatural family' (*Boyhood*: 35). Freudian commentators agree that what he fails to understand is that his 'dark desires' (60) are part of normal development. He fantasizes over: 'beauty and desire ... the leg[s] of [Coloured] boys (56) ... perfect bod[ies] ... short frocks that show off beautiful legs (60) ... the sisters of the English, so golden-blond, so beautiful, that he cannot believe they are of this earth' (136). The 'naked sculptures in the *Children's Encyclopaedia* affect him the same way ... something thrills inside him; a gulf opens up; he is on the edge of falling' (57). Moreover, phantasmal images: 'a feast of sexual delight ... ruled by his dark desires' (60) render him 'guilty' (*Ibid.*). As a coping mechanism he projects this sense of guilt onto his mother. There is an emotional duel. One of John's tactics is to keep his mother in a position of servitude: 'he lets her do everything for him. ... The only thing he will not let her do any more is come into the bathroom when he is naked' (34). 'He shares nothing with his mother. ... She shall know nothing ... He will always come first in class ... As long as the report is faultless she will have no right to ask questions' (5).

According to the "Oresteia Complex" theory John is striving to persecute the mother who he fears is persecuting him. The child fears persecution from the moment of birth when he recognizes the significance of good and bad objects (breasts). Klein suggests that the infant has oral fantasies that cause a mental split. In the transition between: 'the "paranoid-schizoid position" which takes the form of fantasies of persecution, and the "depressive position" which causes feelings of depression and despair, the child experiences guilt as persecution' (Alford 1990: 172). In her view, the "depressive position" is the 'foundation of morality' (*Ibid.*). Klein expands this theory: 'the divided character of man's own nature, his perpetual war against his own hate, becomes a barrier against his desire for a Utopian future' (*Ibid.*).

In his psychosis, John adopts the role/s of accuser and self-accused, self-judge and jury, punisher and self-punished: 'the questioning ... may wander here and there; but in the end, unfailingly, it turns and gathers itself and points a finger at himself. Always it is his thinking ... that slips out of control and returns to accuse him ... he is guilty' (*Boyhood*: 60). His conscience is swamped with negative emotions that emerge as self-doubt. Jeffrey Abramson argues that: 'Conscience is morality ... moral principles are aggression that is turned back against the self. This process is joyless and punitive because guilt breeds discontent' (1984: 170).

John clearly suffers from 'discontent' (*Ibid.*) and he rarely expresses spontaneous 'joy' (*Boyhood*: 110). Proof of this is found in his ironically uncharacteristic 'mood of reckless intimacy ... his magnificent first memory' (30), which he suspects is 'made up' (*Ibid.*). The real 'first memory' (*Ibid.*) is withheld because he does not want to be 'turned into a laughing stock' (*Ibid.*). The joy he feels about the 'scrap of paper' (*Ibid.*) is lost. The closest John comes to achieving intimacy is by default. A scout named Michael, 'straddles him' (16) as he saves John from drowning; 'the three of them ... have wrestling fights as if they were children again, rolling about on the grass, tickling each other, laughing and giggling' (25). He 'remembers wrestling with Eddie on the lawn ... the smell of Eddie's hair stays with him' (74). Then, 'impulsively he grips his father's hair, tugs with all his might ... The violence of his action still puzzles him. He has never been so free with his father's body before. He would prefer if it didn't happen again' (109-110). This intimacy is juxtaposed with the pleasure he derives from an inanimate object: 'there is nothing to match the elation of riding a bicycle' (55).

The protagonist avoids physical contact by engaging in hobbies that do not require the participation of others. He 'absorbs himself in his collections ... stamps ... lead soldiers ... cards of Australian cricketers ... English footballers [and] cars of the world' (*Boyhood*: 36). He is also 'good with his hands [and] spends hours on end with his Meccano set' (*Ibid.*). In addition, he invents a solo game of 'imaginary

[indoor] cricket' (28) and constructs a contraption that enables him to bat and bowl 'all by himself' (30). However, when he is alone on the real pitch, he faces the ball with trepidation: 'In this game there is no pretending, no mercy, no second chance ... he is on trial, one against eleven, with no one to protect him' (53). 'He knows no one who is as consumed by cricket as he is (144) ... But the truth is, he prefers his solitary game on the stoep to real cricket. The prospect of batting on a real pitch thrills him but fills him with fear too' (145).

Apart from cricket, he loves tales of stoic heroes, adventure tales of castaways, pirates and shipwrecks; 'Superman and Captain Marvel' (27), the '*Children's Encyclopaedia*' (*Boyhood*: 14). He reads: 'books from the public library' (7), 'all the Enid Blyton mystery stories, all the Hardy Boys stories, all the Biggles stories. But the books he likes best are the French Foreign Legion stories of P C Wren' (104). Could this be an underlying desire to identify with his father-as-soldier? The military metaphor is sustained in John's graphic depiction of letters: 'Vera, with its icy capital V, an *arrow* [V for violence] plunging downwards ... a Russian name ... he chose the Russians as he chose the Romans: because he likes the letter *r*, particularly the capital R, the strongest of all letters' (27). ... 'Only the English have the VC. He does not fail to notice that VC, are his mother's initials' (108).

John 'loves to page through albums' (*Boyhood*: 39) [though] 'he spends less time on the photographs than on the pamphlets ... dropped on the Allied positions from German aeroplanes' (40). This fascination brings to light an ironic discrepancy concerning the attitude he projects toward his father:

[He] is immensely ... proud of his father's war service. He is surprised—and gratified—to find how few of the fathers of his friends fought in the war ... And there is the blue porcelain eagle that his father found in the ruins of a house in Naples and brought it back in his kit-bag, the eagle of empire that now stands on the desk in the living-room. But he treasures the photograph, taken in a studio in Cairo, of his handsome father ... If he had his way it would be on the mantelshelf too (40-41).

The narrator places John's unreserved pride in his father, under the spotlight. He is also proud of his father's talent for bowling. Jack Coetzee 'grew up in the Karoo, where there was no proper cricket and no way of learning [how to bat]. Bowling is a different matter. It is a gift: bowlers are born, not made ... his father's method: patience, cunning' (*Boyhood*: 51). John's recurring psychological disaffection for his father is thus subverted. This begs the question, "How can John compete with and destroy a father whose qualities he subconsciously admires?" Inasmuch as the world he inhabits signifies a labyrinth of contradictions and inconsistencies, John himself emulates these ambiguities.

Evidently, the protagonist attempts to deal with these equivocations by remaining insular: 'He is with her but separate from her, not holding her hand' (*Boyhood*: 59). Repressed anger with himself and his mother emerges as intense guilt and shame: 'the spectacle of [his] ... mother playing cricket with her son, too easily seen from the street is ... shameful' (29); 'He is ashamed of his mother for the crudeness with which she talks about money' (33); He is also ashamed of his father's 'embarrassing qualification. He is an attorney but no longer practises. He was a soldier but only a lance-corporal. He played rugby but only for Gardens second team ... and now he plays cricket, but for Worcester second team ...'(51); 'Guilty and angry they pass each other in the passage' (156); 'He seethes with rage all the time' (*Ibid.*). John's fiery temper is relentless: '[*T*]hat man, he calls his father when he speaks to his mother, too full of hatred to give him a name: why do we have to have anything to do with *that man*?' (156); His mother's 'ant-like determination angers him to the point that he wants to strike her' (158). These intense feelings derive from his ultimate inability to control the lives of his parents. Persecution appears to be his primary weapon and his younger brother is not excluded from his malice:

He persuaded [him] to put his hand down the funnel where the mealie-pits were thrown in; then he turned the handle. For an instant before he stopped, he could feel the fine bones of the fingers being crushed. ... He has never apologized to his brother, nor has he ever been reproached with what he did (*Boyhood*: 119).



Perhaps John is the one who makes his family “unnatural” (*Boyhood*: 35). Surely, the amputation of ‘half the middle finger on his brother’s left hand’ (119) is cause enough for reprimand. This is the second time that ‘No one ever mentions it again’ (15) so John is denied the opportunity for resolution. By not confronting his evil deeds, his position as the tyrannical ‘prince of the house’ (12) is subliminally reinforced. Ironically, his mother is ‘full of scorn for men who are useless with their hands’ (31). She makes ‘sweeping judgments, born out of passing moods’ (33), but overlooks John’s flaws. When ‘he chose the Russians in 1947 when everyone else was choosing the Americans his parents’ [hardly expressed their] disapproval’ (27). Furthermore, role-reversal in the Coetzee home elevates John’s superior status in the family:

[In] a normal household ... the father stands at the head: the house belongs to him, the wife and children live under his sway. But in their own case ... it is the mother and children who make up the core ... [They all know that] a child is not meant to rule the roost ... [and] the family, led by his grandmother, is not blind to the secret of No.12 Poplar Avenue, which is that the eldest child is first in the household, ... the father last (*Boyhood*: 38).

Coetzee’s narrator satirically undermines John’s repeated references to his “abnormal” family: “[C]an’t you just be normal?” asks his mother. ‘I hate normal people’, he replies hotly’ (78). When at last the parental rebuke comes it is in silence: ‘her gaze flickers over him not wrapped in illusion’ (161). His father sees him with the: ‘eyes of a man fully conscious ... the eyes take him in ... eyes ... without judgment’ (160).

John is patently aware of his own flaws. For this reason, he avoids confrontation with his parents and the world, by keeping fiercely guarded secrets:

Whatever he wants, whatever he likes has sooner or later to be turned into a secret. He begins to think of himself as one of those spiders that live in a hole in the ground with a trapdoor. Always the spider has to be scuttling back into its hole, closing the trapdoor behind it, shutting out the world (*Boyhood*: 28).

The nature of his secrets highlights his immaturity: ‘... of what passed at the camp [near-drowning] he breathes not a word to his mother’ (17); ‘the great secret of his

school life is that he has become a Roman Catholic' (18); 'preferring the Russians to the Americans is a secret so dark that he can reveal it to no-one' (26); 'of his private cricket games he says nothing to his friends' (29); 'the scrap of paper the secret ... first memory' (31); 'of all the secrets that set him apart, this may ... be the worst ... the dark erotic current [that] runs [through him] ... desires' (57); 'the secret and sacred word that binds him to the farm is *belong* (95). However, his most closely-guarded secret is: 'fight though he may, he still belongs to his mother' (96).

In his psychosocial 'perversion of the natural order' (*Boyhood*: 38) ... He knows that 'His schoolfellows think he is a namby-pamby and a mother's darling' (107). Their perception of this identity role is pointedly correct: 'His difference from other boys may be bound up with his mother and his unnatural family, but is bound up with his lying too' (35) ... 'He is: 'a liar, knows he is bad, but he does not change ... he is a liar and he is cold-hearted ...: a liar to the world in general, cold-hearted toward his mother [who] can see, that he is steadily growing away from her' (Ibid.). ... 'His heart is old, it is dark and hard, a heart of stone ... [another] contemptible secret' (123). Consequently, his mother has 'learned not to say I love you to him (121) ... [knows] she is too close to him ... [understands that] he will not kiss her, refuses to be touched by her ... [and that] he deliberately hardens his heart against her—refusing to give in' (47). His only consolation for the way he behaves is that 'he is merciless to himself too ... he does not lie to himself' (35).

John's ability to construct satisfactory identity-roles is persistently compromised by moral anxiety. Freud argues that when ego- and id-wishes are in conflict with the superego, which acts as an internal moral regulator, the child is suffering from 'neurotic anxiety' (Boeree 2006: ..). Characteristically, the superego internalizes the authority of parents. However, owing to the discrepancies in his parents' authority over him, his psychosocial dynamics are confused. The *laissez faire* style of parenting that he contends with is frustrating because he has no clearly defined sense of adult/child boundaries. Accordingly, he commits himself to breaking free of his

parents' authority. The 'source of his desire for detachment emerges from the seat of emotion that causes the emotions of love and hate to divide against the self' (Kovel 1981: 197). Emotional chaos leads to identity crisis/crises.

The boy's negative emotions operate on the hypothesis that: 'libido and aggression underpin the power of human passion: love, hate, jealousy, greed, envy, guilt, retribution, expiation and atonement' (Alford 1990: 171). This assumption derives from the ancient legend of Orestes, whose mother prevented him from reclaiming his kingdom: '[In] his imagination [John desires] a kingdom in its own right ... the only place in the world he wants to be ... a place [he] loves ... with such devouring love' (*Boyhood*: 91). Orestes loses his power and glory. This is mirrored in John's awareness that 'one day the farm will be wholly gone, wholly lost; already he is grieving that loss' (80). His imagined kingdom 'will never belong to him, he will never be more than a visitor' (96). He believes his identity-as-monarch is his by some inexplicable right; 'he alone is abroad, like a king' (25) and 'he sits in the circus tent being entertained like a king' (47). Juxtaposed with this is his mother-as-servant who does 'everything for him' (34). What he desires at a conscious level is in conflict with his realistic, moral and neurotic anxieties. This dissension sparks in him a primitive desire for revenge: 'he would not rest until he had his revenge' (13).

Nonetheless, these conflicts, which are based on the fear of loss, draw attention to John's deeper unconscious and the cognitive distortion of his perceived reality. On the surface, he believes that: 'Cricket is not a game [but] the truth of life' (*Boyhood*: 54) and that his bicycle 'is the most solid thing in his life' (55). In juxtaposition to these expressions is a subconscious and unconscious reality: 'the firmest thing in his life ... the rock on which he stands ... [and] would be nothing without' (35) is his mother. Loss of his kingdom pales into insignificance when weighed against the loss of his mother. John's emotions, feelings of bereavement and isolation come from his phantasmal attempts at matricide. In reality, he cannot imagine her dying: "'When are you going to die?' ... 'I'm not going to die' she tells him, but ... [he senses]

something false in her gaiety' (Ibid.). By perpetually distancing himself from her, he denies the possibility of her death.

The psychological impact of imagining her death goes deeper. Without her he loses the baby inside him, the one who knows how to express spontaneous feelings of love and gratitude. His consciousness is infused with a palpable terror that he shares with no one. He is afraid 'the nightmare might turn to reality [at which time he would have] no recourse but to retreat into petulant shouting and storming and crying, into the baby behaviour that he knows is still inside him' (*Boyhood*: 111). This image galvanizes him with fear. If, this 'ugly, black, crying, babyish core of him were to emerge for all to see and laugh at, would there be any way that he could go on living? Or is there something else in him that refuses to die?' (112) He seeps into memory:

He is a baby. His mother picks him up, face forward gripping him under the arms ... he is naked; but his mother holds him up before her, advancing into the world. She has no need to see where she is going, she need only follow. Before him as she advances, everything turns to stone and shatters [allusion to the Hermes myth]. He is just a baby with a big belly and a lolling head, but he possesses this power. ... Then he is asleep (*Boyhood*: 113).

This is the matricide of his dreams. He discerns his own power to kill his phantasmal mother, and at a subconscious level, he knows that she knows this. There is a 'side of her ... never seen ... before: ... treacherousness' (115). Yet, this perfidy is not what he fears most. Rather:

from the person in all the world who knows him best, who has the huge advantage of knowing about his first, most helpless moments, most intimate years, years of which, despite every effort, he himself can remember nothing ... is her judgment ... it will be like a stroke of lightning; he will not be able to withstand it (*Boyhood*: 161).

Ultimately, on all levels of consciousness, he cannot deny that she is 'What keeps him in existence [so] he cannot cease to exist' (*Boyhood*: 112). Part of John's identity-as-royal derives from his innate belief that he is in some way extraordinary: 'he knows there is something special about him. He should have died but he did not. Despite his unworthiness, he has been given a second life. He was dead but is [a]live

(17). He is a gift from God (49) ... The boy is special' (165). Like his blood relative, Jacobus Coetzee, John cannot die because he is written into fictional historicity by the author, J.M. Coetzee. Both characters articulate the impossibility of their respective deaths. The third-person narrator of *Boyhood* explores this concept: 'His own death is a different matter. He is always somehow present after his death, floating above the spectacle, enjoying the grief of those who caused it and who, now that it is too late, wish he were still alive' (164). The subject narrator in history of *Dusklands* cannot contemplate a world devoid of himself: 'the truer truth is that my death is merely a winter story I tell to frighten myself ... A world without me is inconceivable' (1974: 107).

Indeed, J.M. Coetzee's fictional white protagonists cannot die because they are immortalized by literary canon. Nonetheless, the fictional young John of *Boyhood* is consumed not so much with the prospect of his own death, but by the impact that this eventuality would have on his mother. This is articulated in 'fear of his mother's grief, grief so great that he cannot bear to think about it ... (He sees her in a bare room, standing silent, her hands covering her eyes; then he draws a blind on her, on the image)' (Ibid.). Although: 'he has two mothers. Twice-born: born from woman and born from the farm' (96), John Maxwell Coetzee is also the 'mother' of the text. Vera Coetzee offers her son a prophetic warning: 'Wait until you have children of your own' (162). In J M Coetzee's case, the texts at the matrix of this dissertation can be seen metaphorically, as a self-motivated, self-birth into 'the intellectual currents [that] flow into the turbulent waters of colonialism and apartheid' (Attwell 1991: 11). Fictionality and historicity are the parents of this offspring.

Until the point when 'all the stories ... in his head' (*Boyhood*: 163) are re-birthed into the vastness of the fictional genre, John Coetzee's inner child: 'fears water [amniotic and psychosocial-historical]' (16, 83) and 'panic[s]' (83) at the possibility of 'drowning' (16). This argument is corroborated when the fictional John tries to re-inhabit his identity-as-infant: 'the blank-faced, pudgy baby being held up to the

camera by a dark, intense-looking woman' (48) ... '[but] whoever he truly is, whoever the true 'I' is that ought to be rising out of the ashes of his childhood, is not being allowed to be born' (140). Birth and death are prominent features in John's world. An image that encompasses both of these notions is the 'dead baby in a brown paper packet' (134). This child is anonymous, genderless and free of its parents. However, unlike the dead baby, John looks forward to: 'a normal life' (8); 'a life beyond childhood, beyond family and school to a new life where he will not need to pretend anymore' (14).

John's ability to move toward this new life is complicated. He feels guilty that his mother has given up so much. She: 'had a life before [he] was born. He is glad for her sake, since she has no life now' (*Boyhood*: 40). 'Sometimes when she is feeling bitter, she makes long speeches to herself, contrasting her life on the barren housing estate with the life she lived before she was married' (47-48). John however, is more focussed on her use of 'sibilants' (48), than the content of her complaints. For reasons unexplained, she endures his family's shame: 'on long hot nights ... his mother walk[ed] to and fro in her petticoat, sweat standing out on her skin, her heavy fleshy legs criss-crossed with varicose veins ... That was how they lived, [imprisoned] waiting for the invitation [from his father's family] that did not come' (81). He witnesses her sense of abandonment and shares the embarrassment, shame and guilt that she experiences. However, the stifling she feels in Prince Albert is mirrored in Reunion Park. She says: "I will be free. I will not be a prisoner in this house" ... [and] remains defiant' (3), [but she is, nevertheless] defeated' (4). John feels partly to blame for this and he 'promises himself ... that he will make it up to her one day' (*Ibid.*). In the event, she is prevented from fulfilling her own desires. The truth is that on the issue of her emancipation 'he belongs with the men' (*Ibid.*):

[The] memory of his mother on her bicycle does not leave him. She pedals away ... escaping towards her own desire. He does not want her to go. He does not want her to have a desire of her own. He wants her always to be in the house, waiting for him when he comes home (*Boyhood*: 4).

Yet, despite the tight hold he inflicts upon her, the protection she offers him at home, does not extend beyond familial relationships. The outside world is a nightmare for John. The tyranny he displays at home disappears at school. There he hides away ‘so that he will not be noticed’ (*Boyhood*: 13). He is ‘the youngest [pupil] (6) [yet] ... He is clever ... top of his class’ (95). Despite his academic accomplishments, he is excluded from the mainstream “in-group”. There are several reasons for this. As I have already shown with reference to his mother, John is inherently afraid of punishment. Moreover, the terror of his libidinal phantasies is concretized in the classroom where corporal punishment is exercised freely. He understands neither the pleasure nor the camaraderie that his classmates experience when they are beaten with ‘canes ... that [have individual] personalit[ies]’ (6). The idea of ‘flogging’ (5) makes John ‘squirm with shame’ (6). He is thus excluded from classroom ‘conversations ... [and] ... joke[s] with teachers about their canes’ (8-9). This exclusion spills over to family life: ‘When his father and brothers get together ... talk always turns to their school days. They reminisce about their schoolmasters and their schoolmasters’ canes’ (9). He is ashamed of being different. He ‘has a sense that he is damaged ... that something is slowly tearing inside him ... a wall, a membrane ... [and] nothing will stop it’ (*Ibid.*). Not surprisingly, ‘He dare not slip. If he slips, he risks being beaten; and whether he is beaten or whether he struggles against being beaten, it is all the same, he will die’ (13).

His first day at Worcester Primary School presents a problem that has traumatic consequences for him. In a moment of panic, he adopts the identity of a ‘Roman Catholic’ (*Boyhood*: 18), thinking that ‘Roman’ (*Ibid.*) must somehow be associated with ‘Horatius ... his two comrades ... [and their] indomitable courage’ (20). Since his own family ‘[is] nothing’ (18) in religious terms, ‘the topic is difficult to [r]aise at home’ (*Ibid.*). The matter of fact passive narrative voice reveals that: ‘Not even his father’s family go to church’ (*Ibid.*). Why does a typical Afrikaans farming family, whose entire cultural heritage rests upon patriarchal Euro-white Calvinism—the mystical belief that the land of South Africa is theirs by divine right—not go to

church? Notwithstanding the obvious satirical effect here, twin ironies emerge. First, John is asked to choose between being a 'Christian or a Roman Catholic' (Ibid.). In my understanding, Roman Catholics are Christians. Second, religion is widely documented as the pivotal axiomatic premise of Afrikanerdom. Yet, the Coetzees of *Vöelfontein* no longer worship their benevolent God. The critique extends to the Dutch Reformed Church. Afrikaner *dominees* pull spiritual strings by reinforcing the linguistic message of domination. The *dominee* in *Boyhood* is portrayed graphically and literally, as a man of the cloth: The '*dominee* is ... on the stage, a pale young man in a black suit and a white tie' (23). This is clearly religion as performance. The formal garb points to the socially-accepted appearance ideals of those who represent a serious Christian message. In metaphorical terms, the 'black suit' represents benighted Africa; the 'white tie', the light of the Christian message; the 'pale' white skin of the *dominee*, the inheritance of misguided Europeans whose Christian faith was founded in what can now be perceived as a sacrilegious lie/myth.. South Africa's mythic Canaan was as unstable as the original Canaan (Israel) is today.

John's irrevocable decision to become a Roman Catholic determines its own form of punishment. Catholics are persecuted along with the Jews:

in revenge for which ... the Afrikaans boys, big, brutal, knobbly, sometimes catch a Jew or a Catholic and punch him in the biceps, short vicious knuckle-punches, or knee him in the balls, or twist his arms behind his back till he pleads for mercy (*Boyhood*: 19).

The boy has no idea what is expected of a Catholic. The real Catholics persecute him and insist that 'he must come to catechism' (*Boyhood*: 20-21). The Jews conversely, 'do not judge' (21). Though John declares religion a non-entity in his life, his need for a spiritual life beyond his mother and school manifests itself later at St Joseph's:

There is one part of Luke's gospel that he does not like to hear read. When they come to it he goes rigid, blocks his ears ... the angels ... tell the women: [that] He is not here but [He] is risen. If he were to unblock his ears and let the words come through to him, he knows, he would have to stand on his seat and shout in triumph. He would have to make a fool of himself forever (142).



The prospect of becoming a laughing stock is an ever-present reality for John. Knowing that his own projected style of masculinity is wanting, he is careful not to posit trust in the men he encounters:

[He] is wary of something that breathes from all men: [it is a] restlessness, a roughness barely curbed, a hint of pleasure in cruelty. He does not know how to behave toward ... [them]: whether to offer them no resistance and court their approval or to maintain a barrier of stiffness (*Boyhood*: 131-132).

Adopting a manly identity is problematic for one who struggles to make sense of, and to mirror, the psychosocial-sexual dynamics of the white patriarchal identity roles he observes. This problem is complicated by his preference for the company of women ‘[who] are easier because they are kinder’ (*Boyhood*: 132). He ‘speak[s] easily’ (95) to his cousin ‘Agnes’ (*Ibid.*); he wonders if this is ‘because she is a girl’ (*Ibid.*). John is not a stereotypical boy in that he:

loves to eavesdrop: on the soft comforting gossip of women, stories passed from ear to ear to ear, [about] who is getting married to whom, whose mother-in-law is going to have an operation for what, whose son is doing well at school, whose daughter is in trouble, who visited whom, who wore what when [until] ... a soft white web of gossip [is] spun over past and present (85).

For John, the possibility of performing socially acceptable, fully-fledged masculine identity/identities is intensely complex.

This predicament is further compounded by the mixed signals he gleans from his white male role models whose opinions and actions leave him bewildered. John, hero worships Michael: ‘how wonderful it is that Michael should have noticed—noticed him, noticed that he was [drowning]’ (*Boyhood*: 16). With his schoolmates, ‘Greenberg and Goldstein’ (25), he is torn between their making him feel ‘happier ... [than he has felt] in all [his] life’ (25) and the clash between their Jewish roots and his own. Trevelyan, ‘the ... English lodger ... [who] could not speak a word of Afrikaans’ (75) negates John’s ‘theory that the English are good’ (75) when he ‘beats Eddie ... a seven year-old Coloured boy’ (73). John witnesses this thrashing. The white immigrant, ‘hold[s] [Eddie] by the two wrists and flog[s] him on the bare legs with a leather strap’ (74). ‘... while applying the strap ... [he] snort[s] with every

blow, working himself into as much of a rage as any Afrikaner' (75). This incident occurs before John moves to Worcester. However, the episode finds its equal in 'Miss Oosthuizen' (6), the teacher who 'flies into rages and beats ... Rob Hart' (Ibid.). The Trevelyan incident disturbs, disappoints and disillusiones John, who up until this point, believes that the only people who behave in such a despicable manner, are Afrikaners.

Cleverly juxtaposed with Trevelyan's outburst of 'English' aggression and violence, is Afrikaner pacifism: '[John] and [his] two friends' (*Boyhood*: 70) are caught trespassing by a 'huge, truculent Afrikaans boy in khaki shorts' (Ibid.). John is habitually terrified of punishment and 'He grows light-headed with fear' (71). However, contrary to his expectations, 'the farmer does not ... have a *lat* or a strap or a whip [all stereotypical accoutrements for a white Afrikaans Boer]' (Ibid.) and despite their 'guilt' (Ibid.) the farmer dismisses them. This is a pointed reversal of the Trevelyan/Eddie debacle: 'The Afrikaners have not even behaved badly ... [and] it is they [the English boys] who have lost' (71). These socio-cultural contradictions are an enigma to John whose being is trapped in the liminal space/s between English and Afrikaner cultural dynamics.

The dual-medium school in Worcester amplifies this feeling of being trapped. He is taught in English by Afrikaners: 'Mr. Lategan [is typically Hitleresque] a little man with close-cropped hair that stands upright and a moustache' (*Boyhood*: 8). John's class teacher, 'Mr. Gouws is as fair as a person can be. His command of English is good, and he seems to bear no grudge against the English or against boys from Afrikaans families who prefer English' (131). Nevertheless, John much prefers the teachers at St Joseph's in Cape Town. In Cape Town, 'he and his mother [soon realize] different classes of [white] people attend different schools. St Joseph's, caters for, if not the lowest class, then the second-lowest' (136). John is not sure 'what class they belong to, [or] where they fit in ... but [at St Josephs] he can relax:

[t]he teachers at St Joseph's belong to the Marist order. To him these Brothers, in their severe black cassocks and white starched stocks, are special people. Their air of mystery impresses him: the mystery of where they come from, the mystery of the names they have cast off ... [however,] he does not like it when Brother Augustine [whose real name is Stan Silcock] comes to cricket practice wearing [clothes] like an ordinary person [and he] particularly dislikes it when Brother Augustine ... slips a 'box' under his trousers (137).

John clearly relates outward appearance with inner personality and identity.

Although his time at St Joseph's represents his senior years at school, he is not at the same level of emotional and/or physical maturity as his contemporaries. Stan Silcock (2007) argues that the boy's difference/s emerged from an age discrepancy. Despite John's senior intellect, he was far less mature than his classmates because he was two years younger. His psychosocial-sexual outlook in the novel is naïve. He believes that babies 'come out of the mother's backside, neat and clean and white' (*Boyhood*: 56). Not surprisingly, his book-driven contribution/s to his friends' 'talk about sex ... is evidently not interesting enough: [and] soon the older boys begin to separate off' (147). Even though he is immature, he is au fait with 'stories that [say Brother Jean-Pierre] has been doing things to small boys' (138), and he is disturbed by the rumour that his friend, Theo, 'is a *moffie*, a queer' (148). Over and above his confrontation with the world of sex, John's intelligence is challenged by 'a worthy opponent' (143), and 'like everyone at school, he ... has to play rugby [even though he] is frightened of being tackled' (146). The timid John is obviously out of his depth in such a brutal game. But he is probably more afraid of the physical contact with tough heavy-weights, than he is of the ball.

In his 'English classes ... [his Irish teacher] Mr Whelan, favours 'boys with English names' (*Boyhood*: 139). The offshoot of Mr Whelan's prejudice is that John 'writes essays [that] are dull, mechanical performances' (*Ibid.*). For these, 'he gets 6 1/2 ... never more than 7' (*Ibid.*). According to Brother Augustine (Stan Silcock 2007), who taught John in his matriculation year, the boy's essays were phenomenal. In his matriculation examinations, J.M. Coetzee was awarded the highest mark for English

in South Africa. The fictional Mr Whelan represents the type of myopic apathy that stifles budding artistic creativity. On the one hand, this character draws attention to the ways in which apartheid politics failed to nurture black intellectuals. On the other, it highlights the current dilemma in South Africa's education system.

Mr. Whelan's ostracism confirms John's sense of being alien to others in his childhood world. This feeling extends to his position at the patriarchal farm where 'his father's family has never taken him into its bosom' (*Boyhood*: 37). They: 'disapprove of him and the upbringing he has had at the hands of his mother' (79) ... [in this] 'they find something deeply insulting to their son and brother ... and, without being rude, do not hide their disapproval' (38). On the other side of the coin, 'His mother's family ... accept him—rude, un-socialized, eccentric—not only because without accepting him they cannot come visiting, but because they too were brought up wild and rude' (78-79).

His mother has three brothers. Of these, Norman is the 'wild [one]' (*Ibid.*). Norman is vociferous in his opposition to the political views of liberal white English-speaking South Africans, and he believes that one should '[N]ever trust a Jew (*Boyhood*: 22). Furthermore, Norman is of the opinion that 'Hitler gave the Germans pride in themselves ... [and that] they didn't want to fight South Africans (*Ibid.*) He is convinced that 'If it hadn't been for Smuts [South Africa] would never have gone to war against Germany [and that] Smuts was a *skelm*, a crook ... [who] sold [South Africa] to the British (*Ibid.*).

Norman 'sleep[s] on the sofa until eleven in the morning, moon[s] around the house for hours, half-dressed ... smoking and drinking tea and talking about the good old days' (*Boyhood*: 22). In typical understated irony, Coetzee exposes Norman as 'a *skelm*, a crook' (41):

[H]e lives in a hotel room in Pretoria [and] makes his money by selling pamphlets which he advertises in the classified[s]—"Learn the Japanese art of self-defence ... in six easy lessons". People send him ten-shilling postal

orders and he sends them ... a single page folded in four, with sketches of various holds' (42).

Norman's political propensities reflect the aggressive potency of pro-German Afrikaners: '[he] did not join up, but marched with the Ossewabrandwag instead' (*Boyhood*: 42). This revelation impacts negatively on Norman's identity and the way John scrutinizes him. The "Ox-wagon Sentinel" was a nationalist Afrikaner organisation opposed to South Africa's entry into World War II on the side of the British. Embittered Afrikaners mobilized a paramilitary group modelled on Hitler's Nazi Storm Troopers, and sabotaged the pro-British Smuts government. Many of its adherents were incarcerated during the war, including John Balthazar Vorster and P.W. Botha, both of whom were respectively destined to become Prime Minister. Such men were staunch advocates of Afrikaans Christian Nationalism and racist apartheid politics.

Evidently, John's father, Jack Coetzee, dislikes Norman and prefers his wife's brother 'Lance, the schoolteacher who did join up' (*Boyhood*: 42). 'No one ... except [John's] mother ... mentions [the disgraced] ... third brother ... [who] lost the [family] farm' (Ibid.). John enjoys it immensely when his:

[f]ather and his mother and Norman get into political arguments. ... He is surprised that his father, the one he least wants to win, is the one he agrees with: that the English were good and the Germans were bad, that Smuts was good and the Nats are bad (43).

Jack Coetzee is committed to his political convictions: 'Despite the defeat of 1948 and the death of General Smuts his father remains loyal to the United Party [even though] the UP has no chance of winning the next election ... under Strauss' (*Boyhood*: 68). The potency of the new political dispensation does not go unnoticed: 'the Nats ... assured themselves of victory by redrawing the boundaries of constituencies to favour their supporters in the *platteland*, the countryside' (Ibid.). However, in his apparent naïveté, John brings home the injustice of such political manipulation: 'He does not see the point of elections if the party who wins can

change the rules. It is a bit like the batsman deciding who may and who may not bowl' (Ibid.). Once the 'Nats' (Ibid.) were 'in power ... [no one could] stop them ... They ... [did] what[ever] they like[d]' (68). 'An image of Dr Malan is engraved in his mind. Dr Malan's round, bald face is without understanding or mercy ... He has not forgotten Dr Malan's first act in 1948: to ban all Captain Marvel and Superman comics' (70). No one living in South Africa after 1948 will forget Dr Malan and/or his tyrannical successors.

Once the reins of socio-political power fell into the hands of conservative Afrikaners, South Africa was transformed into a police state. All those with white skins benefited from racist legislation even though many opposed apartheid's extreme right-wing politics. In the event, the stratification and segregation of society based on skin colour promoted intense racial hatred. This filtered through to up-and-coming generations of white Afrikaners. What John:

[H]ates most about Worcester ... [is] the rage and resentment ... crackling through the Afrikaans boys' (69). ... He thinks of Afrikaners as people in a rage all the time because their hearts are hurt. He thinks of the English as people who have not fallen into a rage because they live behind walls and guard their hearts well (*Boyhood*: 73).

When faced with this juxtaposition, John keeps his 'secret attachment ... to England' (*Boyhood*: 128), even though he is confused. He loves speaking the Afrikaans language: 'When he speaks Afrikaans all the complications of life seem suddenly to fall away (125), [but he] could not pass for a moment as an Afrikaner ... [and] it is unthinkable that he should ever be cast amongst them: they would crush him, kill the spirit in him' (90-91). Notwithstanding his dread of such an eventuality, he is critical of the English: '[the one] thing about the English that disappoints him [and] that he will not imitate, is their contempt for Afrikaans' (125). Positing his identity in either camp is an ongoing frustration for John. He 'loves ... the Karoo ... the beloved landscape of ochre and grey and fawn and olive-green ... the only place in the world where he wants to be—as he wants to live: without belonging to a family' (90-91). In

his heart, ‘Belonging to the farm is his secret fate, a fate he was born into but embraces gladly’ (96). On the other hand:

There is the English language which he commands with ease. There is England and everything that England stands for, to which he believes he is loyal. But more than that is required, clearly, before one will be accepted as truly English: tests to face, some of which he will not pass (*Boyhood*: 129).

If he cannot pass the test/s that offer entrance to the English and/or Afrikaner “in-group/s” then how can he possibly construct an identity that reflects the society he represents, or become the person he inevitably is? The identity roles that he performs in the world are constructed on pretence. He engages in Afrikaans cultural traditions: ‘He does not allow himself to be kissed, except by his father’s sisters ... [it] is part of the price he pays for going to the farm’ (121). Submissively, he ‘participat[es] in their rituals ... [but] despise[es] himself for his cravenness’ (79). At home conversely, he refuses to accept his father’s Afrikaans language constructions:

[He] ... mocks his father’s speech: ‘*Mammie moet a kombers oor Mammie se kniee trek anders word Mammie koud*’—Mommy must put a blanket over Mommy’s knees, otherwise Mommy will get cold. He is relieved that he is not Afrikaans and is saved from having to talk like that, like a whipped slave (*Boyhood*: 49).

The ‘slave’ simile points a critical finger at South Africa’s violent and well practiced discursively-based patriarchal master/slave mentality. At the same time, it draws attention to the Afrikaans language as a medium through which ideological patriarchal traditions and customs are kept alive.

John maliciously criticises his father’s Afrikaans cultural peculiarities, but he is not prepared to forfeit his visits to the farm:

[When] they go to the farm at Christmas ... the whole extended family congregates ... twenty-six of them. All day long his aunt and two maids are busy in the steamy kitchen, cooking, baking, producing meal after meal, one round of tea or coffee and cake after another, while the men sit on the stoep gazing lazily over the shimmering Karoo swapping stories about the old days ... Greedily he drinks in the atmosphere, drinks in the happy slapdash mixture of English and Afrikaans ... this funny, dancing language (*Boyhood*: 81).

The farm, more than anything else, affects John's senses: '[E]verything in the Karoo is delicious, the peaches, the watermelons, the pumpkin, the mutton, [it is] as though whatever can find sustenance in this arid earth is thereby blessed' (90). This religious trope is extended to include miracles:

The hotter the day, the cooler the water [in the canvas water-bottle]—a miracle, like the miracle of the meat that hangs in the dark of the storeroom and does not rot ... the pumpkins that lie on the roof in the blazing sun and stay fresh. On the farm there seems to be no decay (*Boyhood*: 83).

However, in the nuanced narrative gaps, the notion of moral decay seeps into the foreground. The 'Two Coloured families [who] live on the farm' (Ibid.) are brought into the temporal-spatial moment when the ghost of 'Outa Jaap' (84) manifests itself as the product of fictionality and historicity. This character is portrayed as 'sightless' (Ibid.), suggesting that he is blind to the patriarchal white hegemonic discourses that ensure his subliminal acceptance of his own manipulability. Sardonicly, the narrator points to the opposite: 'Though Outa Jaap is gone now, his name is still mentioned with deference ... [he] belonged to a vanished generation' (Ibid.). John has a sense that:

Outa Jaap was part of the farm ... [there] before his grandfather ... [and] though his grandfather may have been its purchaser and legal owner, Outa Jaap came with it, knew more about it, about sheep, veld, weather, than the newcomer would ever know (Ibid.).

The cynicism of this critique is expanded: '[John's] grandfather ... lies buried, but the farm is still his. His children run like midgets on it, and his grandchildren, midgets of midgets' (*Boyhood*: 97). This imagery portrays the essence of lineage, the power of the authoritarian puritanical patriarch and the replication of generation after generation of white Afrikaans landowners. Through the naïve consciousness of the protagonist, the narrator reveals that whiteness is privileged even in death:

At the fork is the gravestone, a fenced plot with a gate of its own. Dominating the graveyard is his grandfather's marble headstone ... On the other side of the road is a second graveyard, without a fence, where some grave-mounds are so weathered that they have been reabsorbed into the earth. Here lie the servants and hirelings of the farm, stretching back to Outa Jaap and far



beyond ... from the earth comes a deep silence, so deep that it could almost be a hum (Ibid.).

One does not have to look far beneath the surface of this quotation to interpret the power of white domination and its concomitant exploitation of South Africa's indigenous peoples. The socio-political marginality of these inferior others, is represented symbolically in allegory. The humming sound is the voice of dissent. It emanates from the 'little black bees' (*Boyhood*: 98) who represent the black masses. Despite being 'rob[bed] of their honey ... over the years' (Ibid.) read as the land of milk and honey that has been stolen by whites for centuries, '[they] stay on' (Ibid.) because there is no choice. In a moment of mature clarity, John refuses to be included in the patriarchal collective fold: 'He would like the bees to recognize that he, when he visits, comes with clean hands' (Ibid.). This notion is sustained: 'it seems to him that ... The Karoo is Freek's country, his home; the Coetzees, drinking tea and gossiping on the farmhouse stoep are like [European] swallows, seasonal, here today, gone tomorrow, or even like sparrows, chirping, light-footed, short-lived' (87). The white experience in South Africa is posited as transient.

This is John's identity-as-thinker: 'a boy from his class found him lying on his back under a chair. 'What are you doing there?' ... 'Thinking ... I like thinking' (*Boyhood*: 29). He wonders 'whether Freek' (86) or 'Josias the man from Schochat's is a man or boy. [H]e has a sense that Schochat's boy [and/or Freek] ... is in fact not a boy at all but a grown man' (64). Furthermore, the narrator exposes John's conscious 'thinking' about the symbolic and semiotic sign-systems that permeate his world: 'the servant's lavatory' (1); 'They are of course South Africans, but even South Africanness is faintly embarrassing ... since not everyone who lives in South Africa is ... a proper South African' (18); 'Coloured people are the salt of the earth, [his mother] says, yet she and her sisters are always gossiping about pretend-whites with secret Coloured backgrounds' (37); 'One can dismiss the Natives perhaps ... They can be argued away because they are latecomers, invaders from the north, and have no right to be here' (61); 'The Coloureds were fathered by the whites ... upon the Hottentots: that

much is plain, even in the veiled language of his school history book' (62); 'He does not like it when ... Lientjie has to pretend she is invisible and he has to pretend she is not there ... when she speaks to him in the third person, calling him '*die kleinbaas*' the little master' (86). Then there is the visit from the Coloured prosecutor. The event is narrated in sublime mocking satire:

Though Mr. Golding [a Jewish name?] is Coloured he is somehow in a position of power over his father ... After he has left there is a debate about what to do with the teacup. The custom, it appears, is that after a person of colour has drunk from a [white] teacup, the cup must be smashed ... in the end his mother just washes the cup with bleach (*Boyhood*: 157).

Inevitably, John is responsible for the cultural practices that he accepts or denies. He must choose which social masks to don, which identity roles to perform and where he sees himself in the landscape of apartheid. Along the way, he needs to synthesize all of his selves: 'son, despot, lamb, scholar, grandson, friend, nephew, cousin, cricketer, thinker, writer, adolescent, Roman Catholic, South African, English, Afrikaner, white', with his deep-seated emotions of love and hate. If and when he integrates these selves into a whole unified adult male self he will be able to overcome his neurotic anxieties. No doubt, his finely-tuned intellect will govern the decisions that project him into the future of a South Africa where black African Nationalism will undoubtedly rise up against the monster of apartheid.

## CHAPTER SIX

### *YOUTH*

**Poetry is a hazardous occupation, very hazardous.  
There may be things in there—inside you, that  
Maybe you can't handle.**

—James Dickey

This novel is the continuing story of John Coetzee. Like its precursor it is narrated in the present tense by an unnamed third person. The opening pages of *Youth* introduce us to a more mature John who has left school, is studying mathematics at the University of Cape Town and is earning enough money to be self sufficient: ‘He may be only nineteen but he is on his own feet, dependent on no one ... He is proving ... that each man is an island: that you don’t need parents’ (2002: 2). Coetzee’s final instalment in his biographical trilogy uses lexical and syntactical formulae that repeat themselves in different ways: ‘He has a list of words and phrases he has stored up, mundane or recondite, waiting to find homes for them’ (61). This technique gives the novel a sense of cohesive circularity, as in: “history repeats itself”. It also points to Beckett’s vision of a repetitive cyclical universe where the game of life ends in stalemate (*Endgame*). At the same time it acts as a conduit between the mature J.M. Coetzee writing his first novel *Dusklands* and the young man who is an aspirant poet in *Youth*.

The textual roots planted in *Dusklands* and in *Boyhood* are picked up in *Youth*. John’s intention is:

[t]o qualify as a mathematician [Jacobus is a master of enumeration], then to go abroad [emigration links the white male protagonists] and devote himself to art. ... While perfecting his poetic skills [creative writing—Dawn’s biography—the subjective depiction of Jacobus’s story] abroad [In England and America] he will earn his living doing something obscure and respectable [computer programming]. Since great artists are fated to go unrecognized for a while, he imagines [himself as] ... a clerk humbly adding up figures in a back room [Dawn is one of Chomsky’s backroom boys] (*Youth*: 22).

The several interrelated white male selves present in *Dusklands*, *Boyhood* and *Youth*, reflect the author's own struggle with finding and performing acceptable identity roles in a postcolonial world. Authorship is thus problematized because Coetzee is writing himself into his own fictional history. By [re]writing his pseudo-self/selves as fictional protagonists, Coetzee surreptitiously inscribes divergent meanings to phases of colonial history that impact him personally.

The older John in *Youth* has escaped the strictures of his "unnatural family" and more especially, the stifling self-sacrificial love of his mother: 'All his life she has been coddling him; all his life he has been resisting' (*Youth*: 18). Unlike Eugene Dawn who 'needs coddling' (*Dusklands*: 1), John resists physical contact with his mother. Coetzee places Dawn and John at antithetical poles of the mother-son relationship. These characters represent two sides of J.M. Coetzee's writing self/selves:

I see it as a dialogue between two persons. One is a person I desired to be and was feeling my way toward. The other is more shadowy: let us call him the person I then was, though he may be the person I still am. ... As a teenager, this person, this subject, the subject of this story, this I, though he more or less surreptitiously *writes*, decides, to become a scientist, and doggedly pursues a career in mathematics, though his talent there is no more than modest. How do I read this resolve? I say: he is trying to find a capsule in which he can live, a capsule in which he need not breathe the air of the world. All his life he has lacked interest ... He lives wherever he finds himself, turned inward. ... At the age of twenty-one he departs South Africa, very much in the spirit of shaking the dust of the country from his feet (*Doubling the Point* 1992: 392-393).

This is the 'split' John Coetzee whose: 'emotions of love and hate continue to divide against his self' (Kovel 1981: 197).

John's identity is fraught with ambivalence. It is not unusual for adolescents to experience conflicting emotions because the emotional self and id wishes clash with the superego's desire to do what is right. According to Erikson (1968, 1981 in Louw 1995: 439), identity confusion occurs when the 'adolescent is engaged in redefining himself in society' (439). The boy can only develop his sense of identity as a being in

the adult world by ‘integrating all his earlier identities into a whole’ (Ibid.). If he is to pass through adolescence into manhood successfully ‘he must experience a sense of continuity, and understand that he is the same person that he was during childhood’ (Ibid. 440). John’s confusion stems from feeling different and special at the same time; a contradiction that affects his attempts to try out new identities. He is special to his mother, but he has no idea ‘what kind of special’ (*Boyhood*: 165) he is. Despite this, he ‘is convinced he is different, special. What he does not know yet is why he is in the world. Though he ‘has not abandoned the idea of being a great man’ (104) ... ‘He suspects he will not be an Arthur or an Alexander, revered in his lifetime’ (*Boyhood*: 108). Identifying with legendary heroes is, according to Erikson, not abnormal. The transition between boyhood and manhood requires: ‘self-examination, exploring various occupations and ideologies, and fantasizing about identity roles’ (Erikson in Louw 1993: 40). John is ‘immersed in ... inward explorations ... [and] need[s] ... inner solitude’ (*Youth*: 11). What is more, ‘he has no feel for what is called the real world’ (*Youth*: 22) and at university he is ‘view as an outsider’ (23). He is nevertheless an intellectual who recognizes his own strengths and weaknesses. Emotionally however, he continues in his struggle to overcome intense feelings of shame and guilt. This leaves him fumbling around, un-socialized as he fails to adopt identity roles: man, son, brother, friend, lover, student, artist, employee, that accord with society’s ideals.

John’s habit is to avoid potentially painful emotional experiences: ‘Habit is a great deadener’ (Beckett 1978: 89-91). To John, life is a series of stories. When crisis/crises occur, he invents stories or manipulates language to justify his participation in unsavoury incidents. The lying boy of *Boyhood* has become the lying adult in *Youth*. His independence is based on lies: ‘he is in the flat under false pretences ... [though] it is not entirely a lie’ (*Youth*: 1). In *Boyhood*, he is disliked by Son because ‘he is not straight, honest and truthful’ (1997: 100). John’s lying nature is evident throughout *Youth* despite the narrator’s insistence that ‘he has no talent for lying or deception or rule-bending’ (*Youth*: 97). He is self-deceived: ‘That is the story

he tells himself' (*Youth*: 60) ... 'would it be a lie if he introduced himself as a mathematician'? (72) He pretends to be 'twenty-one. ... It is a lie: he is twenty-two' (73). How could this lie possibly benefit his position?

If the young protagonist's performance of identity roles rests on pretence, how can the writing self who is writing that self (into his diary?), and/or the narrator who is giving voice to that self, be deemed dependable? The device of narrated lying extends to the author who has infinite control over the fictional characters and contexts that he portrays. Seemingly, the telling of lies, and/or the invention and telling of stories provide an overriding metaphor in all three texts. This highlights the instability of writing as truth and points to the deceptive nature of fiction and history. Extending this a step further, John's compulsive lying reflects the lie of whiteness that he is born into. Both the lies and the truths of John's birth rest on the politics of white colonialist patriarchal history: 'the immovable verdict of history, the fate of being' (*Youth*: 20).

As always in Coetzee: '*Things are rarely as they seem*' (*Youth*: 10). Accordingly, the intuitive reader in the transferential relationship is challenged to dig deeper. In Coetzee's review – *Portrait of the Monster as a Young Artist* he intuits: 'it is of course a truism that character is formed in our early years, that the child is father to the man' (2007: 4). John's identity as a student in *Youth* is compromised by his inability to grow from the child into the man. At nineteen, 'something of the baby still lingers in him. How long before he will cease to be a baby? What will cure him of babyhood, make him into a man?' (*Youth*: 3) He is immature, insensitive to others and he has 'a lot of growing up to do' (9). John is, in *Youth*, a self-professed: 'panic stricken boy ... not more than eight' (30-32) ... 'like a cabin boy ... still a child ignorant of his place in the world' (36, 58).

Metaphorically, life is like a game of chess to John. In this mind game, he has to enact and encode social rituals, routines and habits that threaten to subsume his

individuality and difference. The game is remorseless—cruel and unrelenting: ‘he is locked into an attenuating endgame, playing himself, with each move into a corner and into defeat’ (*Youth*: 169). As he searches for an integrated whole self – the synthesis of the boy and the man, he formulates ideas on the meaning and/or meaningless of life. In the process, his soul-searching leads him into the depths of melancholy and mourning.

According to Freud’s theory, John experiences ongoing mourning and melancholia ([1917] 1991: 252-267) in response to a libidinal object. Freud describes melancholia as a pathological state of “impossible mourning” (Ibid.). Because one is not conscious of *what* has been lost, one directs these feelings toward the self. Freud identifies certain mental features pertaining to this neurosis: ‘profound painful dejection; loss of interest in the world; perception of the world as poor and empty; loss of the capacity to love any new object; an inhibition of activity’ (Ibid). In the normal process of mourning, the ego, aware that the object no longer exists, gradually severs its attachment to the object. In melancholia, ‘libido withdraws into the ego replacing an object cathexis with an identification of the ego with the abandoned object’ (Ibid: 368-370). This is the:

[e]go’s desire to incorporate the object into itself, “cleavage” or division of the ego whereby the aggression towards the lost object is directed against itself. This causes the individual: diminution of self-regard, self reproaches and impoverishment of the ego. This conflict within the ego, acts like a painful ‘open wound’ that empties the ego until it is totally depleted (Ibid.).

It is the ambition of the novel to put meaning on trial by unfolding its history. For this reason, the omniscient narrator teases out elements of John’s story that have been hidden from the character and the reader: ‘Do you want to know the truth about yourself [do you want to know what makes me tick (*Dusklands*: 48)]? ... What is truth anyway? If he is a mystery to himself, how can he be anything but a mystery to others? (*Youth*: 132)

No doubt many aspects of John's identity/identities will remain a mystery, because fictional personae are either permitted or denied access to, the medium through which they learn about themselves. The reader/analyst in the transferential relationship, conversely, has the agency and authority to retrieve all the pieces of the puzzle. Some of the missing pieces are in the earlier novels. As a child, John idealizes *'the Swiss Family [Robinson] (Boyhood: 46)* whom he juxtaposes with his own family. In the *'Swiss Family there are no bad brothers, no murderous pirates; in their family everyone works happily together under the guidance of a wise strong father' (Ibid.)*. The notion of a *'perfect' family here, is a reworking of Dusklands: 'Martin is putting together parts of the puzzle which when complete will depict Mama Bear ... Papa Bear ... Teddy Bear ... and Suzie Bear [as they] wend their way down the garden path toward a beaming sun' (1974: 37)*.

This Utopian family is undermined by the mention of *'bad brothers' (Boyhood: 46)* which recollects the incident where John crushes his brother's middle finger. The event signals John's potential for badness as violence. Children, it is claimed, learn from their mistakes. But what if John's mistakes (read as badness) are not his own? In *Youth*, the narrator reflects on John's perception of badness:

Normal people find it hard to be bad. Normal people, when they feel badness flare up within them, drink, swear; commit violence. Badness is to them like a fever: they want it out of their system; they want to go back to being normal. But artists have to live with their fever, whatever its nature, good or bad ... That is why artists can never be wholly present to the world: one eye has always to be turned inward (30-31).

John is clearly at a disadvantage in a world where he fails to vent his anger. Moreover, *'Opium and alcohol are not his way, he is too frightened of what they might do to his health' (Youth: 59)*. This means that until he becomes a writer, he will suffer the burden of his "unhealthy" psychological, emotional, physical and spiritual *'angst' (49)*.



In the transference relationship, I am motivated to uncover the cause of John's 'fever' (*Youth*: 30-31), because missing pieces of John's family puzzle surreptitiously come to light. For the moment I jump ahead. During his time at IBM, John befriends (if he is capable of such an interaction) a colleague named 'Bill Briggs [who] has a marked London accent' (50). As I have argued throughout this dissertation, the names of Coetzee's characters have more significance to the work/s as a whole than that of simple random appellations. The double *B* found in Bill Briggs represents the 'bad brother', 'bad blood' and the (Kleinian) 'bad breast'. These tenets are recurring thematic concerns in the trilogy. However, my concern turns to the double *B* in *Boyhood*: 'Bob Breech'. Though the identity-role of 'Bob Breech' is significantly downplayed by the narrator, the single insidious sign in *Youth* suggests that 'Bob Breech' has slipped into the textual lacunae without reference or relevance.

I regress as I follow the paper trail back to *Boyhood*. John 'loves to page through [family] albums' (1997: 39). This is where he searches for evidence of a past that will in some way explicate his self/selves. His parents' albums harbour images of a bygone era where John is an outsider: 'Who is this other man? He asks his mother idly. Bob Breech, she replies ... When she feels particularly bitter about her life in Reunion Park, she says she wishes she had married Bob Breech (Ibid.). [Why did she] not marry him? ... He stares hard into the face of the dead Bob Breech. He can find nothing of himself there' (Ibid.). Physically, John resembles his mother: 'No matter how indistinct the photograph, he can always pick his mother out from the group: the one in whose shy, defensive look he recognizes a feminine version of his own' (39).

Apart from this similarity, John bears little resemblance to his family. Jack Coetzee is courageous. His father served in the war '[when] few of the fathers of his friends' (Ibid.) signed up. John is 'cowardly' (*Youth*: 54). Jack 'has an animal indifference to privacy' (*Boyhood*: 126). John hates to bare his body. Jack is well liked and sociable: 'there is a farewell party at the office from which his father returns with a new watch'

(*Boyhood*: 133) ... ‘they are well disposed toward Jack’ (*Boyhood*: 54) who indulges in alcohol: ‘His father’s drink was brandy and coke’ (*Youth*: 123). John is a loner and has no taste for drinking: ‘He tried brandy, once, can recollect nothing except an unpleasant, metallic aftertaste. In England they drink beer, whose sourness he dislikes’ (*Youth* *ibid.*). Vera Coetzee is outgoing and adventurous. In the album there are: ‘first the team pictures (hockey, tennis) then the pictures from her tour of Europe: Scotland, Norway, Switzerland, Germany; Edinburgh, the fjords, the Alps, Bingen on the Rhine’ (*Boyhood*: 40). His younger brother, and not he, is the one who is good with his hands: ‘[he] know[s] how to fix cars?’ (*Youth*: 125).

John is different to his family. He remains isolated from mainstream society preferring to watch from a place of safety rather than to participate in its frightening activities. His propensity for being alone denies him the opportunity to develop social skills that would motivate the performance of contemporary identity roles. This lack makes him psychosocially dysfunctional. Nevertheless, as a white South African, his privileged social status is confirmed by his Afrikaans surname. Surnames signify the family line; its history, its genetic memory, its cultural traditions, its religion, its politics and the heritage of the family’s blood. Thus, names and naming always signify systems of power. For instance: “‘Afrikaner’ is a name; and naming and making a name stick is above all, as we know an exercise in power. A child is born wild; we name it to subjugate it’ (Coetzee 1992: 342).

I return now to the name/naming puzzle concerning the double *B* in ‘Bob Breech’. First, pun suggests a breach of promise: ‘He learns that Bob Breech ... went back to England ... that there he died of ... a broken heart ... a broken heart because of the dark-haired, dark-eyed, wary looking school-teacher [Vera] ...[who] would not marry him’ (*Boyhood*: 39). Second, a breech is the back part of a rifle or gun barrel. This sustains the metaphor of violence and simultaneously suggests a shotgun marriage. I contend that Vera Coetzee is the victim caught up in the ‘web of gossip spun over past and present ... *a daughter [who] is in trouble*’ (*Boyhood*: 85) (italics my

emphasis). Is this why the Coetzee family ostracises her? Vera is an ‘interloper’ (*Boyhood*: 100) at the patriarchal farm. It is her alienation that precludes John from visiting the farm: ‘He remembers his very first visit to *Vöelfontein*, when he was four or five’ (*Boyhood*: 125). There he is not well liked and ‘He knows that his father sides with his family against him ... one of his father’s ways of getting back at his mother’ (*Boyhood*: 79). What is more, a breech birth means that the baby is delivered feet or buttocks first—a ‘bad’ delivery. The word *breech* also means *buttocks*. This taxonomy connects the baby, who is ostensibly the protagonist John Coetzee in *Boyhood* and *Youth*, with Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*. I discussed textual references to: ‘buttocks’, ‘labour’ and ‘childbirth’ in Chapter Four. This imagery is sustained in *Boyhood*: ‘babies ... come out of the mother’s backside ... so his mother told him ... when he was small ... It is part of the trust between his mother and himself’ (*Boyhood*: 57-58).

Thematically, this proposition ties Coetzee’s trilogy together. The youth, John Coetzee joins his textual predecessors whose trust has similarly been violated. I am reminded of Beckett’s *Endgame* where Hamm calls Nagg: ““accursed progenitor”, “accursed fornicator”, “Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?” (1957: 56) These utterances vociferously reflect the breach of trust between parents and their offspring. Are there yet other distortions of truth that John is led to believe? The narrator tells us: ‘[John] at least knows where he comes from’ (*Boyhood*: 41) but does he? ‘If [his mother] had married Bob Breech, where would he have been? Would he have been Bob Breech’s child? Would Bob Breech’s child have been him? He does not inquire further. But listening to the sisters he puts two and two together’ (*Boyhood*: 39). Alarm bells ring. Is the role of Bob Breech more than a cameo performance? Is this man John’s “real” textual father? Is this perhaps the root of John’s ‘secret attachment to England’ (*Boyhood*: 128) – the memory of his blood? ‘Is he after all going to turn out to be his father’s son? How deep does it run in him ... Are there other, as yet unrecognized-at-ways in which his father is going to manifest himself in his life?’ (*Youth*: 123)

Understatement draws attention to an interesting anomaly: ‘his [mother’s] English is faultless, particularly when she writes ... How did [it] happen? ... [with] ... not a drop of English blood in [her] veins ... Where could [she] have learned English?’ (*Boyhood*: 105-106) Coetzee leaves this question open-ended and unresolved. However, I intuit that her English language skills were perfected in conjunction with Bob Breech. Vera comes from Afrikaner stock: ‘the *dominee* says a prayer in Afrikaans for the departed sister (Aunt Annie). John’s mother walks like her ‘cousin, Albert’s son. ... They have the same plodding gait ... the same way of lifting their legs and setting them down heavily’ (*Boyhood*: 164-165). Is it not credible that John’s natural love of the Afrikaans language, his talent for writing and his timidity, stem from the ‘du Biel’s’ (*Boyhood*: 120) and not the Coetzees? After all, ‘Uncle Albert never earned a proper salary in his life. He spent his days writing books and stories’ (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, Uncle Albert figures in the photographs ‘as a frightened-looking boy in a sailor suit [‘Weep, weep! cries the cabin boy’ *Youth*: 36]’ (*Boyhood*: 120). John is an equally frightened young man. What John inherits from Jack Coetzee remains a mystery.

John’s mother’s age is another ‘mystery that intrigues him endlessly. ... While she is out of the house he searches through [her] papers ... looking for [a] birth certificate, without success ...’ (*Boyhood*: 49). She and John share the same birthday: ‘this means ... that he is a gift from God’ (*Ibid.*). Or is he the love child of Vera du Biel and Bob Breech? Conceivably, ‘[Bob’s] courage [might have] failed him’ (*Youth*: 54) and he fled to England. Jack Coetzee, whose ‘eyes are without judgment’ (*Boyhood*: 160), could have married Vera—a thirty-six-year-old spinster carrying an illegitimate child—out of pity. This would explain her unaccounted for rejection by the Coetzee family. It is also significant that John, who shies away from intimacy and physical contact, ‘wants to cry: I am just a child! He wishes that someone, a woman, would take him in her arms, make his wounds better, soothe him, tell him it was just a bad dream. ... He wishes his grandmother would come and put it all right’ (*Boyhood*: 160). The narrator has, by this stage, exposed the flawed relationship existing

between John and his paternal grandmother. I am left wondering if the woman he is referring to in the above quotation is his maternal grandmother. If I adopt the position of mother in the transferential relationship, my instinct tells me that Vera's mother would have availed herself to her daughter, and her grandson. Why else would John crave his grandmother's affection?

In his book, *White Writing*: Coetzee opines: 'All acts of shame are recorded in the blood. [T]he blood is thus a pool of unconscious memory passed down through the generations, and speaking in its own good time' (1988: 150). This is corroborated in *Boyhood*: '[his] own first memory, one ... he would never repeat ... the secret one he thinks [about] all the time ... the scrap of paper ... abandoned ... one day he must go back ... find it ... rescue it' (*Boyhood*: 31). This discarded scrap of paper is analogous to his own 'real' birth-certificate: 'only one piece of evidence remains of a real Bob Breech' (*Boyhood*: 39) and that is his son John Coetzee. He is after all 'his mother's son, not his father's (meaning Jack Coetzee)' (*Boyhood*: 40-41).

This revelation brings to the transferential relationship an added dimension. On the one hand it draws the threads of *Dusklands*, *Boyhood* and *Youth* together. On the other, it exposes the pathological psychosis of what it means to be white and South African. In the silence of John's mixed blood – British and Afrikaner and other, I hear echoes of vile white frontiersmen trading beads for land; I hear their guns and their ravaging of indigenous women and children; I hear subjugation of the masses by terrorism; the dilution of indigenous blood by sexual violence; I hear the lies of imperialists parading as missionaries: 'Balthazar du Biel met ... the daughter of another missionary, when he came to South Africa to convert the heathen' (*Boyhood*: 120); I hear the hatred between the Brit and Boer in the Anglo-Boer War; the British concentration camps that kept women and children incarcerated, starving and diseased; I hear South Africa's three-hundred-year-old history speaking "whites only: *net blankes*" in hegemonic patriarchal discourses; I hear the blood of guilt and shame coursing through John's veins and spilling into the darkest recesses of his mind—

trapped. The fictional John, is however, blind to the psychological impact of his questionable birth. The guilt and shame that is his, becomes my own. My exposure of John's link to Bob Breech makes me feel guilty. Such is the potency of language.

Clearly, Coetzee's manipulation of linguistically-constructed protagonists spills over to his readers. John's psychosis is steeped in South Africa's brutal colonialist past. Paradoxically, whether he is a Breech or a Coetzee, he is no less guilty of carrying the colonial genes of white imperialist history: 'British interests, British influence and the British Empire' (*Boyhood*: 111) were causative factors in the implementation of legalized racism. Either way John loses. Colonialism and its imperialist quest for territorial expansion clearly impacts individuals who have no control over conception, birth or childhood. John's ignorance to his dubious birth makes his struggle for autonomy even more compelling. Never more than now is the young man who 'left home ... to escape the oppressiveness of family' (*Youth*: 18), wedged into the liminal space between Europe and South Africa.

This is the psychosis that John carries with him into the adult world of *Youth*. There he is confronted with a changing South Africa:

[h]e cannot fail to see that the country around him is in turmoil. The pass laws are being tightened ... protests are breaking out ... police fire shots into a crowd ... the business sickens him: ... the bully-boy police [the adult ex-bully-boy classmates]; the government, stridently defending the murderers and denouncing the dead; and the press, too frightened to come out and say what anyone with eyes in his head can see (*Youth*: 37).

In terms of apartheid's strict censorship laws: 'newspapers find ways of talking about it. ... *One of the many protest marches country-wide ... Defused, they say, by the good sense ... of the police and the co-operation of the march leaders ... So they tame the event, making it less than it was*' (Ibid.). The ever concerned for himself John, 'would be frightened ... if he were the police (*Youth*: 38) ... [facing] Thousands upon thousands ... [of PAC] marchers' (Ibid.). Whatever it is that this 'army' wants 'there

are not enough policemen in the land to stop them, not enough bullets to kill them' (Ibid.).

Part of the government's "total strategy" was to boost the power of white armed forces. The South African Defence Force was implementing 'new rules [and] at any time [John] could find a call-up notice in his letterbox' (*Youth*: 40). J.M. Coetzee: 'had got through four years of high school without doing [compulsory] military drill' (*Doubling the Point* 1992: 337) so it is hardly surprising that John: 'would not be able to stand ... the training camp ... where they send conscripts ... to break them ... he would not be able to endure it; he would slash his wrists' (*Youth*: 40.). He is not blind to the mood of discontent that is brewing around the country. However, the enormity of the problem is sardonically undermined in sublime understated satire:

Three hundred years of history, three hundred years of Christian civilization at the tip of Africa, said the politicians in their speeches: to the Lord let us give thanks. Now before his eyes the Lord is withdrawing his protective hand. [In the] shadow of the mountain, he is watching history being unmade' (*Youth*: 39).

The emotionally and psychologically immature youth, responds to the 'grim host of soldiers [who he is surprised to learn are not garden boys] [with] shock [and] dismay' (Ibid.). However, anticlimax sustains a comedic effect: 'their afternoon is ruined ... all they want now is to go home, have a Coke and a sandwich; forget what [has] passed' (Ibid). Evidently, lunch is more important than one of the most significant events in South Africa's racist history.

Now that John is free of his parents' prying eyes, he is ostensibly performing the identity of a sexually-mature white male. Even so, '[the] process of turning himself into a different person that began when he was fifteen' (*Youth*: 98) is not, and perhaps never will be complete. He endeavours to 'cut all bonds with the past' (Ibid.) and like Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee, he is (thematically) striving toward a 'new life'. John, like his fictional predecessors, is imprisoned in the novel that writes him. Consequently, liberation from the print that defines him/them relies solely on the

reader's ability to interpret and derive meaning from the transference of textual information. Only then will an interminable number of alternate 'new lives' emerge.

One such new life for John involves '[getting] beyond childhood, beyond family and school to a new life where he will not need to pretend anymore' (*Youth*: 14).

Evidently, he has a modicum of independence and he is supporting himself by means of various odd jobs. He 'rarely sees his parents ... [now because] he uses his own independence to exclude [them]' (*Youth*: 18). He dissociates with Afrikaners whom he perceives as dangerous: 'There is a manner that Afrikaners have in common: ... surliness, an intransigence, and not far behind it, a threat of physical force' (*Youth*: 124). He consciously rejects Afrikanerdom and for the moment maintains his allegiance to the British. Once he has his degree he will move to London, a move he hopes will distance him from the bondage of family and the increasingly revolutionary racist South Africa: 'the PAC says, "*Africa for the Africans! Drive the whites into the sea!*"' (*Youth*: 38-39) Slogans such as these and the social issues they represent overshadow John's apparent freedom. He remains fearful and anxious, 'eccentric and un-socialized' (*Boyhood*: 78).

John has not found a way out of his self-imposed 'purgatory' ([*Boyhood*] *Youth*: 3). 'Purgatory' is part of his psychopathology—Freud's neurotic anxiety (Boeree 2006: ..) and he persists in his uncontrollable desire to purge himself of intense feelings of guilt and shame. Mowrer (1960) argues against Freud's 'neurotic anxiety' position, suggesting that these emotions stem from 'actual misdeeds or sins and not as a result of conflict/s between the superego and other wishes'. If the 'Bob Breech' hypothesis stands, John is a victim of misdemeanour and not a perpetrator. Though he has no conscious knowledge of the 'thing' that perpetuates his psychopathological guilt, this 'thing' hampers his socialization process. At the same time, this 'thing' strives to satisfy the needs of his superego, which craves perfection: 'What is wrong with him is that he is not prepared to fail. He wants an A or an alpha or one hundred percent for



his every attempt, and a big *Excellent!* [i]n the margin. Ludicrous! Childish! He does not have to be told so: he can see it for himself' (*Youth*: 168).

His subconscious and unconscious drives prevent him from forming reciprocal emotional relationships. He perceives 'reciprocation ... [as a] trap' (*Youth*: 99) particularly the one 'built up [by his] mother [one] he has not yet found his way out of' (*Ibid.*). Like Eugene Dawn, John's nature is obsessive-compulsive. This neurosis stems from a deep-seated need to prove self-worth. However, it simultaneously demands perfection in others. This is of course impossible and idealistic. In addition, John has a terror of humiliation: 'if all the stories that have been built up around him ... were to collapse ... [exposed] for all to see and laugh at ... [he] could [not] go on living' (*Boyhood*: 112) ... 'he would ... make a fool of himself forever' (142). Consequently, he dissociates himself from, and disidentifies with, those who operate in his inter-personal space/s. Though he maintains distance between himself and others he persists in suffering from self-loathing. He is afraid of the world and gladly chooses isolation: '[he] prefers books to life' (*Doubling the Point*: 24). This '[quite accurately] confirms his sense of being outside a culture that at this moment in history is confidently setting about enforcing itself as the core culture in the land' (*Ibid.*: 394).

Unresolved Oedipal conflicts reflect in John's failure to integrate the 'boy' with the 'youth'. According to Erikson, the child must synthesize trust and mistrust to acquire hope and autonomy. When this process is successfully completed, the child is able to overcome feelings of shame and doubt. However, if the autonomous self comes into conflict with those around him/her the child begins to express self-doubt. Erikson points to early adulthood as the time when feelings of intimacy should overcome feelings of isolation. By forming close relationships the young adult develops an identity acceptable to the self and to others (1968, 1981). The converse of this is to protect that self against intimate reciprocal relationships with a member of the opposite sex. John's failure to grow one self into another deprives him of integrated

wholeness. This keeps him trapped in limbo. Consequently, he builds his psychosexual identity roles according to the moment. This leads to stagnation and self-preoccupation (Erikson 1968, 1981).

In his state of stagnation, John's ego remains split. The 'libidinal abandoned object' (Freud [1917] 1991: 368-370) dividing John's ego is his mother. For this reason, he engages in affairs with dominant substitute mother-types. His affairs are 'ruled by women' (*Youth*: 70). The first entanglement is with a thirty-year-old nurse: a British immigrant who imposes herself upon him and whose unfamiliar personal habits impinge on his intra-personal space. Her character is duplicitous. On the one hand, she performs as John's suffocating mother. On the other, she, like John, has a dysfunctional relationship with her own mother. This is evident in Coetzee's lexical/syntactical reworking of Klein's theory:

[she] and her twin sister were born in England; they were brought to South Africa at the age of fifteen ... Their mother used to play the girls off against each other, giving love and approval first to one, then to the other, confusing them keeping them dependent on her' (*Youth*: 4).

Furthermore, Jacqueline's psychosis/neurosis lays the structural foundation for John's: '[she] was for a while crazy enough to be locked up. She is still under therapy, as she struggles with the ghost of the dead old woman [her mother] (Ibid.); [she] feel[s] exhausted and sometimes cr[ies] soundlessly' (*Youth*: 7). John recognizes similar symptoms in himself:

[he is] ... exhausted (56) ... Tiredness is a test' (66) ... what if [he] stays on and fails the test, fails disgracefully? What if, alone in his room, he begins to cry and cannot cease? ... What happens to people ... who cannot stand up to the testing, and crack [like Eugene Dawn]? He knows the answer. They are shipped off somewhere to be taken care of – to some hospital, home, institution (*Youth*: 114-115).

Jacqueline is a nurse. This is significant because she embodies the nursing mother of John's earliest fantasies (Freud and Klein). In addition, she 'wears a little bronze badge ... on the *breast* of her tunic' (*Youth*: 6). However, the motto on the badge:

'PER ARDUA' (Ibid.) is misplaced as it is used by the RAF, and has no connection to 'Guy's Hospital in London' (*Youth* ibid.). On the one hand, the badge draws attention to Jacqueline's breasts as a symbol of nurturing and nourishing. On the other, it is a symbol of her authority as the dominating mother-type in the relationship. The pin of the badge denotes violence: '[it] felt like a tiny knife-prick' (112). John's pain and despair are a 'weight that descends' (166) upon him, crushing his spirit ... 'better not to wound oneself in this way, over and over' (Ibid.). The metaphor of violence at this stage of the novel is twofold. It reflects the brutality exercised by white apartheid policemen (*Youth*: 37) and it recollects John's failed examination for his 'woodman's badge' (*Boyhood*: 15). This flaw in his portrayal of the perfect boy scout is mirrored in his 'woodenness' (*Youth*: 67) as a lover.

Notwithstanding Coetzee's clever cohesive syntactical structures, John is suffocated by Jacqueline's intrusion into his personal space. He 'cannot remember inviting her: he has merely failed to resist. ... They sleep together in a bed built for one' (*Youth*: 7) ... '[but] the truth is ... He sleeps better by himself. With someone sharing his bed he lies tense and stiff all night, wakes up exhausted' (87). John is:

[n]ot utterly unschooled ... in sex ... [but] if the man has not enjoyed the lovemaking, then the woman will not have enjoyed it either ... that he knows, that is one of the rules ... But what happens afterwards, between a man and a woman who have failed at the game?' (*Youth*: 6)

He does not pursue this line of thinking and continues to 'us[e] her' (7) while he 'broaden[s] his education of the erotic' (8). Inevitably, the relationship leads to 'bouts of passionless sex' (67). Evidently, he relates to sex as he relates to life: it is a test that he must endure.

His spell of endurance comes to an end when Jacqueline finds his 'true thoughts' written in his 'diary' (*Youth*: 8). He reacts to her as he reacts to no one else but his mother: 'He flares up in anger. You are not going to stop me from writing'! (Ibid.) John's diary operates as a metatext. If this personal document is true to itself, then is the novel *Youth* simply a third person reading of John Coetzee's life, according to

J.M. Coetzee's diary? The power of the diary to speak for itself is revealed in an altercation with Jacqueline:

Is he sorry? Certainly he is sorry Jacqueline read what she read. But the real question is: what was his motive for writing what he wrote? Did he perhaps write it in order that she should read it? Was leaving his true thoughts lying around where she was bound to find them was his way of telling her what he was too cowardly to say to her face? ... The question of what should be permitted to go into his diary and what kept forever shrouded goes to the heart of all his writing. If he is to censor himself from expressing ignoble emotions – resentment ... or shame at his own failures as a lover – how will those emotions ever be transfigured into poetry? (*Youth*: 9-10)

Through her response to John's betrayal a window to the diary is momentarily opened: 'If as you say, you find me such an unspeakable burden ... if I am destroying your peace and privacy and your ability to write, let me tell you from my side that I have hated living with you, hated every moment of it, and can't wait to be free' (*Youth*: 8-9). Her thoughts of freedom replicate John's own desire to escape South Africa and his family.

The entries John makes in his diary are fundamentally flawed. What is recorded in a diary is a subjective incarnation of the writer's ability to persuade 'him' self that what 'he' writes is based on personal truths and that it is not an imaginative work of artistic creativity through which 'he' channels phantasmal accounts of 'his' own: desires, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices, thoughts, feelings, ideals and experiences based on 'his' unique ability to manipulate language (truths or lies) to satisfy his own needs. John's diary is as relevant to my reading as it is to Jacqueline's. Unlike Dawn's biography (*Dusklands*: 47), John's diary is, or should be, personal and private. Accordingly, most of what John writes in the diary remains sacrosanct (unless *Youth* is the diary). It is, for the most part, a mystery whose presence in the novel suggests more than the narrator divulges. For instance:

[w]ho is to say that the feelings he writes in his diary are his true feelings? Who is to say that at each moment his pen moves he is truly himself? At one moment he might truly be himself, at another he might simply be making things up ... a fiction, one of many possible fictions, true only in the sense

that a work of art is true – true to itself, true to its own immanent aims (*Youth*: 10).

After the diary incident, John accepts an invitation to house-sit for Mr Howarth on condition that he shares the house with a ‘woman from New Zealand’ (*Youth*: 28). She attempts to seduce him ‘in the middle of the night’ (*Ibid.*) but he is ‘repelled ... first a cold shiver runs through him then panic. ‘No!’ he cries out. ‘Go away!’ And he curls himself up in a ball. ... ‘Bastard’ she hisses, and is gone’ (28-29). This relatively minor event is pregnant with clues. First the event qualifies the violation (incest) of Eugene Dawn in *Dusklands*. Second, I have provided textual evidence that posits Jacobus Coetzee as a ‘Bastard’ (*Dusklands*: 57, *Youth*: 29). The term also undercuts John’s legitimacy as a Coetzee. By adopting the foetal position, John is metaphorically reattaching himself to his mother. The image is borrowed from Beckett: ‘[Estragon takes up a] foetal position in the hope of going to sleep’ (*Waiting for Godot* 1978: 68-70).

Once Jacqueline abandons John, ‘he has to make do with other women – in fact with girls who are not yet women ... girls who sleep with a man only reluctantly, because their friends are doing it ... or because it is ... the only way to hold on to a boyfriend. He gets one of them pregnant’ (*Youth*: 32). It is unlikely that the ‘one who is pregnant’ is a serious girlfriend and his primary concern is for himself: ‘How ... can a child be a father? [This echoes his earlier musings: ‘How can a child have children?’ (*Boyhood*: 162)] There is the tiniest pause, long enough for him to accept the opening and speak: ‘I will stand by you,’ he could say. But how can he say [that] when what *standing by her* will mean in reality fills him with foreboding, when his whole impulse is to drop the telephone and run away? (*Youth*: 33)

The pregnant girl, Sarah ‘put[s] him to shame’ (*Youth* *ibid.*). She arranges an illegal abortion at her own expense while John, ‘grows more and more nervous’ (*Ibid.*). Sarah brings: ‘her own towels and sheets ... [and] sensing his squeamishness, she has hidden from sight the evidence of what is going on inside her body: the bloody pads

and whatever else there is' (*Youth* *ibid.*). Sarah is the mother of the dead baby as well as a pseudo-mother for (the baby) John. She hides her body from him in much the same way that Vera 'denies ... her breasts' (*Boyhood*: 35). Unlike Vera however, Sarah has an abortion. Though John adopts the identity of nurse, 'he is useless, worse than useless' (*Youth*: 35). The: 'déjà vu feeling slips over me [the reader and analyst] and I bathe in it gratefully' (*Dusklands*: 39). From his stock of words, Coetzee reincarnates Eugene Dawn: 'the watchdog guarding the sleeping babe ... a model nurse' (*Dusklands*: 39-40). John is no more competent to care for Sarah, than Dawn is to care for his son. The textual parallels are obvious.

The strength of John's character is severely tested. He sees the nursing episode as a 'penance, a stupid ineffectual penance' (*Youth*: 35). Religious innuendo sustains this: '[O]n the morning of the third day [the Resurrection] ... he prays' (*Ibid.*). However, his conscience is not cleared by God's grace because the prayer is not for the violated Sarah or the dead baby, it is for himself: 'he prays that she will never tell the story to anyone' (*Ibid.*). Furthermore, his response to the unwanted pregnancy and abortion is childish: 'How can he who is still a child bring up a child?' (*Youth*: 35) This is not the first time John expresses this tenet: "'Wait until you have children' [his mother tells him]. What nonsense, what a contradiction! How can a child have children?' (*Boyhood*: 162) What this tells me is that John remains childlike in his perception/s of his fictional reality. This is corroborated by his insistence on relating emotionally debilitating experiences to the realm of fantasy: '[It is a] mess of the kind that never finds its way into the novels he reads' (*Youth*: 32). Not surprisingly, every time John fails in his relationships, he is desperate to close 'the book' (*Youth*: 133).

John's ill-fated liaisons with women, is a problem that follows him to London. Caroline is 'a drama student with stage ambitions' (*Youth*: 68). They: 'ha[d] an affair during his last weeks in Cape Town' (*Ibid.*). She arrives in London and they resume the relationship. However, 'it is difficult from the start [because] her ... hours are unpredictable ... sometimes she comes back ... as early as midnight, sometimes as

late as 4 a.m.’ (*Youth*: 69). Waiting for her to arrive is exhausting. It ‘soon becomes a routine, a routine [habit is a great deadener] that when he is able to stand back for a moment and reflect, astonishes him: He is having an affair in which the rules are being set by the woman and by the woman alone’ (69-70). This practice is not new to John. On his father’s side, the Coetzee family is ‘led by his grandmother’ (*Boyhood*: 38). His mother’s: ‘[t]wo sisters ... hover ... over [their sons] with suffocating solicitude ... his brother and his cousins are timid, always at home under the eye of their fierce mothers. His father calls the three sister-mothers the three witches. ‘Double, double, toil and trouble,’ he says, quoting *Macbeth*’ (*Boyhood*: 38-39).

John believes he is different to his brother and his cousins: ‘he has broken away, or half broken away’ (*Boyhood*: 38), but his attraction to surrogate mother-types contradicts this. He does not break off his inconvenient, unsatisfactory, loveless affair with Caroline. They continue to ‘make love ... [though] Caroline’s mind is elsewhere’ (*Youth*: 70). His ‘glooms and his sulks [are] fast becoming a burden to her’ (*Ibid*). John does not want Caroline as a stand in mother, but he is helpless without her: ‘Caroline may not be the mysterious, dark-eyed [Vera Coetzee is: ‘dark-haired [and] dark-eyed’ (*Boyhood*: 39)] beloved he came to Europe for, she may be nothing but a girl from Cape Town from a background as humdrum as his own, but she is for the present, all he has’ (*Youth*: 70). He wonders why, a girl like Caroline ‘bother[s] to keep him in tow ... when he has become a eunuch, a drone, a worried boy’ (110).

His affairs fail one after another. With the Polish Anna he fears ‘there is no spark’ (*Youth*: 54) and he would be unable to ‘extricate himself without ignominy’ (*Ibid*). The unnamed English girl at the ‘Poetry Society’ (73) is ‘a student at King’s College’ (*Ibid*). In her room ‘she allows him to undress her ... but there is no warmth between them ... [she] withdraws, folds her arms across her breasts, pushes his hands away, shakes her head mutely [like Sarah and Vera] ... The verdict she has delivered on him would be his verdict too’ (*Youth*: 74). This mirrors an earlier incident: ‘[Vera’s] gaze

flickers over him ... she sees him, sums him up, and is not pleased' (*Boyhood*: 161). Next, the Austrian Astrid, who is 'not yet eighteen ... [is] a mistake ... they have come too far ... to pull back, so they go through with it' (*Youth*: 87). He is too 'cowardly' (9, 42) to say, "Goodbye" to her. Instead, '[he] ... lies with his eyelids clenched till he hears the creak of the stairs and the click of the front door' (102). The 'icy winter of 1962, [is remembered as] one humiliating affair after another: stages in the poet's life ... the testing of his soul' (164).

John's superficial, insincere relationships bear no resemblance to the 'passionate ... transfiguring power ... of love' (*Youth*: 79) that lives in his fantasies. Rather:

His experience ... is that amatory relations devour his time, exhaust him, and cripple his work. Is it possible that he was not made to love women, that in truth he is a homosexual? One evening he allows himself to be picked up by a man ... the [act] is quick, absent-minded, devoid of dread but also devoid of allure ... a game for people afraid of the big league; a game for losers' (*Ibid.*).

Whichever route 'he follows it seems to him he loses' (*Youth*: 97). His brief dalliance into the world of homosexuality merely confirms his heterosexuality. Outwardly, 'there still lingers about his person an air of colonial gaucherie ... his clothes are not right ... [and] he still has the short back and sides and the neat parting impressed on him in childhood. ... In England the girls pay no attention to him ... their eyes ... slide over him or glaze with disdain' (71). He looks markedly different to:

[t]he young men ... [who in 1960s London] wear narrow black trousers, pointed shoes, tight boxlike jackets with many buttons. They also wear their hair long. ... [W]hen he imagines dressing up in such clothes, clothes that seem to him not only alien to his character but Latin rather than English, he feels his resistance stiffening. He cannot do it: it would be like giving himself up to a charade, an act' (*Youth*: 71-72).

Twin ironies emerge here. First, the passionate love that John seeks is more synonymous with Latinos than with the English who are 'famous [for their] British coldness of temperament' (*Youth*: 81). Second, John fails to realize that the modern young men *are* acting out the charades of their own lives. Their dress signifies their need to be accepted by the "in-group". This subgroup of society either corresponds



with societal norms and mores or rebels against those principles. Either way, the youths are performing roles in life's drama, at a particular temporal-spatial moment in the development of humankind, and in history. John cannot follow the crowd because he 'lack[s] ... gaiety, style and romance ... [and] has no talent for pleasure or fancy clothes' (*Youth*: 96-97). He sees himself as 'an ordinary bloke from the colonies' (*Youth*: 106) and 'When he is not dressed up in one of his IBM suits, he has only the grey flannels and green sports jacket he brought with him from Cape Town' (*Youth*: 71). He has after all been brought up to wear 'the clothes his mother buys' (*Boyhood*: 56) and he dislikes the Boers who wear: 'long beards and ugly clothes' (*Boyhood*: 67). '[Not] in a month of Sundays would Londoners take him for' (*Youth*: 102) one of their own.

Performing on life's stage is an ordeal for John. He is: 'still anguished, but his anguish has become habitual, even chronic, like a headache ... he [is] trapped, lonely, miserable ... [has an] impasse of spirit ... is living on the brink of psychic collapse ... madness (*Youth*: 59) ... [and he is] not built for fun' (*Youth*: 77). He is too: 'embarrassed [to] make [a] simple act of reciprocation ... [this debility] feels like a sickness: meanness, poverty of spirit, no different in essence from his coldness with women' (94-95). There 'is a pact he is ready to offer the women in his life: if they will treat him as a mystery, he will treat them as a closed book' (*Youth*: 133).

The chapters of John's life are closed one after another. One such chapter involves his resignation from IBM. He is unemployed and is 'masquerading as a dependable professional man [in] free lodging[s]' (*Youth*: 122). He is 'as good as unknown in London ... [and can therefore] vanish into a sea of anonymity' (131). While he is 'lodging' at the 'Merringtons' (124), his mother lets him know that his cousin is arriving in London. He turns his attention to the 'forbidden' (126):

In his fantasy he recognizes the erotic tingle [as] his girl cousin ... sparks desire in him. Is it simply that [she] is forbidden? Is that how taboo operates: creating desire by forbidding it? Or is the genesis of desire less abstract: memories ... stored since childhood and released now in a rush of sexual

feeling? ... [Two] people with a history in common, a country, a family a blood intimacy from before the first word was spoken? (*Youth* *ibid.*)

However, his hopes of sexual intimacy with his cousin Ilse 'are dashed' (127) when she: 'is ill with flu that has turned to pneumonia' (126).

This is of little consequence to John because her friend 'Marianne' (*Youth*: 127) is available. In his fantasy, she is desirable: '[she] is from home [the place he renounces] ... [and] an air of illegitimacy hangs excitedly around her' (128). The 'ethos of laconic decency' (53) that John admires in Ford's 'Christopher Tiejens' (*Ibid.*) is displaced when John becomes 'a fellow [who] goes about deflowering virgins' (*Ibid.*). He learns too late that 'Marianne is a virgin ... [she] bleeds while they are making love. ... There is blood all over his body ... the blood has soaked through to the mattress, leaving a huge uneven stain' (129). On the one hand, the bloody mattress points to John's own bloody birth and Sarah's abortion. On the other, the metaphorical bloody stain represents the violence of colonialism: the stain of indiscriminately spilt blood: the mixing of blood—embodied in the mixing of bodily fluids during intercourse: the stain on the white imperialist's psyche—one that does not disappear when the body is geographically re-routed. John acknowledges this predicament: 'Guiltily, angrily, he heaves the mattress over. Only a matter of time before the stain (in all its guises) is discovered. He must be gone by then he will have to make sure of that' (*Ibid.*). Once again, the cowardly youth wants to 'run away' (*Youth*: 33) ... *I must get out before it is too late!*' (39) Is this perhaps what Bob Breech did?

The bloody stain on the colonial canvas is concretized in the Merringtons' Malawian nanny. Her name is Theodora which means 'gift of God'. According to his mother, John is also 'a gift of God' (*Boyhood*: 49). Theodora, like John is a displaced subject from the colonies. Conjointly, they represent the antithetical ills of capitalist imperialism as the driving force of colonialism. This is evident in the clever juxtaposition between John's 'sandals ... made somewhere in Africa, Nyasaland

[Malawi]' (*Youth*: 3) and Theodora's 'tennis shoes [made somewhere in Europe (?)]' (*Youth*: 122) White European man is in black Africa and the black African woman is in white London. John and Theodora are both ostracised in London: 'we don't need a graceless colonial here, and a Boer to boot' (*Youth*: 86) ... 'he knows he is not wanted in their country ... NIGGER GO HOME say the slogans painted on walls. NO COLOURED say notices in the windows of lodging houses. Month by month the [British] government is tightening its laws. ... If [John] is not made to feel as nakedly unwelcome as [Theodora] it can only be because of his protective coloration (*sic*): his ... pale skin' (*Youth*: 104).

Here for the first time, the importance of 'shoes' as a recurring motif comes to light. Theodora's wearing of tennis shoes in *Youth* is surreptitiously linked to the removal of John's tennis shoes at the beginning of *Boyhood* (10). John's feet are 'soft and white ... he has to hop from foot to foot to keep from burning ... his feet are blistered and bleeding' (*Ibid.*). Theodora has 'swelling ankles. Walking, she rocks from side to side ... indoors she wears slippers' (*Youth*: 121). John's feet have walked on alien soil; so too have Theodora's. What is more, this motif ties John and Theodora to *Dusklands*. Jacobus Coetzee is 'living [a] Bushman life [but] repair[s] [his] shoes (56) ... stones were still stones. Shoes [he] could not give up' (*Dusklands*: 98). Moreover, the theme is expanded in the textual fabric of *Boyhood*. Only some of John's '[white Afrikaner] classmates ... wear shoes' (*Boyhood*: 10). The 'Jews wear shoes [like John]' (*Boyhood*: 21); '[the] two [white Afrikaner] brothers from De Doorns ... are so poor that they own neither jerseys, blazers nor shoes' (*Boyhood*: 56) yet, regardless of their social status they are entitled to a privileged white education; 'the Coloured [boy] wears no shoes' (*Boyhood*: 60); '[John] fears and loathes the hulking barefoot Afrikaans boys' (*Boyhood*: 69). After Sarah's abortion John's 'dead child ... [is] chalked up against him ... [this feels like] baby-shoes slung around [his] neck' (*Youth*: 36).

The underlying foundation of this thematic concern rests on Euro-white settlers. When Europeans arrived in South Africa the terrain was harsh and alien. Shoes were an essential means of protection for their tender white feet. However, over time, they became more and more acclimatized and their feet hardened to the stony ground. Consequently, succeeding generations gradually relinquished their shoes and were able to walk barefoot like the indigenes. The motif of 'shoes' extends to the schism between South Africa's two white cultures: John removes his shoes (Afrikaner) but his feet are too soft and sensitive (Brit):

The courts are some distance away; along the pathway he has to tread carefully, picking his steps among the pebbles. Under the summer sun the tarmac of the court itself is so hot that he has to hop ... to keep from burning. ... but by afternoon he can barely walk (*Boyhood*: 10).

The irony of course rests on John's scout troop which is called: 'the tenderfeet' (*Boyhood*: 14). On yet another level, the shoe/foot motif is relevant to generations of white Afrikaners who doggedly followed in their fathers' footsteps. Since 1994, however, many post-apartheid white South Africans have been donning their shoes and walking away from a political dispensation that favours black shoes. The shoe motif has come full circle.

Clearly, Coetzee's interlinked lexical, syntactical constructions in the trilogy depict 'complicated, staggered ... plots ... [where] the cunning with which a note, casually struck and artlessly repeated, will stand revealed chapters later, as a major motif' (*Youth*: 53). However, Coetzee does not always rely on word structure/s to heighten his critique. The antithetical interconnectedness of John and Theodora replicates the oppositional historical poles occupied by Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee. The power of political visual art captured in *Dusklands* – Dawn's photographs and Jacobus's metaphorical camera, reappears in *Youth*:

In the next room, high on a wall, sits a huge painting consisting of no more than an elongated black blob on a white field ... He is transfixed. Menacing and mysterious, the black shape takes him over. ... Where does its power come from [that] ... stirs up a well of dark feeling within him? ... [D]oes the [painting] correspond to some indwelling shape in his soul? (*Youth*: 92)

Coincidentally (or not?), the artist's name is 'Motherwell' (*Youth*: 92). The: 'black blob' (Ibid.) in the painting represents South Africa's voiceless, faceless, subjugated black masses whose traditional way of life has been misshapen 'elongated' by white history. John senses the power of this 'menacing ... black shape' (Ibid.), one that is overpowering and unstoppable.

While Theodora represents a retributive Mother Africa, she is depicted as a powerless African mother who is ironically 'brought to England by an anthropologist' (*Youth*: 120). Who could better understand the incongruity between a lone, rural African woman in London, than an anthropologist whose career rests on the study of humankind's socio-cultural difference/s? The narrator's cynical sarcasm is evident: 'the Merringtons ... brought [her] back to London because of the bond she had forged with [their] child' (Ibid.). The violence of this action is achieved in antithetical understatement:

Each month she sends home the wages that keep her own children fed and clothed and in school. ... She works six days of the week. On Sundays she goes to church [she is obviously Christianized], but otherwise spends the rest of her day of rest at home. She never uses the telephone; she appears to have no social circle (*Youth*: 120-122).

If cutting sarcasm laced with irony and understatement is not enough, the word 'golliwog' (Ibid.) with its offensive connotations is surreptitiously slipped into the text. The term refers to an Afro-mammy-type-doll with bright clothes, a black face and fuzzy hair (*New Oxford Dictionary* 2001: 588). Theodora is the personification of the mute doll. She is also a black mammy—traditionally a black nursemaid who looks after white children (Ibid: 1121).

As a white South African, John is well read in the signs and symbols of prejudice. This makes his close proximity to Theodora very uncomfortable. Yet, he does 'not blame her ... for her silences ... [and/or] her resentment. ... She must know what Afrikaners are. There are Afrikaners – big-bellied [ 'John is just a baby with a big

belly and lolling head' (*Boyhood*: 113)], red-nosed men in short pants and hats, roly-poly women in shapeless dresses all over Africa: in Rhodesia, in Angola, in Kenya, certainly in Malawi' (*Youth*: 121). The caricatures speak volumes about appearance ideals and the Afrikaner's sense of communal group identity. Coetzee ridicules:

[the] handful of Hollanders [who] waded ashore on Woodstock beach and claimed ownership of foreign territory they had never laid eyes on before; that their descendants should now regard that territory as theirs by birthright [is] doubly absurd, given that the first landing-party misunderstood its orders. ... It was never intended that they should steal the best part of Africa. If they had obeyed their orders ... Theodora would happily be pounding millet under Malawian skies and he would be – what? He would be sitting in an office in rainy Rotterdam, adding up figures in a ledger (*Ibid.*).

This makes a mockery of South Africa's early white European settlers. At the same time, the narrator sums up the wider repercussions of colonialism's imperialist enterprise in the wider African context. Ironically, whether John is in 'rainy Rotterdam' (*Youth*: 121), sunny South Africa or dreary London, the onus of complicity lives on. Without colonialism's quest to expand European interests in far-flung territories around the world, John Coetzee the protagonist and John Coetzee the author would not exist. Moreover, the juxtaposition of Holland and Britain sustains John's duplicitous origins. Is he an Afrikaner fathered by Jack Coetzee, or a Brit fathered by Bob Breech? Either way John is left holding the proverbial colonialist 'baby'.

John is aware that Londoners 'do not want forlorn South Africans cluttering their doorstep like orphans in search of parents' (*Youth*: 87). However, veiled implication here suggests that John is subconsciously searching for evidence of his *real* English father. Furthermore, John, like Dawn, sees himself as an orphan: 'the worried boy' (*Youth*: 110) ... [a] worried boy-man who [occasionally] ... sees himself from the outside:

[He is] a young man sauntering around a foreign city, eating up his savings, whoring, pretending to be an artist. How can he so casually betray ... his ancestors ... then hope to escape their avenging ghosts ['The Sins of the Fathers' (*Boyhood*: 120)]. ... He is their child, foredoomed from birth to be

gloomy and suffering. How else does poetry come anyway, except out of suffering, like blood squeezed from a stone? (*Youth*: 116)

The one facet of John's identity that is consistent is his ability to endure hardship: 'During the winter ... there were times when he thought he would die of cold and misery and loneliness. But he has pulled through' (*Youth*: 113). Nevertheless: 'his misery ... does not feel like a purifying bath' (67). Rather, it is a 'pool of dirty water' (*Ibid.*). However, when speaking 'Afrikaans he can feel himself relax at once as though sliding into a warm bath' (*Youth*: 127). This replicates the boy John, who finds the reading of myth-based storybooks 'a pleasure, like slipping into a warm bath' (*Boyhood*: 46). For John, such moments of sensual pleasure, are few and far between.

When at last his senses are awakened the moment/s rise out of a deep-seated spirituality:

[h]e sinks into a sleep or half-sleep in which consciousness does not vanish but continues to hover. It is a state he has not known before: in his very blood he seems to feel the steady wheeling of the earth. The faraway cries of children, the birdsong; the whirr of insects gather force and come together in a paean of joy. His heart swells. *At last!* ... It has come, the moment of ecstatic unity with the All! ... It lasts no more than seconds in clock time [but] ... he is refreshed, renewed. ... If he has not utterly been transfigured, then at least he has been blessed with a hint that he belongs to this earth (*Youth*: 117).

This 'blessing' (*Ibid.*) finds its parallel first in *Boyhood* (142) and again in *Youth*:

[The] Christian message ... is unsettling. ... The pale, bony Jesus of the film shrinking back from the touch of others, striding about barefoot issuing prophecies and fulminations, is real in a way that Jesus of the [Catholic] bleeding heart never was. He winces when the nails are hammered through the hands of Jesus; when his tomb is revealed to be empty and [when] the angel announces to the mourning women, 'Look not here, for he is risen', and the Missa Luba bursts out and the common folk of the land, the halt and the maimed, the despised and rejected, come running or hobbling, their faces alight with joy, to share the good news, his own heart wants to burst; tears of an exultation he does not understand stream down his cheeks' (*Youth*: 154).

His emotional lapse into tears is ‘wipe[d] away before he ... emerge[s] into the world again’ (*Youth* *ibid.*). However, the epiphany stays with him as he waits for his ‘[destiny] ... [to] come like a bride’ (*Youth*: 165). In the Bible the Church ‘is the bride ... [and Jesus is] the bridegroom’ (*Revelation* 19: 6). Paradoxically, the young man who is ‘ready ... to be remade ... to be rid of his old self and revealed in his new, true, passionate self’ (*Youth*: 111) is self-deceived both in Christian terms and those of the world.

His ‘saving grace is the Third programme’ (*Youth*: 90). He listens to:

Joseph Brodsky, Ingeborg Bachmann, Zbigniew Herbert ... [who] release their words along airwaves ... the words of poets of his time, telling him again of what poetry can be and therefore what he can be, filling him with joy that he inhabits the same earth as they ... But how to get word through to the Archangel afterwards? (91)

He is similarly moved by the music of Anton von Webern: ‘Crouched over the radio, he listens. First one note, then another, then another, cold as ice crystals, strung out like stars in the sky; a minute or two of this raptness, then it is over’ (92). His love of the arts is apparent:

At the: Everyman Cinema ... he watches the Apu trilogy on successive nights in a state of rapt absorption. In Apu’s bitter, trapped mother, his engaging feckless father he recognizes, with a pang of guilt, his own parents. But it is the music above all that grips him ... catches at his heart, sending him into a mood of sensual melancholy (*Youth*: 93).

He wonders ‘how ... [his] emotions [will] ever be turned into poetry’ (*Youth*: 10). Though he ‘reads everything’ (25) he believes that ‘art cannot be fed on deprivation alone, on longing, loneliness. There must be intimacy, passion, love as well’ (10). Perhaps, ‘[I]f he were a warmer person he would no doubt find it all easier: life, love, poetry. But warmth is not in his nature ... for the present, the present indefinite he is cold: cold frozen’ (168). The ‘truth is [that he is] too frightened’ (58-59):

He has a horror of spilling mere emotion on the page. Once it has begun to spill out he would not know how to stop it. It would be like severing an artery and watching one’s lifeblood gush out. Prose, fortunately does not demand



emotion ... [it] is like a flat, tranquil sheet of water on which one can tack about at one's leisure, making patterns on the surface (*Youth*: 61).

In his state of melancholia he begins to wonder if he is: 'now in the process of losing the poetic impulse. Will he be driven from poetry to prose? Is that what prose secretly is: the second best choice, the resort of failing creative spirits?' (*Youth*: 60)

Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion but an escape from emotion,' says Eliot in words [John] has copied into his diary. "Poetry is not an expression of personality but an escape from personality". Then as a bitter afterthought Eliot adds: "But only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape these things" (61).

Dread of confronting his inner self and that self's subconscious and unconscious desires, immobilizes his artistic creativity: '[T]o know one's own mind too well spells, in his view, the death of the creative spark' (*Youth*: 105). 'Does his first venture into prose herald a change of direction in his life? Is he about to renounce poetry?' (64) In Freudian terms, melancholia and mourning go hand in hand. What John fails to recognize and therefore denies, is his sense of bereavement. He has lost his country as home, his boyhood self, his family and its nostalgic cultural traditions. He is also mourning for the life of the poet he has not yet become.

Loss and bereavement are not new to John: 'One day the farm [and South Africa] will be wholly gone, wholly lost; already he is grieving at that loss' (*Boyhood*: 80). At a conscious cognitive level: 'He would prefer to leave his South African self behind as he has left South Africa itself behind ... [his] undistinguished, rural family, bad schooling, the Afrikaans language' (*Youth*: 62) ... 'consign it to the past ... seal it away in [his] memory' (*Youth*: 131). However, 'South Africa is a wound within him ... a wound [that does not] stop bleeding' (116). This is the Freudian 'open wound' that characterizes melancholia and mourning. Nothing he can do, think or feel will eradicate reminders of his loss. In his mind's eye he sees:

a dazzling space of sand at the foot of rocky cliffs pounded by breakers, with gulls and cormorants screaming overhead as they battle the wind (62) ... mile after mile of white sand under a great blue sky (102) ... the heat and dust of the Karoo (116) ... the streets [of Cape Town] ... the desert of the Great

Karoo ... it is his country, the country of his heart. ... Patriotism: is that what is beginning to afflict him? Is he proving himself unable to live without a country? Having shaken the dust of the ugly new South Africa from his feet [the shoe/foot motif], is he yearning for the South Africa of the [white] old days, when Eden was still possible? (*Youth*: 137).

These images are the mental photographs that 'tug at [his] heartstrings' (*Ibid.*). South Africa is inside him, '[the] black phlegm [he tries to] ... cough up' (*Youth*: 102).

John's melancholia and mourning extend to: the 'piano' (*Youth*: 16) that he cannot master; the 'play' (69) he could not write; his failure at dancing (89); the poetry locked inside him. He knows, that 'at eighteen he might have been a poet ... Now he is not a poet, not a writer, not an artist' (*Youth*: 168). Given the opportunity to defend his place as an artist in the world, he fails to 'take the initiative. He should have said, 'I am not what I may seem to be ... I may look like a clerk, but I am in reality a poet, or a poet to be. ... But he had not spoken up, had not pleaded, however abjectly, for himself and his vocation: now it is too late' (*Youth*: 96). Now he is: 'killing time, he is trying to kill Sunday so that Monday will come sooner, and with Monday the relief of work. For nearly two years he [has] waited and suffered, [but] destiny stayed away' (165). He 'hates ... confrontations with the blank page ... cannot bear the weight of despair that descends at the end of each fruitless session' (166). Though 'he wills himself to act, nothing will happen in love or art. But he does not trust the will ... [he] must wait for the aid of a force from outside ... the Muse' (*Youth*: 166-167).

Despondently, he waits 'for the day when chance will at last smile on him' (*Youth*: 111). If, for the present, 'he cannot ... write poetry that comes from the heart, if his heart is not in the right state to generate poetry of its own, he can at least string together pseudo-poems made up of phrases generated by a machine' (161). This is a reworking of *Dusklands*: 'I still think of my best work, the best of my work for ITT for example, as a kind of poetry' (1974: 31). One of [John's] computer generated poems is 'printed with a derisive commentary. For a day or two back in Cape Town, he is notorious as the barbarian who wants to replace Shakespeare with a machine'

(*Youth*: 161). His epigrammatic poems: ‘Too often lack feeling; too often they are merely bookish’ (*Youth*: 61). He: ‘is no longer reading poetry ... [he] has stopped yearning ... he cannot help seeing a connection between the end of yearning and the end of poetry ... so this is what, unbeknown to [himself he] was preparing for ... this is where mathematics leads one’ (*Youth*: 144):

the more he has to do with computing, the more it seems to him like chess: a tight little world defined by made-up rules, one that sucks in boys [not men] of a certain susceptible temperament and turns them half-crazy, as he is half-crazy, so that all the time they deludedly think they are playing the game, the game is in fact playing them. ... Is that his problem ... that all the time ... he has been ... fooling himself into believing he belongs with sculptresses and actresses? (*Youth*: 149-150).

Though ‘many words will come, [they are] not the right words, the sentence he will recognize at once, from its weight, from its poise and balance ... the destined one’ (*Youth*: 166). He is a ‘twenty-four-year-old computer programmer in a world in which there are no thirty-year-old computer programmers. At thirty one is too old to be a programmer: one turns oneself into something else – some kind of businessman – or one shoots oneself’ (*Youth*: 168).

Regardless of his melancholia, his sense of loss, his inability to write and his dysfunctional relationships with women, he is not prepared to follow the working class crowd, or to ‘sign away all chance of becoming an artist’ (*Youth*: 141). Rather, he applies himself to his new job: ‘the programming ... is interesting. It requires mental ingenuity; it requires, if it is to be well done, a virtuoso command of Atlas’s two-level internal language ... he arrives for work ... looking forward to the tasks that await him’ (*Youth*: 144). John’s ability to write code equates not only with his ability to write creatively, but his penchant for writing in different languages: ‘there are times when he is reading German when he forgets he is reading a foreign language ... [and] he has an insider’s knowledge of Dutch’ (*Youth*: 76). What is more, the twin language metaphor resurrects the dualities in John’s life. He has: ‘two mothers’ (*Boyhood*: 96); her good and bad breasts; he has ‘two farms behind him’ (*Boyhood*: 22); two fathers: ‘Jack Coetzee and Bob Breech’ (*Boyhood*: 39-40). In

addition, there are numerous juxtapositions: the British and the Afrikaners; the English language and Afrikaans; Russia and America; capitalism and communism; apartheid and liberation; intimacy and attachment with independence and detachment; faith in God with mythology and destiny; optimism and pessimism; success and failure; hope and despair; poetry or prose; science and art. John belongs to ‘two worlds tightly sealed from each other: he must think twice about the life he leads’ (*Youth*: 130-131). All ‘he is searching for at present is the moment in history when *either-or* is chosen and *and/or* is discarded’ (160). John sees himself, as ‘an undistinguished graduate from a second-class university in the colonies’ (*Youth*: 157).

In the closing pages of *Youth* Coetzee depicts a more mature protagonist who performs the role of the real J.M. Coetzee who goes to America. By this stage in the narrative, John is already showing signs that he is Eugene Dawn’s understudy. Like Eugene Dawn, ‘he has aided the arms race, [has] become an accomplice in the Cold War (*Youth*: 163) ... [and] has lent himself to evil. ... *Experience*: That is the word he would like to fall back on to justify himself to himself ... [but] telling lies to oneself is getting to know intellectual squalor’ (164). John’s abhorrence of the Vietnam War parallels Dawn’s:

British newspapers and the BBC have carried stories [in which] ... the Viet-Cong are killed by the thousand while the Americans get away unscathed. If there is ever a word of criticism of America, it is of the most muted kind. He can barely bring himself to read the war reports so much do they sicken him (*Youth*: 152).

He deplores America and all it stands for. He is especially uncomfortable with South Africans who: ‘[act as] fake Americans ... [as do] ... the British [who] are no less eager to ape the Americans. ... Why look to America for everything?’ (*Youth*: 90). Ironically, John has been performing as a fake Englishman for three years, and he will soon look to America for the muse that will influence the future of his writing.

John is aware that America is ‘hard and merciless ... sends artists mad, locks them up and drives them out’ (*Youth*: 151, *Dusklands*: 43-49), but England is a world that ‘he

can escape' (*Youth*: 149) and ultimately, he does. Though he is initially averse to the idea of going 'to America ... [instead of] wasting his time [in England]' (*Youth*: 151), he is prepared to 'accept the word of fate' (153). 'Does [this] mean he is growing up? Is what growing up amounts to: growing out of yearning, of passion, of all intensities of the soul?' (144) The final episode in the trilogy offers no resolution to John's sense of melancholy, his deep-seated grief and loss, his neurotic anxieties, his dysfunctional social and sexual skills, his ability to perform in life's drama as a whole and integrated self. Are Coetzee's readers expected to believe that he abandoned poetry for ever in favour of prose? Or is the master still playing games?

The clue is in 'the horn-rimmed spectacles. ... Should he have been wearing glasses his whole life?' (*Youth*: 154) John's clarity of vision becomes my own:

We end up looking like our ideal selves, says Baudelaire. The face we are born with is slowly overwhelmed by the desired face, the face of our secret dreams. Is the face in the mirror the face of his dreams, this long lugubrious face with the soft, vulnerable mouth and now the blank eyes shielded behind glass? (ibid)

John no longer rejects the reflection in the mirror. Though language constructs every aspect of being in symbolic, semiotic and semantic signs, it does not have the power to change or manipulate the way we look. Naturally, as I have shown with reference to John, fashion and appearance ideals dress us in costume and influence to some extent the ways we behave. Human beings wear psychosocial masks to hide their dark, inner selves but ultimately, the face in the mirror is the person who is looking to that mirror for self-reflection, self-approval and self-esteem. John's 'new eyes', signal the beginning of a healing process that culminates in the (actual) writing of *Dusklands*.

Now, he is reading Beckett's *Watt*: 'it is funny, so funny that he rolls about laughing' (*Youth*: 155) even though laughter is not his habit. He plays cricket: 'He is much better, much better as a batsman and a bowler too, than his fellow players ... Must he a colonial, teach them how to play their own game?' (159) Without warning, John's

elusive ‘inner flame, a flame that consumes, yet paradoxically renews all that it touches’ (*Youth*: 30) comes to him in the synthesis of cricket and poetry. ‘Must he be miserable again in order to write? Does there not also exist, a poetry of ecstasy, even a poetry of lunchtime cricket as a form of ecstasy? Does it matter where poetry finds its impetus as long as it is poetry?’ (*Youth*: 160) In *Boyhood*, ‘Cricket is not a game; [it] is the truth of life’ (1997: 54). In *Youth*, ‘Poetry is truth’ (2002: 30). According to logic then: ‘he is reading in the history of logic’ (*Youth*: 159) cricket is poetry and the truth of life is not a game (*Boyhood*: 54, *Youth*: 160). What, in the final analysis then is Coetzee’s truth and Coetzee’s game?

Julia Kristeva tells us that: ‘Literary works can overcome melancholia, which she describes as a “living death”, at a semiotic level by means of melody, tone, rhythm, gesture, [and] semantic polyvalence: form is content and content is form’ (in Raponi 2003)<sup>9</sup>. John believes that ‘In poetry the action can take place everywhere and nowhere’ (*Youth*: 62). Though ‘He carries a book of poetry around with him in his pocket’ (*Youth*: 72) he does not enjoy ‘Wordsworth’ (*Boyhood*: 105). However, in an ironic twist, Wordsworth’s ‘famed attack on the doctrine of special language for poetry claimed there is no “*essential* difference between the language of prose and metrical composition. [Wordsworth] set up as the criterion for a valid poetic language: that it be, not a matter of artful contrivance, but the spontaneous overflow of feelings”’ (Abrams 1988: 143).

According to Kristeva’s hypothesis and Wordsworth’s standpoint, Coetzee’s prose fiction could be classed as poetry. He is after all, a meticulous writer who ‘brings to the writing of prose the hard jeweller’s craft of poetry’ (*Youth*: 24). In *Boyhood* and *Youth*, the third person narrator projects John’s consciousness by pouring out the character’s innermost cognitive thoughts, the poignancy of his emotions, the frailty of his psyche; the emptiness of his impoverished spirit; his aloneness and sense of

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<sup>9</sup> Sandra Raponi’s article does not reflect page numbers.

isolation from the world—being alien—a misfit and a failure. Though the narrative is expressly humorous at times, it is, at other times, emotive and poignant.

While the abovementioned tenets refer to tone and melody in Coetzee's prose, I return to *Dusklands* to exhume examples of rhythm. In *Dusklands*, Coetzee insidiously weaves a lingering steady rhythm into his lexicon: 'the hisses settled into a steady rhythm' (74) while the sound of horses hooves reverberate through the textual canvas at 'a nice steady trot' (59). The Hottentots 'run to the sounds of ... horses hooves' (Ibid.); '[Jacobus] cantered over to the wagon. A file of children trotted behind' (73); '[Jacobus] inhabited the horses that had lived under [him]' (77); 'she heard our horses ... the force of the ... kick ... we trotted down' (100). The horse imagery is sustained in the image of the 'horse ... that [John's mother] does not buy' (*Boyhood*: 2) is a lingering presence in the text, while 'Woltemade's white horse' (*Boyhood*: 108) represents the corpus of white immigrants and their interaction with indigenous peoples. In addition, the 'white horse with shaggy hooves' (*Youth*: 16) acts as a cohesive device that ties Dawn, Jacobus and John to their European roots. Like white immigrants, horses wear shoes. Like white immigrants, horses are not endemic to South Africa

John's observation of the 'big white horse and ... the ... handsome ... milkman' (Ibid.), is significant because of the sensual language that describes the image: '[the] young man, with the first stirrings of the day's wind fingering his horse's mane; smile[s] so gentl[y]' (*Youth*: 17). Here, emotively-charged sibilants are juxtaposed with the 'cruelty of [South Africa's racist] laws' (Ibid.). Coetzee uses the same formula in *Dusklands*. There, the harsh rhythmic sounds of the horses' hooves mentioned above, are juxtaposed with melodic soft sounding sibilants that are delicately counterpoised with the heinous violent crimes that pervade the textual fabric: '[slave] shuffle' (*Dusklands*: 68, 69, 82, 88-115); 'spare myself the farce' (68); 'curiosity squinting into the sun' (69); 'shambles' (75, 90); 'swift tropical sunrise' (76); 'spasms of shivering' (76); 'stone desert shimmering' (77); 'the last

swallows swept over the water' (78); 'a false sense of shame' (87). The clue pointing to this device is found in *Boyhood*: 'She [his mother] speaks in a low whispering voice in which only the sibilants stand out' (1997: 48). His mother remains the woman of his libidinal fantasies: 'she is wearing a white blouse ... Her hair streams in the wind. She looks young, like a girl, young and mysterious' (*Boyhood*: 3). She is the one who feeds his 'imagin[ation] ... 'a beautiful girl in a white dress' (*Youth*: 2). His mother is, like it or not, his 'Muse' (*Youth*: 167).

Poetic language abounds. Laced with mythological innuendo, simile is used for optimal effect: 'like a pale stunned deep-sea fish [several kinds of fish were sacred to [Hermes]]' (*Dusklands*: 7); 'slipped like smoke' (17); 'like the staff of Moses [Hermes]' (68); 'like an equestrian statue [Hermes]' (72); 'like a pallid symbol' (106). The device of simile is undoubtedly Coetzee's most frequently used figure of speech. In *Boyhood* images take on a new cadence: 'like elephant skin' (1)<sup>10</sup>; 'like a wounded warrior' (10); 'like a rat in a corner' (13) – this image is repeated later: 'they are ... like rats in a cage' (158); 'cunning and heartless, like jackals' (22); 'like a whipped slave' (49); 'as slim as an eel, quick as a hare' (61); 'like children at a circus' (72); 'like a dog from a chain' (79); 'like two jellyfish' (99); 'like a stone column' (*Dusklands*: 116). The pattern repeats itself in *Youth*: the 'typeface of Pound's *Cantos* is interrupted like strokes of a gong' (19). Oxymoron creates drama and heightens tension: 'the sun was high and no-one was warmed' (*Dusklands*: 101), while metaphor is used extensively to good effect. Metaphor infiltrates the heart of psychosocial issues: violence, sexual, gender and property rights, racial inequity, illegitimacy, religion, social status, education, linguistic codes of patterning, patriarchy, myths and taboos; the unreliability of history.

Notwithstanding the obvious figures of speech employed in poetry, the beauty of the prose is counterpoised with the horrors of frontier life in *Dusklands* where sheer aesthetic splendour is everywhere articulated: 'the ochre plains ... blue mountains ...

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<sup>10</sup> The page numbers cited between (1) and (116) denote quotations from *Dusklands*.



the Great River ... the sun a few degrees above the horizon ... there were stars in the sky. The sweet smell of cattle ... a frond of Jacaranda ... the Nama dove ... the African highland ... the sun's dying glow ... dusk—the dying fire of the sun' (63-95)—the embers of apartheid.

This final episode in Coetzee's trilogy, characteristically offers no resolution. John Coetzee is left in uncertain circumstances where he continues to 'play himself ... into a corner and into defeat' (*Youth*: 169). At the end of the novel, he fails to identify himself as a poet and therefore expects no recognition or acclaim. However, this does not signal the end of poetry for the young man. Rather, his poetry is yet another subtext in *Youth*: 'my fevers [melancholic artistic creativity] ... [is/are] distinguishable only by the flexing of my soul's wings' (*Youth*: 77). Clearly, the poignancy of poetry that carries 'a world of meaning in one line' (61), is never more heart-rending than when John plunges into the darkest depths of misery: 'Day after day goes by when not a word passes his lips. He begins to mark them off with an *S* in his diary: days of silence' (*Youth*: 114). If the aim of poetry is to stir our feelings, senses and emotions, then Coetzee *does* write poetry and John Coetzee the protagonist *is* a poet. The boy has grown into the man who has thus far endured life's tests. Sadly, in the real world, humankind continues to struggle against unrelenting political power structures that continue to dominate those individuals who either fail to resist, or have no recourse to change the status quo. Victimization and persecution will inevitably persist.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### CONCLUSION

**The composition of our lives is not so much stories, as “loose-leaf” novels which defy encapsulation in narrative ... these are something close to enchantment, closer to music played with ordinary things—heard, seen and felt.**

—Thomas Moore

In my exploration of J.M. Coetzee’s construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of white male identities in *Dusklands*, *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* and *Youth*, I have shown that identity is an ever-changing facet of the human condition. My adoption of Freud’s psychoanalytical theory on transference has opened up insightful textual spaces from where I have gleaned covert and overt information. In the novels, Coetzee’s protagonists epitomize the quandary of individuals whose lives are dictated by those who wield political power. This power is not confined to governments of state and their bureaucracies. Rather, Coetzee challenges the inner-workings of domestic familial power relations that act as a microcosm for aggressive national and international politics. In all of these contexts, language signifies, internalizes and naturalizes the socio-political order. According to Dino Felluga, Butler’s theory on performativity suggests that ‘the distinction between the personal and the political, or between the private and the public is in itself a fiction designed to support an oppressive status quo in which our most personal acts are in fact, continually being scripted by hegemonic social conventions and ideologies’ (2006). Consequently, human beings are named, described, labelled, stigmatized, marginalized and categorized according to the language of dominance. Identity construction is a response to the way/s that individuals identify, or disidentify with prevalent ideological discourses. Coetzee’s postmodernist texts reflect the legacy of colonialism and how living in a postcolonial world impacts individual lives. In all

three novels, violence and the abuse of power are pivotal to understanding the ways that his respective characters perform their various identity roles. Each protagonist portrays a unique set of psychosocial dynamics that is fraught with neurotic anxieties, insecurities and vulnerabilities. Each of them is a victim of the paradigmatic circumstances he is born into. They are all citizens of the governing state.

In his latest novel, *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee's narrator remarks:

We are born subject. From the moment of our birth we are subject. One mark of this certificate is the certificate of birth. The perfected state holds and guards the monopoly certifying birth. Either you are given (and carry with you) the certificate of the state, thereby acquiring an *identity* which during the course of your life enables the state to identify you and track you (track you down); or you do without an identity and condemn yourself to living outside the state like an animal (animals do not have identity papers). ... Whether the citizen lives or dies is not a concern of the state. What matters to the state and its records is whether the citizen is alive or dead (2007: 4-5).

This quotation is pertinent to my analyses of Coetzee's characters. Eugene Dawn is born into an aggressive patriarchy that rests on capitalism, consumerism and militarism. Though Dawn is a representative of America's patriarchal military bureaucracy, he is outside of the state inasmuch as he cannot cope with the demands of the socio-political order. Nor can he cope with graphic images of war-torn Vietnam, his marriage, his sexuality and masculinity, or a deep-seated neurosis related to the taboo of incest. The language that names and identifies Dawn as an American citizen is oblivious to his needs as an individual. Jacobus Coetzee's claim to citizenship of South Africa is at best dubious. He is ostensibly a citizen of the colony, but as I have shown with regard to the records that name him: 'Jacobus Janszoon Coetzee (Coetsee, Coetsé)' (*Dusklands*: 108), his citizenship is nullified by his illiteracy – he is unable to confirm his 'identity' because he represents himself as 'X' (ibid. 125). Paradoxically, the 'herder' (110) on the Cape frontier is becoming a 'citizen of the world' (Ibid.), while Jacobus's identity is further undermined by his mixed blood: a 'Bastard' (57) carried by a Hottentot woman. In John Coetzee's boyhood South Africa, identity documents symbolized apartheid. Whites carried

identity cards; blacks carried passbooks that refuted their humanness. During the apartheid years, the state treated indigenous peoples 'like animals [kept them] subject[ed] [and did not much care if they] were alive or dead' (Coetzee 2007: 4-5). It is significant that John 'looks for a birth certificate, but without success' (*Boyhood*: 49). As for the adult John and his writing self, 'he would hope to leave behind, were he to die tomorrow, a handful of poems ... edited by some selfless scholar' (*Youth*: 58). This implies that his life comprises a few words that can be changed and manipulated by an unknown person. As Eugene Dawn remarks, 'It has all come down to this (I ease myself in and tell (*sic*) over the clear, functional words)' (*Dusklands*: 43).

Clearly, the characters and their identity/identities cannot exist without language. Words determine lives and how they are lived; whether or not we experience hardships and turmoil, love and/or hate, events and incidents both good and bad, culture and tradition, memory and nostalgia, disappointment and disillusionment, hope and despair, acceptance or rejection, opportunity or disadvantage, gain and loss. Everything happens in and through language. Coetzee brings to his fiction succinct words that undermine his own use of language and draw attention to language as a source of knowledge and power. At the same time, he brings to the texts his own disillusionment with the country of his birth. Consequently, his characters' psyches are affected by his own precarious place in South Africa's racist history.

As I have shown with reference to the texts, Coetzee's characters are inhibited by their closely guarded secrets: 'She believes I have a secret, a cancer of shameful knowledge' (*Dusklands*: 10). This tightly structured sentence points to a diseased society where corruption of the spiritual and moral life breeds shame and guilt. This malignancy does not escape the characters. Rather, they reproduce it in their own minds. While Dawn and Jacobus resurrect repressed memories in dreams and fantasies John Coetzee remains ignorant of the secret he carries in his blood. Nevertheless, persistent feelings of shame and guilt render the respective protagonists

socially and sexually dysfunctional. Coetzee's surreptitious revelation of hidden 'knowledge' is crucial to understanding how the characters enact their identity roles and encode their worlds. Furthermore, he draws attention to language as knowledge, by asking whether or not language is an end in itself; whether or not we can believe what language suggests or claims; whether language as an art form is 'true only in the sense that a work of art is true – true to itself, true to its own immanent aims' (*Youth*: 10).

It is not surprising that Coetzee's innovative modes of narration successfully cross and blur, frontiers—geographical, physical, emotional, spiritual and psychological. As his white males journey toward self-knowledge he draws on the metaphysical in dreams, nightmares, fantasies, storybooks and illusions. These in turn reveal Eurocentric mythological heroes and African wizards. Europe and Africa are delicately counterpoised in the novels, suggesting the natural oppositions: light and dark; black and white. The ancient myths of Hydra and Hercules, Hermes, Oedipus and Orestes, are worked and reworked in the texts. I have discussed the mythic child-god Hermes in some detail. However, this masculine ideal is significant on yet another level. The branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation is "hermeneutics", a word/term deriving from "Hermes". This is but one example of how myths become embedded in language.

In this dissertation, I have analyzed Coetzee's language in his semi-autobiographical prose fiction. In doing so, I have interpreted the identities of Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee and John Coetzee. Textual evidence indicates the interrelatedness of characters that are in some way, related to J.M. Coetzee. I have discussed the ways in which these characters respond to their particular paradigmatic circumstances in diverse temporal-spatial moments in historical time. Each of their fictional lives has been marred by the patriarchal societies they reflect, inasmuch as they have no individual political power to effect change. This is true even of the violent Jacobus. His ability to murder his unfaithful servants rests on those who fortify his strength: 'I

reached Scheffer and their guards ... I ... told the Griquas to bring the others' (*Dusklands*: 102-103). Dawn, Jacobus and John are cowardly and socially inept. All three characters attempt to perform a range of identity roles that will help them to sever their attachments and to attain a new life. However, transcendence is impossible because they are each confined to the annals of literary history. Only when readers engage with the author and his use of language, will new interpretations of the relevant stories give the characters 'new life'. Without attentive academics, the characters will remain 'like ... mute creature[s]' (*Boyhood*: 125).

As I have shown, the essence of identity construction is language; a language that provides scripts for life's performances. Coetzee's postmodernist texts reproduce postcolonial situations where his fictional personae inhabit milieux where power is always in the hands of those who speak the language of dominance. For example, in Dawn's America the powerful controlling 'father-voice ... exhorts his children [read as: Vietnamese, black, inferior, powerless, other] to patriotic sacrifice' (*Dusklands*: 21). The role of parent/s is integral to understanding the ambition of these novels. Coetzee juxtaposes the stereotypical patriarchal white authoritarian male, with an array of mother figures. According to the psychoanalytical theories of Klein and Freud, mothers have a profound effect on the psychosocial-sexual development of their sons. Coetzee exposes the fallibility of parents per se. However, he exhorts the manipulability of language, its form and content, to reverse the positions of nurturing mothers and their male counterparts. The domestic familial realm of inter-social activities is pinpointed as the place where the perpetration of insidious violence goes unchecked. The dysfunctional home replicates the violence apparent in greater society.

Violence, physical, emotional and psychological, informs the hearts and minds of the characters. Incest, miscegenation, rape and illegitimacy in the domestic context are at the heart of each novel. Personal violation is analogous to the unspeakable violence committed by inhumane patriarchal systems of power in: the Vietnam War, on the

South African frontier, in apartheid South Africa and in London where the Malawian nanny has been physically and psychologically wrenched from her African roots. In Theodora's case, the patriarchal white male is still the master. Discrimination and prejudice abound. In *Dusklands*, the Vietnamese other is depicted in a dying landscape where patriarchal America rapes and ravages. Jacobus's Cape frontier operates according to the white master/black slave dichotomy. In England, John comes face to face with hierarchical class prejudice and he encounters xenophobia when Britain's postcolonial black children arrive in the metropole to claim their portion of the colonial legacy.

My interrogation of *Dusklands*, *Boyhood* and *Youth*, has exposed the physical and psychological impact of history's twin demons. The first is colonialism and its quest for material riches and territorial expansion, its need to divide and rule, its reliance on distorted, ideological myths and belief systems, its perpetuation of hegemonic patriarchal discourse, its missionizing ethos and its inherently flawed perceptions of the indigenous other. The second is the role of mothers in their divergent forms and their irrevocable effects on characters who enact a range of failed masculine identities. Each of the characters is isolated from mainstream society and fears 'attachment'. Coetzee denies them reciprocal, mutually-satisfying relationships and, as is his habit, he offers no catharsis or resolution to this dilemma. Consequently, Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee and John Coetzee—both the boy and the man—remain trapped in their fictional worlds.

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