Trauma, narrative and ethics in J.M. Coetzee's selected fiction

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Abstract

English

The traumatic encounter in J.M. Coetzee's representation of colonialism is shown to facilitate the ethical evolvement of his protagonists. However, in order for characters to attain ethical salvation, it is necessary that they come into proximity with the Other. In narratives that deconstruct colonial discourses, Coetzee attempts to expose the workings of myth both in the enactment and sustenance of the colonial project to show that myth is coextensive with violence in colonialism and that violence is a concomitant of colonialism.

In anti-realist narratives that represent human and animal Other, it is shown that the citation of an alleged quietism in Coetzee's narratives fails to take into account his scrupulous ethical stance against suffering and oppression and that he contests authority by foregrounding alterity. Hence his refusal to publicly express his political views is problematised.Consequently, his hospitality settings suggest a postcolonial ethics based on interrogating language.

Keywords: colonialism, deconstruction, ethics, language, myth, narrative, postcolonial, proximity, salvation, traumatic

Afrikaans

Dit is bewys dat die traumatiesekonfrontasie in J.M. Coetzee se kolonialisme die etiese ontknoping van syprotagonistegefasiliteer het. Vir karakters om egteretiese redding te verkry, is dit nodig dat hulle nader aan die Ander beweeg. In narratiewe waar koloniale diskoersegedekonstrueerword, poog Coetzee om die werking van mites in beide die uitleef en onderhoud van die koloniale projek bloot te lê en sodoende te wys dat die omvang van die mite in kolonialisme, gelyk is aan geweld en dat geweld 'n byverskynsel van kolonialisme is.

Anti-realis narratiewe wat die Ander van mens en dier verteenwoordig, toon dat die aanhaal van 'n beweerde quiëtisme in Coetzee se narratiewenie daarin slaag om sy gewetensvolle etiese standpunt teen lyding en verdrukking in aanmerking te neem nie en dat hygesagbeveg deur andersheid voorop te stel. Derhalwewordsyweiering om sy politieke menings openbaar te maak, as probleem gesien. Gevolglik suggereer sygasvryheidraamwerk 'n post-kolonialeetiek wat op die interrogasie van taal gebaseer is.

isiXhosa

Ukuhlangana okudabukisayo ekumeleleni kuka-J.M. Coetzee kobukoloni kuboniswa ukusiza ukuthuthuka kwesimilo sabalingiswa bakhe. Kodwa-ke, ukuze abalingiswa bathole insindiso yesimilo, kuyadingeka ukuthi basondelane Nomunye. Ezindabeni ezisusa ukwakhiwa kwezinkulumo zamakholoni, u-Coetzee uzama ukudalula ukusebenza kwenganekwane kokubili ekusungulweni nasekusekelweni kwephrojekthi yamakholoni ukukhombisa ukuthi inganekwane ihlangene nodlame ku-colonialism nokuthi udlame luhambisana nobukoloniyali.

Ezindabeni ezimelene namaqiniso amele umuntu nesilwane Okunye, kuboniswa ukuthi ukucashunwa kwezinsolo zokuthi cwaka ezilandweni zika-Coetzee kwehluleka ukubheka isimo sakhe sokuziphatha esiqinile ngokumelene nokuhlupheka nengcindezelo kanye nokuthi uphikisana negunya ngokwenza ushintsho olungaphambili. Ngakho-ke ukwenqaba kwakhe ukuveza imibono yakhe yezombusazwe kuyinkinga.Ngakho-ke, izilungiselelo zakhe zokungenisa izihambi ziphakamisa izimiso ze-postcolonial ezisekelwe olimini lokuphenya.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Research Background

Dusklands, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Disgrace* and *Elizabeth Costello* are selected for this study as they exemplify Coetzee's ethical stance of foregrounding the marginalised.

'The story of Friday's tongue is a story unable to be told, or unable to be told by me. That is to say, many stories can be told of Friday's tongue, but the true story is buried within Friday, who is mute. The true story will not be heard till by art we have found a means of giving voice to Friday.' – Susan Barton, in *Foe* (Coetzee 1986:118)

J.M. Coetzee is a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature, awarded in 2003. He is also the first author to have won the Booker Prize twice, amongst other recognitions. Yet many would agree that his fiction resists easy interpretations. During the apartheid era, his anti-realist narratives appeared at odds with the historical urgency. Numerous critics pointed to a lack of political commitment in his fiction.

However, in awarding Coetzee the Nobel Prize in Literature for 2003, the Swedish Academy noted his representation of the marginalised. How then does Coetzee represent the Other in his fiction? Yet in narratives that deconstruct dominant discourses, Coetzee is seen to privilege proximity, that is, pit the subject against the Other.

This dissertation explores trauma in Coetzee's fictional works about colonialism, from the perspective of its potential to facilitate the ethical enlightenment of his characters. It argues that proximity is a necessary process in the subject's recognition of the Other and in characters' eventual ethical enlightenment. The traumatic encounter in Coetzee's colonialism is, therefore, seen as a vehicle for his protagonists' enlightenment. This is as Coetzee uses narrative to bridge the gap between the political (public/postcolonial) and the ethical (private) by staging "moments of personal crisis" for his protagonists in the form of traumatic encounters with the Other.

In awarding J.M. Coetzee the Nobel Prize in Literature, the Swedish Academy made certain comments while explaining its decision to grant the South African-born author the esteemed accolade. Its citation lauded "South African writer John Maxwell

Coetzee ‘who in innumerable guises portrays the surprising involvement of the outsider’”. Furthermore, the academy described his novels as characterised:

> […] by their well-crafted composition, pregnant dialogue and analytical brilliance. But at the same time, he is a scrupulous doubter, ruthless in his criticism of the cruel rationalism and cosmetic morality of Western civilisation. His intellectual honesty erodes all basis of consolation and distances itself from the tawdry drama of remorse and confession.

This statement can be shown to be self-contradictory. Firstly, the study disputes the inference that Coetzee involves the outsider as a matter of course, as implied in the academy’s assertion of “the surprising involvement of the outsider”. It will, therefore, argue that the representation of the Other is a consistent attribute that is central to Coetzee’s novelistic practice, beginning with his first novel, *Dusklands*. Secondly, the study notes an inference in the same statement the academy released when recognising Coetzee, an inadvertent assertion, perhaps, that appears to nullify ethics in the characters’ actions. Contained in the second paragraph, it reads: “Coetzee’s interest is directed mainly at situations where the distinction between right and wrong, while crystal clear, can be seen to serve no end”. This claim is the basis for Bosman’s 2017 dissertation, “‘The surprising involvement of the outsider’: An Examination of Pessimism and Schopenhauerian Ethics in J.M. Coetzee’s *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Joseph Conrad’s *Under Western Eyes*”.

Bosman disputes the statement for purporting to empty ethical value in morally right action. This is more so as in the last sentence of the press statement, the academy goes on to imply the ethical worth in Coetzee’s characters that it earlier purports to deny. That last line reads: “His protagonists are overwhelmed by the urge to sink but paradoxically derive strength from being stripped of all external dignity”. In response, this study contends that the ethical enlightenment of characters in the aftermath of adversity is a constant feature of the literature. One could argue this is a pattern that can be read back into the texts. Nevertheless, the academy’s citation that Coetzee involves the outsider, although inaccurate, acknowledges the author’s recognition of the Other.

The accolade can, therefore, be seen as a long-awaited affirmation of the writer's ethical commitment, in the wake of adverse criticism that, with his anti-realist narratives, Coetzee evades the political and historical currents of his own country. This, at a time when the voice of the responsible artist to speak up is most needed. Some of that negative criticism is from fellow South African writer Nadine Gordimer, whose criticism is evaluated below. Nonetheless, it will be apposite to assert that the adverse discursive opinion directed at the author's fiction is not altogether unfounded. For instance, in his evaluation of Coetzee's early novels and in response to such historical commentary, Derek Attridge appears to concede that criticism of the writer's work as detached from the *Zeitgeist* and, consequently, as unsympathetic to the suffering of the oppressed, is understandable, and, therefore, deserving of a thorough address (2004:2), not least, to demonstrate the importance of the author's work in the "ethico-political realm" (2004:6).

Attridge is one of numerous leading scholars to attest to a broad ethical dimension in Coetzee's literature. Another is David Attwell. In underlining the fact that his anti-realist, intertextual and metatextual fictions are not divorced from the historical, Attwell speaks of a "situational metafiction" and "the relationship between reflexivity and historicity" (1992:3) in Coetzee's texts. This points to a concern for the South African context, most often the setting of his earlier novels up to *Disgrace* (1999).

To address Gordimer's criticism first. She has called out Coetzee for allegorising the South African situation and characterised his approach as reflective of a lack of courage and commitment, as Attridge points out (2004:51). The targets of Gordimer's criticism have included *Waiting for the Barbarians*, a text that is part of this study, and *Life & Times of Michael K*. In critiquing the former, Gordimer admonishes Coetzee for imprecision as regards the text's temporal and geographical setting (Jolly 1989:70), despite signs that the physical setting somehow resembles the Northern Cape. Gordimer's review of *Life & Times of Michael K* is perhaps the most stinging. In "The Idea of Gardening", published in *The New York Review of Books* on 27 February 1984, she laments "the revulsion against all political and revolutionary solutions" (Kannemeyer 2012:396) and the choice of Michael K as unfit to represent the average South African (Kannemeyer 2012:397). Such ascription would be at odds with the writer's critique of

South African recent history, as a close reading of *Dusklands*, his first work of fiction, would demonstrate, in a pattern that this study claims is replicated across the author's fictional oeuvre. Nevertheless, a vital clue to understanding his ethics would be to appraise his attitude towards suffering, and the associated professed capacity for sympathy. Coetzee has said:

> Let me add *entirely* parenthetically that I, as a person, as a personality, am overwhelmed, that my thinking is thrown into confusion and helplessness, by the fact of suffering in the world, and not only human suffering. These fictional constructions of mine are paltry, ludicrous defenses against that being-overwhelmed, and, to me, transparently so (Coetzee1992:248; italics in original).

Perhaps, most importantly, Coetzee's ethics can be traced in his confessional writings, which include the fictionalised autobiography *Boyhood*. In it, Coetzee expresses an in-built ethic for resistance. "He chose the Russians in 1947 when everyone else was choosing the Americans" (Coetzee 1997:27). The reason behind this choice was that he thought 'R' "the strongest of all letters". What one sees then, from age seven to age fifty-seven, Coetzee's age around the time of the publication of *The Master of Petersburg*, a book Attridge singles out as an example of an artwork widely seen to be at odds with the times (2004:2). All considered, over and above Coetzee's fascination with things Russian, the protagonist of that novel, Dostoevsky, is a major influence of Coetzee's (Kannemeyer 2012:10).

Nonetheless, despite everything, one does sense a notable aversion to abuses of power against the weak, in his novels, hence his determination to stand up for the Other. The ethical encounter with the text, therefore, becomes an essential exercise when attempting to understand his narratives. Such an act would dispel "the opacity of his fiction", to quote Jane Poyner's characterisation of the writer's fiction in some quarters (2006:4). To make matters worse, some of the adverse criticism that has been directed at Coetzee's writing has not been theoretically based. An example of such appraisal comes from Colin Bower. In an article published on 28 September 2003, in the South African *Sunday Times*, called "The art and artifice of J.M. Coetzee", Bower embarks on what amounts to a repudiation of Coetzee's narratives. He denounces the writer's style as "wooden" and "lifeless". He writes:

> I have searched in vain…for evidence of literary craftsmanship in Coetzee, the kind of craftsmanship that might justify a Booker or two. In fact, I find the opposite: writing that is disengaged, […] which makes the task of specific demonstration invidious.

The article appeared in the days leading up to Coetzee's Nobel Prize triumph. It led to a backlash by commentators who questioned the judiciousness behind its publication (Kannemeyer 2012: 558). Conversely, Poyner employs a methodical approach in her appreciation of Coetzee' writing. She attempts to demonstrate the existence of a tension between the private and public, or the ethical and the political, in Coetzee's fiction and essays (2006:4), in order to underscore the ethical commitment underlying the fiction, and the parallel unwillingness for the political. Coetzee, for instance, tells Attwell in *Doubling the Point* that, "Sympathetic to the human concerns of the left, he is alienated, when the crunch comes, by its language – by all political language, in fact" (1992:394). Affirming this view is J.C. Kannemeyer, author of an authoritative biography of the writer. He points to the subject's unwillingness to participate in political causes, be they right-wing or left-wing, during Coetzee's time as a student at University of Cape Town. He writes that "Coetzee did not take part in demonstrations or other forms of resistance. While studying, he went his own way…" (Kannemeyer 2012:86). In arguing that Coetzee's artistic standing is not compromised by works such as *The Master of Petersburg*, published in 1994, when expectations were that Coetzee would intervene in the South African situation (as it coincided with the advent of the country's democracy), Kannemeyer points to a personal affair as a probable motivation for the novel. He sees a parallelism between the personal loss sketched out in the novel and Coetzee's loss of his only son Nicolas (Kannemeyer 2012:465). Of note is that Dostoevsky's stepson suffers a horrific death, just like Coetzee's son, who died in an accident. One would conclude that Coetzee's knack for privacy, and his reluctance for publicity, may well have been factors in the hostilities he inadvertently inspired. However, of note is that personal trauma can be redirected, or repurposed, into meaningful experience, through the narrative writing act. “In the imagining of new ways of survival and in the rewriting of identities, the literary writer is often a pioneer,” state Chris Van der Merwe & PumlaGobodo-Madikizela in *Narrating Our Healing* (2008:61). Their work on trauma also credits literary narratives with offering the traumatised reader guidance in the reconstitution of a shattered identity (61). It discusses personal and collective trauma by exploring the role of narrative in the context of a violent national history.

Furthermore, the fact that Coetzee appears to have remained unfazed by the negative interpretation of his work does not seem to have helped matters. An example is his statement that “a story is not a message with a covering” (1987:4), and his learned explanation of the distinction between the artistic and the real world (Poyner 2006:25-26). In response, Attwell states: “This conviction … has cost Coetzee a great deal in South Africa” and is seen “as a form of political and ethical evasion” (1992:12). As well as insinuations that his fiction is elitist (Attridge 2004:2), such views have only served to deepen the enigma surrounding J.M. Coetzee and, no doubt, to the misreading and under-appreciation of his work.

Central to such misapprehensions, however, is the failure on the part of some critics, to accept that literature is not obligated to serve instrumentalist purposes, as Coetzee himself avers in his statement that “a story is not a message with a covering”. However, in some instances, critics who have re-evaluated his work, have changed their opinions of Coetzee’s writing. One person who appears to have revised her opinions of Coetzee’s art is Gordimer. Contrary to her earlier position, taking the character of Michael K to be insufficiently representative of black South Africans. In her Preface to *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*, Gordimer writes that Michael K “was one of them, all of them” in. She contends that Coetzee’s fiction could not have come from anywhere else but South Africa and accedes to the ethical in the writing. Furthermore, she appraises the “demand on intellect, morals and mores” (1996:ix).

Against this backdrop, it would be fitting, to concur with Attridge’s characterisation of Coetzee’s narratives. In an exposition on modernism and postmodernism, Attridge avers that Coetzee’s writing is more modernist than postmodernist, citing Coetzee’s use of modernist techniques to interrogate dominant discourses, claims to knowledge and certainty (2004:4-5). Nevertheless, Attridge himself refuses to dismiss postmodernist and postcolonial aspects of the fiction. His motivation for emphasising the modernist element appears partly to be his tracing of the influences of Kafka and Beckett, known literary forebears of Coetzee's. Furthermore, Attridge articulates the cultural resistance in modernism that is evident in Coetzee craft:

> My argument, briefly, is that what often gets called (and condemned as) the self-reflexiveness of modernist writing, its foregrounding of its own linguistic, figurative, and generic operations, its willed interference with the transparency of discourse, is, in its effects if not always in its intentions, allied to a new apprehension of the claims of otherness, of that which cannot be expressed in the discourse available to us – not because of an essential ineffability but because of the constraints imposed by that discourse, often in its very productivity and proliferation. (Attridge 2004:4)

If modernism is to be viewed as a cultural mode of resistance to realism, one would conclude that Attridge's analysis of Coetzee's narrative style is correct, more so, insofar as modernism's riposte to realism's cooption in dominant cultural discourses is concerned (Eysteinsson 1987:208). It is apt, then, that Canepari-Labib critiques what she sees as "Coetzee's Denunciation of Western Metaphysics of Power" (2005:59). She argues that "in all his texts, the author sets out to investigate the role language plays in the constitution of identity … and the correlated issues of power" (Canepari-Labib 2005:61).

As posited earlier, Coetzee's undermines language that privileges the subject and erases the Other. In other words, he locates Othering in its cultural paradigm and exposes the ways by which it manifests as a natural phenomenon among those who wield power. For instance, in "Pigs, People and Pigoons", Helen Tiffin explores humans' readiness to other entities they see as different from them, implicating such practice in humans' sense of exceptionalism. In her attempt to upend such notions, she shows how misconceptions of humans as a special species can blind them to uncomfortable truths. She argues that anatomically, physiologically and functionally, humans are closer to pigs than pigs are to bees, and yet humans refuse to see themselves as animals (2007:245). This is a point on which Sune Borkfelt concurs. Borkfelt argues that: “As a consequence, being an animal becomes intrinsically negative and helps to keep those defined as such outside the moral community” (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:139). He furthermore states:

> Non-human animals are arguably placed in a constant, almost irredeemable state of alterity and are unable to speak for themselves from this Othered position, which distinguishes their otherness from that of humans. Their otherness is somehow seen as something very basic, because we continue to think of it as a natural, rather than a cultural, phenomenon. (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:137)

Borkfelt also connects Othered humans and animals, in a way that helps to reveal the way in which Coetzee’s fiction seeks to undermine humans’ views of animals as absolute *Others* (italics mine). It is significant, for instance, that he singles out a trope in Coetzee’s fiction, whereby protagonists exude a greater sympathy for animals as they “descend from positions of power and respectability” to being outcasts or victims (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:147). In *Disgrace*, for example, David Lurie works, with not, ordinary animals but strays, a state of affairs that signifies his lowering in society. “A dog-man, Petrus once called himself. Well, now he has become a dog-man: a dog undertaker, a dog psychopomp; a *harijan*” (Coetzee 1999:146; italics in original). It is apt, therefore, that Borkfelt concludes:

> Generally, one might describe otherness as a focus on difference, but conventionally on difference *within* our own species, even if the process of Othering sometimes includes *animalising* other humans (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:138)

In their contribution of the trauma element to this study, Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela also expose this fallacy, characterising it as indicative of a failure to accept and understand difference, “Our natural tendency is to feel threatened by what is different, and to form negative stereotypes of those who belong to another group – racial, cultural or religious” (2008:61). In other words, Coetzee sets out to dismantle, through writing, the cultural barriers that purport to distinguish humans from all other animals, by foregrounding alterity in instances of proximity. "Literature frequently destroys these stereotypes and challenges readers' imagination and empathy, stimulating them to discover a shared humanity in characters who are 'different'," note Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela (2008 61-62). Of significance is that in Coetzee's colonial hospitality settings, such contexts are underpinned by conflict, arising from differences steeped in societal constructs. This explains how in Levinas as in Coetzee, proximity ethics are enounced as an oppositional, ethical stance to confrontation. Levinas's ethics of an infinite responsibility for the Other can be seen to underscore sociality/proximity in Coetzee's postcolonial narratives that deconstruct historical discourses:

> I analyze the inter-human relationship as if, in proximity with the Other – beyond the image I myself make with the Other man – his face, the expressive in the Other (and the whole human body is in this sense more or less face), were what *ordains* me to serve him. I employ this extreme formulation. The face orders and ordains me. (Levinas 1985:97; italics in original)

Levinas's philosophy is also central to this study. As well as his overall proximity framework, his concept of infinite responsibility, explored in terms of the sympathetic imagination in Coetzee, is indispensable to articulating characters' need to create a distance in which recognition of difference trumps expectations of knowing the Other, or demands for the Other to be the same. The Latvian-born French philosopher is, therefore, a source of two of this study's theoretical concerns: philosophy and trauma (the others being narratology and postcolonialism).

The sympathetic imagination in Coetzee is aligned to postcolonial and decolonial imperatives in his fiction, that critiques colonialism, just as Levinas's foray into infinite responsibility ethics was inspired by the horrors of the Holocaust, an event in which he lost most of his close family members. In Coetzee, who writes from the perspective of a colonial subject, as in Levinas, proximity to the Other is an illuminating moment regarding the Other's irreducible alterity. This makes essential the appreciation of difference (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:24). As Levinas states in *Totality* *and Infinity*: “There is knowledge, in the final account, an impossibility of escaping the self; hence sociality cannot have the same structure as knowledge” (1969:60). Therefore, trauma is the lived experience the two writers share, thanks to their historical focus on Otherness.

The colonial encounter in Coetzee’s colonialism can, therefore, be said to exemplify Levinas’s traumatic encounter of the Other because in the hostilities that such encounters portend, the ready response on encountering the Other is to annihilate that Other, as suggested in Hegel. However, since there is no master without the presence of a slave, the supposed master will spare the slave to affirm his master status (Hegel 1977 113-115). In *Dusklands*, for instance, Jacobus Coetzee details an instance of a colonial traumatic encounter:

> The African highland is flat, the approach of the savage across space continuous. […] Across this annulus, I behold him approach bearing the wilderness in his heart. On the far side, he is nothing to me and I probably nothing to him. On the near side mutual fear will drive us to our little comedies of man and man, prospector and guide, benefactor and beneficiary, victim and assassin, teacher and pupil, father and child. (Coetzee 1974:80-81)

Therefore, in Levinas’s philosophy and in Coetzee’s narratives that critique subject-Other relations, there is a mutual suggestion of an ethical demand on the subject to initiate or oversee a truly intersubjective interaction. Furthermore, both writers are concerned with an encounter with the Other that does away with violence, one that has a basis in respect. It is noteworthy that in philosophy, the opposite of violence is respect (academic.oup.com). Nevertheless, Levinas’s placing an emphasis on the face, its nakedness as a mark of its destitution (1985:89) can be construed as a reminder that our vulnerability as living beings shows in the face. He prioritises access to the face, rather than the look, which he disapproves of as knowledge, perception (1985:85). His point emphasises the understanding rather than the knowledge that Coetzee also diagnoses as the anti-dote to colonial violence.

He states that “the face is not ‘seen’. It is what cannot become a content” (Levinas 1985:86). Levinas also says that the face’s *meaning* consists in saying: “thou shalt not kill” (1985:87; italics in original). It follows, then, that a concentration on the face culminates in an understanding of a sameness rooted in difference. Such an ethics is seen to be lacking in Jacobus Coetzee. In “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee”, the narrator Others the Hottentots’ alterity. He says: “They throw their sheepskins away and dress like people” (1974:57). One, therefore, does see in Coetzee’s writing, Levinas’s suggestion of taking responsibility for the Other. “To do something for the Other. To give. To be human spirit, that’s it” (Levinas 1985:97). Hence Coetzee’s texts are seen to conform to literary narratives that can potentially help victims bridge their trauma, as insisted on in trauma theory. For example, Ricœur elevates reading to beyond mere enjoyment and attempts to illustrate that a proximal relation between reader and text can facilitate the redress of trauma (Ricœur 1991:430).

Furthermore, a close reading of the text, a sustained grappling with the narrative, is seen to be an ethical exercise and reading itself an ethical good. In narratives that call the reader’s attention into an ethical relationship, thanks to the multiplicity of meanings suggested, Coetzee’s texts invite the reader into a proximity relationship; the reader plays guest to the text’s host. This is a point that Attridge attempts to highlight in *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading*. He draws attention to narratives that have the potential to Other the reader. Hence the Otherness of texts that are “saturated with cultural meanings” (Attridge: 2004:7) require responsibility from the reader (Attridge2004:xii), as Roland Barthes’s *S/Z* narrative theory, adopted for this study, affirms. In *S/Z*, Barthes stresses the essence of plural texts. Thanks to their refusal for closure and certainty, Coetzee’s narratives are a prime example of such texts. Notes Barthes:

> [t]he systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. The interpretation demanded by a specific text, in its plurality, is in no way liberal: it is not a question of conceding some meanings, of magnanimously acknowledging that each one has its share of truth; it is a question, against all-indifference, of asserting the very existence of

> plurality, which is not that of the true, the probable, or even the possible. This necessary assertion is difficult, however, for as nothing exists outside the text, there is never a whole of the text (which would by reversion form an internal order, a reconciliation of complementary parts, under the paternal eye of the representative Model): the text must simultaneously be distinguished from its interior and from its totality. (Barthes 1974:6)

Centralised in this proposition is a suggestion to emphasise the importance of responsible interpretation, a necessary ethical exercise in Coetzee's texts, that defer closure. Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela single out such narratives for the polyphony of voices that makes the amelioration of trauma possible:

> Modern novelists tend to shy away from authoritarian narrators dictating the run of events and explicating the appropriate reaction to the story – independence is granted to every character. (2008:60)

As indicated in the Nobel committee's statement, Coetzee's characters salvage some measure of hope and strength, in the aftermath of their misfortune. Consequently, in his investigation of colonial trauma, Coetzee disrupts narratives that Other humans and animals and the corollary distancing and ill treatment of them. He focuses on historical power relations embedded in language, as demonstrated in *Dusklands*, and one would add, *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

In *Dusklands*, Coetzee extrapolates from the historical record to show how proximity is an important step towards understanding, as opposed to knowledge of, the Other, by critiquing master narratives that Other native. He exposes the perspectival element in history, whereby narrativisation is shown to legitimate the subject on the one hand, and on the other, disempower the Other. Similarly, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* he deconstructs liberal discourses and the manner in which the subject projects language that Others native onto the self; Empire's cruel citizens are seen to be the barbarians that its citizens purport to fear. Increasingly, in *Disgrace* and "The Lives of Animals" in *Elizabeth Costello*, he represents non-human animals. One is, therefore, compelled to concur with Marais, who centralises a responsibility towards the Other in the fiction.

Marais quotes from the eponymous character of *Elizabeth Costello*, in his positing of Coetzee's consciousness of the Other. He writes:

> The writer is a slave, a secretary who writes under dictation. In his or her writing, s/he, it would seem, has no choice but to follow 'the invisible.' Implicit here is a contrast between the visible and the invisible, the phenomenal world of history and the domain of the other. Importantly, too, the writer's allegiance, according to Costello, is to the other rather than to history. (Marais 2009:xiii)

In his exploration of Coetzee's colonial texts, Marais critiques the myth in colonialism and analyses the proximity of host-guest encounters. Myth in this instance refers to its interpretation in Barthes as something that is not factually true but accepted as true through signification and cultural practice (De Jong 2008:163). One does discern influences of Derrida, Freud and Levinas in Marais's work.

In its rebuttal of criticism that denies Coetzee's writing an ethical stance, this study advances the argument that Coetzee's narratives propose alternatives by challenging readers to look beyond the limits of a purely rationalistic perspective, or to be in proximity with their sensibilities. In Tim Mehigan's words, Coetzee embarks on a project that is "anti-Cartesian" (2011:6). This is shown in texts that lack certainty and in a refusal for valorisation. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the fate of the protagonist Magistrate is a source of conjecture. In non-conclusive texts, that echo skepticism, Coetzee is, therefore, able to suggest the political and postcolonial in his writing while resolutely inhabiting the ethical realm. His vegetarianism (Kannemeyer 2012:154) and ethics of non-violence (Kannemeyer 2012:474), are suggested in the characters of Costello in *Elizabeth Costello* and the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, respectively, for instance. This is not to collapse the distinction between character and author, however. As the relationship between character and creator is complex, it cannot be assumed that first-person narrators speak for their authors (Dooley 2010:34). Similarly, to deny a connection between writer and character outright, would be imprudent. Of significance is the suggestion that Elizabeth Costello is sometimes Coetzee's ventriloquist. It is of significance that Anton Leist observes that "The

Magistrate is a private figure, whereas Costello is a private one" (Leist& Singer 2010:221).

Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier, in Coetzee, the ethical is central. Levinas says: "First philosophy is an ethics" (1985: 77) and that "When one observes the colour of the eyes one is not in a social relationship with the Other" (Levinas 1985: 85). This element of proximity philosophy is adumbrated in Levinas's *Totality and Infinity*, subtitled *An Essay on Exteriority*, apparently to highlight the Other's totalisation in language. In Buber, this logic is represented as 'I-Thou', intended to constitute the Other as a subject or appreciate an inter-subjective presence; and 'I-It', standing for the forestalling of such recognition. In Coetzee's fiction, such totalisation is contested in Michael K's silence, for example, because "words, it would seem, rob K of his being and substance", says Mike Marais (2001:115).

Corollary to the suggestion of an imaginative sympathy, one that seeks to detach itself from traditional rationality, is Coetzee's proposition of the suffering body, human or animal, in his texts. The Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* struggles to come to terms with not only an exotic female Other but an Othered tortured body of the barbarian girl. In *Disgrace*, a critically wounded goat, suppurating with maggots, is sent away to die because it can no longer be saved (Coetzee 1999:83), a realisation that brings tears to Bev Shaw's eyes, and possibly, the reader's.

Therefore, this dissertation takes the position that critics such as Bower, who question the relevance of the writer's narratives or are seen to traduce his literary legacy, miss the import of Coetzee's aesthetics, by failing to commit to the text ethically themselves. One would argue that, instead of interrogating Coetzee's responsibility to the historical and social imperative, the debate should instead focus on how he meets or discharges that responsibility. Nonetheless, one would be tempted to agree with Attwell, who in critiquing dissenting criticism, remarks that Coetzee has suffered for his art, to paraphrase his statement, cited earlier. One would also posit that, with the benefit of hindsight, Coetzee has been vindicated; the conferment with the Nobel Prize in Literature award being a case in point. Mehigan is one of the scholars who appear to validate such a view. He says:

> To some extent, then, the Nobel lecture provided a belated response to those who had criticised Coetzee for failing to issue overt statements in his writing condemning the oppressive and racist white minority government of the apartheid era and its policies, and for offering an allegedly bleak view of post-apartheid South Africa since that time. (Mehigan 2011:4)

Mehigan's assertion coheres with a claim from Pieter Vermeulen, who interrogates not the content of ethics in Coetzee's fiction, but the development or the turn in the ethics trajectory in Coetzee's writing, in order to show the limitations of language, pun intended. In "Being True to Fact: Coetzee's Prose of the World", Vermeulen discerns a tension in Coetzee's early works, between representation and reality (Leist & Singer 2010:271) as Coetzee himself professes in *Doubling the Point* (1992:17), and as has been demonstrated by the analysis of language that Others in *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

Dusklands, for instance, critiques language as an interest of power. In pursuant of this pattern, one could argue that in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the real barbarians may well be Empire and its agents, thanks to their cruelty towards the supposed barbarians of the storyline. One could, therefore, conclude that in both these texts, claims to knowledge and the basis for naming (the Other), are at odds with reality, or simply, turn out to be false representations, as Vermeulen argues.

In acceding to Vermeulen's observation, one does note, as a matter of course, that when the ethical demand in Coetzee's craft more notably shifts from concern with truth and philosophy, such as is evident in the first two novels of this study, to bodily suffering, as sketched out in *Disgrace* and "The Lives of Animals" (although one could also argue for body "politics" for *Waiting for the Barbarians* as well, given its torture theme), a form of writing emerges that purports to critique the impotence in language, when it comes to articulating reality, and/or encapsulating more accurately, a speaker's thought process. An example of the latter is Elizabeth Costello's frustration and self-doubt, in her attempts to persuade humans of their proximity to animals, while making the case for vegetarianism in "The Lives of Animals". Therefore, Coetzee interrogates language's role in the Othering and distancing of alterity while simultaneously challenging its capability to render phenomena truthfully. Obversely, language's authoritativeness is a question intrinsic to Coetzee's narratives, given their potential to Other the reader. Consequently, its capacity to alter perception and behaviour is the subject of analysis in the fifth chapter of this dissertation, relating to the debate of the poetic and the philosophical, alternatively, literary sensitivity versus philosophic rationalism, as it pertains to ethics in Coetzee's writing.

One would note that in the early novels, Coetzee critiques the myths used to justify colonialism, in his representation of the oppressed. For instance, the coloniser who assumes the position of master to the native's slave, as demonstrated in Hegel, disintegrates psychologically. This is a turn that proves the point that colonialism is ultimately unsustainable and, therefore, a myth.

Incidentally, there is some similarity between how Coetzee goes about representing his ethics and renowned South African artist William Kentridge his art. Kentridge says that art is not about demonstrating the instrumental good but acknowledges the political ramifications. Kentridge originally appeared on the BBC's Hardtalkprogramme on 6 March 2020, speaking to Zeinab Badawi. The episode was re-broadcast on 27 October 2022. He also denies, like Coetzee, that the Other can be known, explaining that one can only sympathise with alterity, in explaining his work's depiction of the oppressed, in the South African context. Through prescient observation, one becomes aware of what is on the margins, and absorbs it into the well of the mainstream, says Kentridge. Although this point risks emulating the Academy's assertion of the "surprising involvement of the outsider", Kentridge's ethos, inspired by the Holocaust and colonial apartheid, does resembles Coetzee's: Kentridge also has Michael K-types, for his subjects. This has to do, perhaps, with both artists' professed sense of helplessness in the face of suffering, tinged with a qualified optimism for the future. They both draw on South Africa's complicated history to explain its contemporary status.

However, in their shared medium of art, the writer's role in society sometimes takes on a controversial turn. In terms of debates generated by Coetzee's works, the opprobrium levelled at *Disgrace* has no equals. Although the political and ethical are difficult to separate in any analysis of this novel, it will be explored mainly from the standpoint of proximity in order to show characters' development in the face of alterity. Of significance is that the ANC government labelled the novel a racist text that denigrated black people and submitted a complaint to the Human Rights Commission's Hearing on Racism in the Media on 5 April 2000 (Kannemeyer 2012:529). The episode of the novel that appeared to have angered the leadership in Thabo Mbeki's government is the rape of Lucy by three black men. As Rosemary Jolly observes, the uneasy reception of *Disgrace* was partly "a response to our wariness of the proximity in which Coetzee places humans and other animals in the novel" (Poyner 2006:150). Nonetheless, the fallout from *Disgrace* is significant in that it is a source of conjecture whether it had a bearing on the private Coetzee's eventual relocation to Australia in 2002, as scholars such as Poyner like to believe (Poyner 2006:3).

In pursuant of Jolly's declamation, it would be worthwhile to delineate how proximity will be applied in this study. Due to its postulation of an encounter with the Other that is based on the ethical, the proximity philosophy of Levinas and Buber will be the mainstay of this dissertation. It can be explained as a situation or situations involving a close encounter between self and Other. In its assumption of an asymmetrical relationship whereby a one-on-one encounter with the Other places a premium on the need for responsibility for that Other, proximity as a concept has found greater usefulness in client-service provider settings than mainstream philosophical discourse today. Of note is that it carries spatial connotations, as reflected in the ethical motives in Levinas' face-to-face encounter. Most notably, it suggests a form of responsibility deemed to be ethical in that it desists from any knowledge claims of that Other, and one would assume, pity. Levinas (1906-1995), its most famous proponent, says:

> [t]he proximity of the Other is presented as the fact that the Other is not simply close to me in space, or close like a parent, but he approaches me essentially insofar as I feel myself – insofar as I am – responsible for him. (Levinas 1985:96)

Pioneered by the Austrian-Israeli Martin Buber (1878-1965), its other famous philosopher is the Dane Knud Løgstrup (1905-1981). Although bearing a resemblance to Levinas's, Buber's ethics do differ with those of Levinas, in some respects. Buber uses

"I-Thou" to depict states of humaneness as an ethical endpoint in discharging responsibility towards the Other, whereas Levinas's version of ethical duty involves a hospitality where the self takes responsibility for the Other unconditionally, as will be demonstrated in the course of this dissertation. For its part, Coetzee's writing is seen to problematise proximity, in colonial settings where the ethics of encounter with the Other, is called into question. Therefore, in *Dusklands*, Coetzee undermines the historical record in an attempt to show that proximity is an important step towards understanding, as opposed to knowledge of, the Other.

In the first part of that novel, "The Vietnam Project", a functionary of the United States State Department others the Vietnamese natives by refusing them possession of the *cogito*, alleging that they are inferior psychologically and culturally (Coetzee 1974:20), but passes up the chance to meet with them up close. The character of Eugene Dawn is loosely based on a real-life civil servant working for the United States State Department during the 1970s, Herman Kann (Leist& Singer 2010:25-26).

Dawn's conceptualisation of the Other contrasts that of former civil servant and *Pentagon Papers* whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, for instance. The latter has elaborated on the significance of a physical colonial encounter as a means to understanding Otherness. He admits to revising his views of the United States State Department's war against communism after visiting Vietnam in 1961. In an interview with Stephen Sackur on BBC Hardtalkprogramme (5 December 2022), Ellsberg stated that following his visit to Vietnam, he realised that "this is not a place to plant an imperial flag". One could paraphrase this as Ellsberg's way of insisting that the Other cannot be the same. In this respect for difference, lies the hope for the idea of the sympathetic imagination, one that recognises the Other without attempting to totalise that Other. As this dissertation will attempt to motivate, this is suggested as the way out of a politics based on confrontation, a politics that also inheres in the varying colonial hospitality contexts of Coetzee's fiction.

The consequences of Dawn's actions, insofar as it concerns his decision to distance the Other – in language and also, physically – are the subject of discussion, of the next chapter. This is more so, in view of the fact that concomitant of Coetzee's moral philosophy, is the presentation of alternatives, for his characters to make a choice or choices, as highlighted in *J.M. Coetzee and Ethics*, by Anton Leist and Peter Singer. Of interest is an argument put forward by contributors, that in order to live more fulfilling lives as humans, we need to look beyond rationality to also harness our sensitivities. This is despite the fact that there is no consensus as to how sympathy, at it appears in proximity philosophy, should be channelled. Levinas's ethics of responsibility for the Other rejects the view that the Other owes a duty of reciprocity (Levinas 1985:98). Contra Levinas, Buber's philosophy of dialogue stipulates reciprocity as a condition for the encounter with an Other subjectivity. He states "That we are compelled to respond, with words or actions, when approached (met) by the Other, is what creates our responsibility to the Other. It is only through dialogue that I and You can relate and fully meet" (Buber 1958b). In demanding that the Other should reciprocate in order for the self to be able to discharge responsibility towards him or her, Buber's formulation, therefore, holds real practical value when it comes to evaluating contexts of proximity to Otherness in Coetzee. Contra Buber, Levinas takes dialogue to be optional:

> But the saying is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it. The saying is a way of greeting the Other, but to greet the Other is already to answer for him. It is difficult to be silent in someone's presence. (Levinas 1985:88)

Of note here is that Levinas distinguishes between the ethical representation (saying) and the containment of alterity in knowledge structures (said). However, his insistence that the Other's reciprocity is not required appears to undo the notion of a face-to-face encounter it centralises, an eventuality that Buber's theory accommodates, by positing that dialogue can move from I-Thou (mutual communication) to an I-It (states of uncooperativeness) to I-Thou again.

Allied to this is the influence of scholars such as Derrida and Irizarry, whose hospitality theorisation valorises silence as a condition for encountering the Other ethically. In their view, silence negates the violence in language, that historically has silenced, obliterated or disempowered the Other. For Derrida, the impropriety in language lies at the centre of conditional hospitality, which attempts to capture the Other in the terms of the selfsame. To demand that the guest communicate in a foreign language is "the first violence to which foreigners are subjected" (2005:68), he observes, in "The Principle of Hospitality". Luce Irigaray notes that silence is "an indication of our ability to relinquish a meaning organised only by our signs and rules" (2011:113). Proximity ethics, therefore, lays down a moral framework within which to encounter the Other ethically. In deconstructing historiography, one could argue, Coetzee makes an attempt to do the same. Jacobus Coetzee's descriptions of the natives in *Dusklands* are a case in point:

> The one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They become Christians too, but their Christianity is an empty word. They know that being baptized is a way of protecting yourself, they are not stupid, they know it wins sympathy when they accuse you of mistreating a Christian. (Coetzee 1974:57)

One of the protagonists of *Dusklands* is seen to be distancing the Other in this statement and not trying to establish a relationship of proximity from which the recognition of the Other unmediated by knowledge, may arise. Of concern to some scholars, however, is the apparent incompatibility of Levinas's face-to-face encounter, rooted in unconditional hospitality, with modernity. Besides, it also appears unsuited to contexts of hierarchies. Malcolm Westmoreland criticises the kind of hospitality that does not ask of the guest his or her identity, and "gives up security, authority and property and promises benevolence" (2008:7). "In welcoming the guest, the host is interrupted" (6), he says, in "Interruptions: Derrida and Hospitality". Suffice it to say it cannot always be taken literally. One could argue for its symbolic, gesture as its true significance, in that, through the face, the asymmetrical relationship is established.

> The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. (Levinas: 1985:86)

Another element in proximity thinking is that of Løgstrup. He inserts the idea of trust into Buber's "I-Thou". Buber concedes that, in the course of dialogue, the "I-Thou" (subject), shifts to "I-It" (object) and back to "I-Thou" (subject) again. "I-Thou is unsustainable as a permanent condition. We inevitably step back, look away, or end our dialogue" (Buber 1958b). Situations of mutual misunderstanding, owing to cultural difference, for instance, are not uncommon in the colonial encounter. One would agree with Marais that in his portrayal of such misapprehensions, Coetzee seeks to "interrupt that history" (2009:xiv) by making "the text a home for the other" (xv). For instance, citing Kant's categorical imperative of the individual, Buber insists that the encounter with the Other should not be seen as a means to an end but as an end in itself. The Other cannot be objectified. In his claim, he argues that "to invest one's self in the Other means to lose a measure of control over the ensuing dialogue and its direction" (Buber 1958b). This is a claim that finds similarity in Løgstrup's conceptualisation of trust. He says that the other person's will cannot be subverted for his or her own interests (Løgstrup in Jodalen 1997:87). David Lurie's concern for his daughter Lucy's safety in *Disgrace*, which borders on the overbearing, can be understood in these terms.

However, in his insistence that the self must avail oneself to the Other, and in noting that "the tie with the other is knotted only as responsibility" and that "knowledge must not determine proximity" (1985:97) Levinas posits an ethical conundrum. Of immediate concern is the host's relinquishing of primacy to the guest. To this extent, Marais's scholarship is essential to elucidating the struggle for primacy in the host-guest settings of Coetzee's narratives. His idea of hospitality in Coetzee attempts to show that the host-guest relationship is complex and interchangeable. This is shown in his characterisation of the meeting in *Dusklands* between Jacobus Coetzee and the Nama people. Marais argues that the fact that the Nama come to him on Coetzee's arrival on their land, shows the interchangeability of the relationship and Jacobus Coetzee is also a host. (2009:9). Using this observation as a starting point, this study argues that much as Jacobus Coetzee was both guest and host in the land of the Namaqua, the Dutch East India Company personnel who settled on a part of the Cape colony were also both guests and hosts, because the natives who encountered them at their outpost would be on their territory, This assessment is noteworthy in that one can go on to argue that Coetzee appears to hint at unconditional hospitality. He is seen to criticise a form of hospitality that sets up demarcations or boundaries or that refuses “to give up one’s home”:

> [t]he first landing-party misunderstood its orders, or chose to misunderstand them. Its [the Dutch East India Company] orders were to dig a garden and grow spinach and Onions for the East India fleet. Two acres, three acres, five acres at most: that was all that was needed. It was never intended that they should steal the best part of Africa. (*Youth* 2002:121)

In Coetzee’s narratives, therefore, there is a discernible attempt to prescribe ethics rather than the law as a more practical solution to conflict in contexts of decolonisation and postcolonialism. An example is Lucy’s actions in *Disgrace*. She elects not to report her attackers following her rape, by opting to deal with her ordeal personally. This response will be explored in terms of the sympathetic imagination beginning in Chapter 3. Conversely, in critiquing unconditional hospitality, Marais questions its practicability and points out that community owes its existence to the exclusionary practices by which it is constituted (Marais 2009:2). For one, in Coetzee’s colonial hospitality, communities describe themselves by what they are not, negatively, as Marais observes (2009:1). The Dutch community at the Cape in *Dusklands* and the townspeople at the outpost of Empire in *Waiting for the Barbarians* are but two examples. Hence Marais observes that “Empire is only ever in the process of coming into being” (2009:14) because the distancing tendencies that lead to its founding ultimately presage its downfall, as seen in *Waiting for the Barbarians.*

One of the ways by which Coetzee appears to counter the distancing, and, therefore, Othering of the marginalised in his narratives is through a refusal to inhabit the Other, thereby making his texts “a home for the other” as Marais avers. In *Life & Times of Michael K*, he uses indirect discourse, a trope that critic Benita Parry disapproves of for appearing to distance rather than represent alterity ethically, in her criticism of the repeated use of “he thought”, “he found” and “he said” as a “speaking for” (Attridge 2004:50). Consequently, one feels inclined to side with Attridge on this point: that free indirect discourse is intended to achieve the opposite. The explanation that the author is reluctant or unwilling to speak for Michael K is plausible. As Marais has highlighted repeatedly, such distancing is made out of respect for the alterity of the Other, to contest claims of knowledge of that Other (2009:35).

In the fiction, the harmful consequence of attempting to capture the Other in the selfsame are well-documented; in *Dusklands*, Eugene Dawn falls victim to a mental breakdown while Jacobus Coetzee goes berserk and murders his ex-servants. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate is tortured and Othered, as Empire's authority unravels chaotically. As Daniel Ellsberg tells Stephen Sackur regarding colonial adventurism: "If you cannot tolerate lying you can't be in government for a week. I had been in government for ten years". Ellsburg's inference of a sympathetic imagination of the Other is pertinent, in view of the contest of interpretations as to how a subject can achieve it. In "The Limits of the Sympathetic Imagination", Sam Durrant suggests that it is the *failure* (italics mine) of the sympathetic imagination that leads characters to the realisation that alterity is irreducible and, therefore, leads them to accept Otherness:

> "[...] Coetzee's fiction unequivocally rehearses the failure of Costello's sympathetic imagination, the failure of the literary endeavor itself. And yet…this failure is the precondition for a new kind of ethical and literary relation, a relation grounded precisely in the acknowledgment of one's ignorance of the other, on the recognition of the other's fundamental alterity. It is as if attentiveness to the difference of the other becomes possible only in the wake of the failure of the project of the sympathetic imagination, the failure to think one's way into the reality of other lives. (Poyner 2006:120)

Cogent as Durrant's explanation may sound, a counter formulation of the concept by Michael Bell gives one pause for thought. Bell's postulation is that some form of *experiential* knowledge of the Other (italics mine) is necessary if the sympathetic imagination is to manifest in the subject. For instance, in "What Is It Like to be a Nonracist?", Bell defends Thomas Nagel against accusations by Elizabeth Costello that he is anthropomorphic, arguing that his "antianthropomorphic skepticism gives an absolute protection to the otherness of the non-human creature" (Poyner 2006:177). Bell also argues that the poems of D.H. Lawrence, rather than those of Ted Hughes, contain an anthropomorphism that is consciously 'under erasure', as per Derrida, and that Hughes's poems "are more open to the charge of anthropomorphism", owing to their melodramatic quality (178). He faults Costello for a "misreading" of cited authors (181) and asserts:

> The being of these creatures is unknowable and the poems typically show the concentrated exercise of sympathetic imagination that is required to confront experientially, rather than to recognise theoretically, their radical otherness. […] what is ultimately at stake for him [Lawrence] is an extension of human being rather than a claim to full internal knowledge (Poyner 2006:177-178)

In evaluating these opposing viewpoints, one does, however, note their mutual assertion: they both purport to disavow anthropomorphism, an indication, perhaps, of the need for an ethical detachment in the recognition of alterity. It would be apt, then, to adopt Bell's formulation, as it more convincingly foregrounds the sensitivity that more accurately reflects the Levinasian sympathy in Coetzee's narratives. Its combination of a principled "not knowing" and "knowing" is seen to be sound, in its positing the extension of the human, as opposed to the inhabiting of the Other, as the requirement for the manifestation of the sympathetic imagination. In acquiescing, this dissertation cites this conceptualisation as the origins of an ethics of responsibility for the Other, one that respects that Other's radical alterity. State Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen:

> Derrida's ethics of hospitality incorporates this headache: it must persistently reassure itself that the other is invariably absolute in order to ensure that the ethics of hospitality never risks being annulled and the stranger never risks becoming too familiar. (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:30)

In his novels, characters' refusal to reduce the Other to the same corresponds to Coetzee's withholding of certainty and closure in his texts. Consequently, the study finds it apt to explain Coetzee's silence concerning a refusal to make authoritative statements about or provide interpretations of his fiction. This is a principled (namely, ethical) position, that is, the refusal to act as the Author or authority on his own works, as shown in his texts.

The character of Elizabeth Costello is a case in point. She seems to be a convenient outlet for the author's views. However, Coetzee's refusal to act as the author of his works also is a refusal to subordinate his writing to a political cause, that is, to write propaganda literature. Coetzee has spoken of "the contest of interpretations…the political versus the ethical [is] played out again and again in my novels", in *Doubling the Point* (1992:338). This historical fact must have eluded most of the adversarial commentary on J.M. Coetzee's fiction during the 1980s, when calls for the writer of conscience to speak up were at their most strident. "Perhaps history has learned a lesson", David Lurie muses in *Disgrace* (Coetzee 1999:62), in a reflection that ironically, appears to vindicate Coetzee.

A brief background of Coetzee may be in order for a better understanding of his fiction. Born in Cape Town in 1940, he witnessed the historical changes of the following years with a sense of injustice. Of the events that would shape his ethics, the coming into power in 1948 of the National Party was one. Notorious for introducing the segregationist policy of apartheid, the party's rise and rule were unwelcome developments in Coetzee's own household, as outlined in his memoir *Boyhood*. In the fictionalised memoir, in which Coetzee refers to himself in the third person, one finds a connection between his visits to the family farm Voëlfontein and a developing sense or awareness to animals' alterity and a parallel questioning of their treatment at the hands of humans (Coetzee 1997:98).

However, proximity in Coetzee does not end with the ethics of the hospitality of colonialism. It is also associated with the idea of an ethical encounter with the text, as outlined in Attridge. Attridge argues for the literariness of the event of reading. Hence in his exposition of the ethics of reading Coetzee, Attridge speaks of "a mode of writing that allows the attentive reader to live through the pressures and possibilities, and also the limits, of political engagement" (2004:6). This is a statement that justifies Attridge's stance, one that appreciates the complexity and richness of Coetzee's texts (Attridge 2004:7).

Equally of the essence is the juxtaposition of the body with suffering, its placement in proximity to an array of contexts. The suffering body as indubitable reality, is a motif Coetzee deploys in multiple settings: the body as text, as witness or as truth. The reader cannot but acknowledge the embodiment of suffering that is the body. States Coetzee in *Doubling the Point*: "its [the body] power is undeniable" (1992:248).

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate bellows under the strain of torture: "the noise comes out of a body that knows itself damaged perhaps beyond repair and roars its fright" (Coetzee 1980:132-133). Whereas in *Totality and Infinity*, subtitled *An Essay on Exteriority*, Levinas attempts to highlight and critique the Other's totalisation in language, in Coetzee's fiction, such totalisation is contested in Michael K's silence, for example, because "words, it would seem, rob K of his being and substance", according to Mike Marais (2001:115). In both these instances, language is seen to be inadequate to expressing the suffering body's trauma:

> In the space between silence and the roar is language, the medium of communication that cannot be trusted as it problematizes access to the narrative of suffering whose text is the body. (Wright 2006:94).

Wright's assessment conforms to a claim in trauma theory that the experience of trauma has no equivalence in coherent language, which is seen as incapable of capturing the enormity of the body's pain (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:10). Yet to heal from trauma, it is imperative that victims find ways to express their ordeal. Paul Ricœur attempts to convey the role that narratives can play in such situations. The account of the traumatic event "wells up from the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the reader" states Ricœur (1991:430). By configuring the text, the reader hopefully succeeds in reconfiguring his or her life, that is, re-assimilating their life with the assistance of the text (Ricœur 1991:430). This is because, as a phenomenon, trauma defamiliarises the self into an Other, and is itself, an Othering experience.

It is in this context that the trauma of encounter in Coetzee's fictions can be deconstructed. "In the renewal of cultural discourses and the exploration of the possibilities of language to contain new experience, literary writers have a vital role to play" state Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela (2008:58). One could argue that Coetzee is one such writer. His deconstructive narratives parody, undermine, subvert, or manipulate historical discourses, as the case may be.

Chapter 2.*Dusklands*: Violence, narrative and colonialism

‘What is important is the philosophy of history. Flaubert’ *Dusklands* (1974:53)

Introduction

Dusklands introduces Coetzee’s career-long concern with the relationship between history and power. In his first novel, Coetzee critiques the historical record by questioning the power structures inherent in language. Although the constitutive novellas, “The Vietnam Project” and “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee” may appear to be in a disjunctive relationship, one does note a pairing strategy, one that juxtaposes distant epochs in history. Coetzee’s intent is to interrogate colonial imperialism, as this is the unifying theme connecting the two texts. One could say he exposes violence as a perennial phenomenon of the colonial experience.

In motivating for proximity as a necessary condition for engaging with the Other, this chapter attempts to trace character development in Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee, by positing the traumatic encounter in colonialism as a vehicle for ethical enlightenment. It evaluates these protagonists in terms of Marais’s model of colonial hospitality while employing proximity theory to trace their prospects of ethical enlightenment.

Using Levinas’s philosophy of infinite responsibility for the Other as the framework from within which to assess Coetzee’s idea of the sympathetic imagination, and Buber’s concept of dialogue as ethics (Levinas has admitted it was Buber who “pushed me to engage in a phenomenology of sociality” [Zahavi 2018:435]), this chapter attempts to trace Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee’s ethical “journey”. This is done bearing in mind that Buber proposes three spheres in which the “world of relation”, his euphemism for ethics, arise: human with nature, human-to-human and between human and intelligible forms (Buber 1923:5). Of significance is that Buber recognises animal alterity in a way that Levinas’s ethics do not.

Exclusionary colonial practices (Marais 2009:3) are, as a consequence, opposed to Buber's and Levinas's, as well as Derrida's, and also, Coetzee's own conceptualisation of the ideal – unconditional hospitality. Coetzee, in line with the thinking of proximity philosophers, appears to suggest this ethic as a way out of colonial conflict. As argued in Marais, to engage the Other ethically, is to do so pre-reflectively (Marais 2009:33).

In discussing narrative, violence and colonialism in *Dusklands*, this chapter analyses Coetzee's subversive narratives to find the means by which he attempts to speak for the silenced Other, without capturing that Other in knowledge. Of significance is that in his undermining of official records and historical discourses, Coetzee uses parody in order to expose the subjective interests that underlie narrativity.

The conundrum of how best to assess a two-part novel with interlacing themes is complicated by the existence of apparently incongruous documents that coalesce around the second story. One would be inclined to accept Teresa Dovey's advice to read *Dusklands* as alluding to Oswald Spengler's *Der Untergang das Abenlandes* (translated as "the Decline of the West") because the novel reveals a concern with history as repetition. This makes it possible to read the first story through the second and vice versa. Of note is that Spengler argues that history should be seen as cyclical rather than linear. To the extent that Spengler emphasises analogies in his cyclical interpretation of history, *Dusklands* can be interpreted as allegorical. Unlike Dovey, Peter Kohler appears to miss the point that the novel is a writerly text that requires the reader to decipher the strategies Coetzee employs to undermine master narratives. He accuses Coetzee of failing to escape colonial history and its western ontology and alsocriticises him for being implicated in the very economy he is attempting to critique (Kohler 1987:32). "Starting with *Dusklands*, Kohler undertakes an historiography of South African literature. However, *Dusklands* itself may be read as a critique of the historiographer project," states Dovey (1987:16), in response. This study sides with Dovey because she approaches the novel from its deconstructive imperative.

As a result, this dissertation argues that the existence in proximity of a pair of apparently unrelated stories makes possible a dialogical inquiry and relationship. That way, the reader is able to see the ways in which master discourses construct 'reality'.

This also makes *Dusklands* a “writerly text”, as stated in Barthes (1974:4). Part of the explanation is that each protagonist is set in his respective historical moment and there is no benefit of hindsight or retrospective narration from outside history. Owing to the suggested dialogue between the texts, “The Vietnam Project” can be read as a latter-day imperial account or the repetition of the imperial conquest of southern Africa narrated in “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee”, that took place some two hundred plus years earlier.

This relationship will also be shown to be disruptive. It would be justifiable to claim that *Dusklands* is a subversion of the manner in which master narratives or dominant discourses authenticate themselves by a re-telling of history that validates normative discursive practices. Dovey is, therefore, correct to assert that “*Dusklands* itself does make certain silences speak, amongst them the silence of historiographers concerning the motivation for their own entry into a particular discursive arena” (1987:20). An example of one such historiographer is S.J. Coetzee, the author of the Afterword of “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee”. His reason for participating in the history of Jacobus Coetzee appears to be to connive with the same discursive forces Coetzee is intent on undermining. This is as his document purports to deny the violence in colonialism that Coetzee places in historical context. S.J. Coetzee says: “The present work ventures to present a more complete and therefore more just view of Jacobus Coetzee” (Coetzee 1974:108).

One could interpret this as an attempt to cover for reported wrongs that S.J. Coetzee does not find fit to reference. Therefore, in concurring that history is presented as a repetition, of both the modes of telling it, and of its repetitiveness, the juxtaposition of the two novellas comes across as a conscious design to underscore the epistemic violence and the myth of colonialism on the one hand and the physical violence they connive to manufacture on the other. “The myths of a tribe are the fictions it coins to maintain its powers”, says Eugene Dawn in “The Vietnam Project” (Coetzee 1974:24). One could argue that his pronouncement gives one an idea of Coetzee’s undertaking and of the task that he sets the reader in *Dusklands* to decipher untruths. Of note is that Coetzee implicates language in his colonial texts.

Language as epistemic violence characterises the pronouncements of both Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee. Their subject status is reinforced by expressions of control and power. Dawn boasts that "Had I lived two hundred years ago I would have had a continent to explore, to map, to open to colonization" (Coetzee 1974: 31-32). His antecedent more directly contains the Other in language: "But I know Hottentots" (Coetzee 1974:62). Twinning the two texts thus enables Coetzee metafictional playfulness; the arrangement encourages one to cross-reference for mutual themes. One such theme is complicity. Of note is that complicity is a recurrent theme of both Coetzee's fiction and criticism. It is also ironic that the quest for domination and attempts to distance the native are undermined by a simultaneous desire to seek the proximity of the Other, as will be demonstrated in citations of the reflections of both Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee.

In *Dusklands*, complicity is seen in attempts to justify subjective narratives that legitimise colonisation; S.J. Coetzee's text is one example of such narratives. Also, Coetzee's collection of essays, *White Writing*, attempts to expose the violence in language. He examines the "Discourse of the Cape" (1988:15) and interrogates seventeenth century claims of "Hottentot" idleness by travellers to the area, in a chapter entitled "Idleness in South Africa".

Hence in developing the theme of complicity, Coetzee writes into the first account a character called Coetzee. In the second story he evokes a distant colonialist ancestor also called Coetzee, the narrator of "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee". The fact that there are no less than four Coetzees in the novel is indicative of a more complex approach to deconstruction, than any straightforward narrating would allow. It would, therefore, be apt to concur with David James in this regard. He states that "each of its [*Dusklands*] two sections employs a first-person register that disturbingly blends cruelty and confession" (2011:41). Choice of narration is, therefore, Coetzee's method of exposing the justifications for colonial violence written into subjective colonial discourses.

His answer to colonial violence is found in his suggestion of the sympathetic reflection in Levinas: "I analyze the inter-human relationship as if, in proximity with the Other…his face, the expressive in the Other…were what *ordains* me to serve him"

(Levinas 1985:97; italics in original). This is based on the assumption that every subject is complicit in the colonial ills of history.

Of relevance is that in *Dusklands*, Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee both see their crimes against the Other, that is, the indigenous people of South Africa or their counterparts in Vietnam, as duty towards their communities. Dawn quotes Freud's *Totem and Taboo*. He says: "We are the father putting down the rebellion of the band of brothers" (Coetzee 1974:24). For Jacobus Coetzee, the killing of his ex-servants and the destruction of the livelihoods of the Great Namaquas are acts carried out "for my people, who exist" (Coetzee 1974:106). Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela are, therefore, correct in their suggestion that literature has the potential to heal both subject and Object through identification. This possibility is underscored in the intimation that the literary aesthetic can defer an ethics that leans towards violence:

> Marginalised people are often the focus of the writer's attention. […] those who are silenced by society are heard in literature, providing more privileged readers with an opportunity to expand their consciousness and deepen their sympathy. (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:61)

Their statement places characters who may resemble Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in line for probable rehabilitation through narratives. However, as regards the two protagonists' opinions of themselves, Attwell's implication of the displaced subject appears appropriate. Neither Dawn nor Jacobus Coetzee, after all, has the standing to be an envoy of his community. Dawn is a low-level functionary in the United States State Department. However, he over-exerts himself in a way that is incommensurate with his position. Martin Woessner cites what he sees as his "overdeveloped sense of duty" (Leist& Singer 2010:232). The same attributes are found in Jacobus Coetzee. He describes himself as "a tool in the hands of history" (Coetzee 1974:106), but soon realises that he may be unsuited to the task of being a martyr: "Will I suffer? I too am frightened of death" (Coetzee 1974:106).

These and other reflections by the protagonists underscore the problem of lack of self-knowledge that is seen to be the root of colonial violence. Coetzee, therefore, seeks to contest this kind of rationality and the Cartesian certainty associated with it, by an ethics not based on knowledge of the Other, but on sympathy and uncertainty. By extension, and as Marais shows in *Secretary of the Invisible: The Idea of Hospitality in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee*, colonial society by its very nature foregrounds knowledge of the Other, rather than ethics, in order to forestall its inevitable demise. Marais observes:

> The problem is, of course, that the strategy of affirmation in the communities represented is profoundly aporetic: it consists in naming, and therefore presenting in a recognizable form, the stranger who is, precisely, unknowable. (Marais 2009:8)

It follows that because colonial society is self-constitutive, all those who are its subjects are guilty, as Levinas shows with his proposition of collective guilt ("We are all responsible for all" [1985:101]).

In the real-life histories that form the background to *Dusklands*, Coetzee appears as a subject in a certain moment in time. He is a postgraduate student in the United States at the height of the American war in Vietnam. He also discovers the histories of his country's indigenous peoples (Gallagher 1991:51), an interest, one would surmise, that must have been piqued by the discovery of the involvement of an ancestor who was a pioneer colonialist in the conquest of southern Africa.

In *J.M. Coetzee and the Power of Narrative*, Gillian Dooley references an interview in which Coetzee accuses the "whites of South Africa" (2010:36) of participating in a history of colonial oppression. ("*We are all guilty of all and for all men before all, and I more than the others*" [Levinas 1985:98]).

Coetzee's deconstruction of self-interested subject narratives is, therefore, rooted in a self-consciousness of the history of colonialism and the violence that characterises it. In his deconstruction of discourses that endorse colonial hegemony, Coetzee uses parody to expose their bias. Collingwood-Whittick is, therefore, correct to state that:

> The main technique that Coetzee enlists in his project of demystification is to reveal, by means of conflicting evidence embedded within the narrative

> structure and the narrator's point of view, the flagrant contradiction that exists between what is chronicled, alleged or transmitted through the annals of South African history and the reality concealed behind the façade of that hectoring discourse. (Collingwood-Whittick 1996:75)

Coetzee interrogates Cartesian rationalism for the apparent un-reason in colonialism. In the traumatic encounters in his texts, subject irrationality is seen as a precursor to colonial hostility. As outlined in Marais, the subject's sense of identity is dependent on the validation of his self status by the Other. This is a claim that Attwell reinforces. He states that "the ontological indeterminacy of the colonial ego is the result of its historical indeterminacy" (1990:1). Hence Pippin's suggestion of a will to power as a motif of *Dusklands*:

> The suggestion of a voracious, devouring predatory subject, flattening any question about meaning and value into the questions of human survival, comfort, and the power to effect one's will echoes with Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialect of Enlightenment* and its charge that the Enlightenment attempt to reject myth has turned into its own unreflective myth of absolute self-sufficient power and the total negation of nature, with Marcuse's analysis in *One-Dimensional Man*, and, of course, with Heidegger's attempt to show that the late-modern reliance on technology does not just create technical problems and is not the mere application of a tool but has fundamentally altered our sense of ourselves, our sense of Being itself, so that we have come to live comfortably with a thoughtlessness and forgetfulness so complete it my become final and unredeemable. (Leist& Singer 2010:27)

Dusklands, therefore, deconstructs the myth of the Other as animal or savage, among others, which speaks to the violence in language that Derrida faults for animating conditional hospitality.

Allan Gardiner sees justification to structure the myth of colonialism in its temporal finitude. He observes that the forces "which impose the beginning of the imperial project on each new ‘unconquered’ place simultaneously invoke those that will bring about its demise” (1987:174). Decolonisation can thus be understood as a reversal of colonial myths and violence, as appears to be Coetzee’s project.

“The Vietnam Project”

Eugene Dawn structures America’s imperial adventure in Vietnam as a benevolent intervention of might over a recalcitrant and culturally inferior adversary. In this novella, complicity is personified in the paternalistic attitudes and nihilistic reflections of Dawn.

Ideally, his role in the conflict should not extend beyond his position as mythographer in the United States State Department. To this effect, he is writing “The Vietnam Report” that gives the novella its name. Attwell sees Dawn’s title “New Life Project” as part of an attempt to re-establish “a crumbling edifice” (Attwell 92:47). Towards the end of his narration, however, Dawn effectively dismisses his myth specialism and calls for total warfare against the Vietnamese.

Dawn has a misplaced sense of self that underscores a crisis of identity. He says: “My body betrays me” (Coetzee 1974:7). This means that were it not for the limits the body imposes on one by making it impossible to work longer than is possible, Dawn could just go on and on. His overwork ethic frustrates any attempts at establishing healthy social relationships. He is not enamoured of his boss, whose name is Coetzee. As per Marais, as the content creator of the New Life Project (Coetzee 1974:1), Dawn assumes primacy, and is, therefore, his boss Coetzee’s host. That he does not appreciate his superior’s benign patronage and self-distances from a meaningful engagement with Coetzee, makes him a hostile host. Despite his assertion that “Disobedience does not come easily to me”, he dismisses his boss’s polite recommendations as “insults” (Coetzee 1974:5). Similarly, it would appear he takes his marriage as nothing more than a cohabitation arrangement that is not deserving of the proximity expected of a marital union. It is an attitude that contradicts and makes insincere, his expressed wish to be closer to his wife. He insinuates that “I am plainly addicted to my marriage, and addiction is a surer bond than love” (Coetzee 1974:11). Thanks to his deferring an ethical embrace, he remains stalled in an ‘I-It’ space. Derrida contends that there can be “no ethics without the presence *of the other*” (1976 139-140; italics in original). His displacement is evident in his attempt to go beyond his remit by attempting to influence the policy of the war itself, despite his minion status.

Aside from his over-exertion is the matter of his cruelty, which Woessner attributes to an over-developed rationalism. “But if his story, like Eichmann’s, teaches anything, it is that reason alone is not enough. Hyperrationality is irrationality” (2010:232). His articulation of psychological warfare is a case in point. He encourages random killings, despite the guilt or innocence of the victims, as an effective strategy to subdue the insurgency in Vietnam: This is seen in his report statement: “‘I am punished therefore I am guilty’ He who utters these words is vanquished” (Coetzee 1974:24). The suggestion of a ruthless father intent on punishing rebellious sons is his reworking of the Freudian paradigm in the service of America’s war.

Laura Wright explains this reformulation of conquest in terms of the symbolic feminisation of territory in colonialism and the process of colonisation as its phallic appropriation (Wright 2006:40). This sees Vietnamese territory instrumentally constructed as “mother”. It is not surprising that Eugene Dawn contemplates the decimation of Vietnamese agriculture as a means of attaining victory. He thinks of maximising the use of Agent Orange, the herbicide and defoliant developed by Monsato and other corporations, to destroy Vietnamese agriculture, forests and jungles. Effectively, he prescribes rape, although the signal to mount an attack on the land itself is not lost, as he speaks of “this winged dream of assault upon the mothering earth herself” (Coetzee 1974:28).

It becomes clear that Dawn interacts with the world aggressively; his attitude lacks ethical interaction, according to Buber, who says: “The primary word I-Thou can only be said with the whole being” and that “The primary word I-It can never be said with the whole being” (1923:2). Of essence is that Buber states that man “takes his stand in relation” (1923:4). This is an encouragement of the proximity that Buber prescribes. An educated bureaucrat, Dawn is aware and capable of such ethical reflection. He shows an awareness and incipient desire to humanise the Other, which, however, is undercut by his outsize ego, whose ultimate aim is to conquer and dominate. For instance, although he sometimes contemplates relations of reciprocity with the Vietnamese – “Why would they not accept us?" (Coetzee 1974:17) – they are tied to a conflicting impulse to annihilate and Other them through violence: 'We scared the shit out of them. They didn't know who was next' (Coetzee 1974:23). His occasional insights fail as they are finally drowned out in a self-absorbed outlook. This shows in his assertion: "When I joined the Project I was offered a familiarization tour of Vietnam. I refused, and was permitted to refuse" (Coetzee 1974:14). He also states that "For a year now the Vietnam Project has been the center of my existence" (Coetzee 1974:2). Dawn, therefore, cannot develop ethically, as he deprives himself of the face-to-face encounter and the proximity in Buber that respects the subjectivity of the Other in dialogue, and alsoprioritises "presence". His preference to deal with the Other of the imagination instead of reality, is a sign of his perversion. His fixation with the Vietnam photographs he carries around in his briefcase is a case in point:

> My third picture is a still from the tiger cages on Hon Tre Island…Watching this film I applaud myself for having kept away from the physical Vietnam: the insolence of the people, the filth and flies and no doubt stench, the eyes of prisoners, whom I would no doubt would have had to face…These things belong to an irredeemable Vietnam in the world which only embarrasses and alienates me. (Coetzee 1974:16)

The irony of his statement is that a trip to the foreign country may well have redeemed him. This is in view of the theme of earthly salvation that pervades Coetzee's fiction, whereby characters get to know themselves better thanks to the proximity of the Other. Therefore, the photographs themselves become a medium of distancing actual human subjects. That he finds himself zooming in on one of these photographs so close that the face in it dissolves into a plane of photographic pixilation (Coetzee 1974:16), affirms his streak as a control freak. Martin Woessner is correct to impute that "Dawn ponders and ponders, but does not feel" (Leist& Singer 2010:232). Consequently, he is denied the ethical space of an 'I-Thou' interaction with other human subjects.

Conversely, Richard Nixon-era whistleblower Daniel Ellsberg, talking on the BBC's Hardtalkprogramme on 5 December 2022, said he changed his mind about the war following a two-year stay in Vietnam, which convinced him of the impossibility of winning the war. He took a stance against the conflict by leaking secret government documents to expose the falsifications to motivate it, in the so-called *Pentagon Papers* scandal, in 1971. Unlike Ellsberg, Dawn chooses to deal with the Other of experience, presented to him in the form of photographs, the one of It, and not of Thou. (Buber says: "All real living is meeting" [Buber 1923:10]). While the Other can never be known, had Dawn taken up the offer to travel to south-east Asia, he may have come to the same conclusion, as does Ellsberg. America's Other of myth rebuffs American hospitality in Vietnam, for which the Other is punished with violence.

Nevertheless, Coetzee seems aware that the graphic portrayal of violence might enable the sadist. "Early in his career, we find Coetzee doubting the efficacy of certain kinds of discourse and fearing that vivid realism may write the viewer," notes Gallagher (Gallagher 1991:53). In "The Vietnam Project" the reader sees the effects of violence, for example, and not its enactment. This is as violence is related monologically and via reportage, through Dawn.

However, Gallagher, like Coetzee, observes the complicity of American society in the perpetration of violence overseas by the United States military. She notes a sense of national cohesiveness around "the unity of the National family" to celebrate "hero" pilots whose bombing exploits were televised and admired for their efficacy (Gallagher 1991:53).

Coetzee, therefore, critiques the documentary format to show that the American public is just as complicit as the country's military. Other than the ethic of "guilt of all" in Levinas that Coetzee seems eager to impart, evidence shows that opinion was largely in favour of the war. It was only after citizens began to realise the human toll in American lives lost that their opposition to the conflict started (Gallagher 1991:54). Therefore, in parodying the propaganda that makes violence acceptable, Coetzee speaks for the silenced Other real victims of the war. This is in view of the fact that "the media consistently depicted the enemy as Other", according to Gallagher (1991:53). As Othering takes away the subjectivity of the person or persons involved by placing them in the realm of object, violence against that Other becomes permissible psychologically.

Media monitor Daniel C. Hallin shows that violence against Vietnamese society went hand in hand with its Othering. He states:

> [t]elevision coverage of Vietnam dehumanized the enemy, drained him of all recognizable emotions and motives and thus banished him not only from the political sphere, but from human society itself. (Hallin 1986:158)

It is significant that Coetzee makes a number of associations and analogies in his depiction of myth in relation to violence and the Other. Kannemeyer points out that "The Vietnam Project" is loosely based on Herman Kahn's book, *Can we Win in Vietnam?* (Kannemeyer 2012:167). It is appropriate that *Dusklands*' epigraph is an excerpt from that book:

Obviously it is difficult not to sympathize with those American and European audiences who, when shown films of fighter-bomber pilots visibly exhilarated by successful napalm bombing runs on Viet-Cong targets, react with horror and disgust. Yet it is unreasonable to expect the US Government to obtain pilots who are so appalled by the damage they may be doing that they cannot carry out their missions or become excessively depressed or guilt-ridden.

This means that "The Vietnam Report" should be seen as a deconstruction of the lie that the war was being won, parlayed in the book by the American administration. Its purported aim was to reassure the American public, amid anxiety and opposition to the war. In fact, the United States military was losing control of the conflict and the Vietnamese resistance was inflicting increasingly extensive damage on South Vietnamese and American installations (Attwell 1992:51). It is this divisive projection in propaganda that Coetzee critiques. States Attwell: "Dawn's epistemic framework encourages a Manichean emphasis on cultural difference and the assertion of power" (1992:54).

Against this backdrop, it becomes feasible to see Dawn's character as modelled on Kahn, save for the fact that, unlike the influential Kahn, Dawn is a low-level functionary. Nonetheless, it is significant that there is an analogical thread from which the reader may analytically profit. For instance, Coetzee's representation of an anti-war ethic makes relatable former US National Secretary of State Robert McNamara.

McNamara was fired from the administration of Lyndon B. Johnson for opposing the war. On his departure, he wrote: “The United States must be careful not to interpret events occurring in a different land in terms of its own history, politics, culture, and morals” (Kannemeyer 2012:167).

McNamara’s declamation may as well have been directed at the likes of people with views such as Dawn’s. Dawn attempts to model Vietnamese society from within his society’s paradigm. His recitation and eventual dismissal of the Freudian myth of the father attests to this. He dismisses the myth not because of its incompatibility with the cultural sphere of its target. He withdraws it because it depicts a vulnerable father: the United States, after all, is “father” to the rebellious “sons” of Vietnam:

> ‘In origin the myth is a justification of the rebellion of sons against a father who uses them as hinds. The sons come of age, rebel, mutilate the father, and divide the patrimony, that is, the earth fertilised by the father’s rain. Psychoanalytically the myth is a self-affirming fantasy of the child powerless to take the mother he desires from his father-rival’. (Coetzee 1974:25)

The mythical interposing of the father between the mother and the son to give the son/child a distinct identity, reinforces Marais’s observation that colonial community identifies negatively in that it describes itself in relation to Others, in terms of what it is not, as a consequence of which it is always coming into being (Marais 2009:14). The dependence in the economy of hospitality, of the host that searches for the guest in order to validate one’s host status, is a constant trope in Coetzee, as realised in the arrival and waiting that characterises most of his early fiction. This is seen in *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. It is evident in Dawn’s reflection on the impasse in Vietnam:

> Why could they not accept us? We could have loved them: our hatred for them grew only out of broken hopes. […] Our nightmare was that since whatever we reached for slipped like smoke through our fingers, we did not exist; that since whatever we embraced wilted, we were all that

> existed. We landed on the shores of Vietnam clutching our arms and pleading for someone to stand up without flinching to these probes of reality: if you will prove yourself, we shouted, you will prove us too, and we will love you endlessly and shower you with gifts. (Coetzee 1974:17)

Canepari-Labib observes that "because the individual searches for identity in the place of the Other, this very identity (understood as the Cartesian notion of an intrinsic and fixed identity) is negated" (2000:113). This is illustrated in Grant Hamilton's characterisation of Dawn's use of the family metaphor as an effort to:

> [c]ondition the Vietnamese body by bringing it into the American/Western 'family' of the selfsame: to transform the incomprehensible Other into the known value of Subject by means of identification through representation to become 'the sons' of the imperial father. (2005:299)

Dawn, therefore, encapsulates the self-affirming colonial ego that dehumanises the Other, and that characterises not only the colonial project but historical discourses as well. One tends to agree with Attwell that Dawn's name represents the Dawn of decolonisation. This would necessitate taking into account Attwell's observation that in *Dusklands* "the beginning of the process [pioneer colonialism] is therefore seen from the perspective of its end" (Attwell 1992:47).

In the real-life story of Herman Kahn, this can be viewed in attempts to objectify the Other. From this vantage point, violence is justified as the Vietnamese problem is a purely technical concern and one of having a "theory of victory" (Attwell 1992:52). Says Dawn: "There is only one problem in Vietnam and that is the problem of victory. The problem of victory is technical. We must believe this. Victory is a matter of sufficient force, and we dispose of sufficient force" (Coetzee 1974: 28). One is prompted to establish a comparison not only between Kahn and Dawn but also between McNamara's anti-war views and Coetzee's anti-war stance. Kannemeyer expatiates on Coetzee's stance against the Vietnam War and recounts the writer's involvement in an anti-war sit-in along with fellow lecturers during his time at Buffalo. Coetzee admits that his arrest for participating in that event virtually scuppered his chances of attaining permanent residence in the United States (Kannemeyer 2012:201).

Nonetheless, Coetzee's anti-war ethics are found in his fiction as in his narrative he is seen to speak for the voices that McNamara's propaganda is designed to silence. In Dawn's report is the voice of the "clever brother", a euphemism for a native Vietnamese combatant who is determined to fight the American occupying force: "I have gone over to Saigon – so can you" (Coetzee 1974:20). In moral philosophy, Kant is among a selection of philosophers who oppose the physical occupation of one people by another, on a moral basis; his *Metaphysics of Morals* places autonomy at the heart of reason (Paton 1948:445, 452). Edward Said also proffers this argument, in his portrayal of anti-colonial resistance. He notes that insurgency is a constant feature of the imperial colonial experience (2003:195-196). "For if colonialism was a system, as Sartre was to say in one of his post-war essays, then resistance began to feel systematic too" (Said 2003:196).

It follows that Coetzee propounds an anti-colonial ethics. Evident in Kannemeyer's biography is an overarching spirit of "infinite responsibility" for colonial wrongs. This is more so in Coetzee's tending to create a personal connection to them through a tenuous link to colonial atrocities in his own family history. Incidentally, Coetzee refuses to see South Africa's recent history as an anomalous, isolated case. He sees apartheid as part of "a wider historical situation to do with colonialism, late colonialism and neo-colonialism", according to Attwell (1992:16). He also tells Stephen Watson that "I'm suspicious of lines of division between a European context and a South African context, because I think our experience remains largely colonial" (Watson 1986:23).

Nevertheless, Attwell argues that *Dusklands* is not a straightforward philosophical meditation on Western imperialism because solipsism and narcissism are seen in terms of the failure for reciprocity by the protagonists (Attwell 1992:45). One is inclined to concur with such an argument on the basis that in "The Vietnam Project" Coetzee is seen to target language and knowledge, by critiquing their association with power. This helps the reader to understand the character of Dawn, as an extension or a representation of that power. Says Pippin:

> For Dawn and the people he works for, in a postmetaphysical or scientific age all that is "other" than the self and human will is merely stuff, obstacle, material, chaos, and dangerous contingency to be mastered. (Leist& Singer 2010:28)

Pippin's statement explains the depiction of the native as savage, in both accounts of *Dusklands*. It is a view the American propaganda machinery consistently propagates in the course of the Vietnam War. Gallagher for instance, reports of a stereotypically distancing depiction of the Vietnamese enemy in the American media. This is seen in the use of words such as "savage", "half-crazed" and "suicidal" (Gallagher 1991:53).

It is interesting to note that a deconstructive reading would show the same qualities in the Americans themselves, and also in Dawn. Cartesian rationalism in its attempt at "civilisation", and to "bring light to what is dark" as Jacobus Coetzee avers (Coetzee 1974:106) is contradicted by the violence of Western colonialism. In emphasising this disjuncture, as evident in the parody that characterises *Dusklands*, Attwell points out that the Enlightenment coincides with colonial expansionism (1992:47). As per its narration in *Dusklands*, that expansionism is accompanied by a barbarism far removed from the stated civilisational motive. Coetzee's portrayal of imperial colonialism, then, is intended to show that far from being benign, the colonial expansionist project goes hand in hand with force and violence, regardless of epoch. To quote Dawn once again: "Had I lived two hundred years ago I would have had a continent to explore, to map, to open to colonization" (Coetzee 1974:31-32). Such reflections show him to be a reincarnation of Jacobus Coetzee.

Of equal import is that the colonial enterprise is driven by the self-interested and self-centred individual. Dawn's descriptions of his wife are a good starting point in assessing his character. He neglects his wife and family. He does not make an effort to establish a healthy relationship in his marriage, choosing instead to be mired in his work. He says:

> I am plainly addicted to my marriage, and addiction is in the end a surer bond than love. If Marilyn is unfaithful, she is so much the dearer to me,

> for if strangers prize her she must be valuable, and I am reassured. (Coetzee 1974:11)

Canepari-Labib points out that Dawn replaces her with voyeuristic fantasy (2005:164), that is, with a world of experience, an It (Buber 1923:4). Not only is Dawn incapable of establishing meaningful relations with others. He is also not in proximity with himself and has an unhealthy relationship with his own body, which he tries to push to its limit. "I am vexed by the indiscipline of my body. I have often wished I had another one" (Coetzee 1974:5).

This is connected to the question of identity Dawn raises in his last utterance: "I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am" (Coetzee 1974:49). The statement becomes a self-validating deflection of responsibility. This is evident in a coercive paternalism, be it towards his son or the Vietnamese. He has accepted violence as a tool to extort Vietnamese compliance and attention:

> We bathed them in seas of fire, praying for the miracle. In the heart of the flame their bodies glowed with heavenly light; in our ears their voices rang; but when the fire died they were only ash. […] Having proved to our sad selves that these were not the dark-eyed gods who walk our dreams, we wished only that they would retire and leave us in peace. They would not. […] Then we ran out of pity. (Coetzee 1974:18)

Having realised that the Vietnamese are recalcitrant, Dawn decides, finally, against the propaganda of radio, because, he concludes, the Vietnamese lack the Cartesian doubting self (Coetzee 1974:20). For him, the "father-voice", his codeword for American military violence, is the only thing that needs projecting. "We are the father putting down the rebellion of the band of brothers," he says (Coetzee 1974:24). Robert Pippin is correct to impute that this stage of the report deconstructs everything that precedes it (Leist & Singer 2010:26).

This is because towards the end Dawn loses his sense of reality and experiences a mental breakdown. In an effort to find himself, he abducts his son and escapes with him to a hideaway somewhere in California. His son's name, Martin, refers to Mars, the god of war.

The signs of his paranoia include blaming women for all his problems, as Canepari-Labib observes (2005:65). Having blamed Marilyn for spoiling Martin (Coetzee 1974:35) he implicitly blames his mother too, whom he mentions for the first time: "My mother […] is spreading her vampire wings for the night" (Coetzee 1974:49). One would, therefore, assume he thinks he is his mother's fault. It would not be out of place to label him a misogynist. Further proof of his failure to become a more rounded character is that he misleads his doctors: He says:

> So if, as we pick our slow way through the labyrinth of my history, I spy an alley with all the signs of light, life, freedom, and glory at the end of it, I stifle my eager shouts and plod on after the good blind doctors. (Coetzee 1974:47)

His failure to own his life narrative outlasts his therapy. He cannot seem able to transform his chaotic life story into a meaningful experience, he loses its plot. This makes him a suitable candidate for healing through narrative:

> Turning trauma into literary narrative means turning chaos into structure. A narrative has a topic, and normally keeps to that point; the plot of the story usually creates a causal link between different events; characters act according to their identities, and their actions show some kind of continuity; and patterns are created and repeated to indicate central themes. In all these ways, the shattering effect of the trauma is transformed by the author into (relative) coherence and unity. (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:60)

There is no sign that Dawn has reflected on his past and that he changes for the better. He has no points of contact by which to form some kind of identification and relate to his own life. As shown in the text, he remains in denial until the close of the narrative, to the extent of frustrating the efforts of the specialists tasked with his recovery (Coetzee

1974:47). One would conclude that the chances of turning his trauma ordeal into a meaningful experience from which he can grow personally are non-existent.

"The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee"

Since it is agreed that *Dusklands* is an undermining of historical discourses, this dissertation abides by a statement advanced by Robert Pippin as regards the text's main concern. He writes that the moral of "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" is in how a subject gets to rely on someone he regards as nothing, to survive a life-and-death situation:

> Jacobus Coetzee in the second half of *Dusklands*, even in his ignorance and willful blindness, becomes deathly ill and dependent on 'one whom he does not recognize as a recognizer', one could say in Hegelese, his servant, Klawer. (Leist& Singer, 24)

This assessment is more fitting for a deconstructive description than David James's definition of *Dusklands* as "an explorer's account of imperial domination and revenge" (Mehigan 2011:42). This is because Hegel's master-slave dichotomy becomes the means by which Coetzee represents the oppressed. Marais is one of the authoritative critics who see this to be the mainstay strategy in Coetzee's deconstruction of the colonial hierarchy. In its Hegelian postulation, the master-slave dichotomy enables Coetzee to demonstrate history's subordination to the interstices of power. Hence Coetzee in his narratives demonstrates that in colonialism, language is seen to legitimise the subject and obliterate the object. States Attridge:

> In every case, the dominant figure is white, and owes his or her power over the racially different other largely to that fact. And in every case, the language and the consciousness through which the servant's world is mediated is the master's. (Attridge 2004:17)

In "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" J.M. Coetzee juxtaposes four distinct narratives to underscore this reality. One could say this is a strategy intended to foreground the silencing of the Other in the historical corpus. There is a Translator's Preface, "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee", the Afterword by S.J. Coetzee and the supposedly original Deposition granted to authorise the protagonist's journey into the interior, from which his story emerges.

The juxtaposition enables the reader to pore over the constituent parts, back to front, should one so choose. This facilitates also, the realisation that *Dusklands* is essentially a deconstructive project. Dovey's assertion concerning Coetzee's texts is also affirmed in the process. She describes Coetzee's narratives as criticism-as-fiction or fiction-as-criticism (Dovey 1988: 9). In concurring with Dovey, one could argue that in their oppositional aspect, they authenticate an internal criticism. As a consequence, the erasure of the object looms large. Wright is therefore correct to assert that the various texts:

> [e]ngage in a dialogue with one another that ultimately debunks both the enabling myth that allows for colonial domination and the fable through which Jacobus asserts his distinctness from the hare, the fable that in turn allows him to treat indigenous South Africans as animals and, more disturbingly, as meat. (37)

As a result, the reader must be involved in gleaning for answers to the questions these documents raise. S.J. Coetzee's Afterword, for instance, is a good example of a self-affirming interpretation of history. As Kannemeyer notes:

> The afterword by S.J. Coetzee emphasises the authenticity of the 'new' edition, claiming that it is more complete than earlier editions and for that reason furnishes a more accurate view of Coetzee's experiences. All of it, however…is a parody on the editions of the Van Riebeeck Society, with S.J. Coetzee as the typical conservative, authoritarian and uncritical Christian-nationalist historian proffering his research as a labour of piety towards an ancestor and a pioneer of 'our' people, a man of fortitude. (Kannemeyer, 221)

Furthermore, Coetzee is seen to ridicule as a fiction the supposed supremacy of Cartesian rationality. Rooted in Descartes's call for "a practical philosophy" which would make

Europeans “like masters and owners of nature” (people.cs.uchicago.edu). *Dusklands* sets out to portray the disastrous results of Descartes’s call.

To the extent that Coetzee himself manipulates the historical discourse by inserting untruths, one would surmise that his intention is to show that supposedly official historical accounts are in the final say the outcome of what their authors intend them to be. Or as Dovey puts it, history like language “is presented as corrupted: fickle and enigmatic” (1987: 22). It is noteworthy that while most commentary is in agreement as to the scrutiny to which language is put and exposed as unreliable, not all shows an awareness of the depth to which Coetzee delves to make this point. To start with the use of language: One would be justified to argue that in this novella, Coetzee is at his most subversive. If the author’s style can be regarded as modernist, as demonstrated in Attridge’s exploration of the texts in Chapter 1, then one can also state that *The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee* is also one of his most postmodern pieces of writing. Indeed, Attridge also appears to conform to such ascription and appears to structure his argument to reflect this reality. In his adumbration of the trope of the event of literature, Attridge states that the novella is best approached technically, as “a moment in the reader’s experience of the work” (Attridge 2004:18). This is because Coetzee appears to virtually relinquish his authorial duties to an omniscient protagonist, with a questionable, if non-existent, sense of responsibility. There are glaring contradictions in the telling of the story, enough to make the text suit Tim Mehigan’s characterisation of Coetzee’s novels as artifacts that exhibit a keen awareness or acute consciousness of their conditions of production (2011:5). It is on the basis of this description that this study finds it apt to label Jacobus Coetzee’s narrative postmodern.

Then on to the manner in which language is undermined. Of especial concern is the Deposition. There have been suggestions that it is the only authentic document in the second account of *Dusklands*. Unfortunately, the usually erudite Wright is one of those caught in this trap. She states: “The afterword is followed by a deposition made by Jacobus Coetzee in 1760, the only authentic historical document among the various others that J.M. Coetzee presents as real” (Wright 2006:37). On the contrary, Kannemeyer, in “A life in writing”, shows that too has been tampered with and is, therefore, also fake (2012:21). This would make all four constituent narratives of "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" spurious. Kannemeyer, for instance, points out that the main narrative is the result of a source that was "adapted and skillfully transmuted into pseudo-documentary" (2012:21).

The manipulation does not, however, stop with textual tinkering: the Van Plettenberg Society mentioned in the Translator's Preface is non-existent (Kannemeyer 2012:220). Coetzee's invention, therefore, makes a mockery of the Van Riebeeck Society by obliquely questioning the objectivity and truthfulness of accounts in its archives. "Perhaps the problem has less to do with language per se and more to do with the kind of erasure of difference and distance implied by the term 'translation'", states Anna Jones Abramson, in her exploration of inhabiting in *Elizabeth Costello* (2014:25). Her observation is pertinent in relation to *Dusklands* as well, seen in the light of arbitrary attribution that can neither be corroborated nor verified and that essentially disinforms.

It is, therefore, significant that Dovey talks of *Dusklands* as an "orchestration of voices" (1987:19). This is as Coetzee is seen to bring into proximity a plurality of voices. Barthes's suggestion of judicious interpretation of meaning and re-reading as "a way of asserting the irresponsibility of the text, the pluralism of systems…" (Barthes 1974:11), is, therefore, of relevance, considering the complexity of Coetzee's narratives.

The onus the texts place on the reader by virtue of their writer's refusal to assume an authoritative position over them, or the opening that exists for their re-writing by the reader, is, therefore, emphasised. In *Digging through Darkness: Chronicles of an Archaelogist*, Carmel Schrire writes:

> Coetzee seems to challenge the informed reader to spot the seams when he transforms the actual Van Riebeeck Society into the fictional Van Plettenberg Society, and the well-known Cape Archives, into the unknown South African National Archives. His teasing is light but his message is profound. Attribution is moot because historic documents that seek to alter the truth are more fictional than inventions. (Schrire 1995:6)

This means that for any reader who takes seriously the fictional S.J. Coetzee's counter-narrative, he or she risks the loss of a history of epistemological and physical violence that accompanied pioneering colonial expeditions. For example, Gallagher discloses the careless use of sources by S.J. Coetzee, which she deems "sloppy at best and deliberately misleading at worst" (1991:79). "He claims that Barrow 'records' an instance of a farmer lighting a fire under a span of oxen, but Barrow actually reports a *story* he had heard about a farmer lighting a fire under *one*oxen" (Barrow 183-84; italics in original). Gallagher's investigations also reveal the subversive imperative in *Dusklands*, that is, to expose the difference between what is reported and the reality of what happened. Slated as "that supercilious English gentleman Barrow" (Coetzee 1974:109) by S. J. Coetzee, Barrow is painted as an example of a pattern to "wrongly see the Dutch farmers as ignorant, slothful, and brutal peasants" (Gallagher 1991:78). Gallagher is therefore correct to assert that the Afterword is "Coetzee's most scathing attack on twentieth century mythmaking" (1991:77).

The parodying of S.J. Coetzee's version of history by J.M. Coetzee is, therefore, a postcolonial exercise. This also applies to the focalisation in the first-person narrative of Jacobus Coetzee. It enables the author to create a distance between himself and the narrator. Of note is Jacobus Coetzee's consistent use of the word "savage" to describe the natives. His remarks as to the state of relations between European and native are insightful:

> The one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They become Christians too, but their Christianity is an empty word. They know that being baptized is a way of protecting yourself, they are not stupid, they know it wins sympathy when they accuse you of mistreating a Christian. […] Even the wild Bushman who believes he will hunt the eland among the stars has more religion. The Hottentot is locked into the present. He does not care where he comes from or where he is going. The Bushman is a different creature, a wild animal with an animal's soul. […] Heartless as baboons they are, and the only way to treat them is like beasts. (Coetzee 1974:57-58)

Marais shows that such attitudes are a result of the conditioning of the self in colonial community mores. The irony in Jacobus Coetzee's statement is a case in point. He professes to be a Christian but fails to treat his neighbours as fellow humans, as he sees them as "baboons". This makes it psychologically permissible to kill "Bushmen", since they are animals, as Wright's analysis above aims to show. Further on, Jacobus Coetzee says: "The only sure way to kill a Bushman is to catch him in the open where your horse can run him down" (Coetzee 1974:58). Jacobus Coetzee, therefore, "does not bring about the existence" (Buber 1923:2) of the Other, because he speaks I-It, not I-Thou.

This makes sustainable Gallagher's observation that both Jacobus Coetzee and S.J. Coetze engage in "white writing" (Gallagher 1991:77). In view of the fact that they reinforce subject self-identification, one is inclined to concur with her statement.

Similarly, it would be apt to see Jacobus Coetzee's journey to Namaqualand as more of an internal exploration than an external discovery, as Dovey frames it: "The narrative does not succeed in providing proof of an autonomous identity; the interior is continuous with the exterior self" (Dovey 1987:23). Furthermore, Jacobus himself speaks of the "endless inner adventure" (Coetzee 1974:65). It is inescapable that Jacobus Coetzee does not recognise the alterity of the natives around him. They only serve as the means by which he validates his subject status. In other words, he meets the Other of the imagination, the one of myth, that is structured by his community's knowledge (Marais 2009:2).

To give an example, in S.J. Coetzee's Afterword, it is shown that the Hottentots are so-called because they were heard to sing a ditty that rhymes with that word. The writer of the Afterword seemingly displays his tendency to write the Other out of history by placing this background in parenthesis:

> ("…Ãtentãten, ãtentãten", sang the natives of the Cape to the shipwrecked sailors of the *Haerlem*, "ãtentãten, ãtentãten", and danced in 2/4 time. Hence the appellation Hottentot.) (Coetzee 1974:113)

As Gallagher argues, travel narratives assisted in the process of colonisation, whether covertly or overtly (1991:54). In concurring, Borkfelt, points out that descriptions of the native as more in proximity to the animal than the self human justified colonialism. The need was created, therefore, to bring Western "civilisation" to the far reaches of the world in order to "save the natives from their state of animality" (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:140). This means that travel narratives distance indigenous peoples and justify their subjection. So Othered, they could not be trusted with agency, making it logically acceptable to control and rule over them.

Gallagher and Borkfelt are not the only ones to implicate travel narratives in colonialism. Marais cites their role in creating a chasm between the "imagined" and "reality". He argues that they assisted in the production of a certain native who turned out to be different from the one the European encountered, the one who "is unable to do what the invaders expect of him" and who fails to affirm the coloniser's identity (Marais 2009:8-9).

This is because in order to self-validate itself, colonial community exploits the will to power in language. Language thus becomes an instrument to construct the universal man, the "I" in "Man", against which all other identities are Other, observes Canepari-Labib (2005:10). This explains the character of Jacobus Coetzee very well. He attempts to establish control over all Otherness, human and non-human, and threatens to flatten any obstacle that may lie in his path towards self-fulfillment: "Every wild creature I kill crosses the boundary between wilderness and number. […] I am a hunter, a domesticator of the wilderness, a hero of enumeration" (Coetzee 1974:80). One could cite his appropriation of the dog as a simile for Othering as a sign of this all-conquering mentality. After killing Plaatje, he says: "His eyes apologised like a dog's" (Coetzee 1974:103). He also details the nonentity of both hare and dog:

> The death of the hare is the logic of salvation. For either he was living out there and is dying into a world of objects or he was living within me. […] The death of the hare is my metaphysical meat, just as the hare is the meat of my dogs. […] The hare dies to keep my soul from merging with the world. (Coetzee 1974:80)

One would concur with Wright's assessment that the consumption of meat becomes a metaphor for asserting the self in the colonial order (Wright 2006:39). Her suggestion becomes prescient in view of colonial society's tendency to erase the animal. For if the human being is a dog as Jacobus Coetzee implies after killing Plaatje, then the dog is nothing or a thing. Violence against either is a fact of life in colonialism, since both are denied being. Of significance is that the "meat" metaphor is instrumentally extended to the bodies of white women and to black bodies in general, in Coetzee's later fiction. As a consequence, a pattern of "consumption" is established in which the Other body is depicted as an entity to be colonised.

In his narrative strategies to represent the Other, Coetzee also draws attention to women's subjectivity, either presenting them as protagonists or as victims, as part of a metaphysic of suffering that is dominant in his fiction; he also draws attention to animals, progressively, in his writing.

Asked whether he likes animals better than people, he answers that "my fundamental relationship with living beings is not one of liking versus disliking" (Susskind 2001). One does note a stand against speciesism and sexism. On animal alterity, Coetzee's ethics are closer to Buber's than Levinas's. States Buber:

> First, our life with nature. There the relation sways in gloom, beneath the level of speech…creatures cannot come to us and when we address them as Thou, our words cling to the threshold of speech" (1923:5).

Animals aside, and as argued earlier, Jacobus Coetzee's most important ethical test lies in his proximity to "Jan Klawer, Hottentot" (Coetzee 1974: 81). His proximity in a life-and-death situation to someone he sees as nothing is fundamental because, if someone can save your life, then your views about them are bound to change.

However, for a man of a violent temperament, Jacobus Coetzee's obsession with controlling the Other is a barrier to his recognition of Klawer. One would be inclined to concur with Attwell's claim that in *Dusklands*Coetzee depicts a violent ethic and displays aggression as part of his struggle with colonialism (1992:69). This is seen in Attwell's disclosure that J.M. Coetzee purposefully omits the Hop expedition, the follow-up trip in search of commercial opportunities that appears in the primary text, by substituting it with a punitive raid (1992:58).

Given this study's earlier claim that Coetzee adopts literature as a myth in order to counter colonial myths in historical narratives and Attwell's inference of violence as a political tool, one would be justified to conclude that Coetzee depicts violence to undermine its under-representation in dominant discourses. In his study of Coetzee's sources, for example, Attwell shows that the official report of the Hop expedition sent to Holland conceals the murder of a servant who had refused an order to fetch water (Attwell 1992:58).

Violence as a concomitant of colonialism is, therefore, at odds with Levinas's ethics regarding the urgency that the appearance of the Other signals. In Levinas, it is a moment that signifies the interruption of the self. Conversely, Jacobus Coetzee appears to "severe the tie that connects the self to the Other" (Levinas 1985:97), that is, responsibility. To cite the encounter with the Nama as an example. As he approaches his hosts/guests after his arrival in their land, Jacobus Coetzee explores optional adventure models. Gallagher is correct to assert that such exploration constitutes "romantic insertions of the Nama into a European fiction" (1991:66). One would also agree with her claim that the mental exploration conforms to the formulaic structuring of the encounter in terms of travel narrative discourses, which are "generated from the (European) public symbolic order" (Gardiner 1987:181). To recite his musing:

> Tranquilly I traced in my heart the forking paths of the endless inner adventure: the order to follow, the inner debate (resist? submit?), underlings rolling their eyeballs, words of moderation, calm, swift march, the hidden defile, the encampment, the gray-beard chieftain, the curious throng, words of greeting, firm tones, Peace! Tobacco!, demonstration of firearms, murmurs of awe, gifts, the vengeful wizard, the feast, glut, nightfall, murder foiled, dawn, farewell, trundling wheels, the order to follow, the inner debate, rolling eyeballs, the nervous finger, the shot, panic, assault, gunfire, hasty departure, the pursuing horde, the race for the

> river, the order to follow, the inner debate, the casual spear in the vitals (Viscount d'Almeida)…(Coetzee 1974:66)

To rehash Marais, Jacobus Coetzee is received by the Nama in their land but they also come to him, which makes him both guest and host (Marais 2009: 9). However, contrary to Buber's "whole being" dynamic, he does not speak the primary word I-Thou (Buber 1923:10). He says: "The Hottentots stopped too, the mounted man in the middle, the other shuffling up in a cluster around him" (Coetzee 1974:64-65). He uses the language of history and thematises the Other. States Marais:

> In this colonial encounter, both Jacobus Coetzee and the Khoi play the parts of host and guest. While he, logically speaking, is a foreigner who is received by them in their land, they – and this is apparent from the expectations he brings to the encounter – are also received by him. On the most obvious level, these expectations are present in his ascription of the names 'Hottentot' and 'the enemy' to them. By contrast, they, in welcoming him, refer to themselves as the 'Khoikhoin'. (Marais 2009:9)

Marais is, therefore, correct to say Jacobus Coetzee meets an absence (Marais 2009:8). The image presented fails to conform to that of the imagination: "To begin with, they do not provide the display of submission that would affirm not only Jacobus Coetzee's reality, but also that of his community" (Marais 2009:11). The native he encounters "disrupts his expectations". He too admits to this fact: "Let me only say that the wild Hottentots stood or sat with an assurance my Hottentots lacked, an assurance pleasing to the eye" (Coetzee 1974:65). Furthermore, they refuse to affirm his subjectivity: "I was being called Long-Nose. Patiently, like an equestrian statue, I waited for their chieftain to receive me" (Coetzee 1974:72). This scene also exemplifies the protagonist's contradictory impulses, of feelings of wanting to evoke kinship with them, and of a desire to subjugate them. Later on, he reflects that his meeting with the Nama would be the last time they meet on equal terms (Coetzee 1974:65). Marais's formulation of hospitality as interchangeable and Buber's theory of shifting agency during dialogue are confirmed in this scene. Even Jacobus Coetzee himself becomes an It ('Long Norse').

Of significance in this scene is that, Coetzee through narrative, is seen to counter Jacobus Coetzee's will to power. The narrator says: "I have presided over the becoming number of ten thousand creatures, omitting the innumerable insects that have expired beneath my feet" (Coetzee 1974:80). To counter this vain claim is the recognition of animal alterity in the narrative: "Flies buzzed about the ox. Where the ring entered its nose the foam stood out. We breathed in unison, all living beings" (Coetzee 1974:65). In Buber, to be in the presence of animals is a moment worthy of ethical reflection.

There is no indication that Jacobus Coetzee is made present by the Other, that is, his being's confirmation in the Other's presence. He abolishes the "sphere of in-between" that unfolds in Buber's dialogic process (Atterton, Calarco and Friedman 2004:iv). Equal participation is seen to enhance meaning in dialogue. His oratory before the Nama, therefore, reduces the Other to "a content of my experience" (Atterton, Calarco and Friedman 2004:iv) as shown in his reflection: "So we could look at each other like men for the last time. They had never seen a white man" (Coetzee 1974:65). His contemplation does not reflect a "world of relation".

Furthermore, his self-projection on to his guests seals the failure of his encounter of them: "Perhaps on my horse and with the sun over my right shoulder I looked like a god, a god of the kind they did not yet have. The Hottentots are primitive people" (Coetzee 1974:71).

In Levinas, the Other is described as "the near one whose proximity touches without actual tactile encounter" (Wyschogrod 2001:5). Hence the distinction between the prior and the after phases of encounter as "Levinas's phenomenology of enjoyment prior to the advent of the Other" (Wyschogrod 2001:16). Jacobus Coetzee does not experience a "break-in into the house of being" (Wyschogrod 2001:6) when Klawer is in his presence.

To read Coetzee's texts that deconstruct historical discourses would warrant that the reader go beyond the text's own economy. The reader must traverse beyond the text to encounter the character of the real Klawer, or approximations of the character of

Klawer. Since the Other is irreducible, the reader must reduce Jacobus Coetzee's reductions of him.

However, given that proximity philosophy mainly focuses on the face-to-face encounter (Levinas) or intersubjective dialogue (Buber), Jacobus Coetzee's prospects of ethical development can only be realistically assessed in relation to his recuperation at the hands of Klawer and their escape back to the Cape colony, after he is banished for biting off a child's ear.

Jacobus Coetzee says early on: "Jan Klawer, a much older man who was foreman of the labour on my farm" (Coetzee 1974:62). In this instance, language is pre-reflective. In its straightforward rendering of the appellative, it does not try to contain the Other. In terms of Buber's formulation of being made present by the Other, or confirmation of the Other, Jacobus Coetzee does not abolish difference or reduce Klawer to a content of his experience. After this introduction of Klawer, however, Jacobus Coetzee consistently dehumanizes Klawer through language.

Moreover, his earliest memories of Klawer, who "had lived at my elbow since I was a boy" (Coetzee 1974:80) appear to momentarily validate Klawer's being. They are however, sandwiched between his exposition on the metaphor of the gun: "The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us" (Coetzee 1974:79) and his conceptualisation of the native as animal. He states that "Death is as obscure to him [the Bushman] as to an animal" (Coetzee 1974:80).

Levinas states that "ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power" (1969:16). This is seen in Jacobus Coetzee's statement that: "All this I thought, reminding myself of the savage birthright of Jan Klawer, Hottentot" (Coetzee 1974:81). One feels his contempt becoming acute, as he declines into sickness:

> I glared until he squirmed and did a slave shuffle. What was wrong with me? I asked. Did I have the Hottentot sickness? He was sure I did not. The Hottentot sickness was for Hottentots. (Coetzee 1974:81-82)

There is, therefore, no indication that Jacobus Coetzee's relationship of proximity to Jan Klawer has been profitable in the way of proper acknowledgement of his being. On the one hand, he expresses an expectation of a meaningful, intersubjective existence with Klawer, wishing that he becomes less servile. He says: "To this sermon Klawer returned not a word but suggested humbly that it was late…I dismissed him" (Coetzee 1974:80). On the other hand, soon after Klawer's departure, he broods on the savagery and powerlessness of the natives, condescending them for lacking guns. It is noteworthy that despite Klawer's many years of service in his household, Jacobus Coetzee still fails to experience the Other face to face; Klawer is reduced to a mere tool. Argues Buber: "Concentration and fusion into the whole being can never take place through my agency, nor can it ever take place without me" (1923:10). Jacobus Coetzee's rendering of Klawer's consecutive deaths not only haunts his narrative but also exposes his claims to knowing Klawer very well as fallacious:

> With horror, I watched my faithful servant and companion drawn struggling downstream, shouting broken pleas for help which I was powerless to render him, him whose voice I had never in all my days heard raised, until he disappeared from sight around a bend and went to his death bearing the blanket roll and all the food. (Coetzee 1974: 93-94)

No sooner has Klawer disappeared underwater than he reappears, apparently safely on the other side of the bank. He survives a drowning death only to be abandoned to die in a cave by his master. The alternative accounts of Klawer's deaths are not only intended to highlight the narrative's fictiveness; they also show that a sole witness may falsify facts prejudicial to his self interest, according to Gallagher. She also affirms an observation made earlier in this chapter: history can be what a narrator chooses to tell (Gallagher 1991:66-67). Suffice it to say the episode is a moment of rupture in the reader's experiencing of the text. One's sense of the literary event is interrupted and the text becomes a site of Otherness, sundering reader from a proximal relationship with the text.

Attridge suggests an alter ego, fictional translator J.M. Coetzee (2004:20). This is a proposition that would take the number of Coetzees in *Dusklands* to five: over and above Dawn's boss, known only as Coetzee, there is author J.M. Coetzee, his supposed father S.J. Coetzee (who Kannemeyer [2012:12] and others have demonstrated to be a fiction as J.M. Coetzee's father was called Jack Coetzee), the narrator Jacobus Coetzee, plus the fictional translator, J.M. Coetzee. However, the suggestion of a fictional J.M. Coetzee becomes plausible given that in *Dusklands*, Coetzee appears to deconstruct even an image of himself.

An indication of how Coetzee's narratives are sometimes misconstrued is that some readers fail to understand that Klawer's alternative deaths cannot be an error on Coetzee's part, but a deconstruction of Jacobus Coetzee. Coetzee is known for his scrupulousness. He reads and re-reads and revises (Kannemeyer 2012:223-224). Apparently when alerted to the contradiction Coetzee told the publisher: "No, there is no oversight on my part" (Kannemeyer, 253).

Even that early in his career Coetzee had adopted a policy of not assuming authority as the writer. His detailed response to a final request from publisher Peter Randall shows he did not feel compelled to explain the contradiction. Kannemeyer's explanation is, therefore, plausible: as a sole witness, the narrator over-indulges his discretion to falsify facts (2012:254). This once again leads to the complicity in travel narratives that falsify history in order to fantasise adventure (Borkfelt 2011:142). Discourse itself appears amenable to colonisation (Gallagher 1991:80). One could argue Coetzee places colonialism alongside his decolonisation project, in a postcolonial redress of the Other's silencing. His own detailed response is worth noting:

> Regarding the alternative deaths of Klawer: I don't believe in the principle of authorial explication, so what I have done is to ask Crewe – who gave the work a reading which was in my eyes amazingly responsive – what he made of the pages in question. He referred me to the passage on p.2 of his review where he discusses 'the disclosure of the stage machinery' and suggested (a) that Jacobus Coetzee is telling stories to cover up the 'facts' of Klawer's death, and (b) that someone (who) is writing a document called 'The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee' and has been caught with the edges of his revision showing. I don't know how you feel about this interpretation. I find it quite possible. (Kannemeyer 2012:253)

This irony is not lost in the text itself. Before Klawer's final disappearance from the text, Jacobus Coetzee says: "If he had believed in me, or indeed in anything, he would have recovered. But he had the constitution of a slave, resilient under the everyday blows of life, frail under disaster" (Coetzee 1974: 94).

More disturbing is that he celebrates the freedom of being alone at last and sings: "*Hottentot*, *Hottentot* / *I am not a Hottentot*" while invoking God's name and attempting to perform the ur-act (Coetzee 1974: 95). In view of his sojourn among the Namaqua, Jacobus Coetzee would have learnt some of their ways. Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen, therefore, have a point in seeing such behaviour in terms of a fear of 'same-ing', that is, his anxiety to be placed in 'their' category:

> Otherness in its multifarious forms is all too often rendered dark and suspect, provoking reflexes dominated by disavowal and fear, and with reason, since otherness may take on the exacerbating form of being integral to subjectivity itself. (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:18)

One can interpret his refusal to be associated with Hottentots as an attempt to disavow an event that he cannot erase from his life experience, one in which socialisation in colonial society dictates that he views himself not as an independent individual, but in relation to the Other. The Other being inferior in such society, it is not unexpected that he becomes traumatised with the thought of having shared his life with Hottentots. His attempt to "rape" the earth by trying to perform the "ur-act" can be interpreted as a colonialist's urge to re-establish supremacy: to feminise territory and establish mastery over it, just as the colonial subject's status is constructed out of the subjugation of native. In essence, this becomes the basis of subject colonial trauma. This points to an acknowledgment in Coetzee's writing, of the Lacanian observation that identity is constructed through language and through the confrontation of the subject with the Other and of structruralism's assertion of meanings being historically and socially determined (Canepari-Labib 2005:201).

Similarly, his encapsulation of the natives as savages will soon be revealed as introjection as well as self-projection because it is him who is revealed as the savage in the end, when he returns to Namaqualand to murder his ex-servants and erstwhile hosts. Through this act, he can be seen to be attempting to further distance himself from the "animal" Hottentots. Of note, however, is that the killing of the four disaffected servants is rendered graphically, in a departure from a consistent ethic in Coetzee's fiction, whereby the literal presentation of violence is witheld. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for example, events in the torture chamber are not rendered graphically. The same applies in *Disgrace*, where a visceral depiction of Lucy's rape is not given. Conversely, in Jacobus Coetzee's narrative, the presentation of violence is unmediated. "I fired and lowered my gun. Plaatje was still standing. 'Fall damnyou!'I said" (Coetzee 1974:104). Attwell, therefore, is correct to implicate a violent ethic in Coetzee's representation of colonial violence in *Dusklands*. Contra Attwell, Wright does think there is justification to the direct description. She argues that J.M. Coetzee ensures the murdered men "are not forgotten", to rehash Jacobus Coetzee's own words, spoken the moment he instals himself as a god and kills his ex-servants. He says:

> Those of us who may momentarily doubt that we are included in the great system of dividends and penalties may take comfort in Our Lord's observation on the fall of the sparrow: the sparrow is cheap but he is not forgotten. (Coetzee 1974:101)

One notes that Jacobus Coetzee distorts the biblical parable in Matthew 10:29, which reads: "Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father." Coetzee is either parodying Jacobus Coetzee's professed knowledge of the scriptures or the protagonist is consciously misusing a metaphor to justify violence. Either way, the plurality of potential significations calls for ethical interpretation (Barthes 1974:11).

However, Wright contends that "by naming all of the men that Jacobus has killed, Coetzee – via Jacobus – assures that they are not superfluous to the narrative despite the fact that they remain largely silent in the narrative" (2006:41). Jacobus Coetzee says: "I too can attain and inhabit a point of view from which, like Plaatje, like Adonis, like Tamboer & Tamboer, like the Namaqua, I can be seen to be superfluous" (Coetzee 1974: 107).

The killing is, therefore, a denouement that severs what tenuous connection to ethical development the reader may have entertained concerning Jacobus Coetzee's character. Moreover, he is unable to countenance himself in the place of his victims despite his reflection of such a possibility. States Gallagher:

> Jacobus's God, lacking love and mercy, does not provide a coherent center to the universe, a meaningful means of interacting with others and nature. Pure power and knowledge ultimately become solipsism: 'A world without me is inconceivable'. (Gallagher 1991:67-68)

Buber's I-Thou assesses ethics or "the world of relation" not only with man and nature, but also with God. He states that evil corrupts self into object and divorces the individual from his "I" and furthermore denies him salvation (Buber 1923:45-46). Using Buber's yardstick for assessing secular salvation and theological salvation, Jacobus Coetzee is closed to both. The same applies to Eugene Dawn, the other protagonist of *Dusklands*.

As will be noted in the following chapter, the Magistrate's complex character and his capacity to open himself to influences, makes him the perfect character to question colonial authority. He lays the groundwork for Lurie to explore the challenge further and for Costello to take it even further, in her concerted advocacy for animal rights.

The Magistrate, therefore, represents the first step in Coetzee's exploration of the sympathetic imagination in his characters. The protagonist's uncertainty suggests the temporal finitude and mythic element of colonialism.

Of note is that *Waiting for the Barbarians* continues the deconstruction of discourses started in *Dusklands* in that Coetzee uses a sophisticated character who attempts to capture reality from outside history, by questioning Empire's justification, after he witnesses torture and becomes both accomplice in and victim of that torture.

Chapter 3.*Waiting for the Barbarians*: Narrative, ethics and privileging of the Other

‘When some men suffer unjustly…it is the fate of those who witness their suffering to suffer the shame of it’. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980:152)

Waiting for the Barbarians continues the deconstruction of colonial discourses that started with *Dusklands*. An unnamed Magistrate of Empire finds himself caught between duty towards his masters and his assumed responsibility for a racially Other woman, at a time he begins to lose faith in the colonial system. His relatively sedate life is upended when Colonel Joll of the Third Bureau visits his outpost on a mission to clamp down on rumoured imminent attacks by the barbarians. The bureaucrat protagonist is an autodiegetic narrator like Eugene Dawn, but that is where the similarities end. The Magistrate is a more complex character who shows a capacity for sympathetic reflection, unlike the inward-looking and violent Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*.

Some of the commentaries on the novel once again illustrate how Coetzee’s novels can easily be misconstrued if the reader fails to pay close attention to the text. Of note is criticism that questions Coetzee’s supposed liberal-leaning proclivities (Dovey 1988:209) or restricts its interpretation to a universalism divorced from South African politics, as a review in the London *Sunday Times* suggests (Kannemeyer 2012 342-343). A major talking point, as will be discussed below, is that neither the setting nor the time is specified.

In attempting to address such misconceptions, Teresa Dovey discusses the novel from the perspective of Lacanian allegories, averring that Coetzee’s novels in one way or another can be interpreted from such a standpoint. She argues that it is the speech act itself under deconstruction, that is, the discourse the Magistrate renders, the story he narrates (Dovey 1988:218). This would warrant imagining the text as a direct speech in quotation marks, from beginning to end, given the interiorised and unmediated monologue. Notes Dovey:

> […] in giving us a narrator like the Magistrate, Coetzee does not engage in either a critique or an endorsement of the liberal humanist position itself, but in a deconstructive reading of the liberal humanist *novelistic discourse*. (1988:210; italics in original)

Her argument finds support in Gallagher, who points out that the Magistrate consistently deconstructs his own actions and speech acts. She cites as an example the way in which the ability to write is analogous to sexual potency. "It seems appropriate that a man who does not know what to do with the woman in his bed should not know what to write," the Magistrate says (Coetzee 1980:62). Gallagher gives further examples of this self-deconstruction of the self: "Or perhaps whatever can be articulated is falsely put" (Coetzee 1980:70) and "Or perhaps it is the case that only that which has not been articulated has to be lived through" (Coetzee 1980:70). Evoking Derrida, she points out that the statement "whatever can be articulated is falsely put" is itself an articulation (Gallagher 1991:122) as it "endlessly constructs its own destruction" (Derrida 1974:71), just as "The magistrate's sexual and linguistic failures demonstrate his lack of authority" (Gallagher 1991:122). Of related significance is the Magistrate's inability to "read". Placed in proximity to Joll, the barbarian girl and the alternate reality of dreams, he is seen to fail to "perform" because both Joll and the girl as well as the recurrent dream sequence present to him as enigmas. This failure on the part of the Magistrate is the main focus of this chapter and will be discussed below in relation to proximity and his place within history. One is compelled to concur with Gallagher's observation that "His inconclusive dreams demonstrate that the magistrate cannot even read the text of his own identity" (Gallagher 1991:122). The crisis of identity is a hallmark of colonialism. States Stuart Hall:

> Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made with the discourse of history and culture. Not an essence but a positioning. (Hall: 1994:395)

Evident in the storyline and the novel's title is the strategic deployment of myth, as a signifier of a surreality that denies the signification of a falsehood. The barbarians live suspended in memory, in the history of the town. They, therefore, sustain the imagination of Empire's citizens, but are not, at the same time, an invention. In the narrative, two dead soldiers are sent back to the town lashed to their saddles. "The two horsemen […] already beginning to cross the field by the time they are spied […] I begin to run as fast as I can…my heart pounding" (Coetzee 1980:153). The dead soldiers are positively identified by their battalion standard and their bodies' repatriation serves as a warning from the barbarians against Empire's meddling.

Attwell is, therefore, correct to posit that the novel explores history as an object (1992:90). One, therefore, sees history in its structural articulation as opposed to its presentation as an event in *Dusklands*. "It is not that the barbarians are the purely fictive construct of Empire. Fictions do not return imperial horsemen strapped dead on their mounts, as a warning," he avers (1992:89).

In the intertext of Cavafy's poem which carries the same name as the novel, the senate's concluding remarks reveal the mythical twist in the "waiting" when members bemoan the non-arrival of the barbarians, and characterise them as having been "a solution" of some sort:

> And some people have arrived from the frontier;
> They said there are no barbarians any more
> And now what will become of us without Barbarians? –
> Those people were some sort of solution. (Cavafy 1951:28)

The implication that residents only find meaning in their lives through an awareness of the barbarian threat can be likened to Marais's observation that colonial society historically needs its Others in order to affirm its host status in the colonial order (Marais 2009:4, 7). This is illustrated by the fact that much as the citizens at the outpost are fearful of the barbarians, so much so that some of them take to deserting the town of their own volition towards the end of the narrative, is indicative of the fact that their "civilised" existence can only be authenticated in relation to the "barbarian" enemy. In light of the inhumane cruelty of torture, administered by Empire on its supposed barbarian enemies, the true barbarians are, therefore, Empire's zealous agents, as Kannemeyer notes (2012:337). The language that names and shames is projected on tothe self to expose its barbarism. One would be persuaded to acquiesce inAttwell's assertion that "naïve expectations of closure are disconfirmed, leading to more complex, if unresolved, versions of 'truth'" (1992:90). It is also plausible that Attwell, like Dovey and Gallagher, interprets the myth of the barbarians as a deconstructive critique (1992:90). Equally sustainable is his claim that the novel rests on "how Empire *imagines* the barbarians" (Attwell 1992:89; italics in original). This is a validation of the contention that the barbarians' undue presence in the imaginative faculty of Empire's residents is not altogether unwarranted: they are not a wholly imaginary entity.

Insofar as this is the narrative's background, the Magistrate occupies a specific position in the historical spectrum of Coetzee's fiction, where a postcolonial future becomes possible to imagine. As a historical man, he questions his role as an agent in Empire's history of oppression. His pastime as amateur archaeologist and his curiosity to "read" or examine the past in scripts, codes or on the body as a "text" from which to decipher "truth", makes justifiable Poyner's claim that he is more of a "reader" than a "writer", unlike some of Coetzee's other characters (2009:56). One is tempted to think of Lurie in *Disgrace*, MrsCurren in *Age of Iron* and Dostoevsky in *The Master of Petersburg*, as his opposites.

One would be obliged to ask then, what is the "truth" that the Magistrate attempts to find? Truth as verisimilitude is a common topic of critique in Coetzee. Empire, as one would note, is interested in its monolithic version of truth. This is illustrated in Joll's discussion with the Magistrate:

> 'What if your prisoner is telling the truth,' I ask, 'yet finds he is not believed? Is that not a terrible position? 'Imagine: to be prepared to yield, to yield, to have nothing more to yield, to be broken, yet to be pressed to yield more! […].
>
> 'A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth. Training and experience teach us to recognize that tone.'
>
> 'The tone of truth! Can you pick up this tone in everyday speech? Can you hear whether I am telling the truth?'

> '[…] No, you misunderstand me. I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see – this is what happens – first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth.' (Coetzee 1980:5)

Empire's Manichean approach to reality refuses to entertain the possibility of shades of grey and insists on black and white binaries, as seen in its reading treason into the Magistrate's journey to the barbarians and the closing out of a probable humanitarian motive. States Wright:

> '[b]arbarian,' like 'terrorist,' becomes a floating signifier devoid of specific meaning. The Magistrate's continued denouncement of the myth of barbarian existence at the end of the novel – 'we have no enemies … unless we are the enemy' [Coetzee 1980:85] – functions to conflate the us-and-them dichotomy, the same dichotomy that constructs him as other from the girl and that allows him the potential for imagined identification with her through his own bodily suffering. (Wright 2006:82)

As Poyner argues, it is in Empire's interests to "construct" the enemy out of the barbarians (2009:54). An example is the episode where Joll ushers in a barbarian chain gang whose members are then flogged by the townspeople after the victims' bodies are inscribed with the word 'ENEMY' (Coetzee 1980:115). Of significance is that the symbolism of that scene resides in its relevance to Coetzee's replication in his early fiction of asymmetrical relations as a trope, as Marais observes in *The Idea of Hospitality*:

> […] my eventual argument is that this novelist's continued sense of responsibility for what has not, and cannot, emerge means that his writing possesses a certain repetitive quality. (Marais 2009:xiv)

Its use can be described as Coetzee's unfailing representation of the marginalised entity, as argued earlier. In discussing the Magistrate's character development in terms of his proximity to the barbarian girl, this chapter argues that thanks to his relationship with the young woman, the Magistrate profits from a traumatic encounter with the Other which facilitates his recognition of the Other as Other, as Wright argues above. The realisation that the Other cannot be the same, or the acceptance of the Other's radical alterity, becomes the essential element in his enlightened state towards the narrative's end. As seen in Chapter 1, Michael Bell explores this trajectory in relation to Coetzee's fiction, in arguing for the essence of the recognition of the absolute alterity of the Other, that emphasises difference, from which the sympathetic imagination is seen to arise.

By the same measure, Joll's proximity to the Magistrate, is also in a sense, a structuring of his Otherness in relation to the Magistrate. For much of the rest of the narrative, one sees the Magistrate expressing his bafflement at Joll's apparent opacity, his inability to "read" him because he shields his eyes, "the windows to the soul", behind a pair of sunglasses. Joll speaks the word of It, as he is not interested in the world of relation, the I-Thou. He is there to seek the "truth" that Empire has formulated, the world of experience: "Training and experience teach us to recognize that tone," he says (Coetzee 1980:5). Buber maintains that experience does not lead to the establishing of ethical relations with man (Buber 1923:4).

One does observe that proximity to the Other is explored in various contexts in the novel in order to demonstrate that a traumatic encounter can either be a missed opportunity in the recognition of the Other or a means by which one is placed on a new path to awareness. In light ofJoll's overseeing the Magistrate's Othering through torture, this is a point that cannot be discounted. Joll becomes a factor in the protagonist's journey towards ethical insight. Also, as Kannemeyer suggests, the fact that the Magistrate sees his own reflection in Joll's opaque glasses is indicative of his own complicity (2012:336). Poyner appears to concur with this assessment:

> Yet in his proximity to the likes of Joll on the one hand and in his imprisonment and torture at the hands of the latter on the other, the Magistrate's position of both oppressor and oppressed is experienced as a kind of double consciousness that can only lead to madness. (Poyner 2009: 54)

Therefore, both Joll and the girl are instrumental in channelling the Magistrate's sense of renewed assertiveness in that they present him with a struggle of reading the self. This struggle on the part of the Magistrate is on display when he tries to scrutinise Joll. Joll's glasses refract his own image. In his relationship to the girl, her physical blindness becomes a counterpoise to his moral blindness. This explains Poyner's characterisation of the Magistrate's attachment to the girl's broken body as "morally suspect" (2009:62). Gallagher has noted the establishment of such parallelisms, leading her to conclude that Coetzee's stories suggest an alternative to South African realities (1991:x).

Poyner in *J.M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship* and Marais in *The Idea of Hospitality* offer competing explanations as to the Magistrate's failure to recognise the barbarian girl. Poyner articulates what she frames as the "madness of civilization", alternatively, the moral blindness behind Empire's persecution of the barbarians, as the reason behind the Magistrate's inability to come to terms with the young woman's difference (2009:62). Marais, for his part, prefers to see not the colonial order of thinking, or ideology, but history in general, in the Magistrate's struggle and inability to capture the girl's being outside of inherited knowledge (Marais 2009:32-33). The cultural argument tends to carry more weight though, in that, as Marais demonstrates, the Other is the object of history, which has tended to erase her or him. Coetzee's task then is to make visible that which history has obliterated (Marais 2009:25). The cultural reasoning is also consistent with the tenable position Marais adopts, that is also a central claim of this study, which posits Coetzee's deconstructive narratives as relevant texts for decolonisation and postcolonial contexts. The recognition of the Other is an imperative in these situations.

The inherent political element appears to be missed or underplayed in some commentaries of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, but first, a reminder from Attridge. In "Against Allegory", he warns that the richness of a story and the urgency of the literary event of literature risk being lost in rushing to look for an allegorical reading (Attridge 2004:43). This would appear to oppose allegorical readings of the novel as a metaphor for events in South Africa in the turbulent late 1970s when political unrest placed the country in the global limelight. It will be worthwhile at the same time, to point out that

Attridge does not dismiss the political aspect of the novel. This will be shown in the discussion of the debate on allegorisation in terms of Coetzee's ethics and his representation of the marginalised in his anti-realist narratives. Granted, of the many assignations of allegory to *Waiting for the Barbarians* one is from Kannemeyer:

> At the risk of using the word rather loosely, one could say that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is an allegorical version of the abuses in South Africa in the apartheid years. (Kannemeyer 2012:336)

This is a position with which Gallagher and Attwell concur. Gallagher states that in his third novel, Coetzee "turns to a more allegorical rendition of the dynamics of contemporary life in South Africa" (1991:112). In corroborating this position, Attwell explores the political situation in southern Africa at the moment and concludes that "Coetzee's Empire is recognizable as the fictionalization of this especially paranoid moment in apartheid discourse" (Attwell 1992:93). He, therefore, dismisses, and quite rightly so, the idea of "ethical universalism" as not wholly accurate, pointing out that the "refusal of specificity" is "strategic" (1992:92).

While not disputing such interpretations, Attridge's claims against allegory are worth entertaining for the ethical issues they raise. For one, he alleges that a close reading of the text would familiarise the reader with Coetzee's uniquely honed narrative techniques. This is given that it is during the process of appreciating his unique craft that one finds the modes by which Coetzee exposes and subverts national myths as Gallagher suggests (1991:x). Therefore, in adopting a literal reading, the chances of missing the Magistrate's self-deceiving liberal inclinations are minimised, the "subtler forms of oppression" (Attridge 2004:43) that are a milder variant of Joll's overt violence. Ethical reading, therefore, is bound to enable us to absorb effectively, the affective, and the sense of complicity not lost on the part of the Magistrate, who appears to pass judgment on himself ahead of us. He says:

> (On the other hand, who am I to assert my distance from him? I drink with him, I eat with him, I show him the sights, I afford him every assistance as his letter of commission requests, and more. The Empire does not require

> that its servants love each other, merely that they perform their duty.) (Coetzee 1980: 6)

However, Wright finds the Magistrate's rumination untenable and denies that he can ever be conflated with Joll. For certain, they cannot be on the same spectrum on the moral scale. The Magistrate himself is not unaware of the distance separating him from Joll. After Joll's army has been humiliated by the barbarians, he says: "I stare through the window at the faint blur against the blackness that is Colonel Joll" (Coetzee 1980:160). Nonetheless, Wright sustains her argument with the proposition that the Magistrate and Joll ask for confession from the girl on different modes of signification, he to "gain entry into the girl's narrative" following her torture and Joll out of "the desire to inflict pain" (Wright 2006:79). However, her argument does not align with Coetzee's exploration of the sympathetic imagination in the Magistrate. Coetzee himself has described the Magistrate as a "man of conscience" (Gallagher 1991:120).

The Magistrate is supposed to reflect to some degree, Levinas's idea of unbounded responsibility, namely, that "I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for their responsibility" (Levinas 1985:99). He implies as much when he mouths to a disconsolate Joll, through the window of his carriage: "The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves" (Coetzee 1980:160). In view of the protagonist's pronouncements and the theme of complicity to which Coetzee repeatedly returns in his fiction, one is inclined to concur with a suggestion from Poyner, on this matter. Pointercautions against making a literal moral equivalence that sees the Magistrate as a moral likeness of Jolly – but to establish the self-interest that unites them (2009:55). Jolly exploits the barbarian girl for his version of "truth" through dehumanization and the Magistrate does so with a fetishistic fixation on her tortured body. This explains Pointer's argument that the novel's power lies partly in the Magistrate's realization that the boundaries separating him from Jolly are not so clear cut (2009:54). Her statement suggests that both men are mutually complicit, and is, therefore, allegorical. States the Magistrate:

> For I was not, as I liked to think, the indulgent pleasure-loving opposite of the cold rigid Colonel. I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are

> easy, he the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow. Two sides of imperial rule, no more, no less. (Coetzee 1980:148-149)

Structural complicity is what Marais seems to implicate in his statement that Joll and the Magistrate both host the girl in her “less than happy visit” to the outpost (Marais 2009:33) (Coetzee1980:79), an observation Wright appears to pick up on to argue that after torture and humiliation, the Magistrate’s status as benevolent coloniser is subverted (2006:43). Albert Memmi’s characterisation of the leftist coloniser comes to mind:

> The leftist colonizer is part of the oppressing group and will be forced to share its destiny, as he shared its good fortunes […] Colonial relations do not stem from individual good will or actions; they exist before his arrival or birth, and whether he accepts or rejects them matters little […] No matter how he may reassure himself, “I have been this way or that with the colonised,” he suspects, even if he is in no way guilty as an individual, that he shares a collective responsibility by the fact of membership in a national oppressor group. (Memmi 1974:38-39)

The fact that it would appear inevitable to attempt to draw an analogous relationship between the Magistrate and Joll, makes it impossible to escape allegorisation in discussions of the novel. One could argue that all of Coetzee’s novels are liable to an allegorical reading, including the two novels that supposedly foreground realism, *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace*, in that they are allegories of the historicist kind, as Attridge points out (Attridge 2004:33).

If myth is a story (Segal 2015:3) then Attridge’s position that Coetzee’s fiction is more fully appreciated when one engages the text literally, is a sustainable one. Such an assessment should not, however, be an excuse to dismiss allegory where it is warranted. States Segal: “Theories that read myth symbolically rather than literally still take the subject matter, or the meaning, to be the unfolding of a story” (2015:4).

Nonetheless, this chapter will posit that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is more meaningfully appreciated as an allegory. This is a position that can be motivated on the basis of empirical consensus: Attridge (2004:42), Attwell (Kossew& Harvey 2019:57), Kannemeyer (2012:329) and Poyner (2009:58) are all agreed that the torture early into the novel is an allegory of the murder in police custody of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko in 1977. In pointing out that one is likely to make one of two connections to real-life events when examining the text on a global level, Attridge effectively endorses the idea that the novel is an allegory (2004:42). As he points out, the first connection is that Joll's report on the death of the elderly prisoner is a near-replica of the state's version into the death of Biko. The second type of allegory, would allege that *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a metaphor for oppression everywhere, as suggested in Bernard Levin's review in the London *Sunday Times*:

> On the surface, the story, though a metaphor, directly indicts [Coetzee's] country as one ruled by 'people who assert that there are higher considerations than decency'. But beneath the surface it is timeless, spaceless, nameless and universal. Coetzee sees the heart of darkness in all societies, and gradually it becomes clear that he is not dealing in politics at all, but inquiring into the nature of the beast that lurks within each of us, and needs no collective stimulus to turn and rend us. […] Each of us, it seems, is waiting for the barbarians, and if Coetzee is right, none of us will have long to wait. (Kannemeyer 342-3)

The irony in Levin's comment is that he initially is able to establish the political connection but then deflects it in the rest of his criticism. Typically, Coetzee could neither deny nor agree with Levin's criticism. He could only say that the words "universal" and "transcend" were too big for him. Quizzed in an interview on the novel's historical allusion he answered that nobody started writing from a carefully established position in advance, a response which appeared to be a refusal to endorse the apartheid connection (Kannemeyer 2012:344).

Against this backdrop, the different interpretations of allegory appear to affirm Gallagher's assertion that Coetzee creates alternative narratives. This is further corroborated in Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela. They write that literary narratives contain "a unique combination of the specific and the universal", a trait they cite as distinguishing literature from historiography (2008:62). To cite an instance of the universal: In "*Waiting for the Barbarians* after September 11", Patrick Lenta makes a statement that highlights the novel's relevance to situations of national trauma. He writes that:

> J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*…offers allegorical terms for understanding the relationship between torture, law and power in the post-September 11 context. (2006:1)

Given that the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001, polarised opinion regarding how the country should respond to the event, it is salient that Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela contend that "literary narratives, through dealing with universal themes, can have a unifying function in a divided community" (2008:63).

In the novel, for example, it is obvious that the first assessment of the murder report early into the novel is specific, as it is read in tandem with the report into Biko's murder, which it is shown to resemble. The second interpretation cannot be wrong either because one cannot deny that *Waiting for the Barbarians* can be read as a general metaphor of abuses that go on all the time in different parts of the world (Attridge 2004:42). However, one could argue that the universal interpretation Levin appears intent on championing at the expense of the political element although correct, is inaccurate.

This can perhaps be illustrated by a criticism that contains both types of allegory. American critic Anthony Burgess's review would appear the natural outcome of what such considerations of literary interpretation bring to bear on the text. Burgess lauded a "grave and admirably written story" and notes a:

> [P]owerful fictional indictment not only of the separatist ideology that sustains Coetzee's own country but of that stupidity in all of us that finds its most typical expression in destruction. (Kannemeyer, 348)

Bearing in mind Barthes's contention that responsible interpretation is called for within a system of plurality, one would be justified in acceding to Burgess's interpretation on the basis that the power of allegory lies in its imprecision. However, apropos Barthes, this chapter would argue that the interpretation of the plurality of a text does not amount to liberal interpretation (Barthes 1974:6). This would make Burgess's assertion not so wrong, but not so right, either. This study, therefore, regards Attwell's observation that the "refusal of specificity" is "strategic" (1992:92), as definitive. In its allegorisation of South Africa, the novel acquires its power, as Poyner points out.

This is not to deny the argument of the event of literature its premise. Attridge's insights make it incumbent on the reader who fully absorbs the allegorical meaning to still be observant of the prose that makes this work special; Kannemeyer speaks of "Coetzee's most brilliant and cleanest prose" (2012:338), in his summation of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. An example of that is the line: "I trudged home through the balmy darkness, taking my bearings from the dim sky-glow of the household fires" (Coetee 1980:17). In other words, what renders or brings out more forcefully the allegorical import is a committed engagement with the text. For instance, in detecting themes including responsibility to the Other, confession and truth as well as trust and betrayal, in Coetzee's texts (204:xii), all of which can be discerned in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Attridge implicates the special qualities that give literature "its peculiar importance". His argument is that such issues are staged rather than argued:

> A literary work is not an object or a thesis; literature happens […] The event of the literary work can have powerful effects on its readers and through them, on the cultural and political environment; but these can never be predicted in advance. (Attridge2004:xii)

A reader such as Levin, therefore, would be within his rights to infer a universalist allegory. However, the danger of appending a universalist reading is that it risks obscuring the political reading, which, as most critics are agreed, is how *Waiting for the Barbarians* should be approached. To complicate things further, an observation from Northrop Frye posits that all traditional commentary is allegorical on the basis that it attaches images and ideas to events (1957:89). This argument makes it all the more untenable to examine the novel in any other way. Therefore, this study deems it fit to defer to Attridge's nuanced opinion: that in attaching an allegorical meaning, we should not forget the "immediacy" (2004:44) of the moment of the literary event, and of moments in the text that disrupt "any consistent experience of extraliteralcorrespondence" (2004:34). It is through such obligation that the work can be afforded its deserved treatment.

However, Poyner argues that the indeterminate place and time creates a temporal no-man's land or "interregnum" (2009:53). In this interregnum, writing is implicated alongside torture, in "writing" the Other (Wright 2006:82). Canepari-Labib, quoting Homi Babha, states that by objectifying the victim, and concentrating on the body as the site of pain, the liberal writer, and subsequently, reader, produce and maintain the victim's Otherness, in a "voyeuristic gaze" that "fixes the cultural difference in a containable, visible object" (Canepari-Labib 2005:97). Her observation is consistent with the Magistrate's assertion that: "So I begin to face the truth of what I am trying to do: to obliterate the girl. I realize that if I took a pencil to sketch her face I would not know where to start. Is she truly so featureless?" (Coetzee 1980:50).

Furthermore, towards the close of the narrative, the Magistrate is seen to abandon his attempts at writing the settlement's history due to his awareness that such an act would be tantamount to "producing" the Other. This is shown in his reflection that "when the barbarian is truly at the gate, perhaps then I will abandon the locutions of a civil servant with literary ambitions and begin to tell the truth" (Coetzee 1980:169). One discerns in his assertion the imputation that he and the barbarians have lived and suffered differently, which makes his telling of the Other's story unfeasible. In *Culture and Imperialism*, Edward Said questions the ethics of "writing" the Other:

> Most readings rightly call attention to Conrad's skepticism about the colonial enterprise, but they rarely remark that in telling the story of his African journey Marlow repeats and confirms Kurtz's action: restoring Africa to European hegemony by historicizing and narrating its strangeness. (Said 2003:164)

As will be shown below, the text's allegorisation is the source of some of the fiercest criticism levelled at it, not least for its alleged replication of colonial discourses. Having established the novel's allegorisation of South Africa, Coetzee's connection to the real-life events allegorised in the text, is also worth examining. He is reported to have been deeply affected by the deaths in detention of Biko in 1977, Ahmed Timol in 1971 and Neil Aggett in 1982 so much so that the events would form the background to two of his most important essays, "Into the dark chamber" (1986) in *Doubling the Point* and "Breyten Bretenbach and the reader in the mirror" (1991) in *Giving Offense* (Kannemeyer, 2012:329).

One does note, therefore, that it is the specific allegory that explains Coetzee's concerns. He uses it to disclose the truth that Biko was murdered, as it deconstructs the official narrative of the activist's death. In exposing government cover-ups, he is seen to champion the oppressed through a subversion of the implausible myth that Biko attacked an investigating officer and succumbed to a self-inflicted injury. It makes a mockery of and exposes as a lie the official narrative. It is also remarkable that the writer chooses to express his sentiments about the affair in private correspondence and not in the public domain. In a letter to Sheila Roberts, Coetzee writes:

> Biko's death has cast a pall over everyone. It would seem that the pathologist is going to report that he was murdered; my guess is that the government is then going to brazen it out – refuse to hold an inquiry or else hold some kind of low-level cover-up, such as an 'internal' police inquiry – and to hell what people think. (Kannemeyer 328-329)

"The act of telling the story of his own torture – or Coetzee's act of writing that story – links the act of confession to the Magistrate's ability to engage with the sympathetic imagination," states Wright (80). The fact that Coetzee had to rechannel his despair through narrative, is consistent with Ernst van Alphen's contention that the integration of traumatic events into cultural discourses is essential to relieving both individuals and society of trauma (Van Alphen 1999:37). Moreover, it vindicates Gallagher's observation that: "Coetzee's novels themselves insist on the possibility of exposing a false history and exploring an alternative story" (1991:x).

Responsible authorship, therefore, calls for ethical representation. This is more so as concerns a topic as sensitive as torture. In the novel, Coetzee is seen to avoid its mimetic representation, except, of course, the Magistrate's public shaming, which is consistent with the Third Bureau's wanting to Other him.

As torture synchronises the political atmosphere of the novel as noted, the question then would be how Coetzee handles it in the text. Of note is that critics are largely in concurrence that Coetzee's treatment of the subject is ethically sound. For one thing, the torture chamber is not mimetically represented.

As Gallagher points out, Coetzee was alert to the pitfalls associated with such practice, not least, inadvertently assisting the state in terrorising and harming people: "The author has an ethical responsibility not only to refuse complicity with those in authority who practice torture but also to recognise that torture is a sign, a word, that desperately needs the exposing light of interpretation" (1991:121). That torture is a sign is indicative of its potential to signify identities. In referencing Foucault, for example, Michela Canepari-Labib states that Coetzee in all of his texts sets out to investigate the role of language in the constitution of identity (2000:1). She suggests that "torture is a form of writing the soulhood on the body through pain":

> […] by leaving the individual with just an injured body (the material body Descartes identified with the primary Other), it deprives the person of the 'essence of humanity,' thus creating his / her Otherness and turning full human beings into the 'sub-humans' the systems have been waiting for. (2000:5)

The episode inferred in Canepari-Labib's statement whereby "enemy" is inscribed on prisoner's backs using torture shows Coetzee's consistent referencing of Kafka. In Kafka's "The penal colony", the same is done to prisoners during their public shaming. However, the Magistrate becomes the "dog" of colonialism that Wright speaks of (2006:42), because he is reclassified in the colonial order as non-human Other, along with his barbarian "friends". That the Magistrate also gains in self-worth and is changed by living in proximity to a tortured body, also shows the potential of torture in fashioning new perspectives and identities.

In affirming that the text references the reality of South Africa, Dominic Head cites the dilemma Coetzee may have faced: either to maintain artistic independence (and resistance) or act on the urge to respond to history (Poyner 2006:101). Head believes *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a successful negotiation of that balance, amid competing claims on the artist, a claim this study concurs with.

True to habit, Coetzee was again non-committal when asked if apartheid had been the inspiration for the book. His response was: "What one writes is an investigation and discovery of his own motives for writing" (Kannemeyer 2012:344). Again, we see the author's reticence in the public forum. One does note, once again, the tension between the ethical and political. As the author volunteers to Attwell in *Doubling the Point*, the ethical always takes precedence over the political (1992:338).

However, in the aftermath of his torture, the Magistrate is made to interpret the messages on his slips under compulsion. He sees an opportunity to posit a diatribe against Empire's violence. Despite the fact that he cannot understand what is written on them himself, he says:

> See, there is only a single character. It is the barbarian character *war*, but it has other senses too. It can stand for *vengeance*, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read *justice*. There is no knowing which sense is intended. That is part of barbarian cunning. (Coetzee 1980:122)

One would agree with Poyner that in politicising reading and offering alternative interpretations the Magistrate satirises the monolith of Empire's colonial history "suggesting that truth is far more malleable than such histories would allow" (2009:57). While Barthes contends that writerly texts in their plurality allow the reader to produce the text, Coetzee at the same time, denies closure, thereby indicating that truth is much more than a 'yes' or 'no' but sometimes as often a "yes and no".

However, even in his own time, the Magistrate pores over the slips, despite the fact that they are "blank", like the barbarian girl, in terms of yielding meaning. His immersion in the reading act can be seen as an attempt to put into coherence the narrative of his own life, disrupted since Joll's arrival and his subsequent torture and humiliation.

As Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela (2008:49) point out in a different context, "Trust has been shattered in the past and is not easily recovered – we are full of memories that divide, negative associations, and stereotypes".

After taking the girl back to her people, the Magistrate is imprisoned and tortured. He is subjected to what may be read as a double Othering: not only is he tortured, but he is forced to wear a woman's smock, which feminises him in accordance with colonial binary significations. The wearing of the smock resembles the ending in Kafka's "The Castle", where the male protagonist is forced to wear a woman's dress. Consequently, the Magistrate is reduced to begging to support himself and is released without charge because Empire ostensibly does not have a record of him: "We have no record of you. So you must be a free man" (Coetzee 1980:137). This withholding by Joll's sidekick Mandel of his official prisoner status can be interpreted as indicative of Empire's desire to obliterate its Others.

It would appear that his incarceration and privation have been for nothing. However, he is vindicated in the end as it is his position on how to handle the barbarian threat that appears the better approach. One would argue, therefore, that thanks to his ordeal, the Magistrate becomes a more enlightened human being: "Coetzee's interest is directed mainly at situations where the distinction between right and wrong, while crystal clear, can be seen to serve no end" notes the Swedish Academy. The statement conveys the implication that it is not worth it to act morally. This warranted an intervention from Sean James Bosman, who critiques the aporia in the Academy's assertion, in a discussion that underscores a common pessimistic ethic, in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and Joseph Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, to argue that ethics are a matter of choice and not, as the Academy purports to imply, legislative and imperative.

Apropos Bosman, this study proffers the view that the Magistrate grows in self-worth after his torture. This is a position conforming to the Academy's description of the average Coetzee character as "overwhelmed by the urge to sink but paradoxically derive strength from being stripped of all external dignity". Not only does his humanism appear to triumph, but in the mayhem towards the close, he is the only one left standing of the main characters, with his tormentors Joll and Mandel out of the picture.

Bearing in mind that Coetzee's main undertaking in the novel is not to critique liberal values per se but liberal discourses, as Dovey points out, it is of the essence that the liberal humanitarian question is also addressed. The philosopher Robert Pippin, argues that it is not the making of such gestures that should be criticised but the intentions behind the actions:

> So his humanist intervention is a limited and confused one, and accordingly, his failure to 'reach' her cannot be simply read as an indictment of all liberal, humanist, moral gestures in the face of such oppression. But the frustrating limitations of such gestures (and the danger of self-congratulation in making them) are certainly at issue. (Leist& Singer 2010:36)

Pippin appears to criticise self-validating exercises that negate the Other. On a balance of probabilities, the Magistrate cannot be said to be purely motivated by self-interest. Of course, as he knows himself, his desires are "questionable". However, he entertains notions of playing the role of father figure to the girl: "I gave the girl protection, offering in my equivocal way to be her father" (Coetzee 1980:88). One also senses a pattern in the narrative, of a movement from indifference to concern for Otherness. He says: "People will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms, a fox and a girl".

Although Wright sees in this statement, the Magistrate's own mental enclosure within the colonial order, where barriers setting up opposition systems "of ruled and ruling, dog and human, man and woman" are constantly shifting (2006:42), one cannot deny that the Magistrate is undergoing transformation, not because of himself but despite himself. Marais explains this development in terms of an apparent lack of control or inspiration (Marais: 2009:29). This is not to say that Wright is completely wrong though, as the colonial order she critiques as instrumental to the Magistrate's conduct towards the girl is also cited by Attwell. That they only manage to consummate their relationship on the journey back to her home after a contiguous affair in his rooms back at the outpost is indicative of a range of proximity factors, of which nature is probably one, as Attwell argues:

> During the journey, the Magistrate and the girl are in an indeterminate space, both geopolitically and ethically, and it is here that the relationship is most at ease and also most fully sexual. (Kossew& Harvey 2019:63)

One would concur with Attwell's assertion that as the reintegration of the girl with the barbarians becomes imminent, her agency becomes to recover, while his male dominance is diluted (Kossew& Harvey 2019:64). The suggestion that the relaxed atmosphere of the journey, away from Empire's constrictions, enables a change in both the Magistrate and the girl, and, therefore, facilitates their getting closer, is, therefore, tenable. "You will have to do the same tomorrow morning" (Coetzee 1980:76), the Magistrate says to the girl, during her purification ritual. Attwell is, therefore, correct to state that the Magistrate realises that "the ritual and the journey have drawn them closer than living in the same rooms has done" (Kossew& Harvey 2019:64).

This physical journey, however, should be seen as part of an excursion that begins with the Magistrate's powerlessness before alterity. A case in point is his willed reluctance or emasculation before the buck while on a hunt. He decides not to shoot it and tells the girl: "Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms" (Coetzee 1980:43). He can fraternise with Other beings and his attachment to alterity is shown to be growing.

This enables him to "communicate" with the animal. In Buber, the wild animal's eyes can "speak" a great language, as "the eyes express the mystery in its natural prison, the anadety of becoming" (1923:95). That this process takes place between him and the buck shows a sympathetic side to the Magistrate that he himself cannot yet understand. Nonetheless, Wright disapproves of the simile capturing the girl as a "wild animal". As a consequence, she denies the Magistrate the prospect of change through interaction with Otherness:

> […] while the Magistrate views the girl as "other", as a woman whose 'femininity is associated with darkness and animality'…his ability to analyze his identification with Joll indicates that he is also in possession of a double consciousness that allows him to critique his own treatment of

> the girl as well. […] Despite such beneficence, he is never able to fully understand or transcend his own motives for trying to decode the narrative of torture written on the girl's body. (Wright 2006:80)

Though properly argued, Wright's views are at variance with Attwell's, and can be contested with evidence in the narrative. One could argue that the Magistrate's relationship with the girl is the novel's centrepiece, an observation which also affirms the point that the Magistrate's self-realisation is thanks to his proximity to the young woman. The Magistrate thinks about the barbarian girl more often after his own torture, when she is gone. States Attwell:

> The Magistrate's retrospective self-scrutiny in relation to the girl is more direct and assured than any of his efforts in the novel's closing paragraphs to write a history of settlement. In fact, it is only in relation to the girl, whom he has now permanently *lost* (italics in original), that 'a new footing' is possible. As for the future of the settlement, it may well lie on that road that leads nowhere. (Kossew& Harvey 2019:67)

This observation from Attwell corroborates an assertion in *Narrating Our Healing*. "There is another kind of positive suffering…growth (becoming) and pain are indeed inextricably linked…" (Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela 2008: 21). One would thus be compelled to reevaluate the Magistrate's fixation with the tortured body as an attempt to understand its Otherness, in contrast to Joll's coercive "reading" of the native body through torture, more so, in the aftermath of the Magistrate's torture.

As Attwell has argued, there is more to the relationship than the classic exploitation in colonial discourse would explain. An evaluation of the opposing arguments is bound to corroborate Attwell. For example, Wright views prejudicial conduct underlain by power relations in the Magistrate's behaviour towards the young woman (2006:80). Contra Wright, Marais (2009:33) and Attwell (1992:103) discern a protagonist who is incapable of exercising control over his own actions. The latter argument appears to conform to Coetzee's ethic of uncertainty, in his interrogation of Cartesian certitude.

The point is not that the Magistrate does not treat the girl as an Other – he does; it is that in the process of doing so, he appears to change because of that interaction. In the early stages of the narrative, the Magistrate's self-questioning and sense of uncertainty may be viewed as a sign of the crisis of identity that is typical of colonial trauma. Although Marais alludes to inspiration in his actions, one cannot dispute that his reflections are brought on by a dawning realisation of his compromised place within the system he serves. His self-doubt can, therefore, be viewed as the anti-Cartesian ethics that Coetzee is prescribing, and that in his case, is part of a moral reflection that ultimately, will deliver him from his initial state of inaction to take a stand against Empire's cruelty against its Others. Initially, he is seen to distance himself from the unfolding barbarism, involving the torture of apparently innocent prisoners. He says, "I ought never to have taken my lantern to see what was going on in the hut by the granary" (Coetzee 1980:23). In the aftermath of his torture, he denounces "the submerged mind" and "mad vision" of Empire (Coetzee 1980:146). One could argue that his proximity to torture and the tortured body of the barbarian girl, and his own torture, help sharpen his moral awareness. Hence in analysing Coetzee's early fiction, Robert Pippin envisages an internal breakdown in the psychologically and politically aware colonial subject. It is an awareness of the unequal power that triggers that realisation, and a situation from which a "possible if limited recovery" is implied (Leist& Singer 2010:25). Consequently, it could be stated that recounting his story provides the Magistrate with an outlet for his trauma:

> Language offers the possibility of the transformation of trauma into narrative. The significance of narrative lies not simply in remembering trauma, but in its transformation through language. (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:25)

Furthermore, it is apparent that the Magistrate's traumatic encounter with the barbarian girl posits such unequal standing. Apart from the skewed power relations, the ambiguities involved include professional ethics. Poyner asserts that the Magistrate is aware that his interest in the young woman is an abuse of power (2009:53). All these qualms are a source of unease in the bureaucrat's conduct towards the young woman. However, it cannot be denied that throughout their domestic relationship, it is the girl's Otherness with which the Magistrate struggles to come to terms. His obsessive examination of her body appears as a sign of that struggle with Otherness, and must be seen as an attempt to locate it in its pre-torture history. He says: “It has been growing more and more clear to me that until the marks on this girl’s body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (Coetzee 1980:33). He also says that “There is no link I can define between her womanhood and my desire” (Coetzee 1980:46) and also that “‘She is incomplete!’ I say to myself” (Coetzee 1980:45).

There is no doubt that his feelings towards her are ambiguous, as disclosed in his confession to be “angry with myself for wanting and not wanting her” (Coetzee 1980:35). Marais is, therefore, correct to suggest that “he assumes that he desires her sexually” (Marais 2009:28). This unawareness is complicated by the Magistrate’s inability to know himself or the world, as a result of epistemological violence (Marais 2009:32), a point on which Marais finds support in Poyner. The latter takes acts of misreading and misrepresentation in the Magistrate as symptoms of colonial violence (2009:59).

This frustrated movement in coming to terms with difference is at variance with the development in the dream sequence, in which the girl in the hooded top acquires greater definition. Although after her face is finally revealed the Magistrate describes, “jet black eyes” and admits to an epiphany, ‘So this is what it is to see!’ (Coetzee 1980:57), his sense of intimacy towards the barbarian girl remains thwarted, as shown in his remark: “I feel no desire to enter this stocky little body glistening by now in the firelight” (Coetzee 1980:32). (Buber: “So long as love is ‘blind’, that is, so long as it does not see a whole being, it is not truly under the world of relation” [Buber 1923:15]). Just as noteworthy is his inability to appreciate the face, the symbolic gesture in Levinas, of creating the asymmetry that culminates in the recognition of the Other. He says:

> I have a vision of her closed eyes and closed face filming over with skin. Blank like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blank body beneath it, without aperture, without entry. (Coetzee 1980:45)

This blankness, is analogous, to the Magistrate's stalled attempts to read that pervades the text, despite the fact that where the barbarian girl is concerned, he profits, ultimately, from such effort. This makes incisive a claim by Attwell that Coetzee makes the young barbarian woman agentive: she comes across as self-possessed and sophisticated, countering the Magistrate in speech acts and making him feel challenged (Kossew & Harvey 2019:59). Furthermore, Attwell, in acceding that while the washing of the feet may be construed as a sign of penance, "the washing of the rest of her body makes her more suitable for the imperial bedroom", acknowledges the Manichean depiction that supports anti-colonialist and postcolonial readings (Kossew & Harvey: 2019:58). This aspect of criticism will be the subject of a discussion of Abdul JanMohamed's views of the text.

However, Attwell counters that to see a colonialist element will be to ignore the many attributes of the girl that do not make her an Other simpleton, such as her reverse gaze, which forces on the Magistrate a sense of complicity (Kossew & Harvey: 2019:61). One would, therefore, be inclined to concur with Attwell's reasoning that the intransitivity of desire that characterises colonialist texts and that is often cited in criticism of the novel becomes untenable. Furthermore, Poyner claims a counter narrative strategy to empower the girl: "The Magistrate reads the girl as a blank page: 'she is incomplete'; ironically distorting the 'dark interior' of colonialist discourse, he believes 'with this woman it is as if there is no interior'" (Poyner 2009:56).

Nonetheless in "The Economy of Manichean Allegory", JanMohamed notes: "In its studied refusal to accept historical responsibility, this novel, like all 'imaginary' colonial texts, attempts to mystify the imperial endeavour by representing the relation between self and Other in metaphysical terms" (1985:73). JanMohamed's censure is consistent with the general drift of the bulk of adverse reviews of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which appears to fault the unspecificity of time and place, as noted in Gordimer's "The Idea of Gardening", where she rebukes Coetzee, saying he "seemed able to deal with the horror he saw written on the sun only – if brilliantly – if this were to be projected into another time and plane". Nevertheless, another concern of JanMohamed's appears to be that the Magistrate and the barbarian girl lack proper names, as their identities are represented by their professional and social backgrounds, respectively.

In view of apartheid-era atrocities that cried out to be exposed, it is understandable one could take the view that the historical imprecision and the generalisation of identities does not further the cause. Nonetheless, the proven link to Steve Biko's murder and the fact that the book was put before the censors (Kannemeyer 2012:344) are signs of the novel's political and resistance positioning.

Contra Marais's position that the Magistrate offers the girl a hospitality that is unconditional (2009:28), Poyner and Attwell are in acknowledgement of JanMohammed's contention that self and Other are depicted in historically-determined structures. Poyner observes that there evidently is a desire in the Magistrate to be recognised by the Other in order to clarify his sense of self (2009:60). In concurring, Attwell posits that the Magistrate desires to possess not the girl but her difference, in a typical allusion to the master and slave dichotomy in Hegel (1992:99). The differences in opinion between Marais on the one hand and Poyner and Attwell on the other, nonetheless finds a resolution in the course of their discursive examination of the relationship. Attwell points out that the barbarian girl's impenetrability makes her the writerly text of Barthes's S/Z, as opposed to the readerly one of the "little bird woman" at the inn, who "gives herself over to the agency of the Magistrate". "So the barbarian girl will simply not be delivered up to the Magistrate's probings; her otherness cannot be domesticated" (1992:99). The barbarian girl, therefore, thwarts the process of subject constitution, and as a consequence: "In disallowing penetration, therefore, Coetzee both acknowledges and refuses to perpetuate these generalized implications of dominance" (Attwell 1992:100).

Poyner and Attwell's analyses, insofar as they see a colonialist mindset in the Magistrate, implicitly acknowledge that her presence is an ethical challenge for the Magistrate. His motives may have been "mixed" and his humanitarian gesture "confused" but his lesson, one would be inclined to argue, is also learned. For example, Poyner focuses on the Magistrate's statement that "There is something that has been staring me in the face, and still I do not see it" (Coetzee 1980:170) to argue that "he has learnt that he has learnt nothing" (Poyner 2009:68). This, once again, foregrounds the deconstructive element of the text, the awareness of his unawareness being itself an awareness. Hence Poyner similarly concludes that, that consciousness itself amounts to an ethical awakening (Poyner 2009:68).

This is because the girl appears as the bridge to his recognition of the Other, following his torture. The irony of his being "animalised" through torture is that his developing sympathetic ethic is channelled through animals: he adopts a fox cub and recognises the Otherness of a buck and desists from shooting it. Wright is, therefore, correct to assert that the Magistrate's torture forces him to identify with all suffering Otherness: creatures, women and children. "At this point in the narrative, after his torture, the Magistrate, who has been unable to imagine anything at all, is able to imagine the girl about whom he dreams with intense specificity" (2006:81). Her conclusion is similar toAttwell's; he claims the Magistrate changes because of the girl. Furthermore, the merging of the girl of the dream and the barbarian girl (Coetzee 1980:149) appears to consolidate his ethical restoration.

These scenarios can be taken as the culminating development of a "journey" that the Magistrate has embarked on since meeting the girl. Before meeting her, he was indifferent to the plight of the Other. He says: "I did not mean to get embroiled in this" (Coetzee 1980:8), in referring to the tortured prisoners. Then follow his struggles to understand the girl's difference: "She is incomplete" (Coetzee 1980:45). Finally, he appears to come to terms with her difference. "This is the last time to look on her clearly face to face, to scrutinise the motions of my heart, to try to understand who she really is" (Coetzee 1980:79). Poyner is therefore astute in her summation that "Looking upon the girl before they part, he unwittingly reveals that to understand her is to better understand himself" (2009:56). Buber regards self-fulfillment as a higher ideal: "Only the man who makes freedom to himself meets destiny" (1923:15). In concurring with Buber, this dissertation takes the view that the Magistrate is a better, more assured and forward-looking character. Moreover, he is seen to be basking in the knowledge that his version of history, rather than Joll's, is the one that is vindicated. He is clearly buoyed by a sense of self-fulfilment that his suffering has not been for nothing.

Furthermore, his burying of the slips he has been unable to decipher for future generations to rediscover means an acceptance of his limited position to “write” the future. “([…] When the wind lets up, I promise myself, I will go out and bury them where I found them”) (Coetzee 1980:169). This seems to symbolically link present with past and future, thereby signalling continuity, and the Magistrate’s “ethical” positioning of himself.

The future is implied in his words, “It is not a bad snowman….I leave it feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere” (Coetzee 1980:170). The snowman could symbolise post-interregnum reconstruction. Snow is a fleeting substance that cannot be permanently contained, just as the reality beyond the present can only be imagined. The Magistrate’s putative departure, therefore, symbolises a walk into a postcolonial era.

The search for a new ethics that addresses the trauma of the colonial era and new modes of coping with a changing social order becomes a necessity. This is the challenge that *Disgrace* sets for Lurie, and the focus of discussion in the next chapter.

Chapter 4.*Disgrace*: Precarity, trauma and ethics

‘The question is, does he have it in him to be the woman?’ *Disgrace* (1999:160)

With the pointed questions it asks and the multiplicity of themes it suggests, as well as the many associations and comparisons that traverse it, *Disgrace* is perhaps Coetzee’s most important work of fiction.

Inasmuch as its place among the classics is assured, the novel also disturbs the reader, from the point of portrayal of a realism that explores the sensitive issues of race and history, within the context of South Africa’s violent past. One can, therefore, see Lurie as the postcolonial successor of the Magistrate, whose narrative ends with the promise of a new but as yetunrealised dispensation.

Interestingly, the controversy that greeted its reception polarised opinion – to the extent that the government singled it out as an example of a text that exhibited racial bias can be viewed as analogous to the events of the novel itself. The two main white characters, David Lurie and his daughter Lucy, are seen to be at odds regarding the appropriate modes of responding to personal tragedy, in the context of history and a transforming society, of whom the figure of Petrus, Lucy’s former labourer and increasingly assertive co-proprietor, is representative. Race is co-extensive with history. Moreover, this imbrication is complicated by the fact that *Disgrace* is set in the here and now of a South Africa that is seen to be undertaking the project of national reconciliation and rebuilding, five years into a new post-apartheid dispensation.

Consequently, this chapter explores David Lurie in relation to his proximity to his daughter and Petrus, the female Other and the racial Other, respectively, against whom Coetzee is seen to set his protagonist the task of an ethical interaction, in terms of Coetzee’s recasting of Levinasian ethics in the form of the sympathetic imagination. Of significance is an observation from Marais. He says Lurie’s inability to know his daughter derives not from the reader’s superior knowledge of Lucy. Rather, one gets the sense that Lucy exceeds Lurie's cognitive grasp (Marais 2009:184). This, in essence, is one of the most significant parts of the proximity structure of the novel.

The second narrative strand in relation to proximity in the novel involves Coetzee's exploration of Lurie's character development via his work caring for animals at the Animal Welfare League. Initially indifferent to the plight of animals, Lurie incrementally develops an attachment to them, despite himself. This is seen to be in contrast to his earlier observation that:

> As for animals, by all means let us be kind to them. But let us not lose perspective. We are of a different order of creation from the animals. Not higher, necessarily, just different. (Coetzee 1999:74)

Eventually, Lurie's proximity to animals results in his attempts to dignify them. He does this by accompanying animals that have to be euthanised to their deaths, in a way not dissimilar to palliative care in humans. He also insists on the decent disposal of their remains before they are incinerated. His habit of ensuring the corpses of dogs are well disposed of is the source of debate concerning his motives. If discharging or taking responsibility for the Other is an ethical endpoint in proximity philosophy, Lurie's concern for dead dogs cannot, logically, be comprehended in the same conceptual frame: the dogs are dead and are beyond suffering. This is a quandary that Attridge interrogates in "Age of Bronze, State of Grace" and that this study will dwell on in detail later.

In line with this careful treatment of parallel trajectories in the novel, this chapter explores the face-to-face encounter in Levinas as an ethical imperative in the channelling of the sympathetic imagination and uses Buber's I-Thou to assess ethics; what Buber terms "world of relation" (1923:5,60). In "Lessons from the dead masters: Wordsworth and Byron in J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*", Margot Beard implicitly alludes to the complexity by which the sympathetic imagination is attained by recalling empathy instead of sympathy. She states: "Coetzee's concern [is] with the power of the empathetic imagination to awaken us to the needs of others, both human and animal" (2007:60). Her intervention can, however, be disputed on the grounds that sympathy and empathy are semantically dissimilar. For example, according to medicinenet.com, sympathy involves observation and acceptance, whereas empathy involves taking on someone's feelings. This explication anticipates opposition to Beard's suggestion from proponents of the sympathetic imagination, who posit an ethical distance from the Other, on the grounds that one cannot know the Other. The sympathetic imagination is rooted in an abnegation of knowledge, and is the ethical inspection facing Lurie, as Attridge adumbrates:

> If Lucy and Petrus are others for David Lurie whom he struggles to know, if Melanie is an other whom he wrongs by not attempting to know, animals are others whom he knows he cannot begin to know. (Attridge 2004:184)

As straightforward a task as this may appear, *Disgrace*, like the two novels analysed beforehand, sets the reader the not-so-uncomplicated undertaking to look beyond the economy of the text. This is a necessary exercise in order that the reader apprehend an Otherness that Lurie's focalisation cannot provide. The pertinent task of deconstructing Lurie's views is also important to the analysis of the last and pivotal scene of the narrative: Lurie's giving up of the dog, with whom he has developed an especially strong bond. However, of importance is that, much as Lurie may appear a repulsive character to some readers, his views and thoughts are not necessarily Coetzee's, seeing that his reflections are subverted or undermnined in the narrative. It follows that, as in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee, through Lurie, critiques the protagonist's statements, with a view to offering the reader his character development as a figure on the margins of a changing society in which his previous privileges are no longer guaranteed. For example, Attridge points out the many references in the novel "to the times" (2004: 168).

Another scholar, Florence Stratton, criticises the absence of colonial resistance in the protagonist, claiming that David Lurie's subjecthood is also partly dependent on his professional status (2002:86). However, one would be disposed to counter that Lurie's position as professor makes him aware of Enlightenment values despite his allegiance to Romanticism and that Coetzee deliberately inserts his type of character in order to subject it to a downward spiral in which its rationality is a target of the author's critique.

Nonetheless, Stratton points out that although neither Lurie's nor the narrator's views necessarily coincide with those of Coetzee's, missing in the narrative is the challenge to that cynical view (2002:86). One would accede that her argument has cogency. Contra Stratton, Attridge evaluates Lurie's rationalistic reflections, reading into them not a lowering of standards in post-colonial South Africa nor a yearning for apartheid but the country's colonisation into a global phenomenon, as seen in a "new global age of performance indicators and outcomes measurement, of benchmarking and targets, of a widespread prurience that's also an unfeeling puritanism" (Attridge 2004:173).

Worth noting, therefore, is that although Lurie's musings are subjective, they are proven to be factual in this case. As Attridge asserts, the late 1990s were characterised by "the great rationalization" in education worldwide. Attridge cites this phenomenon based on personal observation, probably the result of his background as a professor of literature (Attridge 2004:166). In yet another apparently controversial incident, early into the novel, it is revealed that Dawn, whose name is probably a conscious female reincarnation of Dawn in *Dusklands*, has had her and her husband's names on a waiting list to emigrate to New Zealand for three years. She complains that:

> 'You people had it easier. I mean whatever the rights and wrongs of the situation, at least you knew where you were […] Now people just pick and choose which laws they want to obey. It's anarchy.' (Coetzee 1999:8-9)

Just as Stratton cites the absence of a counterview to Lurie's cynicism, Attridge notes that Lurie's response is withheld from us when Dawn mundanely references the supposed orderliness of the apartheid era (Attridge 2004:166). On to yet another contentious point, which underscores an ironic twist. Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela rightly acknowledge that the novel is much more than Lurie's traumas (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:83), but then go on to mistakenly identify Lucy as the main character (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:21). This could be taken as hardly surprising, considering the enormous amount of critical commentary that Lucy's character has generated. In making their erroneous claim, Van der Merwe &Gobodo-

Madikizela seem to be responding to a statement by Lucy, in which she challenges her father regarding her agency. She says:

> You behave as if everything I do is part of the story of your life. You are the main character, I am a minor character who doesn't make an appearance until half way through. Well, contrary to what you think, people are not divided into major and minor. I am not minor. I have a life of my own, just as important to me as yours is to you, and in my life I am the one who makes the decisions. (Coetzee 1999:198)

One does see that the statement itself is curious, for the fact that Lucy's character is indeed minor to her father's as she makes an appearance halfway through the novel and as her character is subordinated to that of her father, the main character in the novel. Of related significance as it relates to Lurie's focalisation is his statement: "Not rape, not quite that, but undesired nevertheless, undesired to the core" (Coetzee 1999:25). Some commentators and critics have tended to overlook this statement to dismiss an incident in which Lurie forces himself on Melanie as a routine encounter in their romantic affair (Coetzee 1999:25). Conversely, Lucy Graham observes that "although Lurie protests to the contrary, the act he commits is rape" (Graham 2000:7). Canepari-Labib, therefore, draws attention to the fact of Lurie's focalisation, as evident in his equivocation in the statement above. Of relevance, however, is that Lurie is positioned in the novel as the reader of both Lucy and Petrus (2005:247). At issue is that the narrative is given to the reader in Lurie's narcissistic and typically self-validating solipsism which then prompts the reader to look beyond the economy of the text, in order to decipher that the second violation of the text, reveals the earlier sexual violation to be a rape. Indeed, Lurie appears to entertain this perspective, as in the aftermath of his own trauma, he begins to reflect more thoughtfully on his conduct towards Melanie. One does get the sense that he may also come to the conclusion that he raped Melanie, although this is not stated in the text. In all these instances, it is left for us to make our own conclusions or to metaphorically write the novel ourselves as readers.

Nonetheless, of significance is the fact of Lurie's proximity to Lucy and Bev Shaw, in relation to the status of white women in colonial society, especially in the aftermath of how events play out following Lucy's rape. This is as his character evolvement cannot be seen apart from the status of women in colonialism. His traumatic face-to-face encounter with Lucy, and also to some extent, Bev, should, therefore, be explored in light of a history of white women's subjugation to colonialist mores.

In this regard, Laura Wright's assertions, pertaining to the ambivalent position of white South African women are worth noting. She points out that they are "problematically situated as both white oppressors and subordinate patriarchal subjects". As a result, they are placed within a social and rhetorical system that has largely silenced them or generated narratives of their complicity with apartheid as well as an innocence in need of protection from the supposed threat of black men (Kossew& Harvey 2019:23).

Wright's commentary cuts to the heart of Lurie's tendency to "overprotect" Lucy, as it places it in historical context to show the ethical imperatives of his proximity to his daughter. It also dovetails with a related claim that Wright makes in her own study, *Writing "Out of all the Camps*". In it, she draws attention to the confused space that animals occupy in colonial society. Specifically, she critiques humans' attitudes to dogs, averring that, they are simultaneously loved and loathed (Wright 2006:34).

Nonetheless, white women are also victims of this stratification as they occupy a grey area reserved for them and that is essential for colonial society's identity. This means that in relation to Lucy and Bev, Lurie's white male identity is privileged more. Of significance is an observation by Lurie, regarding Lucy's appearing to subvert the historical roles of male and female. He wonders at her pioneering spirit in taking up farming, a traditionally male activity. He muses:

> A frontier farmer of the new breed. In the old days, cattle and maize. Today, dogs and daffodils. The more things change the more they remain the same. History repeating itself though in a more modest vein. Perhaps history has learned a lesson. (Coetzee 1999:62)

In the society depicted in *Disgrace*, however, and the historical hierarchies notwithstanding, identities are being reworked, as society is seen to be adjusting to a new democratic order. State Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela: "Structural trauma is not only painful in itself, but leaving the well-known framework of that situation may be" (2008:11). This is shown in Lurie's conduct. Despite the fact that Lucy is a fully grown woman capable of and with the right to make her own decisions, Lurie continues to be overprotective of her. An instance of such a trend is the flashbacks in memory, offered in his narrator-mediated viewpoint: "His daughter, whom once upon a time he used to drive to school and to ballet classes…is taking him on an outing, showing him life" (Coetzee 1991:71).

It is understandable that Lurie's concern for Lucy's safety, natural as it may seem of a father's love for her daughter, has been the source of a debate regarding perceived middle class white privilege. At the centre of the argument is the differential exposure to violence that renders mainly black poor women vulnerable to repeated sexual violation due to terrible living conditions rooted in historical poverty. These poor living conditions are furthermore exacerbated by a lack of access to support systems such as therapy and legal services. In "Lucy's Precarious Privilege in Fiona Snyckers's *Lacuna*", Northover evaluates this sort of criticism.

He applies the terms "precariousness" and "precarity" as they are used in Judith Butler, who discusses their distinctiveness. In *Frames of War*, Butler explains that precariousness and precarity are intersecting concepts. Precariousness refers to the general vulnerability of life: "Lives are by definition precarious: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed" (2009:25). Precarity, on the other hand, pertains to certain populations' exposure to injury, violence and death, owing to failing social and economic support networks. While precariousness is ontological, precarity is epistemological, with both being politically and socially-constituted (2009:3).

In attempting to determine Lucy's status with respect to these terms, one would be well-served by noting the remarks of her father Lurie. He says: "It's too much, Lucy. Sell the farm to Petrus and come away" (Coetzee 1999:159). Incisive in this assertion is the fact that it is Lurie who calls Lucy's property a "farm"; Lucy herself calls it a smallholding: "Stop calling it *the farm*, David. This is not a farm, it's just a piece of land where I grow things – we both know that. But no, I'm no giving it up" (Coetzee

1999:200; italics in original). This, once again, underscores the need for the reader to keep in mind that the narrative is rendered in Lurie's focalisation.

Lurie's statement pleading with Lucy to abandon the property conveys the assumption that Lucy's life is in precarity. This is more so in view of his assertion that staying on would be tantamount to an invitation for the attackers to return (Coetzee 1999:158). Northover's article "Lucy's Precarious Privilege in Fiona Snyckers's*Lacuna*" can, therefore, assist in providing invaluable insights into Lucy's situation in *Disgrace*. As the title of her novel suggests, Snyckers attempts to fill the void, the lacuna, of Lucy's silence in J.M. Coetzee's novel in the aftermath of her rape. Furthermore, Northover's input is relevant in that both *Lacuna* and *Disgrace* feature a white middle class woman. Also, he addresses precariousness and precarity in relation to privilege as well as Lucy's trauma, using Freud. His position is that Lucy is in a precarious situation despite her privileged socio-economic and racial status as a white middle class woman in post-apartheid South Africa (Northover 2020:116). This assessment is also fitting for Lucy in *Disgrace*. This is because, as in *Lacuna*, Lucy in *Disgrace* is also in a precarious situation deriving in an unstable income. The former barely gets by financially as a junior lecturer on a one-year non-renewable contract (Northover 2020:116) while in *Disgrace*, particularly after her rape, Lucy's financial situation is stressed. She avoids going to the market owing to her depression and trauma and the text cites her absence as an explanation for the paltry amount her father and Petrus take home when they go to stand in for her: "their takings are down: less than three hundred rand" (Coetzee 1999:116).

Assessing the levels of danger attendant on Lucy's personal safety in relation to these terms is worthwhile not only in order to contextualise the anxiety of Lurie around his daughter's wellbeing but to respond to the controversy around race that greeted the novel's reception. This can be ascertained by referencing the views of the women in Lurie's life. His short-time lover Dawn and his ex-wife Rosalind, make statements that express a longing for past privilege. At the same time, one feels an obligation to concede of their apparent precariousness, from the perspective of the runaway gender-based violence that women in South Africa are subjected to on a daily basis. Speaking of the apartheid-era, Dawn evokes the old days for their orderliness (Coetzee 1999:9) while

Rosalind remarks that “No sympathy, no mercy, not in this day and age” (Coetzee 1999:44). However, given Lucy’s domestic situation as a single woman living on her own in a rural area where her isolation makes her exceedingly vulnerable to crime, it would seem justified to conclude that Lucy lives more precariously than both Dawn and Rosalind. As city womenfolk, the other two women show in their opinions that they ignore the fact of their comparatively more secure situation. That women generally live in precariousness in South Africa is evident in Lurie’s statement:

> A risk to own anything: a car, a pair of shoes, a packet of cigarettes. Not enough to go around, not enough cars, shoes, cigarettes. Too many people, too few things. What there is must go into circulation, so that everyone must have the chance to be happy for a day. That is the theory; hold to the theory and to the comforts of theory. Not human evil, just a vast circulatory system, to whose workings pity and terror are irrelevant. That is how one must see life in this country: in its schematic aspect. Otherwise one could go mad. Cars, shoes; women too. There must be a niche in the system for women and what happens to them. (Coetzee 1999:98)

Although the statement is instrumental to understanding Lurie’s anxiety in relation to his daughter’s safety, the attack in which Lurie is assaulted and burned and Lucy is raped is pivotal in that it affects their relationship to the extent that they consistently argue over the seemingly mundane. In this new phase of their life, Lucy’s responses appear to foreground the assertion that one cannot understand the Other. This is demonstrated in Bev Shaw’s insinuation that Lurie could not have known what happened to Lucy. He ponders:

> *You weren’t there. You don’t know what happened*. He is baffled. Where, according to Bev Shaw, according to Lucy, was he not? In the room where the intruders were committing their outrages? Do they think he does not know what rape is? (Coetzee 1999:140; italics in original)

One would, therefore, concur with Boehmer that the assault on Lurie marks the turning point in his life, from his rationalising the Other’s experience in terms of his own needs to working out a breakthrough into *feeling* the self of another (Poyner 200:143; italics in original). Of significance, however, is that Lurie harbours fears that his daughter will be a repeat victim because she stays alone on an isolated property. He reflects: "How they put her in her place, how they showed her what a woman was for" (Coetzee 1999:115). She, however, also speaks of the intense hatred directed at her by her rapists:

> 'It was so personal,' she says. 'It was done with such personal hatred. That was what stunned me more than anything. The rest was … expected. But why did they hate me so much? I had never set eyes on them.' (Coetzee 1999:156)

Whereas Lucy refuses to see the racial factor as the reason for her victimisation, her father sees it otherwise. "'They spur each other on. That's probably why they do it together. Like dogs in a pack'", says Lucy, to which Lurie replies: "'If they had been white you wouldn't talk about them in this way,' he said. 'If they had been white thugs from Despatch, for instance'" (Coetzee 1999:159). There is irony in this statement in that the person who says that "It was history speaking through them" (Coetzee 1999:159), Lurie, appears to have his partisan views refracted on to him, when he says "If they had been white you wouldn't talk about them in this way" because it is he, not Lucy, who ascribes racial retribution to Lucy's rape.

In view of the epistemic violence in colonialism, one would concur with Jolly's contention that the rape as it is structured in relation to the proximity of humans and dogs in *Disgrace* is problematic. "What, we may well wonder, is Coetzee trying to say about the relation between human violence toward other humans, and humans' inhumane treatment of dogs?" (Poyner 2006:150). Of essence is the place of the dog in Coetzee's colonialism. It symbolises the lowest order of being. As Wright argues, as long as colonial subjugation persists, the barriers separating human and dog will continue to be in flux and trouble identification (2006:42). The dog as representative of absolute alterity, therefore, is a simile for utter abjection, as will be explored in relation to Lurie. This is despite the fact that dogs were the first animals that humans domesticated, hence their status as the least Other to humans and "Man's best friend".

However, Wrights's observations are noteworthy for the fact that, one would argue that the proximity of the black man and animal that reminds one of colonial-era epistemological associations and the ethos of "redistribution and retribution" that Lurie sees as part of post-apartheid South Africa, in which even women are considered as part of the "goods" in circulation (Coetzee 1999:98) combine to make inevitable the politicisation of the novel. As Jolly highlights, *Disgrace* exposes the discomfort originating in colonialism that confuses the distinction between marginalised human and non-human animal because the human Other is conceptualised in terms of animality. However, of significance is Coetzee's refusal to inhabit the human Other and "speak" for the rapists. This is more so as the capacity of language to encode meaning or to satisfactorily translate the speaker's world is one that is constantly interrogated in his writings. Most often, Coetzee interrogates English's compatibility with the African experience. In *White Writing*, for instance, he wonders whether there is "a language in which people of European identity or […] of a highly problematical South African-colonial identity, can speak to Africa and be spoken to by Africa" (1988:7-8). Later, he questions "whether the African landscape can be articulated by a European language [and] whether the European can be at home in Africa" (1988:167).

Surrounding the identity and political aspect of the novel is the contentious assessment that holds that Lucy does not report her rape in order to offer herself as "reparations" to historical injustices committed against blacks by white people. Athol Fugard's questionable pronouncements to the same effect are a case in point. Fugard's response, as will be seen shortly, is an example of a patently misconstrued interpretation as well as an indication of a lack of an ethical grappling with the text. This points to the fact of a third site of proximity exploration: the text's potential Othering of the reader. This Othering aspect of the novel is seen in the actions of the rapists who assault Lucy and her father and Lucy's own uncharacteristic decision to keep the matter to herself. Northover is, therefore, correct to point out that Coetzee's depiction of Lucy is less believable, though tragic (2020:122). Therefore, Marais's assumption of a depersonalised reading is well observed (Marais 2009:190). The attackers' conduct is disgraceful while Lucy's response is strange. As for Coetzee's response to the outcry, he avoided the public limelight but in a letter to Breyten Breytenbach described the ANC's criticism as: "The sort of literary criticism that would get you an F in English I and maybe even in Matric." (Kannemeyer 2012:532). His statement was a response to the ANC's charge that:

> It is suggested that in these circumstances, it might be better that our white compatriots should emigrate because to be in post-aprtheid South Africa is to be in 'their territory,' as a consequence of which the whites will lose their cards, their weapons, their property, their rights, their dignity. The white women will have to sleep with the barbaric black men. ("Blackboard Bungle")

Apart from the implications for Otherness suggested in the ANC's disapproving criticism, there still is another side to Otherness: that of Lucy. She is a double Other, or triple Other: female and lesbian, while her white identity in a largely black society also distinguishes her. This is of significance, given a claim from Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela. They note the fact that she is a lesbian is a "statement of independence", a life story she creates free of the demands of society. It is also a way of escaping the conventional binary opposition of male and female (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:88). In choosing a lifestyle that prioritises her independence, however, Lucy appears to have inadvertently set the foundations for her attack, despite the fact that she does not will it. What, thus far, has been a seemingly coherent life story is shattered. Her unusual response can however be seen as an attempt to own her story. Not only is she alone responsible for negotiating her way out of this traumatic episode. She is also the stronger character because unlike her father, she refuses to read her ordeal through historical discourses (Marais 2009:181).

Nevertheless, there is a lack of consensus on this point among Coetzee scholars. Lucy Graham and Elleke Boehmer have voiced disapproval regarding Lucy's silence. The former bemoans the fact that "to consign rape to a space outside articulation may contribute to a wider phenomenon of silencing" (2003:444) while the latter takes the silence of Lucy and that of "the black wife of Petrus" to be at odds with the required assertiveness essential to countering a history of violence against women (Poyner 2006:146). To grant them their due, such opinions are worth noting for appearing to interrogate the empowerment of the sexual Other as a way of contesting the increasingly forceful masculinity of characters like Petrus.

It is apt, therefore, that Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela observe that *Disgrace* is not only about David Lurie's individual traumas and his working through them, but also the collective trauma of a divided nation (2008:83). Concurring with their assertion is Hannah Britton, who states: "Rooted in the patriarchies found in colonialism, apartheid and the Cold War, these deeply ingrained patterns of sexual violence did not end with the transition to democracy" (2006:145). This phenomenon cannot, however, be used to deny the individual experience of trauma and Lucy's personal suffering and sacrifice in the novel, despite her status as a relatively privileged white woman.

However, in their basic premise, such views also tend to overlook the fact that events are channelled through Lurie's viewpoint. Note Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela: "However, one should remember that this silence is part of a pattern of suggestions about the limitations of David Lurie's perspective – there are many things that Lurie does not know and cannot understand, and therefore he keeps quiet about them" (2008:76). In any case, Lucy could never have disclosed to her father the full details of her ordeal, apart from the fact that the trauma of rape does not translate easily into language (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:76).

Of note is that as Lurie and Lucy's relationship suffers under the strain of their trauma, Lurie develops an attachment to the animals in Bev's care at the animal clinic. Alongside this parallelism is Lurie's opera on Byron, a mutual point of interest for Lurie and the dog to whom he becomes particularly devoted. As his abjection appears to intensify, Lurie is seen to be at his closest to animals, not least for the fact that the animal clinic virtually becomes his home (Coetzee 1999:211). The animals appear to shape his relationship to human Others inversely as they appear the means by which his encounter with human alterity is finally determined.

It is also significant that prior to the rape, Lurie and Lucy had discussed the concept of the scapegoat. That Lucy sees her father as a scapegoat is ironic in that she herself later takes on this role in the text (Coetzee 1999:90-91). A near-literary example of the scapegoat in the text is the terminally-ill goat Bev turns away at her clinic to go home and die; it carries "a load", being diseased (Coetzee 1999:83). Similarly, Lucy accepts the shame of being disgraced, inflicted on her by her attackers, and in a way, becomes a scapegoat of history, and, therefore, a sacrifice, like Petrus's Persian slaughter sheep. Also, in being burdened by her pregnancy in a physical sense, Lucy visibly becomes a scapegoat, by virtue of the outward manifestation of her trauma. Thanks to the bulge of her body, she carries the sins of history Lurie speaks of. Lurie says: "You wish to humble yourself before history. But the road you're following is the wrong one" (Coetzee 1999:160). Most pointedly though, Lurie cites the incompatibility of scapegoating with a secular age; he mentions that the power of the symbolism worked in times of religious belief (Coetzee 1999:91). His refusal to relate scapegoating to modern times, therefore, explains his resistance to symbolic gestures, seen to be relevant to the new South Africa. "Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse," he tells his disciplinary inquiry chair, Manas Mathabane, a rector (Coetzee 1999:58).

Similarly, Coetzee may be seen as a scapegoat as well, that is, by those opposed to the view that *Disgrace* is a racist text; he appears to carry the "sins" of a nation in search of a new identity. On the other hand, if one looks beyond the economy of the text and Coetzee's return to South Africa from Adelaide in 2005 to accept in person the National Order of Mapungubwe (Gold), awarded for exceptional contribution to South African literary heritage by then President Mbeki (Kannemeyer 2012:576), one would be tempted to conclude that unlike Lurie, who opposes the spirit of repentance for which no laws are required, Coetzee embraces the spirit of national reconciliation required of the new South Africa. He is seen to be in proximity with his feeling self. His accepting the invitation evokes Petrus's statement, "But now it is alright" (Coetzee 1999:138). Affirmed in these multiple associations is Gallagher's claim that Coetzee creates parallel narratives (Gallagher 1991:x).

However, in view of the controversy that came in the wake of the novel's appearance, it would not be remiss to suggest that Coetzee may have been wrong to downplay a proposition from Tony Morphet, that his fiction is vulnerable to attack from both the political left and right. His response was: “Yes … though how vulnerable it is we have yet to see” (1985:64). For one, the assumption could be made that he panders to conservatism by reducing the phenomenon of violence to racial politics, given that Lucy’s attackers are black. The same applies to Athol Fugard’s response, which is an example of commentary that potentially feeds into right wing ideology. Fugard’s response to *Disgrace* is noteworthy:

> I haven’t read it, and I’m sure the writing is excellent, … but I could not think of anything that would depress me more than this book by Coetzee – *Disgrace* – where we’ve got to accept the rape of a white woman as a gesture to all the evil we did in the past. That’s a load of bloody bullshit. That white women are going to accept being raped as penance for what was done in the past? Jesus! It’s an expression of a very morbid phenomenon, very morbid. (Fugard 2000)

Rightwing Afrikaans language activist Dan Roodt subsequently suggested the term “Lucy-syndrome”, a barb that apparently ridicules the insinuation that white people should be prepared to abase themselves before black people as retribution for apartheid. The idea of submissiveness Roodt implies is also reflected in the left-leaning ANC’s response. The governing party accuses Coetzee of propagating the message that South Africa is no longer safe for white people and, as a result, they should emigrate. It submitted an oral complaint to the Human Rights Commission’s Hearings on Racism in the Media on 5 April 2000, citing *Disgrace* as an example of a racist text.

The various responses from interest groups can perhaps be seen as a failure of an ethical encounter with the text: Fugard, for instance, admits to not have read the novel before making his pronouncements, while the ANC, as the governing party, has reason to want to defend its record. As Attwell reports, sentiments towards the novel were not unanimous in the party’s top structures and Mbeki himself may have initiated the complaint against *Disgrace* (Kannemeyer 2012:530).

That aside, the figure of Lurie and his failure to imagine himself in the place of Bev, Melanie and Lucy, becomes a failure of the sympathetic imagination. He is seen to lose trust in his daughter. This blinds him to the recognition of their radical Otherness, one that enables an ethical responsibility towards the Other, one that is infinite, as in Levinas. The trust phenomenology of Løgstrup, therefore, has, in this context, potential to offer insights into the dynamics of the father-daughter relationship. This is as it stresses "giving ourselves over" to those we love and sympathise with, just as Levinas and Buber emphasise availing oneself to the Other. Like Levinas and Buber, who posit subjecting oneself before the Other, Løgstrup claims that "to show trust is to deliver oneself up" (*udlevere sig selv* or *selfudlevering*) or to lay oneself open to the Other (2020: xxviii). If Buber goes further than Levinas in acknowledging animal alterity, then Løgstrup goes further than both Levinas and Buber in respecting female alterity. This is seen in his use of both "he" and "she" where Levinas and Buber almost exclusively erase femininity in their insistent use of "he".

Løgstrup says that by trusting, that is, thinking in terms of vulnerability, we can solve the problem of overdemandingness (Stern 2020 603-623). Lurie would, therefore, need to put trust in Lucy to make her own decisions without exercising undue influence and inconveniencing her. Løgstrup also says that even the possibility of "great calamities" that may befall the Other does not justify overruling their choices (Løgstrup in Jodalen 1997:87). This seeming to want to overrule Lucy is clear in her protest:

> 'To begin with, you don't understand what happened to me that day. You are concerned for my sake, which I appreciate, you think you understand, but finally you don't. Because you can't.' (Coetzee 1999:157)

Løgstrup also suggests constructing a "new picture" of someone on each encounter because thinking of the person in terms of the prior image "will be a denial of life" (Løgstrup2020:xxix). Lurie continues to see Lucy as if she was still a child. One does, therefore, conclude that Lurie fails Løgstrup's standard of "the ethical being". It becomes clear that Lurie's inability to recognise Lucy's alterity is the source of their antagonism. He lives in a world of I-It and not I-Thou, by virtue of failing to acknowledge her agency.

Nevertheless, the reason Lurie does not trust Lucy's decisions is that he loves and sympathises with her and fears for her safety. This concern is reflected in the fact that the care ethics in Løgstrup's proximity philosophy intersects with Butler's "precariousness" and "precarity" postulation. Of note is that both theorisations privilege continuity. Butler insists on the "persisting" and "flourishing" of lives (2009:14) and Løgstrup states that "in a situation where distrust is required, though this is the appropriate attitude, it will nonetheless mean that life will not flourish" (Løgstrup2020:xxix).

This is of the essence given Lucy's unusual response to remain silent concerning her rape. It can be construed as at odds with the notion of "flourishing" that Løgstrup and Butler insist upon. Given that both thinkers also see interdependence as an essential part of survival, Lucy's decision to remain silent about her rape does not help crime-fighting efforts that safeguard other women's safety. Also, as Simone Drichel observes, quoting Marais, it is Lucy's quiet acknowledgement of her situation that has partly contributed to a misreading of the novel, specifically, the notion that her actions are an effort to atone for historical crimes. As Drichel notes, her response is pivotal in that it is meant to invest her with an alterity that renders her resistant to interpretation (Mehigan 2011:156).

A theoretical analysis of Lucy's trauma can facilitate some insight into her tragic situation. Her efforts to recover and regain her self-worth can be interpreted as a rebirth from the "death" of trauma. Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) and Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela's *Narrating Our Healing: Perspectives on Working Through Trauma* (2008) may assist in articulating her trauma and her working through it. To first explain the distinction between mourning and melancholia in Freud: Lucy's situation is that of a melancholic and not of a mourner as she has seen her ego decimated in the aftermath of her rape. In mourning, one's world becomes poor and empty, following a loss, a distinction Freud stresses (2017:246). However, more specifically descriptive of Lucy's conditions is the claim that:

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment. (2017:243)

In her effort to heal, she "spends hour after hour lying on her bed, staring into space or looking at old magazines" (Coetzee 1999:114).That she takes to reading while dealing with her trauma underscores the main premise of *Narrating Our Healing*, that narratives offer a pathway for trauma victims to heal as readers can potentially relate the world of the text to their own (shattered) world. Also, Coetzee, through writing can also channel his trauma in the narrative. Lucy also shuns the outside world: she sends her father and Petrus to her stall at the market as she feels too dejected to face the world (Coetzee 1999:115). Most lamentably, she admits to being "dead". She says: "I am not the person you know. I am a dead person and I do not know yet what will bring me back to life" (Coetzee 1999:161). The fact that Lucy thinks of herself as dead points to the feeling of "loss of self" that comes with the loss of self-esteem.

In *Secretary of the Invisible*, Marais traces the motif of the dead, unborn, lost or abandoned child in Coetzee. The fact that Lucy thinks of herself as dead is indicative of Coetzee's insertion of the trope of a failure of love in post-apartheid South Africa that characterises his apartheid fiction, says Marais (1999:169). Admirable in Lucy is the fact that she does not embark on self-delusional expectations of punishment, although she and her father are agreed she may be a repeat target by her attackers. Although Lucy does not suffer a delusion of (mainly moral) inferiority, she and her father appear to refuse to take nourishment (2017:245). They eat for eating's sake, the assault on their lives has killed their love for food (Coetzee 1999:111). This is a sign of the overcoming of the instinct which compels sentient beings to cling to life. Her passive acceptance of her situation is seen to counter rape in that she sacrifices herself; she gives herself over to being possessed as rape can be interpreted as possession (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:87). She appears equally intent on working through her ordeal. David says:

> Lucy is healing too, or if not healing then forgetting, growing scar tissue around the memory of that day, sheathing it, sealing it off. So that one day she may be able to say, 'The day we were robbed,' and think it merely as the day when they were robbed. (Coetzee 1999:141)

Her healing, however, cannot be guaranteed as trauma recovery is characterised by occasional moments of regression (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:25).

There however is hope for Lucy. That she intends to remain on the farm, gives her a new lease on life or “the death of the old” (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:22). She is, therefore, prepared to undergo a second loss (of her land) following the first “loss” of her life-disrupting rape experience. She has resilience and strength. This effort on her part validates a claim by Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela that *Disgrace* is also about ways of healing (2008:89).

Of essence is that Lucy denies a response that would assume a phenomenon of self-individualisation, that opening a case would entail. She, therefore, denies being a statistic, or being just a number, partly, perhaps, out of a realisation that justice victim responses in the new South Africa are racialised, gendered and politicised, in a way that regurgitates history. One would argue that she is Coetzee’s suggestion of a new mode of justice that substitutes love for the law. Lurie, on the other hand, initially insists on a form of justice based on the law. Called on to apologise and show contrition at the disciplinary hearing held to discuss his “harassment” of Melanie Isaacs (Coetzee 1999:39), he refuses to submit himself to what he sees as a repugnant ethics of forgiveness and repentance. He says:

> ‘These are puritanical times. Private life is public business. Prurience is respectable, prurience and sentiment. They wanted a spectacle: breast-beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact. I wouldn’t oblige’. (Coetzee 1999:66)

Lucy’s unusual reaction is also put in perspective by Rosemary Jolly’s astute detection of Coetzee’s way of writing his women characters in *Disgrace*. She states: “One element of Coetzee’s novel that I respect is that he represents no alternatives that his female characters should have taken to avoid rape” (Poyner 2006:163). In view of this background, any attempt on the part of the reader to pathologise Lucy, risks her translation into the abstract concepts such as guilt or salvation which she disapproves of and for which she reprimands Lurie and thereby accommodating the reader in “Lurie’s violating consciousness”. “The ethical task Coetzee sets his reader, as much as his protagonist, is thus to ‘make an effort to see’ an alterity outside Lurie’s projections”, argues Drichel (Mehigan 2011:156).

However, the association of the lead black character, Petrus with what some readers infer to be animal behaviour unsettles them. The stereotype of the violent black man, who is, therefore, seen to be in proximity with animal, and more specifically, "dog", appears to override the image of the emerging prototype of the more assertive, former "dog" of colonialism, Petrus. As noted earlier, Petrus's role in the novel is an ethical test for Lurie's character. It is apparent that in his structuring of the dynamics between these two characters, Coetzee juxtaposes apparently opposing epistemes: David's love for the classics and opera and his background as an academic is pitted against Petrus's abiding passion for the soccer team Bushbuckridge. On their first meeting, which somehow resembles a typical traumatic encounter, as the committed reader would not fail to notice, Lurie attempts to ethically position himself in relation to Petrus, through dialogue. '"You look after the dogs," he says, 'to break the silence'." To which Petrus answers, "I look after the dogs and I work in the garden. Yes" (Coetzee 1999:64). Asserts Buber: "For where there is a thing there is another thing. Every It is bounded by others; It exists only through being bounded by others. But when Thou is spoken, there is no thing" (Buber 1923:3). Over time however, Lurie begins to question Petrus's character more. Therefore, his quest for knowledge trumps his readiness to understand and accept. He shifts to the I-It sphere. This is illustrated in his resenting Petrus's attributing the term "benefactor" to Lucy, despite his awareness that Petrus can only command makeshift English. He reflects:

> A distasteful word, it seems to him, double-edged, souring the moment. Yet can Petrus be blamed? The language he draws on with such aplomb is, if he only knew it, tired, friable, eaten from the inside as if by termites. Only the monosyllables can still be relied on, not even all of them. (Coetzee 1999:129)

At the same time, and as an afterthought, he appears to recognise Petrus's alterity, by acknowledging that Petrus has been subordinated to the discourse of English (Coetzee 1999:129). Complicating the effort of an ethical encounter by the subject is that, contrary to the meaning of his name ("reliable"), Petrus does not come across as someone he can trust, except, of course, when it comes to performing manual tasks. "Petrus is the one who swiftly and efficiently lays out their wares, the one who knows the prices, takes the money, makes the change…Petrus does what needs to be done, and that is that" (Coetzee 1999:116). For instance, watching Petrus make quick work of ploughing with a borrowed tractor, Lurie is amused at the labourer's hands-on approach. His reflection presents Petrus in a positive light and captures him ethically in Buber's I-Thou framing. He says:

> In a matter of hours he has ploughed the whole of his land. All very swift and businesslike; all very unlike Africa. In olden times, that is to say ten years ago, it would have taken him days with a hand plough and oxen. (Coetzee 1999:151)

This depiction of him as custodian of a new South Africa is, however, corrupted by his collaboration with Lucy's rapists, who acted "[l]ike dogs in a pack" (Coetzee 1999:159). Hence one does understand Attridge's claim that *Disgrace* does not offer an optimistic portrayal of post-apartheid South Africa (2004:164). This is more so for a country that is in the process of healing from a violent past of violence and division. For instance, Beverley Roos Muller in the *Weekend Argus* of 22 January 2000, states that "it carries a moral weight which is without hope, without the possibility of redemption". In response, the authors of *Narrating Our Healing*, prefer to differ. They state:

> […] the first step to the healing of a society is to take literary writers seriously when they reveal misery and evil; readers should try to link what is suggested in the writers' texts to everyday life, and move towards making right what is being shown as wrong. (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:61)

Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela seem to be imploring readers of texts such as *Disgrace* to give authors a free pass to their vocation and allow them their artistic licence. Furthermore, as concerns Lurie's character's ethical trajectory, Petrus is the racial Other challenge he has to face. As it appears, in the early part of the novel, Lurie's character is described as follows: "His temperament is fixed, set" (Coetzee 1999:2). Nonetheless, much as he claims that he cannot change, Lurie appears to carry traces of the Magistrate, of an enquiring mind that resolves its inner conflicts with an open-mindedness that is willing to accept misfortunes and disappointments. He appears to accept "the times", as evident in his characterising the burglary at his home as a sign of runaway crime, owing to widespread poverty (Coetzee 1999:176). This also enables his grudging acceptance of Petrus, insofar as he maintains dialogue with him, despite his resenting him for the farm attack and for wanting to take over his daughter's smallholding. One would assume had Lurie cared to see Petrus as a new breed of up and coming black character, intent on making ends meet in a society in which his voice can now be finally heard, it would have been easier for him to accept Petrus. However, the greed "of the times" that Lurie continuously criticise and to which Petrus appears to subscribe with aplomb, would probably be a barrier to Lurie's ethical recognition of Petrus's alterity. Petrus is intent on amassing wives and property, at a cost to his humanity.

Of significance is that despite his dislike of Petrus, Lurie does not distance himself from him. This appears to be Coetzee's suggestion of a future whereby former adversaries collectively pursue the ideal of putting the country first, ahead of perceived or petty differences. As the situation also demands that he liaises constantly with Petrus on the smallholding, Petrus's inevitable role is to initiate Lurie into a "universe of discourse" (Coetzee 1999:58), for which he previously harboured contempt, and to the idea of "repentance" he once scoffed at, as Van der Merwe and Gobodo-Madikizela argue (2008:80). One could say this is one of the ways in which proximity is posited in the novel. This is despite the fact that ethical recognition is forestalled as the plot progresses. For example, after identifying one of Lucy's rapists, Pollux, at Petrus's party, Lurie voices his detestation that he has not been arrested (Coetzee 1999:132). His relationship with Petrus regresses further following this incident. Although he collaborates with him on a pipefitting project at the dam, Lurie leaves no doubt as to the low regard in which he holds Petrus. In an apparent allusion to *Robinson Crusoe* and Coetzee's own retelling of *Foe*, Lurie thinks: "He would not wish to be marooned with Petrus on a desert isle" (Coetzee 1999:137). As one would expect, Lurie fails to "establish a world of relation" with Petrus, a failure that becomes final when he disapproves of his marriage proposal to Lucy.

In their summation of the pipefitting scene, Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela suggest that English has "contaminated" Petrus's experience, citing Petrus's phrase "it is all right now" (Coetzee 1999:138) when the coupling finally fits, as meaning the redressing of historical wrongs (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:84). If Petrus's statement can be interpreted as an allusion to Lucy's rape and, therefore, a settling of scores, then another parallelism can be found in the evocation of territory. Petrus's taking over of Lucy's land can be read as a reversal of colonising, seen in its metaphorisation as the phallus to the land's femininity. The expropriation of land is, therefore, seen as the settling of the original "rape" of the land, inasmuch as Petrus's discourse appears to displace Lurie's.

Similarly, the laying of the pipes is an act saturated in symbolism. It appears to inaugurate the transfer of power from Lurie to Petrus. From now on, Petrus's discourse is on the ascendant while Lurie's begins to slide into the background. This is evident in Petrus's last line during this chore: "No, now it is easy, now I must just dig the pipe in" (Coetzee 1999:139). In a society in which women are powerless, the inferred phallogocentrism does not bode well for their equal representation. However, Petrus, like Lucy, serves as a symbol of Lurie's inauguration into the sphere of the ethicalas a means to settling old scores and as the basis for future inter-communal relations. Lurie's subsequent decision to visit the Isaacs family to apologise can be seen as a sign of his willingness to embrace this ethical paradigm.

With its foregrounding of the animal theme, *Disgrace* succeeds in interrogating a number of issues. As Jolly, points out, the association or the close proximity in which the dog is cast as the emblem of the black man is conspicuous. The argument is that if blacks are the former "dogs" of colonialism, the same symbolism appears to surface in *Disgrace*. However, in suggesting the body – be it the bulging body of the scapegoat Lucy or of any of the suffering animals that Lurie gets to work with, Coetzee is interrogating our ready inclination to distance Other sentient beings, our speciesism. Of note is the position of ambiguity that the dog occupies, not only in Coetzee's fiction, but in society in general. As Wright notes, the dog as an exploitable "tool" and as companion, problematises the attitudes humans have towards animals as lesser beings, which are viewed with a combination of contempt and affection (2006:34). Also, as symbol and speechless body, "the dog inhabits the taboo and unspeakable regions of oppositional thought to disrupt dichotomous categories such as colonizer/colonized, human/animal, and ultimately, self/other" (Wright 2006:34-35).

For Coetzee then, in desisting from an anthropomorphic depiction of animals, and in centralising the dog as being and metaphor, he poses the reader the challenge of identification with Otherness. As it is impossible to identify with a dog, the task then is to challenge humans to recognise the body, in all its forms. Therefore, when he alludes to the dog as body, Coetzee simultaneously interrogates our sense of responsibility towards alterity, to "relieve it of suffering" (Wright 2006:36). For instance, in echoing the last line in Kafka's *The Trial*, Coetzee appears to capture this ethic, via a dialogue between Lucy and Lurie. Lucy says:

> 'Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity.'
>
> 'Like a dog.'
>
> 'Yes, like a dog.' (Coetzee 1999:205)

Coetzee's concern, therefore, is the "body", as signifying oppression or violation in the colonial system, as irrefutable presence and, therefore, statement; the body is a presence which we can either acknowledge and respond to ethically on the one hand, or ignore (if it is human) or abandon (if it is animal), on the other. Asked by Anne Susskind whether he prefers animals to humans, Coetzee replies: "What is my fundamental relation? A hard question. Perhaps a relation of greeting. How do I greet this very being with whom I share life? How does this being greet me?" (Wright 2006:34). His answer is similar to Buber's position on animals. Buber says that "We speak the primary word with our being, though we cannot utter Thou with our lips" (1923:5). Furthermore, this is one of the areas where Coetzee's ethics resemble Buber's more than it does Levinas's, as Buber accords importance to the appreciation of intelligible forms as an ethical exercise: "How we are educated by children and by animals!" (Buber 1923:15).

Nonetheless, the giving up of the dog for euthanasia is a scene some critics have seized on to question whether Lurie's character evolves as a result of his proximity to animals. In following up on this relationship between the dog and Lurie, Boehmer concludes that Lurie does not profit from his proximity to him or the other animals. She thinks, rather, that Lucy and not Lurie, is the better example of the tone of secular atonement set in the novel because she, and not her father, is the epitome of "the human body-in-pain of the text" (Poyner 2006:145). She comes to this conclusion despite her suggestion that in *Disgrace*, animals are "the essential third term" in human relations, that is, play a role in reconciling human self and human Other (Poyner 2006:141).

In the novel, one does see that animals not only serve to initiate deeper reflections in humans, as in the scene where the two Persians tethered to be slaughtered by Petrus become a source of unspecified insight for Lurie. They also, as per Boehmer, facilitate more meaningful human-to-human relations. Central to the human-to-human and human-to-animal connection is the significance of the themes of "grace" and "disgrace". In "Age of Bronze, State of Grace", for instance, Attridge explores the metaphysic of grace and concludes that grace cannot be earned but only given because it comes unsought, even to those who seek it (2004:180). Coetzee himself seems to concur with such an explanation. In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee draws a distinction between "cynicism" and "grace", averring that cynicism is the denial of any ultimate basis for values and grace a condition in which the truth can be told clearly, without blindness (*Doubling the Point* 1992:392). Referencing one of his most important essays, "Confessions and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoevsky" in the same volume, Coetzee, citing Dostoevsky, mentions "faith and grace" as the source of true confession (1992:291). In his postulation that there is a possibility that truth can emerge from the outside and not from self-examination, the inference is made that, given that Lucy's name derives from the Latin *Lux*, which means "light", Lurie is illumined by his daughter, seen as the fountain for ethical values and source of grace for Lurie. Drichel for example, thinks that it is Lurie's proximity to Lucy that enables him to finally decide to apologise to Melanie's father (Mehighan 2011:149). In yet another example, Buber states that "The Thou meets me through grace – it is not found by seeking" (1923:10).

Attridge's insights on this aspect are relevant insofar as they alert the reader to Lurie's potential transformation as the plot develops and of the permutations of "grace" and "disgrace" in the novel, more so, given the ending of the novel on an apparently discomforting note. One could also argue, for example, that the disgrace of the dogs that Lurie attempts to ameliorate through his work at Bev's clinic, is also an attempt to redeem himself from the first act of the disgrace that sets the events of the storyline in motion, the indecent involvement with his student Melanie Isaacs, that prompts his resignation in disgrace. Also of equal relevance is the question whether Lurie's work with animals bestows him with grace. This is a point on which criticism is evenly divided: one line of thought sees Lurie's work with the animals as merely a self-affirming exercise, as Boehmer characterises it (Poyner 2006:145), for example. Another is of the opinion that Lurie, indeed, is redeemed, thanks to his proximity to the animals and/or Lucy. Drichel appears to share this view (Mehigan 2011:149-150). Nevertheless, most scholarship on Lurie's redemption concentrates on the close encounter with the animals and the work in their service that appears to take him over. One could pinpoint this as the reason Coetzee early on foregrounds the animal theme, in what appears a foreshadowing of Lucy's rape.

Before their invasion and attack, Lucy sees her father as a sacrifice, telling him that "to return to the subject, you are safely expelled. Your colleagues can breathe easy again, while the scapegoat wanders in the wilderness" (Coetzee 1999:90-91). In a twist of events, Lucy is the one who eventually becomes a scapegoat of the narrative. Of significance is the fact that Lurie works not with any dogs, the ordinary, domesticated variety. He works with stray dogs, the *harijan* (Coetzee 1999:146). This, therefore, is indicative of his utter abjection or disgrace. Thus, working with animals, coming into proximity with the absolute Other, facilitates Lurie's awakening to an "other" world. Because he is abject, he is finally able to interact with humans feelingly, and not in rationalistic terms, as before. On this basis alone, one could motivate for a measure of grace on his part. For example, on first meeting Bev Shaw when Lucy introduces her, he describes her as a "dumpy, bustling little woman with black freckles, close-cropped, wiry hair, and no neck" (Coetzee 1999:72). He then is seen to move from such condescension to sleeping with Bev. After their intimacy he thinks:

> Of their congress he can at least say that he does his duty. Without passion but without distaste either. So that in the end Bev Shaw can feel pleased with herself. All she intended has been accomplished. (Coetzee 1999:150)

This shows a remarkable leap in Lurie's attitude and perspective. Boehmer is, therefore correct to argue that reason is given up in favour of an involuntary love, that is self unaware: with the loss of the Byronic voice in his chamber opera, he "begins to speak with increasing frequency across the narrative of responding from the heart" (Poyner 2006: 140). It is a transformation that is attributable to Lurie's connection to animals.

An observation by Wright to this effect, would be worth entertaining. She notes that the banjo, the instrument Lurie adopts midway through the composition of his opera, is an instrument created and first played by black Africans (2006:104). His co-opting of the banjo can, therefore, be seen as a seeming neutralisation of his Western cogito in that he appears to defer to his sympathetic side. Likewise, in claiming that Lurie uses the instrument to "hybridize and shape his own historical narrative of the middle-aged Teresa, an Italian aristocrat who 'looks more like a peasant'" (Wright 2006:181), it is sustainable for Wright to cite a shift in ethical outlook in Lurie, on the basis that the character of Teresa looks more like Bev Shaw than Melanie Isaacs. Already, one begins to see Lurie's lowering to a level at which he can begin to recognise the Other. This is especially as Wright observes that the focus of Lurie's operatic endeavour shifts to Teresa in middle age after he meets Bev (Wright 2006:104). Instead of being fixated on beauty and being overly judgmental like before, Lurie now appears to appreciate character and to possess an inchoate ethics of selflessness. Apparent in this trajectory is the ideal workings of Buber's "world of relation", from I-Thou, to I-It and finally I-Thou.

That Lurie's opera starts to take shape after he assumes Teresa Guiccioli's perspective supports the idea of the feminine as the emblem of the sympathetic imagination. This is later suggested in *Elizabeth Costello* and the heroine's promotion of a poetic sensibility as a counter to rationalistic practices. Schopenhauer and Scheler, for instance, assert that women are more able to exercise sympathetic understanding than men (Donovan 2007:180). Lurie, therefore, one could argue, appears to attain grace through his operatic endeavour. In highlighting art's capacity to facilitate grace, Buber states:

> This is the eternal source of art: a man is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work. This form is no offspring of his soul, but is an appearance which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power. The man is concerned with an act of being if he carries it through. […] then the effective power streams out, and the work arises. (Buber 1923:8-9)

Hence Wright speaks of Lurie's impossible attempt to embody the Other, not only women but black South Africans and animals as well, through the opera for Teresa that he does not complete (2006:99). These re-assignations and attempts at imagined identification take place in a realm of animal lives in which Lurie's position regarding their being shifts from one of indifference: "We are of a different order of creation from the animals" (Coetzee 1999:74), to that of involved sympathy:

> One Sunday evening, driving home in Lucy's kombi, he actually has to stop at the roadside to recover himself. Tears flow down his face that he cannot stop; his hands shake. He does not understand what is happening to him. Until now he has been more or less indifferent to animals. (Coetzee 142-143)

Despite these claims, Lurie's work with animals continues to be a matter for debate by critics regarding their role in his final standing as seen in Boehmer's questioning of his ethical redemption. She asks:

> Learning to live from the heart through taking upon himself the burden of dealing with the disgrace of dogs, through scapegoating himself, living out day by day the humiliation of being without honor and status "like a dog"…, does Lurie come to terms with the wrong he has committed? Who or what authorizes such atonement? (Poyner 2006:143)

Contra Boehmer, Marais is of the view that it is through his encounter with animals that Lurie finally gets to recognise the alterity of women in his life (Marais 2009:171). One indicator of this is that his visit to the Isaacs family to apologise for his aberrant conduct towards Melanie comes after his encounter with these non-human Others. One could argue that at this point, Lurie's trauma and the insight it gives him as to the vulnerability of human life, and his utter abjection as "dog-man", caring for not only living stray and abandoned pets, but also dead animals, has "neutered" his rationalistic self-centred self.

However, Buber, and Coetzee in his narrative, proffer the idea that the face interrupts the self's being. Buber equates the animal stare with that of the human: "The language in which it is uttered is what is says – anxiety – the movement of the creature between the realms of vegetable security and spiritual venture" and that "The eyes express the mystery in its natural prison" (Buber 1923:95). Similarly, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate is seen to dissemble after being gazed at by a buck while hunting (Coetzee 1980:42). These examples from Buber and Coetzee, therefore, show that living animals have the capacity to affect our standing as ethical beings. This explains how in *Disgrace*, respect for animals is seen to induce sympathy in humans and to enable them to forge sound relations with other humans, while in *Elizabeth Costello*, humans' claims to be superior beings are explored through an interrogation of their cruelty to non-human animals. This is pertinent in that Attridge questions the value of Lurie's work with dead animals: "If a dog is an absolute Other, what is a dead dog, and what response does it demand? (Attridge 2004:185). One cannot discharge ethical duty to dead animals as Lurie himself is aware:

> Why has he taken on this job? To lighten the burden on Bev Shaw? For that it would be enough to drop off the bags at the dump and drive away. For the sake of the dogs? But the dogs are dead; but what do dogs know about honour and dishonour anyway? For himself, then. For his idea of the world, a world in which men do not use shovels to beat corpses into a more convenient shape for processing. (Coetzee 1999:145-146)

In view of Boehmer's reluctance to credit Lurie's labour of love with animals (Poyner 2006:144). Attridge's summation of Lurie's actions with the dead dogs is one many are bound to find agreeable: that “this is not a practical commitment to improving the world, but a profound need to preserve the ethical integrity of the self” (Attridge 2004:187). The equivalent of this would be Elizabeth Costello’s reasons for his animal advocacy in *Elizabeth Costello*: “out of a desire to save my soul” (Coetzee 2003:89). To sum up, Costello’s actions can be conceived as ethical because her concern is to save the lives of animals while Lurie’s actions are devoid of ethics because the animals are dead.

Similarly, Lurie’s visit of atonement to Melanie’s family is also worth noting. The ritual that takes place during the visit, with its thematics of “grace” and “disgrace” and the idea of secular versus religious salvation suggested are pointers in evaluating Lurie’s ethical trajectory, particularly in the context of his proximity to human and non-human Others in the Eastern Cape. It is not insignificant that Lurie benefits from the unconditional hospitality of the Isaacs family, He is invited to partake of dinner with them. As Attridge observes, the theological creeps into Coetzee’s terminology, thanks to the use of the phrase “state of grace” by Lurie (and Coetzee) (Attridge 2004:182). It is also significant that the evening is structured like a religious ritual (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:90).

Once again, it is inevitable to reference the recurrent theme of confession. The question to ask would be, is genuine confession ever possible in a non-religious setting or public forum? In “Confessions and Double Thoughts”, Coetzee lays down the condition that there must be “an underlying motive to tell the essential truth about the self” (*Doubling the Point* 1992:252). He also proffers the idea that truth comes from the process of articulation, such as in writing (1992:18). In making these claims, the matter of self-interest is at issue, for instance, as non-religious confessions are routinely associated with self-interest. Coetzee, therefore, asserts: “The end of [secular] confession is to tell the truth to and for oneself” (1992:291). One could interpret this to mean that the act of confessing itself becomes a more urgent focus than what is confessed. However, Lurie’s ham-fisted apology also demonstrates the goodwill behind the intention as the only positive aspect in his attempt to atone for his past behaviour. He tells Mr Isaacs that:

> It could have turned out differently, I believe, between the two of us, despite our ages. But there was something I failed to supply […] I manage

> love too well. Even when I burn I don't sing, if you understand me. For which I am sorry. I am sorry for what I took your daughter through. (Coetzee 1999:171)

It is opportune that Adriaan Van Heerden makes a distinction between "guilt" and "shame". In his discussion, he points out that guilt refers to failures with respect to norms, rules, or prohibitions, whereas shame to failures with respect to ideals (Leist& Singer 2010:47). Lurie no doubt feels guilt and remorse. However, he does not feel ashamed. He seems to still be keen to express his "rights of desire". Moreover, that his desire is rekindled on seeing Melanie's younger sister, Desiree, whom he thinks more beautiful than Melanie, shows his lack of shame and makes one question whether he has learnt anything from his disgrace. If disgrace is associated with humiliation and shame (Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela 2008:91), Lurie feels his own past behaviour has been self-humiliating but is certainly not ashamed. The ease with which he succumbs to temptation in the face of beauty understandably can be cited by critics as proof of his failure to become a more moral being.

Conversely, if his identification with animals can be seen as a sign of his humiliation, as stressed by Borkfelt (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:147) It is also a sign that he has revised his view that "We are of a different order of creation from the animals" (Coetzee 1999:74), to cite his statement during an earlier argument with Lucy, in which he is seen to disparage animal rights work. One could conclude that Lurie has shed his former egoistic self but still struggles to shake off old habits. It is little wonder that his host Mr Isaacs is not impressed. Having patiently listened to him reciting his tawdry apology, he replies:

> But I say to myself we are all sorry when we are found out. Then we are very sorry. The question is not, are we sorry? The question is what lesson have we learned? (Coetzee 1999:172)

Lurie's apology has mainly been a self-justificating recitation of his personal feelings for Melanie. He, therefore, remains in I-It phase, because he does not appear to reform. Given the chance, he would try to have an affair with "Desiree, the desired one" (Coetzee

1999:164). He appears to not have repented as required at the earlier sitting. Nonetheless, the fact that he apologises shows his emerging, more humane side. It would be in order to state that he finally makes the apology he failed to make at his disciplinary hearing.

Unlike at his first "trial", at the dinner he shows a willingness to conform to the prevailing spirit. Holding out a bottle of wine, he says: "I brought an offering" (Coetzee 1999:168). Most importantly, Lurie appears to be healed of his moral blindness. "I am sunk into a state of disgrace from which it will not be easy to lift myself" (Coetzee 1999:172). His efforts with the opera and the animals can, therefore, be seen to have benefited him, despite some critics' claims to the contrary. As with the last scene involving the dog, it would appear the dinner would be the wrong place to ascertain whether Lurie indeed changes for the better. It would be more tenable to argue that the plotline of *Disgrace* is his ethical journey. Although it is littered with missteps, it appears a worthwhile exercise from which he is seen to have grown.

Finally, the question of his giving up of the crippled dog, Driepoot. It would be tempting to view as prescient Simone Drichel's assertion, which frames the relationship in reverse assumption: that "Lurie is adopted by a young crippled dog" (2011:164). This would mean an assertion of his freedom. Once again, this leaves his character open to the accusation that he still sees the world in his own terms. Also, his certainty in this act cannot be doubted, especially as Bev challenges him with the suggestion "I thought you would save him for another week". Asked more specifically, "Are you giving him up?" "Yes, I am giving him up", he answers, unequivocally (Coetzee 1999:220). Given that the descriptive narrative shows him "Bearing him [the dog] in his arms like a lamb, he renters the surgery", it is conceivable that one would associate the dog's giving up with sacrifice. Van Heerden's suggestion that Lurie's development appears to assume a Christian dimension appears astute. Just as important is the question he poses prior to this suggestion: What does this strange ending tell us? (Leist& Singer 2010:55).

Boehmer avers that Lurie, like Lucy, is released from his personal past by accepting his suffering. This is a point that Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela also concur with, however, on the unlikely premise that he succeeds in driving out despair (2008:82). For Boehmer, the dogs are nothing more than carriers of Lurie's former disgrace (Poyner 2006:144). Van der Merwe &Gobodo-Madikizela also support this view. They state: “Even at the end of the novel, when he becomes very fond of a particular dog, it is still David who is in control – he is the one to decide when the dog should die” (2008:83).

However, this study prefers to take sides with Van Heerden’s conclusion. He observes that by virtue of experiencing the suffering of “others” (dogs), Lurie has undergone “a measure of moral development” (Leist& Singer 2010:55). One could also conclude that thanks to his proximity to Lucy, Bev and Petrus, Lurie’s worldview is significantly more ethically-oriented although this is not delineated in the text. Furthermore, despite his own doubts and protestations to the contrary, Lurie certainly has learned from his ordeal. Reverting to his former cynical self pre-trauma, he says: “A good person. Not a bad resolution to make in dark times” (Coetzee 1999:216). This important development appears to be overshadowed by the novel’s complexity as well as its politicisation.

Coetzee’s disinclination to enforce closure in his narratives, therefore, becomes problematic. As noted earlier, his unwillingness to comment on his own work (Wright 2006:2) as a principled position, does not help matters, either. This means that, perhaps, at the end of the day, critic and reader must surrender to the fact of Coetzee’s enigmatic literature.

In averring that if a conclusion is to be made, it is that Coetzee interrogates the past through the present, and finally interrogates literature itself, and how to respond to the Other ethically as a solution for the future (Attridge 2004:191), Attridge makes a plausible assessment, under the circumstances.

The question of interrogating literature is one that is to be deferred to *Elizabeth Costello*. The eponymous heroine confronts the question of language’s ability to change human behaviour more directly – and is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5.*Elizabeth Costello*: Authorship and Trauma

‘The knowledge we have is not abstract…but embodied.’ *Elizabeth Costello* (2003:77)

The idea of the sympathetic imagination that dominates the discussion of *Disgrace* continues in this chapter, which examines the topics of authorship and animal trauma, while attempting to explore J.M. Coetzee’s use of the character of Elizabeth Costello in relation to animal rights.

The sympathetic imagination, in the sense of an approach that desists from an anthropocentric view of non-human entities or an expectation of sameness from the human Other, foregrounded in *Disgrace* and *The Lives of Animals*, also appearing as Lessons 3 and 4 in *Elizabeth Costello*, “The Lives of Animals: The Philosophers and the Animals” and “The Lives of Animals: The Poets and the Animals”, respectively. Coetzee originally presented *The Lives of Animals* as part of the Tanner Lectures on Human Values at Princeton in October 1997.

Of note is that at the heart of these lectures is the idea of the sympathetic imagination. A recurring speculation that haunts *Elizabeth Costello* is the question of authorship: is Elizabeth Costello a substitute for the reticent J.M. Coetzee? The biographer Kannemeyer describes the fictional Australian writer as “a kind of alter ego for Coetzee” (2012:511). Another critic, Derek Attridge, worries that routinely taking Costello to be a substitute for Coetzee risks trivialising the serious arguments she makes by taking them as arguments for arguments’ sake (Attridge 2004:197).

However, the glaring likenesses are conspicuous and Coetzee deliberately desists from distancing himself from his characters in some instances. For example, Elisa Aaltola asserts that Coetzee has “strong pro-animal views that coincide with those of his characters” (Leist& Singer 2010: 120), just as Wright observes that Costello’s son is “auspiciously named John” (Wright 2006:114). Coetzee’s first name is John. However, such ruminations can only be useful insofar as they attempt to disclose the ways by which

Coetzee's ethics enter the public realm. His detestation for protests and the public realm is well-documented, as highlighted by the fact that he did not turn up in person for either of his two Booker Prize ceremonies (Kannemeyer 2012:560). So, one would argue, substituting author for character, is, sometimes justifiable, or profitable. Kannemeyer's ascription of the term "alter ego" to Costello in relation to Coetzee should be seen in this light.

Granted, this chapter discusses the sympathetic imagination in relation to the two "The Lives of Animals" pieces in *Elizabeth Costello*. Costello is an ageing Australian novelist with a reputation for making controversial statements on the lecture circuit, in her campaign for animal rights. The contentious claims she makes include equating the slaughter of animals by the animal industries to the Nazi Holocaust. Nonetheless, this derives in an ethical stance that takes all animal and non-human animal life as worthy of equal importance and treatment. Also, she attempts to displace reason by substituting sympathy as the mode by which sympathy for animals can be more easily generated. In "J.M. Coetzee and Animal Rights: Elizabeth Costello's Challenge to Philosophy" Northover notes that Costello's challenge to rationalism from within Western philosophy though rare, is not unusual, as even Plato's philosophy was delivered as dramatic dialogues (2009:48).

In her taking a stand against reason, however, Costello runs into stiff opposition, starting from within her own family. Her daughter-in-law, Norma, her son's wife, who holds a Ph.D. in the "philosophy of mind" (Coetzee 2003:61) ridicules her persistent failures to make cogent arguments and rubbishes her attempts to stand outside rationality. This is as Costello struggles to articulate her passionately-held views partly through convincing those around her not to eat meat, which alienates Norma. Costello wonders whether she is "ape or woman" (Coetzee 2003:9). It is little wonder Norma calls her "jejune and sentimental" (61) and "confused" (2003:81). "There is no position outside of reason where you can stand and lecture about reason and pass judgment on reason" (Coetzee 2003:93). It would be tempting to agree with Northover's characterisation of her as a "fallible Socratic figure" (Northover 2009:50). However, her use of the Socratic dialogue format or *maieusis* (Northover 2009:52), alternatively, the question-and-answer method of teaching that is evident in her taking and answering questions after her lectures, makes her vulnerable because she is seen to be incapable of countering reasoned arguments from the audience.

While her son John is non-committal – we learn that “He himself has no opinions one way or the Other” (Coetzee 2003:61) which shows that John, like the titular Michael K, subordinates his needs to his mother’s – he stands by her although not sharing her views. As one would note, Levinas sees parent-child relationships as convoluted, more so, when either is of the opposite sex. Costello’s position in relation to John is, therefore, one of radical Otherness. Explaining such filiality, Levinas says “the feminine is described as the *of itself other*, as the origin of the very concept of alterity”; he also states that “alterity and duality do not disappear in the loving relationship” (1985:66; italics in original).

Of those coming to Costello’s defence, she can count on Laura Wright. Wright questions the interposing of a female author character, between Coetzee and his espoused ethics (2006:114) while plausibly arguing that intellectuals are accused of talking too much, the reason Coetzee “embodies” Costello, who “acts” by refusing to eat meat (2006:109). Wright, therefore, alerts the reader to the ethical pragmatism that may derive from sympathy. She also argues that: “Conversely, in their unwillingness to allow Coetzee a performative and feminist enactment of an ethical stance, his critics illustrate the limitations of the sympathetic imagination” (Wright 2006:118). Her argument speaks to the inevitability or temptation of conflating Coetzee and Costello, at least in readers’ minds. She is, therefore, astute to posit that:

> The character of Elizabeth Costello, her argument that people treat animals the way the Nazis treated the Jews, and Coetzee’s rendering of both of these variables, establishes a third and perhaps more sentimental place from which to write against the primary binary opposition of animal/human. (Wright 2006:110)

One would surmise that if people treated Jews like animals and people ill-treat animals, the third place Wright is suggesting is an ethics that disavows both racism and speciesism, of sympathy, more so, given their intertwining in the animalisation of humans by other humans. However, in her attempts to disrupt the animal/human dichotomy by contesting for emotion from within the precepts of Western rationality, Costello comes across as patently duplicitous. When she proffers the question: “The question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common – reason, self-consciousness, a soul – with other animals?” (Coetzee 2003:79), she is effectively regurgitating Jeremy Bentham’s rhetorical poser on the need for the rights of animals. Says Bentham:

> Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conservable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? Nor, Can they *talk*? But, Can they *suffer*? (Bentham 1789: XVII, Section 1; italics in original).

Her bumbling manner and controversial premise aside, Elizabeth Costello provides Coetzee the artistic licence to indulge speculations and positions that he cannot be tied to as seen in Costello’s virtual plagiarism of Bentham, a contravention for which Coetzee escapes responsibility. His “quiet disappearance” to Australia in the aftermath of *Disgrace*, can, therefore, be likened to Elizabeth Costello’s reaction following the fallout from her activism. When her hometown newspaper *The Age* runs the headline “PRIZE-WINNING NOVELIST ACCUSED OF ANTI-SEMITISM”, she takes herself as a proverbial scapegoat, like Red Peter, the anthropomorphised ape: “It was she, all at once, who was on trial” (Coetzee 2003:157). Of related significance is that Northover observes that in *The Lives of Animals* Coetzee fails to use the positions of animal rights philosophers Peter Singer and Tom Regan and that Singer’s *Animal Liberation* has a profound influence on the former (Northover 2009:4). In an ironic reversal, Singer points out he cannot tell Costello from Coetzee in that novel. (Poyner 2006:36).

However, the moral question from which Costello seeks to extract sympathy for animals can be framed as follows: If ordinary Germans were inured to the horrors beyond the gates of the Nazi death camps in their midst, how are we any different from them when we pay a blind eye to the abattoirs hidden in our towns, and the unfolding horrors of the meat industry? Her argument is that humans are, therefore, equally guilty for failing to act ethically and morally against the inhumane treatment of animals, just as ordinary Germans were during the Third Reich. She appeals to humans to live more ethically by being in tune with their instincts, sensibilities and life experiences, and not hide behind "ignorance" and being complicit in evil. Costello's claim can be traced to Socrates's maxim that evil is a result of ignorance (Northover 2009:59). If humans could "listen" to animals, they would not exacerbate their suffering by eating meat. "Listening" to animals would entail recognising their consciousness, an act which Costello suggests can make us "hear".

> That is why I urge you to read the poets who return the living, electric being to language, and if the poets do not move you, I urge you to walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner. (Coetzee 2003:111)

If Buber points out that perception, sensation, imagination, will, feelings and thoughts do not "make life whole" for failing to constitute the "world of relation" (1923:3), then Costello would be hard-pressed to pass the Buberian ethical test, which is insistent on "standing next to". Despite urging her listeners to "walk, flank to flank, beside the beast that is prodded down the chute to his executioner" (Coetzee 2003:111), she herself does not make the effort to visit meat-processing factories. She only attempts to evoke the horrors she alludes to imaginatively, while challenging her listeners to take the difficult task of visiting the meat factory:

> Let me say it openly: we are surrounded by an enterprise of degradation, cruelty and killing which rivals anything that the Third Reich was capable of, indeed dwarfs it, in that ours is an enterprise without end, self-regenerating, bringing rabbits, rats, poultry, livestock ceaselessly into the world for the purpose of killing them. (Coetzee 2003:65)

That humans can sense the fear the animals feel on realising their impending deaths, is enough to equate their lot with that of humans, argues Costello. However, her plea and exhortations fail to penetrate through to their intended logical terminus, partly because Costello faces a problem of communication, which hobbles her attempts to relay forcefully, and, therefore, successfully her message. Her claim purporting to equate the horrors of the Holocaust with the killing of animals in abattoirs is an example of language that only serves to alienate some listeners. The poet Abraham Stern's seat is empty as a protest at the Nazi simile. He writes:

> Man is made in the likeness of God but God does not have the likeness of man. If Jews were treated like cattle, it does not follow that cattle are treated like Jews. The inversion insults the memory of the dead. It also trades on the horrors of the camps in a cheap way. (Coetzee 2003:94)

Nonetheless, instead of retracting that controversial analogy, she proceeds with it in the next lecture, in which she blames the meat factories of Chicago, "the Chicago stockyards", for serving as the template for the Nazis' extermination camps (Coetzee 2003:97). It needs be stressed that her rejection of speciesism should be commended; however, her anecdotes equating human and animal disaster alienates some of the humans she is seen to be attempting to win over. Also, she is hampered by the same unwillingness to listen that she accuses other humans of. It is clear that her disapproval of certain philosophers' positions stems from her reluctance to entertain the mode of their discourse: rationality. Her criticism of Thomas Nagel, Mary Midgley and Tom Regan for instance, is based not on their arguments but on their philosophical approach. Consequently, one would be compelled to concur with Bell that she alienates the very people she should be recruiting to her cause, of whom Nagel is one. "Nagel's position of antianthropomorphic skepticism gives an absolute protection to the otherness of the non-human creature," notes Bell (Poyner 2006:177).

Furthermore, she employs the same register of language as they, in her disputation of the philosophic ethic. As Northover observes, she contests philosophical rationalism from within (2009:50), in what appears a questionable attempt to privilege poetic sensationalism. By the same token, she appears to reference sources and authorities that appear to anthropomorphise, rather than respect the alterity of, and take responsibility for animals. This would mean that she is at variance with her creator Coetzee. As Borkfelt avers, a literary hallmark of Coetzee's ethics is his desisting from attempting to represent animals' feelings (Sencindiver, Beville and Lauritzen 2011:147). He presents animals in order to elucidate humans' thoughts of them and their effect on humans.

It would be correct, therefore, to abide by Bell's line of argument, positing that, instead of Ted Hughes, Costello would be better served by citing D.H. Lawrence, although, as Bell points out, the latter did not care for political correctness (Poyner 2006: 178). Bell's argument is that, in order for the sympathetic imagination to flourish, there has to be some form of knowledge about the Other entity in question. He bases his assertion on the observation that there can be no otherness without relation and no relation without otherness (Poyner 2006:178). His argument is that one has to know something experientially in order to accept its difference. After all, as stated earlier, awareness in itself is a form of knowledge.

This is a point worth entertaining on the basis that the sympathetic imagination dispenses with claims to knowledge of the Other, all Othernesses and of certitudes. In its postulation of a responsibility for the Other, for instance, it rejects that the Other be the same or be expected to be the same, and discards the Other's need to reciprocate, as per Levinas. However, as stated earlier in this study, it is Buber's position, one which demands mutual recognition that sounds more practical. Dialogue with the Other should be a fundamental aspect of attempts to take responsibility for that Other. From that perspective, then, Costello is right in her assertion that we refuse to "listen" to animals. It is obvious to us that she is prescribing a mode of ethical interaction that respects the difference of an Other entity. Elisa Aaltola makes a number of notable claims concerning Costello's appeal for a language that has a basis in something other than the rational. In noting Costello's remark that animals are our silent captives who "refuse to speak to us" (Coetzee 2003:70) Aaltola simultaneously references Coetzee's distinctive approach to let animals be and not speak for them. Conversely, by claiming that humans refuse to "listen" to animals (Leist& Singer 2003:121), and that the language of poets is similarly ignored by academia, Aaltola draws an equivalence between animals and poets. She therefore invokes a special kind of "listening" to both animals and poets hitherto closed to academia. It is significant that Costello says:

> I am not a philosopher of mind but an animal exhibiting, yet not exhibiting, to a gathering of scholars, a wound, which I cover up under my clothes but touch on in every word I speak. (Coetzee 2003:70-71)

In "The Difficulty of Reality" (2003:3-7) Cora Diamond beckons us, indeed, to see Costello in the same way as we do the ape Red Peter, to see her as a wounded (human) animal. She is "wounded" in her disbelief; her personal trauma that emanates from the unfolding cruelty and slaughter of animals, as evidenced in her statement: "Yet I'm not dreaming … Calm down, I tell myself. You're making a mountain out of a molehill. This is life" (Coetzee 2003:115). Her allusion to an animal "woundedness", however, is not only a rejection of the anthropocentricism she faults as inimical to the respectful treatment of non-human animals as fellow sentient beings, but also draws attention to anthropocentricism's harmful consequences, in its refusal to acknowledge difference, to recognise animals' absolute alterity. States Aaltola: "The true identity of the animal and the poet is dismissed and devalued: they will only be accepted when disguised is the humanistic, academic veil" (Leist& Singer 2010:122). Aaltola's claim though well-ventilated, could be seen as an unabashed endorsement of sensibility or poetic sensationalism over rationalism. It would be difficult to accredit such a viewpoint to a novelist as erudite and sophisticated as Coetzee. For example, Carol Clarkson investigates Coetzee's repudiation of the "knowing" subject in the form of the figure of Costello and cautions that should not be seen as definitive of Coetzee's art (Mehigan 2011:222-233). To this effect, Crary's exploration of Coetzee's ethics appears more cogent and agreeable. Her point is that Coetzee is intent on appealing to our instinctual makeup by calling on humans to broaden the "rationality" tent, as it were, alternatively, that Coetzee appeals to a less-restricted sense of rationalism, one that also encompasses an ethical standpoint that encompasses our sensibilities (Leist& Singer 2010:249-269).

Similarly, Crary approaches the alleged repudiation of knowledge, to show that at its core is nothing more than a proposition from Coetzee, alternatively, the suggestion of a more sympathetic or intuitive exploration of sensibilities that does not necessarily disavow rationality per se but subordinates it to instinctual drives. This is how Tim Mehigan also appears to see it in his contribution to the debate. He writes:

> The interest of Coetzee's more recent writings, therefore, is to explore the metaphysical dimensions of an ethical outlook and type of thought where to write in the mode of confession is to acknowledge the prior claim of the other to be heard and to be honoured. (Mehigan 2011:6-7)

One would be convinced to accept this explanation on the realisation that Costello, by professing to be "wounded" is confessing, much as Coetzee does in his *autre*biographies. However, this affinity for an ethics centred on "confession" is well-articulated by Crary, in her exploration of scientific rationality and its putative obverse, literary sensitivity, insofar as these concepts play out in Coetzee's fiction. In "Further Reflections on Coetzee and Ethics" (Leist& Singer 2010:262-265), a subsection of her contribution, "J.M. Coetzee, Moral Thinker", Crary evaluates the character of Elizabeth Costello by examining Coetzee's unusual initiative to openly critique conventional rationality, in its traditional philosophical sense. She argues that it would be justifiable to represent *Elizabeth Costello* as "urging us to situate moral reflection outside the realm of reason" (Leist& Singer 2010:263). However, in elaborating, she says such conclusions would be misplaced. One need only look no further than the character of Elizabeth Costello herself and her pirouetting and verbal gymnastics, in her inarticulate defence of poetic sensitivity over rationality. It is apt that James Meffan calls Costello's attempts, a "performative contradiction" (Mehigan 2011: 172-173), and, as Crary herself forcefully counters in her elucidation of "the conceptual tie between the concept of truth and rationality" (Leist& Singer 2010:263), language cannot be divorced from reason, a claim Coetzee repeatedly represents, and perhaps via Elizabeth Costello, registers some or other form of frustration.

In an attempt to circumvent this shortcoming, or more precisely, address some of the shortcomings inherent in language, it is conceivable that attempts are made to ensure that the parameters of reference of the rational are broadened. The inclusion of terminology based in the spiritual appears one alternative. For instance, Aaltola states that "Costello's choice of terminology ("curse", "sin") implies that we will be punished for our actions" (Leist & Singer 2010:23) insofar as our failing animals is concerned. Her statement is indicative of the observation that, in his writing, as evident in his exploration of terms such as "grace" and "disgrace", Coetzee cannot avoid delving into a religiously inspired ethics. However, in his fiction, and through Costello, who replies that the reason for her animal welfare work is "to save my soul" (Coetzee 2003:89), one could posit that the spiritual is canvassed as part of a skepticism that purports to oppose the crowding out of possible sources of not only knowledge but also causality. For instance, in one of her lectures, in which she references Montaigne, Costello challenges her readers, asking:

> We think we are playing with the cat, but how do we know that the cat isn't playing with us? I wish I could think that the animals in our laboratories are playing with us. But alas, it isn't so. (Coetzee 2003:82)

Her epigram appears to vindicate Crary's suggestion of a rationality that refuses to rule out other possible avenues to a moral way of life. Hence Mehigan cites Costello's "skeptically minded son" John as a device by Coetzee to "gnaw away at every utterance and unmask any pretension these utterances might conceal to command knowledge and to speak with clarity and certainty" (Mehigan 2011:6). In the same vein, he takes Coetzee's stance as a critique of Descartes's position as regards humans', or more specifically, Europeans' superiority and the role of the *cogito*. While the skepticism is a questioning, the embodying of suffering is designed to present it in its literality and so act as an image that convinces the reader of the irrefutability of the suffering body. Such a trope enables us to relate more easily in a sympathetic way to non-speech entities: Friday in *Foe*, Michael K in *Life & Times of Michael K* and the animals of which Costello claims to be one.

In her grappling with the question of how to live more sympathetically, meanwhile, Crary for her part goes further than Mehigan, in highlighting that the role of literary activity in morality should be viewed in the broader context of its implication for ethics, as she believes that role to be undervalued (Leist& Singer 2010:251-252). One would, therefore, concur with her argument that certain "sensitivities" such as those discerned in the literary sphere, have a role to play in moral thinking and are internal to "rational capacities" (Leist& Singer 2010:252).

Such a moral-based ethics Coetzee appears to promote is predicated on the postulation that as individuals, we are endowed with the capability to exercise choice. To paraphrase Aaltola, in her characterisation of Costello's encapsulation of responsibility: not understanding the implications of one's monstrous actions can be a valid excuse, whereas understanding and rejoicing in them is not (Leist& Singer 2010:122). Hence we see Costello refusing to forgive herself for wearing leather (Coetzee 2003:89). However, as well as her vegetarianism, her main contention in the debate appears to be her insistence on a more rounded moral outlook, one where the trauma of the non-human Other is alleviated. It could be suggested that in her criticism of our unwillingness to sensitise our moral compass to the suffering of non-human animals, we are as guilty as ordinary Germans were during the Nazi era, of "refusing" to know.

> The people who lived in the countryside around Treblinka…said that they did not know what was going on in the camp; said that, while in a general way they might have guessed what was going on, they did not know for sure; said that, while in a sense they might have known, in another sense they did not know, could not afford to know, for their own sake. (Coetzee 2003:63-64)

As moral beings, therefore, our negligence makes us complicit – not only to the suffering of other humans but also non-human animals. This rejection of speciesism, as articulated by Costello in her Nazi analogy, becomes a controversial proposition. As framed in Stern's argument that, if Jews were treated like cattle, the reverse cannot be of the same moral equivalence. However, in his argument, through Costello, Coetzee appeals to our sensibilities as a seam of knowledge worth tapping into in order for us as humans to live a sympathetically-oriented, and, therefore, more humane way of life.

In his representation of sympathy for the Other, one would argue, Coetzee is seen to take a political stand, despite himself. It is fortuitous, therefore, that in his analysis of Coetzee's fiction, Attridge avers that the political is one domain in which the ethical makes its demands (2004:7). Alluding to the subtitle of *Elizabeth Costello*, namely *Eight Lessons*, and to the background of the lessons as lectures, Attridge asserts:

> They are, that is, events staged within the event of the work; and they invite the reader's participation not just in the intellectual exercise of positions expounded and defended but in the human experience, and the human cost, of exposing convictions, beliefs, doubts, and fears in a public arena. (Attridge 2004:198)

It is not that Coetzee himself is unaware. His reluctance to wade into the political is a natural outcome of a scrupulously orchestrated ethical position and a refusal to be co-opted (Poyner 2006:6). His aversion to speaking the language of power can be seen in terms of his trademark resistance to sameness, as outlined in his memoir, *Boyhood*. Hence the skepticism that characterises much of his fiction.

In conclusion, the fact that Costello appears to falter in both her argumentation and choice of words cannot justifiably be used to castigate poetic sensationalism as untrustworthy or inefficacious. Rather it speaks to the point raised earlier, of the limitations of language to articulate the suffering of human and non-human Other and Coetzee's attempt for a sympathetic corrective in the trope of the suffering body.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

J.M. Coetzee's anti-realist narratives defer closure and compel the reader to participate in the deciphering of the meaning of his texts. This refusal to exercise Authority over his own work has characterised his colonial-era fiction from the beginning of his career.

It is shown that even that early in his career Coetzee expresses an unwillingness to comment on his work, as part of a strategy to parody subject histories that overlook the object. In his first novel *Dusklands* in the novella "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee", the reader is, for example, confronted by competing versions of an event, involving the death of a servant.

Coetzee has made master discourses a target of his characteristic subversion by exposing narratives that silence the Other and contribute to colonial trauma. This is seen in an "anti-Cartesian" stance that prescribes an open-mindedness thathas a basis in an ethical skepticism. Hence critics such as Teresa Dovey caution an ethical grappling with Coetzee's texts as the key to deciphering the undermining of historical discourses at work, as a means to expose violent colonial practices that such discourses attempt to minimise or obliterate.

His work has not always been appreciated in his native South Africa however, as his position towards history and society was questioned. This is seen in the fact that historical claims of political apathy against the author at some point appeared to dominate criticism of his work. This adverse criticism also tended to overshadow his characteristic commitment to the outsider in his fiction, as noted by the Swedish Academy in granting him the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2003. The academy's citation appears to contradict such negative criticism, particularly from the 1980s, which seeks to interrogate the author's apparent silence to the suffering in his own country.

Contrary to such views, and as this dissertation argues, Coetzee in his fiction has always sought to place subject and Other in proximity in traumatic colonial contexts where the protagonist is set the challenge of an ethical encounter. The exception to this pattern would be the early protagonists Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*.

These ultra-violent colonialists are closed off to the prospect of an ethical encounter with the Other because of their refusal to accept difference.

However, their successor Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* makes an effort to reflect on the condition of the Other and is a good example of the embodiment of the sympathetic imagination in Coetzee's fiction. Although the allegorical format such as that employed in *Waiting for the Barbarians* has made Coetzee a target for criticism, it would be hard to dismiss the sympathetic character of the Magistrate and his stance against colonial conflict or to deny that with this classic allegorical text, Coetzee captures the spirit of the times in which it is written

Therefore, this dissertation has attempted to argue that although *Waiting for the Barbarians* is a political allegory, it is best read as a response to South Africa's endemic political violence in the 1970s and as an attempt to expose the torture of political detainees. As scholars such as Kannemeyer and Attridge have highlighted, the death of Steve Biko was on Coetzee's mind when he set out to pen this breakthrough novel. Consequently, the self-questioning attribute of the Magistrate can be seen as part of Coetzee's strategies to foreground uncertainty and sympathy, as a counter to the rationalistic practices that foster colonial violence, whose origins can be traced to Enlightenment values that prioritise rationality and certainty.

Ironically, Coetzee's first major postcolonial work, *Disgrace*, was met with accusations of stoking the same violence that he has typically sought to counter in his fiction. A realistic depiction of a South Africa in transition, the novel was singled out as an example of a racist text by the ANC-led government. Despite the controversy and its divisive nature, *Disgrace* marks a new chapter in the author's career in which non-human animals are foregrounded as entities worthy of ethical treatment and sympathy. In desisting from anthropomorphising animals, Coetzee simultaneously demonstrates the positive role they can play in fostering sound inter-human relations in postcolonial society and in ameliorating human trauma.

Finally, in *Elizabeth Costello*, the eponymous heroine attempts to elevate animals to the level of humans, in order to secure their rights and save them from habitual slaughter. However, Costello’s controversial argument equating the deaths of animals in the custody of the animal industries to the annihilation of the Jews under the Third Reich, alienates rather than elicits sympathy from her listeners. Also noteworthy is her challenge to humans to imagine themselves into the lives of beings such as bats, a suggestion made in an effort to rouse their sympathies and change their conduct towards animals.

As this dissertation has attempted to argue, the impossibility of such a task points to the sympathetic imagination as an exceedingly ethical exercise that demands an awareness of the absolute difference of alterity. In acceding to a realisation of that difference and keeping an ethical distance, its channelling is seen to be possible. Given the impossibility of imagining ourselves in the place of Other entities, the sympathetic imagination is seen as being realised in the failure of such exercise. One would be tempted to concur with critics such as Attridge, who argue that the failure of the sympathetic imagination is reflective of Coetzee’s pessimism over literature’s capability to effect change. It is seen as a failure of language, and of the literary project itself, as seen in Elizabeth Costello’s unsuccessful attempt to win humans over with poetic language and stop them from abusing and killing animals.

However, as Coetzee has demonstrated over a lengthy career, a sympathetic reflection, or sheer love for the Other, as demonstrated in Lucy in *Disgrace*, rather than attempts at understanding the Other, may well be the challenge that his narratives set readers, as a means to offset perennial conflict.

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