



universität
wien

DIPLOMARBEIT

Titel der Diplomarbeit

„Body and Text in Selected Works
of J.M. Coetzee”

Verfasserin

Lisa Edelbacher, Bakk.phil

angestrebter akademischer Grad

Magistra der Philosophie (Mag.phil)

Wien, Januar 2013

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt:

A 343

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt:

Diplomstudium Anglistik und Amerikanistik

Betreuer:

Univ.-Prof. DDr. Ewald Mengel

Hinweis

Diese Diplomarbeit hat nachgewiesen, dass die betreffende Kandidatin oder der betreffende Kandidat befähigt ist, wissenschaftliche Themen selbstständig sowie inhaltlich und methodisch vertretbar zu bearbeiten. Da die Korrekturen der/des Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist daher nicht erkenntlich, mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.

BODY AND TEXT IN SELECTED WORKS OF J.M. COETZEE

Lisa Edelbacher

Table of Contents

1) Introduction.....	1
2) Postmodern Politics.....	4
2.1) Conditions of Postmodernity: Lyotard.....	5
2.2) Postmodern Textuality I: Lyotard.....	7
2.2.1) Realist Illusions.....	8
2.2.2) Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics.....	9
2.3) Postmodern Textuality II: Hutcheon.....	11
2.4) Postmodern/-colonial.....	14
2.5) The South African Condition.....	18
2.5.1) South Africa's Reign of Realism.....	20
2.5.2) Coetzee's Postmodernism.....	22
2.5.2.1) Nothing but a Certain Kind of Story.....	23
2.5.2.2) Anti-realist Illusions / Towards the Body.....	25
3) In the Heart of the Country: A Body or a Monologue?.....	29
3.1) Narrative and Themes.....	30
3.1.1) Unreliable Madness.....	31
3.1.2) A Western Mindset.....	33
3.1.3) Language and Universality.....	35
3.1.4) A Victim to Literature.....	37
3.2) Body.....	39
3.2.1) Birth and Afterbirth.....	39
3.2.2) Writing/Reading Rape.....	43
3.2.3) Symbolism: Bodily Occupation.....	46
3.2.4) Writing Against the Body.....	48
3.2.5) Rebirth and Restoration.....	53
4) Waiting for the Barbarians: Burning, Tearing, and Hacking.....	58
4.1) Narrative and Themes.....	59

4.1.1) Torture, Truth and Allegory.....	59
4.1.2) History and Othering.....	65
4.2) Body.....	69
4.2.1) The Body as Text.....	69
4.2.2) Against Interpretation.....	71
4.2.3) Pain and Truth.....	75
4.2.4) The Body Turned Machine.....	78
4.2.5) Dreaming of Transcendence.....	80
5) Foe: Where Bodies are their own Signs.....	88
5.1) Narrative and Themes.....	89
5.1.1) Against History, Against the Canon.....	90
5.1.2) Patriarchy and Imperialism.....	94
5.1.3) Truth and Storytelling.....	98
5.2) Body.....	101
5.2.1) Substantiality and Desire.....	101
5.2.2) Mutilation.....	105
5.2.3) The Body Underwater.....	110
6) Conclusion.....	116
7) Works Cited.....	119
8) Index.....	125

Acknowledgements

My biggest and most heartfelt thank you, simplified to the extreme...

First and foremost to my family, especially mum and dad, for their continuous support and kindness. To the coolest siblings one could wish for, and to my amazing grandma.

To my thesis advisor, Ewald Mengel, for his invaluable help, encouragement and patience.

And, of course, to those who kept me sane as I was fiddling while the world burned: Maria, Angela, Judith, Leo, Ines, Kirsi, and Simon.

Vielen dank euch allen.

Only nature knows neither memory nor history.
But man - let me offer you a definition - is the story-telling animal.
Wherever he goes he wants to leave behind not a chaotic wake, not an empty space,
but the comforting marker-buoys and trail signs of stories.

Graham Swift

Waterland

The truth of a myth is not in its words [...], but in its patterns.

David Mitchell

The Thousand Autumns of Jacob de Zoet

List of Abbreviations

DP: Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews

EC: Elizabeth Costello

F: Foe

IHC: In the Heart of the Country

WB: Waiting for the Barbarians

1) Introduction

When engaging with the role of the body in J.M. Coetzee's fiction, one inevitably stumbles, very early in one's research, upon an intriguing passage in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee's collaboration with literary critic David Attwell. It reads:

If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple (simple-minded?) standard erected. That standard is the body. [...] Let me put it baldly: in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body, not for logical reasons, not for ethical reasons [...], but for political reasons, for reasons of power. (Coetzee, *DP* 248)

It is as clear a statement as Coetzee has ever given with regards to the body, and yet, it still seems somewhat opaque. How exactly, for instance, can we define the term 'standard'? In what way(s) is the body's authority manifested? And, perhaps most importantly: If Coetzee relates the questions of politics and therefore power to the motif of the body, how is this connection portrayed in his novels?

In order to approach these queries, and to engage with the body in J.M. Coetzee's novels in general, it is, first of all, necessary to focus on the level of literary representation itself. According to Dominic Head, Coetzee can be regarded as "the first South African writer to produce overtly self-conscious fictions drawing explicitly on international postmodernism" (*Coetzee* 1) - a way of writing which has often been interpreted as a sheer unwillingness on Coetzee's part to properly engage with the atrocities committed by the Apartheid regime. However, even though postmodern writing has often been deemed apolitical and aloof, Coetzee's appropriation is a decisively political and ethical one. His novels display, in Jean-François Lyotard's terms, "an incredulity toward metanarratives" (*Postmodern* 11), that is, a scepticism about the unquestioned and seemingly unalterable, yet all-encompassing stories-masquerading-as-truths which shape and govern our lives. Thus, Coetzee's project is certainly ambitious: Challenging the notion of universal truth, exposing the power-structures inherent in all acts of writing, and addressing the

dangers of the mimetic principle, he continues to prove literature's subversive potential.

In this context, the human body is turned into an invaluable agent for demonstrating that all representation is, essentially, based on power dynamics. Coetzee's protagonists characteristically strive to acquire access to what they perceive to be truth or transcendence, but are usually hindered in this endeavour by their own corporeality. Magda, the seemingly mad heroine of *In the Heart of the Country*, endures life as a lonely spinster in colonial times, wishing her history to be different, and therefore proceeding to murder her father, the epitome of the imperial patriarch. In contrast, *Waiting for the Barbarians* tells the story of an unnamed Magistrate, who would prefer to spend his life quietly hiding away in a frontier outpost, but whose world is unmade in the pains of being tortured. Finally, Coetzee's postmodern Robinsonade, *Foe*, centres on the life of Susan Barton, whose desperate attempt to go down in history as a female castaway is prohibited by a male author, a fictional version of novelist Daniel Defoe.

As Derek Attridge (*Ethics* 13) has further noted, Coetzee's interest in the deconstruction of Western metanarratives is rooted in his concern for the Other. It is not surprising, therefore, that all these protagonists display an almost uncanny fascination with the subaltern body. Be it Hendrik and Klein-Anna, the servants whose friendship Magda seeks, or the barbarian girl, whose tortured body the Magistrate attempts (and fails) to read like a text, or Friday, who is always present in Susan's journey, but remains a perpetually silent enigma: By refusing to yield their stories, and remaining indecipherable, they manage to prevent being swallowed up by the dominant discourse. Indeed, as Attridge has noted, they embody "an alterity that makes demands on us not by entering into dialogue with us - something which is ruled out in advance - but by the very intensity of its unignorable being-there" (*Ethics* 13). Hence, even though the body can never be aptly contextualised, its presence remains.

Generally speaking, Coetzee employs a postmodern narrative style in order to draw attention to the absences and silences which all storytelling necessarily engenders. By constructing the Other as a fascinating, yet opaque

presence which can never be deciphered, he points towards the general impossibility of representing him/her within the constraints of the dominant discourse, and thus exposes the artificiality of all grand- and metanarratives.

2) Postmodern Politics

"Postmodernism is the most problematic concept in contemporary cultural criticism" (1), claims Bran Nicol, editor of the anthology *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel*, while Linda Hutcheon suggests that "the postmodern is seemingly not so much a concept as a problematic" (*Politics* 16). Both these statements echo what has been an ever-elusive and ever-futile concern since the highly contested term 'postmodern' made its first appearance: pinpointing its definition. This is a difficulty caused by the fact that postmodernism has manifested itself in an unusually large number of academic disciplines (ranging from literary studies, over visual arts and architecture, to philosophy and history) (Hutcheon, *Politics* 1; Nicol 1), but was also effected by its gradual entrance into non-academic discourse, accompanied by an increasingly inflationary usage of the term. Finally, and probably most significantly, while postmodernism's death has been proclaimed numerous times (McHale Para. 1; Sim vii), we still live in an age that does not seem to have progressed beyond it just yet, which makes it a term even more slippery to grasp and theorise (Nicol 1).

Consequently, it is not surprising that any consensus on postmodernism's alleged nature is both difficult to reach and bound to be provisional. Such ambiguity might, of course, be expected from a concept associated with a culture that has witnessed the disappearance of the real, has been caught in endless surfaces of simulacra, and finds itself, more often than not, disoriented and Disneyfied. Yet, one must not forget that the birth of the postmodern does already hark back several decades¹, and so, with the luxury of at least some hindsight, it is possible to discern certain dominants within the field. Generally speaking, all different theories that have been subsumed under the label of postmodernism are based on "a mode of cultural awareness informed by the

1 Given that postmodernism is a not a very clear cut concept as such, it might only seem logical that the date of its emancipation from its modernist predecessor can also best be described as vague. Simon Malpas places its beginnings in the 1950s, although it was only in the 1960s and -70s that the term gained widespread dominance in Europe and North America (5). Brian McHale, on the other hand, claims that "certainly from about 1975 on", it was possible to talk about the postmodern period (Para. 1).

conviction that everything *is*, in fact, *cultural*; that is, nothing in life – nationalism, value systems, identity, history, even reality – is natural or given” (Nicol 2-3). Stuart Sim (vii) echoes this definition in the introduction to *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, describing it as “a rejection of many, if not most, of the cultural certainties on which life in the West has been structured over the past couple of centuries.” Understood in these terms, then, postmodernism is characterised by a cultural and intellectual awareness, rooted in a deep distrust of totalising and naturalising forces.

2.1) Conditions of Postmodernity: Lyotard

Both Nicol's and Sim's elaborations ultimately hark back to sentiments already powerfully expressed in 1979, when the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard first published his book *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, one of the most seminal, if not the original key text of postmodern theoretical writing. Strictly speaking, Lyotard is less concerned here with postmodernism itself than with the age of postmodernity, that is, with the historical changes that have manifested themselves in the contemporary West since the decline of modernity (Malpas 9) and which have effected the rise of postmodern art. Aiming to describe the shifts which have taken place in the transformation from a modern to a postmodern era, Lyotard focusses on the ways in which knowledge is produced, distributed and consumed, which to him are intrinsically linked to the role of narrative. Indeed, it is precisely through his concepts of grand narrative (*grand récit*) and metanarrative that he establishes the key points around which his definition of the postmodern condition revolves (Lyotard, *Postmodern* xxiii).

Within Lyotard's parameters, modernity is best characterised by the unfaltering prominence of grand narratives. Regarded as universally valid, these schemes provide all-encompassing explanations of the world, and offer tales of how human society functions and progresses. As such, two basic forms can be distinguished: on the one hand what Lyotard terms the “speculative grand narrative” (*Postmodern* 38), which postulates the existence of one great truth,

towards which the progress of all knowledge is directed. On grounds of the "grand narrative of emancipation" (38), on the other hand, one is reassured that the acquisition and development of knowledge increases the individual's freedom, liberating him/her from superstition and delusion (38). Both are, of course, narratives fuelled by the spirit of Enlightenment, and saturated with the notions of progress and rationality. Metanarratives, then, operate on a similar note, but on a smaller level. In short, they can best be described as a set of rules for particular forms of narratives, which have the power to determine their legitimacy (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 35; Malpas 36).²

It is important to note here that both grand narratives and metanarratives hide their own artificiality, their own constructed nature, and derive their power from this concealment (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 45). Consequently, their stability is merely performative, sustained not by any higher forces, but simply by people's beliefs in their validity and trust in their capacity to be all-explaining and universally valid. In that sense, they can be regarded as treacherous, since they perpetuate ideologies without overtly seeming to do so, and thereby conveniently limit the individual's freedom, constraining his/her opportunities and critical thinking. And yet, they have upheld the frameworks of Western civilisation for centuries, be it in the form of promised religious salvation, the notion of history as linear and progressive, or the concept of the subject being autonomous. Postmodernism, however, explicitly challenges any such totalising claims, and according to Lyotard, this is exactly what lies at its very core: "Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as an incredulity toward metanarratives" (11).

And although a simplification indeed, it seems to be precisely this sentence that best expresses his conviction that a "war on totality" ("Answering" 82) is being, and indeed has to be, waged. It follows logically that, due to a societal loss of faith in metanarratives, a different system for making sense of the world must be established. Subsequently, Lyotard argues for what he terms the *petit récit*, the 'little narrative'. Based on Ludwig

2 One only needs to draw on the example of historical records in order to realise the extent of this power: metanarratives determine how a document has to be constituted in order to be regarded as historical, and it is through this process of selection that history is written.

Wittgenstein's notion of language games (*Sprachspiele*), who conceives of language not on an abstract level, but as a performance in specific contexts and with specific rules³ (*Postmodern* 10), little narratives do not pretend to be applicable on any large scale, but only work in particular situations. As such, they are both provisional and competing, and as they are often generated by small groups of people, with a particular goal in mind, they ideally dissolve again within due time, thereby never laying any totalising claims (60). It is precisely through these language games and the little narratives they generate, then, that a new conception of justice can be established, namely "an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus" (66). Thus, the decline of grand narratives does not mean an eradication of all traditional concepts, but an incorporation of plurality and heterogeneity, and a consequent redefinition of them.

2.2) Postmodern Textuality I: Lyotard

As far as the level of artistic representation is concerned, it is Lyotard's article "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?", published about three years after *The Postmodern Condition*, that proves most fruitful.⁴ Overall, he argues that the demise of realism and subsequent emergence of postmodernism can be attributed to the rise of capitalism, which has generated an overarching distortion of life in general, encompassing not only its institutions, but also its social roles and familiar objects. Hence, if realism is to mirror life, but life itself is opaque, it reflects merely an impaired picture. Therefore, living in a postmodern condition entails that we "can no longer

3 Further elaborating on language games, Lyotard discerns three important factors: first, rules "do not carry within themselves their own legitimation" (*Postmodern* 10) but are contracts between players. Secondly, no game can take place without preestablished rules. Thirdly, every utterance should be considered a move in a game (10). Thus, it is made obvious that all language is based on interaction between people, and that its parameters can be changed through interaction as well.

4 Initially responding to the claims of critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, who believes modernity and the project of Enlightenment to be as of yet unfinished, and urges the arts to "explore a living historical situation" ("Answering" 72) instead of focussing on what he deems to be mere "judgments of taste" (72), Lyotard uses their different viewpoints as a basis to convincingly demonstrate the shortcomings of realist prose in the context of postmodernity.

evoke reality except as nostalgia or mockery, as an occasion for suffering rather than for satisfaction" ("Answering" 74).

2.2.1) Realist Illusions

Of course, this does not mean that realist art ceases to be produced; however, its cultural reception has undergone considerable changes since the rise of modernity. Generally speaking, Lyotard argues that realism's prime function is, and has always been, "to preserve various consciousnesses from doubt" ("Answering" 74), which it achieves by pretending to reflect when it actually constructs. Therefore, it strives to offer the recipient signs that are easily decodable, a referent that retains the illusion of stability, and a vocabulary that is immediately recognisable. In short, it constructs the comforting impression of a world that can be understood and related to without much difficulty. These efforts essentially serve to affirm both the recipient's sense of his/her own identity, which can be safely defined in relation to (apparently) stable surroundings, as well as the approval he/she receives from her interlocutors, who share the same (apparently) consistent code of communication; bluntly speaking, realist narratives are thus put to "therapeutic" use (74). It is this illusion of stability, and the corresponding endorsement of the status quo, which ensure that realism functions as the mainstream form of presentation in any given culture (Malpas 28). Indeed, to Lyotard, realism's only definition is that it resolutely "intends to avoid the question of reality implicated in that of art" ("Answering" 75), as to guarantee that its own status and function will not be challenged. As such, it becomes complicit with the dominant mode of cultural practice.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, realist narratives remain the preferred mode of representation for political propaganda, since they provide easily decipherable narratives, but do not interrogate the power-relations involved in their construction. Instead, their representations are conveniently naturalised. Thus, the more influence a political regime exercises, the more restricted aesthetic judgement in general becomes, as any critical investigation into the nature of

representation or the role of the audience would pose threats to the party's dominance (75). What is important to note, however, is that this condition can only be realised if the public desires stability and distraction, not revolution:

When power assumes the name of a party, realism and its neoclassical complement triumph over the experimental avant-garde by slandering and banning it – that is, provided the "correct" images, the "correct" narratives, the "correct" forms which the party requests, selects, and propagates can find a public to desire them as the appropriate remedy for the anxiety and depression that the public experiences. (75)

In phases when power shifts from party to capital, however, from political to monetary means, realism starts to be governed by purchasing power only. In this stage, art is defined merely by the forces of the market, and is, as such, judged according to its efficiency in the economic system. In this situation, too, any critical potential of the realist work remains decisively hidden, since it is automatically undermined by capitalist forces (76).

2.2.2) Modern and Postmodern Aesthetics

These changing parameters of realist narratives perfectly illustrate that Lyotard does not conceive of realism, modernism and postmodernism in solely historical terms, but also approaches them from a stylistic level. As Malpas summarises: "All three coexist simultaneously in any culture and indicate different modes of presentation within a given milieu" (28). While realism's task is to conceal any instabilities in the sign system, both modernism and postmodernism function as critics of this realist illusion, and aim to highlight the power-relations implicated in every act of writing. More concretely, they try to "present the fact that the unrepresentable exists" ("Answering" 78), to "make visible something which can be conceived and which can neither be seen nor made visible" (78). By alluding to what is usually excluded or repressed, they strive to expose realism not as a reflection of reality, but as a sense-making practice, and oppose the illusion of impartiality inherent in realist art. This is the reason why their style tends to be, as Malpas has put it, "deliberately difficult and disturbing" (29).

How, then, can the difference between modernism and postmodernism be conceived of? Applying an aesthetic framework, Lyotard argues that, whereas realism corresponds to the conventional category of the beautiful (as its signs are easy to decode and digest), both modern and postmodern narratives aspire to provoke the reader, to question his/her assumptions about representational norms, and thus simultaneously elicit mixed feelings of both pleasure and pain, of both awe and terror – in short, they attempt to evoke notions of what in the 18th century became known as the category of the sublime ("Answering" 77). And yet, even though both modernism and postmodernism share this concern, it is only the latter which manages to achieve it to a full extent. This is due to the fact that modernism acknowledges the unrepresentable merely as absent content, and thereby nostalgically retains a relatively stable narrative structure (at least compared to postmodern standards), which functions as a gesture of consolation for the reader (79). Postmodernism, on the other hand, focuses on a *Verfremdung* of content and form alike, encompassing a distortion of the signifier itself, and thereby shattering illusions of stability on both levels ("Answering" 81, Malpas 29).⁵

If distinctions seem slightly blurry at this point, it is owing to the fact that Lyotard, despite a terminology that might lead one to assume otherwise, effectively conceives of the postmodern not as a successor to, but as part of the modern. Accordingly, he is quick to negate a mere relationship of historical chronology, when he claims: "A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in its nascent state, and this state is constant" ("Answering" 79). As such, it poses a counterweight to the universalising practices of modernist narratives, and continually undermines any claims to unity. Therefore, postmodernism must always be defined against both modernism and realism, and its definition varies according to cultural specifications. The term postmodern, consequently, is

5 Here, Lyotard evokes Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* as an example for the modernist unrepresentable, while the late work of James Joyce (*Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*) is, contrary to the opinion of numerous other critics, regarded as postmodern due to its stream-of-consciousness-form. In the former, according to Lyotard, "the identity of consciousness" is being eluded, the reader being "victim to the excess of time", while in the latter, it is "the identity of writing" that is at stake, as one falls "victim to the excess of the book [...] or of literature" ("Answering" 80).

reserved for those cultural artefacts which manage to most successfully destroy the totalising claims of the conventional; and yet, from Lyotard's point of view, this also entails that once their shock value is lost, once the public has adapted, they effectively cease to be postmodern (Malpas 29).⁶

Thus understood, postmodernism does not strive to establish an independent counter-discourse to the system of neither realist nor modernist representation. Instead, it can be regarded as a disturbing factor of the known structures of both systems, and, by exposing the contradictions, fractures and silences inherent in them, seeks to point towards an unrepresentable that cannot be expressed within the culture's parameters (Malpas 30). Postmodern narratives, accordingly, are "not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged [...] by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for" ("Answering" 81).

2.3) Postmodern Textuality II: Hutcheon

Lyotard, thus, offers a definition of postmodernism as a political endeavour, since exposing both the constructed nature of grand narratives and the sense-making practices of realism constitutes an attack on the very foundations of Western civilisation and its literary canon respectively. Nevertheless, and interestingly so, postmodern art often tends to be thought of in terms that run quite contrary to any subversive tendencies. From the onset, critics were quick to attest mere superficiality and self-indulgence to postmodern literature, paintings or films, and while it is certainly easy to focus on their witty way with words, their catchy commentaries and playful parodies, it is at the same time a rather reductive stance. Hutcheon addresses this sentiment in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, published in 1989, reprimanding the majority of her fellow critics, who tend to regard

⁶ Following this train of thought, one might argue that this 'loss of the postmodern' poses another of postmodernism's peculiar paradoxes: the author, by setting out to create a postmodern text, also engenders the possibility of its irrelevance once it ceases to sufficiently provoke its readers.

postmodernism's "narcissistic and ironic appropriation of existing images and stories and its seemingly limited accessibility" (3) as flaws that disqualify postmodern art from the political realm.⁷

In fact, Hutcheon is adamant to emphasise that postmodernism, although lacking a definite theory of agency to enable political action, is nevertheless constantly engaged in subverting dominant power structures. Adapting Roland Barthes's notion of the 'doxa' (Greek for 'belief'), who regards it as the "public opinion or the 'Voice of Nature' and consensus" (*Politics* 3), she attests postmodern art a "de-doxifying" quality (3), that is, an ability to challenge the way people tend to perceive cultural representations. As realism presumes a stable connection between signifier and signified, and therefore regards language as a transparent medium (34), it is by highlighting the power-structures inherent in both construction and reception of every image, story or picture, that postmodern art draws attention to the fact that all representations are necessarily grounded in ideology, which "presents what is really constructed meaning as something inherent in that which is being represented" (50). As such, postmodernism cannot be but political, since it very deliberately confronts those operations of power traditionally left opaque.

And yet, the challenge is a complex one. While the aforementioned unmasking of the seemingly natural as solely cultural can undeniably be regarded as postmodernism's underlying goal, this also means that a strong dependency on metanarratives as the basis of such deconstructive work cannot be eschewed. Postmodern art does not aim to eradicate existing narratives, but instead forms complex altercations with them, and is, as a result, significantly defined by what it actually seeks to undermine. Consequently, Hutcheon argues that, even though postmodernism's initial concern is to denaturalise, it "ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge" (2). Thus, due to being complicit and critical in equal parts, postmodernism should be regarded as a paradox (a term that, in addition to its conventional, denotative meaning of

⁷ In the words of Malpas: "The postmodernist, these critics might claim, would fiddle while the world burned if it were not for the fact that he or she had traded in the old-fashioned stringed instrument for the drum machines and samplers that are the stuff of contemporary popular music" (107).

'something (seemingly) contradicting itself', can simultaneously be read as 'against the doxa'), which situates its politics far from any straightforward revisionism (11).

Nevertheless, it is precisely this double-bind that should be considered the key to postmodernism's subversive powers. After all, all deconstruction is based on the principle that discourse can only be challenged from within its own structures, and the paradoxical engagement between an established narrative and its postmodern appropriation enables the display of the power-relations inherent in the former, without, however, establishing the latter as merely another totalising narrative.⁸ According to Hutcheon, the most powerful technique to effect such a de-doxification of an utterance, is the use of parody, "a double process of installing and ironizing" (93) which exposes the dynamics of representation. In a more general sense, however, it is the "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining statement" (1) that Hutcheon regards as the underlying characteristic of postmodernism.

Although her analysis is clearly influenced by Lyotard, Hutcheon is also critical of his arguments, reprehending them for what she deems to be an oversimplification of the relationship between postmodernity and postmodernism. While the latter can undoubtedly be regarded as having its socio-economic and political roots in capitalist Western culture, one should not assume a correlation of pure complicity, but instead be careful to consider "at least the possibility of a relation of contestation and subversion" (26), that is, the possibility that postmodernism could also (partly) be understood as a reaction against the conditions of contemporary life. And indeed, while postmodernism, for Lyotard, challenges conventional representational practices, no interrogation of the cultural frameworks of postmodernity itself (such as globalisation, capitalism or increased reliance on technology) is effected; a point which becomes important when investigating the relationship between postmodernism and postcolonialism.

⁸ The genre that perhaps most exemplifies this paradox has become known as historiographic metafiction, a term coined by Hutcheon herself. See Chapter 4 for its relevance in Coetzee's *Foe*.

2.4) Postmodern/-colonial

"The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one", claims Lyotard ("Answering" 81), and although he is speaking from a Western point of view, and pledging his allegiance to the postmodern, most postcolonial scholars would probably be able to seamlessly integrate these sentiments into their own work. After all, they evoke a wish for the demolition of totalitarian power structures, structures which have been ruthlessly implemented and enforced by colonial rulers time and time again, and constitute a plea for the embracement of difference and diversity⁹. And indeed, as Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin argue, "the intensification of theoretical interest in the post-colonial has coincided with the rise of postmodernism in Western society" (*Postcolonial* 117); however, far from being a straightforward relationship, this has resulted in "both confusion and overlap between the two" (117). While both fields are, of course, wide and diverse in their own right, it is necessary to examine their overall similarities and differences, as Coetzee's novels are evidently influenced by both.

Although the distrust in grand narratives is a phenomenon associated with the West, it certainly also concerns those seeking to free themselves from the remains of colonialism. Sadly, the myth of the White Man, having nobly shouldered the burden of bringing civilisation to the savages of dark wildernesses (a euphemism usually encompassing, but not limited to, violent oppression, capitalist exploitation, as well as cultural and linguistic hegemony), continues to haunt the collective memory of many nations; above all, therefore, it is the deconstruction of empire's lingering narratives that postcolonial authors and theorists have set their minds to, and many have recognised postmodernism's potential for their own cause. Elleke Boehmer, for instance, discerns that both postmodernism's and postcolonialism's historical origins lie in a time characterised by a growing scepticism of Enlightenment values and

⁹ Consequently, the term 'postcolonialism' is understood as "an amorphous set of discursive practices, akin to postmodernism" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin xv) in the context of this thesis.

institutions (244). As a result, it is not surprising that the belief in the superiority of Western reason and its allegedly universalising potential are notions contested by both. Their shared "concern with marginality, ambiguity, disintegrating binaries, and all things parodied, piebald, dual, mimicked, borrowed and second-hand" (244) can be regarded as an attempt to counter these totalising claims and to make room for a plurality of cultural narratives. Here, Lyotard's little narratives definitely echo.

According to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, who define postcolonialism as the "discourse of oppositionality which colonialism brings into being" (*Postcolonial* 117), it is the "decentring of discourse, the focus on the significance of language and writing in the construction of experience, the use of the subversive strategies of mimicry, parody and irony" (117) that unites both projects. In this sense, the incorporation of postmodern techniques into a postcolonial setting offers a way of 'writing back', that is, writing "'against' the assumptions of the centre to a prior claim to legitimacy and power" (*Empire* 245). Consequently, previously hidden power-dynamics are exposed, and a dialectic with the West's metanarratives enabled.

Still, when faced with the concerns of former colonies, the idea of the postmodern narrative as a subversive political tool certainly becomes ambivalent. Overall, one must keep in mind the problematic that postmodernism is ultimately a concept born in and established by the West. As such, postmodern art and theory could be regarded as yet another act of (neo)colonialism, yet another world view imposed on the Orient by the Eurocentric intellectual elite, who might be in a process of deconstructing the myths of its own beliefs and origins, but who, in doing so, might also assume their traditional position of power yet again. On the one hand, the West's interest in postcolonial matters, and its emphasis on the discussion of marginality and difference as positive concepts, might in a covert way also reinforce the dualism between former coloniser and colonised. According to Hutcheon, "the precise point at which interest and concern become imperializing appropriation is a hotly contested one" ("Downspout" 133). On the other hand, then, the question remains whether postmodern theories and

techniques, originally Western, should be employed by postcolonial writers at all (133). As Hutcheon eloquently states:

Postmodernism aims to be accessible through its overt and self-conscious parodic, historical, and reflexive forms and thus to be an effective force in our culture. Its complicitous critique, then, situates the postmodern squarely within both economic capitalism and cultural humanism – two of the major dominants of much of the western world. (*Politics* 38)

This becomes especially obvious when engaging with another vital aspect of this problematic, a point again addressed by Hutcheon, which concerns the role of the subject. In postmodern thought, it has already ceased to be a Cartesian man of reason, and is now first and foremost a creature constructed in discourse and/or driven by desire, neither autonomous nor unified ("Downspout" 130). This stance, however, Hutcheon describes as "the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses" (131). While the Western Man, as the governor of discourse, can freely examine and interrogate the dynamics of his own self, Others have to fight in order to be granted the status of subjects in the first place. Postcolonialism, therefore, is first and foremost concerned with the reclamation, not the deconstruction, of a subject position. What the subaltern subject ultimately seeks is a voice, a discursive space for him or her.

It is in this context that Gayatri Spivak has famously asked the question "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in order to explain that their inability to express themselves as themselves is caused by the parameters carved out for them by the prevalent discourse. As all their words and actions are only regarded within a framework imposed onto them by their hegemonic interlocutors, their situation constitutes „a failure of interpretation and not a failure of articulation" (Spivak, "Subaltern" 195). As a means of resistance, then, Spivak suggests the temporary assumption of an essentialist identity, a strategy she refers to as "strategic essentialism" (194), which perfectly illustrates that the postcolonial subject needs to be a unified one in order to be able to further his/her political projects. What is important in this context, however, is that the employment of such an essentialist stance is a conscious act, and that a critical distance to the totalising impulses inherent in this concept needs to be retained (194-195).

On a similar note, Simon During raises an important point when he discusses the negative aspects of postmodernity, claiming that it can best be described as a condition striving to eradicate all Otherness (focussing, one would presume, on developments such as globalisation and capitalism, and opposed to Lyotard's view, who foregrounds a prevalent distrust in grand narratives and therefore the rise of pluralities), whereas he aptly characterises postmodernism as "that thought which refuses to turn the Other into the Same" (During 125). It is obvious that this definition, on the one hand, entails a high degree of sensibility for the postcolonial cause and its struggle for discursive presence. On the other hand, it also hints at postmodernism's awareness of its own responsibility to combat the negative forces of universalising practices. At the same time, however, During also agrees with Spivak's elaborations on the subaltern subject, when he perceives the postmodern sensibility to be conscious of the fact that "the Other can never speak for itself as the Other" ("Subaltern" 125).

There are two sets of tensions in this conception: one, obviously, between postmodernity and postmodernism, the latter turning against the former's allegedly totalising impulse; and the other, equally complex, between postmodernism's principal recognition of the Other's autonomy and its notion that this autonomy can never fully express itself. For During, who argues that postcolonialism's aim is to "achieve an identity uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts or images" (125), such unresolved oppositions would naturally seem rather contentious. After all, as Chapman perceptively states, postmodernity is not a phenomenon confined solely to the West: "There is no escape in Africa from materialism, rationalism, Western-style economics, the profit motive, and the cult of the individual" (389). If, therefore, one conceives of this problematic in terms of Helen Tiffin's famous phrase that decolonisation is "process, not arrival" (Tiffin 95), as it "invokes an ongoing dialectic between hegemonic centrist systems and peripheral subversion of them" (95), and thus engages in counter-discursive practices (96), one would find in postmodernism a decisively ample tool to write back (Head, *Coetzee* 18).

Generally speaking, one can certainly concur with Ashcroft, Griffiths and

Tiffin, who claim that "the 'post' in post-colonial is not the same as the 'post' in post-modernism" (*Postcolonial* 117), and the relationship between these two is definitely neither straightforward, nor easily defined (nor, for that matter, static). Furthermore, the need of the subaltern subject to construct him-/herself in a way that is strategically essentialist should not be easily dismissed. However, the possibility of an identity that is fully independent from the narratives of the West is, boldly speaking, neither realistic nor possible; an assertion that is shared by most postcolonial theorists nowadays. And yet, During's claim, put in a slightly different context, triggers an interesting question, namely: if the Other cannot be represented as the Other, how do postmodern narratives prevent its turning into the Same, how do they resist its universalising?

Given postmodernism's convincing arguments against realist representations, one can safely conclude that, if such an engagement with the Other should be possible, it can certainly not be based on construction-veiled-as-mimesis, or on grand narratives promoting the concepts of universal truth, progress, and eventual freedom. Thus, while postmodernism cannot be said to provide any easy or definite answers, and must therefore, especially in a postcolonial context, be appropriated carefully, it does have the potential for an ethical treatment of the Other. However, in order to engage with subaltern subjects in a responsible way, in order to eschew the dependency on metanarratives, the argument needs to be taken one step further, as it must be emphasised that postmodernism's real potential does not lie in any attempts to generate a space where a representation of the Other can take place. Instead, its strategies and techniques are best employed in order to stage the impossibility of it ever being fully represented within the dominant discourse; a concern which can be traced through J.M. Coetzee's whole literary history (Attwell, *Ethics* 13).

2.5) The South African Condition

The literary world of South Africa during the waning Apartheid years can

be regarded as a prime example for the difficulties of voicing postcolonial concerns through postmodern structures; or, more precisely, for how postcolonial causes get affected when being confronted with a non-realist paradigm for the first time. Indeed, while postmodernism had certainly established itself a rather fashionable concept in Europe and North America by the 1970s, South Africa's concerns at that time did not lie in the realm of letters, but instead, and especially after the public uproar following the Soweto Riots of the 16th of June 1976, were faced with violence and bloodshed, and occupied with the promise of and pressing need for revolution. As South Africa, thus, experienced a "thoroughgoing politicization" of the whole of society (Attwell, "History" 585), its literature remained predominantly realist. It was by documenting the atrocities committed by the regime that writers hoped to make a contribution to the anti-Apartheid cause (Attwell, "History" 582; Chapman 387)¹⁰.

Coetzee, who has been critical of realism, and constantly questioning the politics of representation in his novels (Attridge 2)¹¹, can be regarded as the first South African author writing in the tradition of the postmodern (Head, *Coetzee* 1). Keeping in mind, however, Lyotard's remark on how the postmodern is always *inter alia* defined by a certain shock value towards its audience, it might not be surprising that Coetzee's novels, while praised on an international level, have from the very beginning met with a fair share of

10 Two notable exceptions should be mentioned in this context. Lewis Nkosi sparked a debate on South African realism as early as 1967, when he claimed that black fiction had predominantly become nothing more than journalistic coverage pretending to be imaginative literature. In other words, having been so preoccupied with documenting the struggles under Apartheid, it had lost most of its value as fiction (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 12-13). Njabulo Ndebele echoed this criticism in 1984, arguing that journalistic representation of oppression only engages the "faculty of recognition" (Ndebele 45) in the reader, and is therefore unable to be a catalyst for transforming his/her consciousness. Instead, it usually merely confirms previously held opinions, and thus does not yield any particular effect for political change (45) – a decisively postmodern stance.

11 Attridge recognises that conventionally, Coetzee is regarded as a postmodern writer, but prefers himself to describe him as late modernist or neomodernist (*Ethics* 2), the reason being that the term postmodern "stems in part from one aspect of the cultural configuration to which [it is] often applied: its tendency to reduce otherness to sameness" (6). However, Attridge (citing Derrida as an example) also recognises that some currents within postmodernism are defined precisely by a negation of such hegemonising tendencies, and it is these currents which come close to his own definition of modernism (6). As such, if we use the terminology employed by Lyotard and Hutcheon, it seems that Attridge is not actually referring to postmodernism, but rather criticising the totalising claims of postmodernity. Therefore, this characterisation of Coetzee as a modernist seems to be rooted not in a vastly different conception of his work, but merely in a different definition of postmodernism than the one outlined thus far.

criticism from within South Africa itself (Attwell "History" 582; Huggan and Watson 3).

2.5.1) South Africa's Reign of Realism

The charges against Coetzee from within his former home country can be aptly exemplified by a review of one of his books, which has gained widespread attention among literary critics. When his fourth novel, *Life & Times of Michael K*, was first published in the United States in 1984 (after its initial South African publication the year prior), it was Nadine Gordimer who composed what would turn out to be one of the harshest responses to it. While she praises the novel for being a "marvelous work that leaves nothing unsaid – and could not be better said – about what human beings do to fellow human beings in South Africa" (6), she nevertheless makes it perfectly clear that she regards its publication as an act of great irresponsibility.

Michael K, a simpleton from Cape Town, who would be content spending his life sowing and tending to pumpkin seeds, preferring to ignore the civil war tearing the country around him to pieces, can hardly be considered a hero in whom the potential for political revolution resides. Rather than make history, he tries to live outside of it, shunning the consequences it might bring him. But what, asks Gordimer, would happen if the people of South Africa adopted the same stance? And why does Coetzee not acknowledge that Apartheid's victims, "seeing themselves as victims no longer" (6), have long ago started their journey towards emancipation and political agency? Ultimately, the charge is a substantial one: Coetzee the intellectual, unwilling to engage with the dreariness of life under an oppressive regime, resorts to opaque novels that make no proper contribution to the overarching cause of political resistance. Instead, he prefers to "clear the reader's lungs of the transient and fill them with a deep breath of transcendence" (3) by being decisively vague and avoiding any political involvement, crafting instead a mere allegory of the historical situation South Africa's people have to live through (3). Due to this retreat, Gordimer reaches the conclusion that "the integral relation between

private and social destiny is distorted here more than is allowed for by the subjectivity that is in every writer" (6).

These comments perfectly illustrate the narrow space that literature was allowed to occupy under Apartheid reign; on the one hand, there was the threat of state censorship perpetually looming, while on the other hand, the resistance against the prevailing regime demanded all art to be part of a direct, political involvement. This view, accordingly, "gave rise to a suspicion of anything appearing hermetic, self-referential, formally inventive, or otherwise distant from the canons and procedures of realist traditions" (Attridge, *Ethics* 1). As Gordimer's criticism has shown, it was not only the ones in power who employed realism for the causes of propaganda; rather, the rule of realist representation seems to have been a systematic illness, which also encompassed literature opposing the regime, as well as literary criticism. Lyotard has argued that the realist imperative issued by oppressive political rule, which aims to stifle all aesthetic experimentation, serves to effect stability. "Artists and writers must be brought back into the bosom of the community, or at least, if the latter is considered to be ill, must be assigned the task of healing it" ("Answering" 73); however, this also seems to be true of the demands made of Coetzee by those wanting to cure South Africa of the sickness that was Apartheid.

As such, one can observe a legacy of colonialism still at work: the tendency to simplify the world by imposing a strict adherence to binary codes imposed by the regime, and its subsequent internalisation by society in general: thus, the world was categorised in either/or, for/against and self/other, whereas postmodernism's plea of both/and was not yet to be accepted. As Attwell has argued, it was a time characterised by "an absorption into a master-code History that allegorizes the smallest acts" ("History" 585), subsuming every sign under the common referent of Apartheid. While Lyotard has argued that the oppressor's realist narratives only manage to comfort the public if the public actually desires distraction and consolation, it is possible to observe that during Apartheid, those aiming for revolution were, through a culture suffused in binary codes, so limited in their imagination that they adopted and actively

employed a realist dogma themselves. Therefore, while the postmodern disbelief in metanarratives was prevalent in Europe, there was hardly any space for such questions in South Africa yet, and any non-realist attempts at representation would, eventually, be evaluated in a framework of active political involvement, and judged accordingly.

Consequently, what many critics did not recognise was the potential of the postmodern form, as *Michael K* does undoubtedly carry a political message. In short, Michael's refusal to participate issues a challenge to the grand narrative of history itself, as he disproves of being represented in the terms that an oppressive regime has carved out for him. Both author and character, thus, find themselves confronted with these totalising claims of history's "hermeneutic pressure" (Attwell, "History" 585), and it is precisely the portrayal of this conflict, not the establishment of a (realist) counter-discourse, that Coetzee aims for.¹² After all, as Chapman has pointed out, Coetzee's fiction strives to make us realise that "[i]t is no use invoking lost pasts, whether Afrikaner or African: the greater responsibility is to understand, modify and re-imagine the symbolic narratives and the maxims by which we construct and construe our 'reality'" (389).

2.5.2) Coetzee's Postmodernism

If we consult his theoretical writing, it is not difficult to discern Coetzee's deep concern for the relationship between South Africa's troubled history and the status of literature at the time. In his acceptance speech for the Jerusalem Prize, which he received in 1987, he gives a painful account of the situation under Apartheid, a description in which he explicitly includes his own novels as well:

South African literature is a literature in bondage [...]. It is a less than

¹² Here, the merging of both postcolonialism and postmodernism in Coetzee's work becomes obvious. Whereas the former has traditionally been occupied with rewriting history and shedding light on those narratives excluded by imperialist discourse, Coetzee's challenge is decisively different, because he is adamant to confront the notion of history as such, and postulates the claim of history-as-text (Head, *Coetzee* 11). On a similar note, Attwell finds Coetzee's novels to be "located in the nexus of history and text; that is, they explore the tension between these polarities" (*J.M. Coetzee* 2-3).

fully human literature, unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them. It is exactly the kind of literature you would expect people to write from a prison. (*DP* 98)

Generally speaking, Coetzee attests this void to two factors: on the one hand, South Africa's literature was, at that time, "too slow, too old-fashioned, too indirect" (*DP* 98-99) to have any lasting effect on society or the course of history, while on the other hand, life itself was too cruel, brutal and callous for a novel to properly grasp and represent. This discrepancy between reality and literature, between the stark atrocities of the everyday and the struggling attempts to write about them, he aptly summarises thus: "We have art, said Nietzsche, so we shall not die of the truth. In South Africa, there is now too much truth to hold, truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of the imagination" (99).

2.5.2.1) Nothing but a Certain Kind of Story

While the Jerusalem speech can be regarded as the eloquent observation of a problem, his talk "The Novel Today", held in Cape Town in the same year, constitutes an attempt at its solution, and can be viewed as Coetzee's most illuminating discussion of the relationship between history and the novel. Overall, he discerns "a powerful tendency [...] to subsume the novel under history" (2), even going so far as to refer to this process as "colonisation" (3). This term is, of course, not one to be used lightly, which underscores the brevity of the concerns outlined in his argument. With historical discourse gaining dominance over the production of and beliefs expressed in novelistic texts, he argues, a certain degree of truth value comes to be expected of literature. In turn, novels themselves are assigned the status of historical texts. As Coetzee is quick to point out, this claim to truth might be a dubious one compared to conventional renderings of history; yet, the novel is able to make its readership look past this flaw, as its strength lies in the ability to convey

experience in a much more specific and individualistic way than history books, thereby engaging the reader on a wholly different level. Drawing on a concept established by Jacques Derrida, Coetzee refers to those novels which aim to seamlessly integrate themselves into the construction of history as having a “supplementary” relation to it (2), thus supporting the common conception of history as linear and progressing.

However, the argument continues, not all novels seek this status of supplementarity, and this is precisely the point at which the connections between history and the novel begin to become problematic. In an era of intense ideological pressure, such as South Africa under Apartheid reign, higher truth value tends to be ascribed to novelistic texts which function as supplements, while those which do not are regarded as less believable (3). Consequently, although literature and history usually co-exist fairly independently from each other, oppressive political situations force them into a very tight relationship. The role of the novel in Apartheid South Africa is thus defined in terms of a binary opposition: it can either form the aforementioned supplement, or it can try to install a rivalry to historical discourse. For the latter to be established, then, the novel needs to “evolve its own paradigms and myths, in the process [...] perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history – in other words, demythologising history” (3). Above all, this makes it strikingly obvious that Coetzee regards history as a discursive construction, the same way that “a novel is a discourse too, but a different kind of discourse” (4). Thus, the dominance of the former over the latter can not be traced back to any epistemological claims, any abstract truth-values, but must merely be understood as a product of prevailing power-dynamics.

What, then, constitutes such rivalry? How can the kind of literature that evolves its own myths be conceived of? And what form would these myths ultimately assume? While such questions are certainly complex, it is possible to conclude that, for Coetzee, any attempts towards an answer definitely lie beyond the boundaries of mere realist representation, which would solely be able to establish a condition of supplementarity. Indeed, employing a postmodern framework, we can conclude that what diminishes realism's

potential for such rivalry is that its final aim would be to mirror life, to provide the reader with what he/she perceives to be a perfect reflection, while masking the fact that it only constructs. Therefore, it is obvious that exposing history as a narrative does not lie in realism's interest, since this would effect its own demise by questioning the construction of discourses, and, as a further consequence, the concept of mimetic representation on which the realist mind relies.

Coetzee himself, therefore, has chosen to discard the term realism altogether. Instead, he prefers to employ the much more sceptical expression "illusionism" (*DP* 27), which does not make any ontological claims, but instead destroys the reader's suspension of disbelief, as it gestures towards the constructed nature of all narrative. Furthermore, Coetzee also comments on its opposite, the aptly named "anti-illusionism" (27), which is simply and briefly defined as "displaying the tricks you are using instead of hiding them" (27). This, then, would correspond to Lyotard's conception of postmodernism as something that disturbs the usual cultural mechanisms from within by exposing their arbitrariness, thereby creating a certain shock-value. However, Coetzee describes anti-illusionism as merely "a common *ploy* of postmodernism" (27, my emphasis), but does not equate the two, which could indicate that to him, there might eventually be more to postmodern writing than laying one's metafictional cards on the table. Furthermore, and interestingly so, he notes that "[a]nti-illusionism is, I suspect, only a marking of time, a phase of recuperation, in the history of the novel. The question is, what next?" (27).

2.5.2.2) Anti-realist Illusions / Towards the Body

Can Coetzee, in his own terminology, be regarded as an anti-illusionist? Given that he writes in the postmodern tradition, which aims at a distortion of both form and content, one might assume this to be the case; and yet, the question is more nuanced than would appear at first glance. Head argues that it is "possible to overstate the *effect* of Coetzee's self-consciousness" (*Coetzee* 9),

since the "surface reading experience" (9) is not as severely impaired as is conventionally the case with postmodern narratives. Instead, one can discern "a strong contrary pull operating simultaneously, an attempt to resuscitate aspects of realism (even while they are undermined)" (9). One is instantly reminded of Hutcheon's theories, as a condition of both inscription and subversion is, to her, characteristic for postmodern narratives. And yet, there seems to be a subtle, but crucial difference: while Hutcheon conceives of this double-bind as an unavoidable, and partly negative, result of the postmodern, it is possible to discern in Coetzee's fiction, in Head's words, "the capacity to retain an aspect of 'realist illusion' in tandem with a self-consciousness that might be expected to destroy all such effects" (*Coetzee* 9-10).

While this might sound (yet again) paradoxical, given that Head (*Coetzee* 1) has labelled Coetzee South Africa's first postmodern author, and that formal innovation is a criterion usually deemed necessary for belonging to this category, one must also note that the postmodern, according to Lyotard, always needs to be defined in relation to its cultural surroundings. In the South Africa of the 1970s and -80s, when literary narratives were realist to such a degree that they could be dubbed elaborate journalism, Coetzee's work was deemed shocking in its allegorical, allegedly non-political stance, even though one might convincingly argue that it "follows on from Kafka and Beckett, not Pynchon and Barth" (Attridge, *Ethics* 2). Therefore, even though his novels do not thoroughly correspond to Lyotard's formal criteria for postmodern literature, as their distortion of the narrative itself can be described as comparatively tame, they can still be said to expose universalising systems and question acts of representation and their inherent power-structures, be they realist or modernist, an impulse which must undoubtedly be considered the most potent factor of postmodern art.

This impulse, then, can first and foremost be detected not in Coetzee's form, but in his characterisation, as all protagonists display a continual yearning for fixed meanings, and a longing for a world beyond the mere signifier. While the Magistrate, for example, is looking for 'the' truth, Magda wishes to be part of history, whereas Susan Barton wants a genuine account of her story to be

published. As such, these characters wish to be part of a realist story, infused with the stability that grand narratives provide. But as they exist within the framework of postmodern worlds, all these attempts at transcendence are doomed to failure. In particular, it is the motif of the body through which the collapse of fixed meaning is enacted. Coetzee's protagonists live in bodies that, for the most part, tend to cause them trouble and pain, and the lack of grand- and metanarratives, the lack of frameworks to make sense of the world, is mirrored in their failure of mastering their own corporeality.

This connection between the collapse of stable narratives and the body infuses the latter with a high degree of significance for the reader, as Conrad Hughes, in his dissertation on the treatment of the body in Coetzee's fiction, demonstrates. In order to frame his analysis, Hughes draws on the theories of Russian formalist Victor Shklovsky and his concept of defamiliarisation. In his 1917 essay "Art as a Technique", Shklovsky concludes that art's purpose is "to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known" (12). In order to achieve this aim, the artist must strive to "make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception" (12). This, according to Hughes, is exactly what is reflected in Coetzee's treatment of the body, which he therefore regards as a "defamiliarising agent", and consequently as "a crucial source of agency and meaning" (3). Although Shklovsky's work is admittedly dated, it allows Hughes to argue for an interpretation of Coetzee's novels that is not strictly knowledge-based, claiming that their full potential lies beyond what can be grasped by reason. Evoking the words of Elizabeth Costello, he postulates that certain passages in Coetzee's writing "speak to parts of the mind that 'prefer sensations to ideas'" (3), echoing Lyotard's conception of the postmodern as confronting the reader with the sublime. Consequently, he/she is faced with a body whose meaning he/she cannot fully grasp. In much the same way that the characters are not granted a recourse to stable meaning, therefore, it is also denied the reader. The body, whose aches and desires are usually portrayed as a curse for Coetzee's protagonists, is thus paradoxically used to effect a postmodern breakdown of metanarratives, although the narrative itself, as Head has argued,

often still manages to retain a certain degree of illusion.

However, within such an overall framework, one needs to draw a clear distinction between the treatment of the bodies of (post)coloniser and (post)colonised in general. While the former are usually portrayed as problematic for the characters, a certain potential seems to reside in the latter. In his highly perceptive article "J.M. Coetzee and the Question of the Body", Brian May proposes that the subaltern body can be regarded as "a seed-ground for curiosity" (393). Describing it as "creative as well as critical" (393), he argues that Coetzee refuses to both confine it to the framework of an anti-imperialist critique, or to merely use it as a vessel for the embodiment of a specific idea. Instead, he infuses it with a potential that resists contextualisation, and a significance that goes beyond the South African condition. Hence, May argues that "Coetzee offers us bodies that [...] contain the raw materials for transformative visionary experience; symbols, or, rather, moments of symbolic potential" (394). On a similar note, Attridge has convincingly stated that Coetzee is able to portray in his novels "an alterity that makes demands on us not by entering into dialogue with us – something which is ruled out in advance – but by the very intensity of *its unignorable being-there*" (*Ethics* 13, my emphasis).

This conclusion, then, corresponds to Derrida's claim that, while postmodernism recognises that the Other can never be properly represented, it also refuses to turn it into the Same. The potential of the Other, therefore, remains locked in its enigmatic body, as he/she is unable to articulate him-/herself in the dominant discourse; and yet, the subaltern body is more than a mere absence, and always gestures towards a beyond. As such, it can be regarded as a symbol for both the impossibility of genuine representation, and the hope that, one day, articulation might be attainable for the Other after all.

3) In the Heart of the Country: A Body or a Monologue?

Fascinating, this colonial history. I wonder whether a speculative history is possible, a speculative philosophy, a speculative theology [...], all sucked out of my thumb.

(*In the Heart of the Country*, 20)

Coetzee's second novel, *In the Heart of the Country*, was published in 1976¹³, and holds the reputation of being his book most difficult to engage with; unsurprisingly, it is also his most overtly postmodern one. Consisting of a series of 266 numbered passages, many of which contradictory, it is told from the first-person perspective of Magda, who lives with her father and their servants on a remote farm in the African wilderness (a landscape resembling the Great Karoo). Far from being a straightforward representation of Apartheid South Africa, however, the novel portrays a microcosm. Exploring in detail the depths of the colonial psyche, it looks, as the title suggests, into the heart of its protagonist and the damages she has suffered, but also inflicted upon others, as a consequence of traditional hierarchies. Thus, what unfolds is a story relating Magda's apparent longings to transcend the structures imposed onto her by colonial, but also patriarchal rule, and her subsequent failure to do so. This inability to find any viable alternatives, to discover a different history, and to construct an identity beyond these confinements, is enacted through the motif of the body.

"Strictly speaking, very little 'happens' in *In the Heart of the Country*", Attwell curtly summarises (*J.M. Coetzee* 60), and it is possible to concur insofar as one might regard the entire novel as a mere fantasy, the muddled result of Magda's (seemingly unstable) psychological condition. After all, what we are reading seems to be the "locked diary" (*IHC* 4) of a "lonely spinster" (4), who is biding her time far away from civilisation, and who, due to the lack of stories in her remote part of the world, has decided to fabricate her own. And yet, from

13 This date refers to the original publication, in which most of the dialogue was written in Afrikaans. The version adapted for international publication, with the dialogue translated into English, appeared in the US and the UK in 1977 (Glenn 120).

another perspective, very much 'happens' in *In the Heart of the Country*: in gory detail, Magda writes about slaughtering her father and his newly-wed bride, only to have the former return to the story alive and well. However, after having discovered that he is engaging in an affair with Klein-Anna, the wife of his servant Hendrik, Magda kills him again. In his absence, she fails to establish a relationship with the servants that exceeds the old, colonial structures, and is then raped by Hendrik, an experience which she renders over several passages, in several different accounts. Eventually, Hendrik and Klein-Anna leave the farm, and Magda, utterly alone and deprived of all human contact, starts talking to 'sky-gods', machines she sees flying above. Eventually, however, her father returns yet again, and she muses that he will outlive her, forever "breathing, waiting for his nourishment" (149) - a body that she cannot dispose of, a presence that will remain with her until the very end.

3.1) Narrative and Themes

Generally speaking, *In the Heart of the Country* features a "typically (almost stereotypically) postmodernist structure" (Head, *Coetzee* 56), which, one would assume, never ceases to remind its readers of its own artificiality, and is therefore characterised by a "defamiliarizing effect" (Poyner 43). After all, the numbers preceding all passages warn one from the outset not to suspend one's disbelief, and retain this function throughout the whole novel, while numerous plot contradictions tend to leave one puzzled. What is more, the text also plays with readers' expectations on the level of genre: it is a *plaasroman* gone wrong, its postmodern counterpart. Far from offering a literary text through which the Afrikaner identity can be sustained, as might be expected of a typical farm novel, Coetzee, yet again, chooses to subvert conventions, and confront the reader with a disturbing anti-pastoral (Head, *Coetzee* 59-60). All these aspects certainly contribute to what Hutcheon (*Politics* 3) calls the de-doxifying qualities of the novel, and are also rooted in a deep suspicion towards metanarratives, Lyotard's prime characteristic of postmodernism (*Postmodern*

11).

Nevertheless, we might be drawn into the narrative to such a degree as to discover, along with Attridge, that this novel is an example of how "Coetzee's intense prose can produce a readerly involvement that overrides all markers of fictionality" (*Ethical* 663). Following a similar train of thought, Attwell recognises that *In the Heart of the Country* employs anti-realist aesthetics "precisely in order to achieve a more 'experiential' narration" (*J.M. Coetzee* 59). This conclusion agrees with Coetzee's own standpoint, who regards the novel as an appropriation of techniques used in experimental film or photography (Coetzee, *DP* 60). Thus, one can argue that the novel displays its postmodern allegiance in such a way as to ensure both de-doxification as well as readerly involvement at the same time.

3.1.1) Unreliable Madness

Decisively postmodern in structure, Magda's story is both contradictory and cyclic. On the one hand, the reader is challenged by different, inconsistent accounts of one and the same event (most noticeably the killings of her father and the rape scenes), while on the other, the narrative eventually returns to the point of its origin, depicting a situation very similar to the one rendered at its beginning. On account of the text's anti-realist elements, then, it is certainly possible to read it as the traumatic account of an imperial psychosis unfolding. However, this constitutes a rather simplistic interpretation, as Magda seems too complex a character to blithely dismiss her as a "psychopathic, patricidal sado-masochist who sees words in the sky and runs alone in the desert after alien ships" (Hughes 75). According to Coetzee himself, "Magda is passionate in the way that one can be in fiction (I see no further point in calling her mad)" (*DP* 62), while Attridge is of the opinion that, in order to employ a "responsible reading procedure" (*Ethical* 668), one should "keep the appeal to psychological explanations (like unbridled fantasizing) to a minimum" (668). This distinction is significant insofar, as declaring a protagonist insane also suggests an attempt to master the insecurities that a postmodern narrative causes for its readers, since

such a label allows them to retain a convenient distance from any association with him/her. Through such a detachment, they are able to rationalise the fragmented nature of reality and self aptly depicted in the novel, and do not need to further engage with any questions concerning the nature of representation itself (Lyotard, "Answering" 74).

As Head (*Coetzee* 57) and Attridge (*Ethical* 664) have pointed out, judging *In the Heart of the Country* in terms of veracity is a futile endeavour, since, in one sense, the whole text is a construct forged by Magda. Instead of puzzling about any alleged truth values¹⁴, therefore, the focus needs to shift to the level of narration itself, since all that can be reasonably interpreted is the way Magda facilitates her own identity construction by carefully picking and embellishing the tales she chooses to relate. This, however, brings us to the question of narrative control, or, to be more specific, to an exploration of the mimetic principle. Since it is impossible to know the extent of Magda's psychosis, one should be open to the possibility that at least some non-realist elements of the text are not a mirror image of it, but instead intentionally placed by Magda herself. In fact, the extent of her self-consciousness is already hinted at in the first paragraph of the novel, when, upon having described the arrival of her father and his bride, she declares: "More detail I cannot give unless I begin to embroider, for I was not watching" (*IHC* 1). It is certainly possible that Magda has simply decided to look away, but at the same time, one might also conclude that she was not watching at all, having made up the whole paragraph.

This double-meaning continues when she states: "I am the one who stays in her room reading or writing or fighting migraines. The colonies are full of girls like that, but none, I think, so extreme as I" (*IHC* 1). Here, the phrasing, which again seems to constitute a purposefully constructed ambiguity, serves as a telling clue to Magda's identity: on the one hand, her condition might be the most severe of all girls in all colonies, while on the other, she might concede that there is literally no-one who shares her extreme situation,

¹⁴ Some elements of the narrative, however, seem to be closer to the truth than others, which becomes obvious when judged in terms of plot development. For an in-depth discussion, see Head (*Coetzee*, 57-59).

because she is not a historical figure, but simply a character in a book. Her account, therefore, can be read as merely a fictional amplification, or possibly an allegory, of colonial life – and she herself is very well aware of that. Thus, Coetzee has chosen for Magda's self-description a language that sounds perfectly innocuous initially, but takes on a much more complex meaning when one realises the extent of the novel's anti-realism. As such, Magda is practising postmodern parody, which both installs and ironises (Hutcheon, *Politics* 93) – however, the irony of these passages only becomes visible in hindsight.

What Magda is describing here is, in fact, her own role as narrator, as the one apparently in control of the story. Indeed, according to Glenn, Magda is not only protagonist, but active creator of the text, a “storytelling I, a self-reflexive writing I reflecting on the conditions of her writing [...], playing with narrative possibilities, wondering what the costs of her intellectual efforts are, even reflecting on herself as a product of textual work” (123). Magda's narrative, therefore, should not be regarded as the mere reflection of a psychologically troubled condition with dystopian inclinations. Instead, the significance of her character lies precisely in the reader not knowing whether she is, indeed, a madwoman, or if she is very deliberately and self-consciously constructing herself as such. By leaving the possibility open, Coetzee invites the reader to continually reflect on the construction of character, and, in turn, of the self.

3.1.2) A Western Mindset

Whether mad or perfectly sane, one can safely conclude that Magda is “both writer and character” (Glenn 123), but this is by no means her most complicated aspect. Arguably, one of the reasons that *In the Heart of the Country* has not found as much resonance within academia as Coetzee's other novels might be its narrator's most peculiar and astonishing trait: the ability to analyse herself by drawing on a variety of philosophical and psychoanalytical concepts, many of which contemporary, as well as her extensive knowledge of Western literature (Head, *Coetzee* 50). By offering very elaborate interpretations of her own narrative, Magda routinely intercepts at a level that is

usually reserved for the reader, or, more specifically, the informed literary critic (50).

Indeed, it is possible to detect countless allusions and references throughout the novel, ranging from Friedrich Hegel's master/slave dialectics and Jacques Lacan's mirror stage to the works of Homer, Franz Kafka and Samuel Beckett - not to mention that the whole novel, from a Freudian perspective, can also be read as a case study of hysteria (Briganti n.p.). It is this veritable jumble of different sources, which has prompted Fiona Probyn to aptly label the text a "pastiche diary" (Para. 7). However, given that Magda has lived on an isolated farm all her life, it is highly unlikely that she could have acquired and understood such an extensive archive of intertext within the constraints of the story she relates (Attridge, *Ethical* 665); this paradox, then, forms an insurmountable gap between the protagonist's apparent identity and what is actually being narrated, one that can hardly be accounted for, even if Magda were classified as insane¹⁵. According to Head, her intellectual background must instead be conceived of as a ploy which "underscores her position as a metafictional device to facilitate the exploration of character construction, and the nature of the 'I-figure' in fiction" (Coetzee 59).

On one level, thus, there is Magda writing about Magda; in order to enable the meta- and intertextual self-reflectiveness which she continually displays, however, she routinely draws on information that can only be accounted for on grounds of the vast knowledge of a Man educated in the West: Coetzee himself (Head, *Coetzee* 69; Poyner 41). An interview conducted by Stephen Watson, who asks about the identities of Magda and Jacobus Coetzee (the narrator of *Dusklands*), further illuminates this point.

COETZEE: (a) Jacobus Coetzee is not an 18th century frontiersman and
(b) Magda is not a colonial spinster.

WATSON: Who are they then?

COETZEE: I ... figures in books. (Watson 23, also see Glenn 122)

15 While Magda does talk about an old schoolhouse (incidentally, what is now Hendrik and Klein-Anna's home), where the children of the desert used to learn about "the rotation of the earth, Napoleon, Pompeii, the reindeer herds of the frozen wastes, the anomalous expansion of water, the seven days of Creation, the immortal comedies of Shakespeare [...] and much much more" (IHC 50), this does not account for her knowledge of contemporary authors and theory.

While Glenn is convinced that *Speak* magazine, which issued this interview, misprinted Coetzee's answer, which should in fact read "I-figures" (122), and would therefore concur with Head's interpretation, he does not provide any conclusive evidence for this claim. And indeed, the printed version also seems plausible insofar as it could simply constitute a reminder against too narrow a reading of his novels, and the assertion that his protagonists are, in fact, constructs committed to paper by an author (not a historian), in order to establish a rivalry (not a supplement) to the grand narrative of history.

3.1.3) Language and Universality

Hand in hand with Magda's Western background goes her belief in universal meaning systems, which becomes obvious in her dealings with the so-called 'voices' and 'sky-gods', the latter apparently being the source both of the former and of Magda's intertextual archive. Again, when she first proclaims: "in my solitude I hear voices" (*IHC* 39), one might, at this point of the narrative, still easily dismiss this remark as tongue-in-cheek, and interpret it as Magda (ever self-consciously) playing with her own image as a madwoman. However, the novel's ending, again, offers a different, non-realist reading: Voices indeed speak to her, and their bearers eventually manifest themselves as "machines that fly in the sky" (137), "which look like narrow silver pencils" (138) - an obvious allusion to the fact that Magda does not have full control over her narrative, but is written into being by Coetzee. "They come from gods; or, if not, then from another world" (138). She then attempts to communicate with these sky-gods, writing messages spelled out on the ground with stones, all with the aim of being taken away and rescued from her solitude. Since Magda is unable to bridge the gap between her own life and the Western wisdom bestowed on her, however, these efforts are doomed to be futile. This failure of communication is preceded, and also caused, by a failure of interpretation:

The words are Spanish but they are tied to universal meanings. If I do not believe this then I must believe either that my witness is unreliable, which while it may disturb a third party does not concern either my voices or myself, the two parties who matter, since we seem to believe in

each other; or that there is continuous miraculous intervention on my behalf in the form of translation, an explanation I choose not to accept until all others fail, preferring the less outrageous to the more outrageous. (*IHC* 137)

While Magda thinks that she is able to understand the voices because they refer to universal signifieds, constituting “a metaphysical discourse” (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 68), “a Spanish of pure meanings” (*IHC* 137), this is certainly not the case, as language is ultimately an arbitrary code, understood and spoken by the ones comprehending its rules. Even though metanarratives are wont to claim universality for themselves, the ties that bind signifier and signified together are solely based on discursive power-structures. Hence, the question remains as to why Magda, who admits to having never learned any Spanish, is able to understand the voices; another paradox which cannot be accounted for within a realist framework. Ultimately, therefore, the more outrageous explanation seems to be the correct one: it is an act of miraculous translation, fostered by Coetzee aiming to draw attention to the level of representation, to the construction of language and discourse, both in a general as well as an imperial context. After all, the Spanish Empire has usurped large parts of the world, which leaves its language far from neutral. Therefore, what Magda understands is, in fact, not “the true language of the heart” (145), and cannot lay claim to the universality she so desperately seeks, but constitutes merely another instance of language exploited for the means of colonialism.

In this context, it is also telling that Magda's answers to the sky-gods might sound similar to, but are in fact not Spanish (“VENE AL TERRA; and: QUIERO UN AUTR; and again: SON ISOLADO” (*IHC* 144))¹⁶, which demonstrates that she lacks full access to the dominant discourse. While she might, through Coetzee's translation, be able to decipher the words that are told, making her own voice heard is impossible. Instead, she only manages to send a distorted answer back, a failure which highlights her intermediary

16 Presumably, an approximate translation would read: COME TO EARTH / THE LAND (Here, 'vene' is possibly modelled after the Latin imperative I, singular, 'veni'. Interestingly, however, 'vene' is the Latin expression for 'veins', which establishes a connection between human body and land), I WANT ANOTHER / SOMEONE ELSE ('autr' apparently being a variation of the French 'autre') and, ironically written in plural, THEY ARE ALONE / ISOLATED (my translation).

position as a female coloniser, whose discursive powers are always compromised and restricted. Thus, the confinements of language, Western knowledge and the power structures established by colonial history culminate in Magda, and these are the only raw materials provided for her self-construction. According to Head, Magda is "the symbolic daughter of colonialism, in both an intellectual and an historical sense" (Coetzee 50). Hence, her background is decisively defined by Western grand narratives, but also proves to be cumbersome for a life in the veld.

Due to her unfaltering belief in universality, Magda also does not take kindly to any criticism of her Western mindset. Thus, when the voices (rendered in italics at this point, indicating a separation from the rest of the text) actively start to highlight the constructed nature of representation, telling her "*It is a world of words that creates a world of things*"¹⁷ (IHC 146), she dismisses it with a short "Pah!" (146). When they then quote Hegel, thereby offering explanations for the imperial psyche, she even actively tries to make them stop: "*The slave loses everything in his chains, even the desire to escape from them. [...] 'Go away,' I shouted*" (146). Thus, Magda remains ignorant of her own situation, even though the voices, which can be regarded as agents of postmodern deconstruction, insistently try to convince her that "everything *is*, in fact, *cultural*" (Nicol 2-3). But while they provide her with insights on the topics of power, reality and the construction of the self, all of which would be applicable to her situation, she still refuses to acknowledge their relevance (Head, Coetzee 63-64). All their de-doxifying efforts prove to be futile, since Magda solely relates their words to her father (IHC 141), or else blames the sky-gods for being "wilfully blind" (140), failing to see that she, herself, is also complicit in the perpetuation of colonial structures.

17 A quote taken from Lacan, the original reads: "[I]t is the world of words that creates the world of things" (65). Coetzee's change from a definite to an indefinite article accentuates that Magda's world, namely the present novel, is only one amongst many.

3.1.4) A Victim to Literature

Taking all these considerations into account, Magda is probably best described as a "displaced narrator" (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 56), a trope often employed by Coetzee, denoting someone "who is not one of the primary agents of colonization but who lives in the conditions created by such agents, and who endures the subjectivity this position entails" (56). But due to Coetzee's meta-involvement, her condition is even more severe: the consequences of a (Cartesian, therefore both rational and masculine) Western consciousness are not merely played out, but instead augmented to the point of impossibility, brought to their extremes by Coetzee projecting his own knowledge onto her. Thus, the disconnectedness Magda is inevitably bound to experience in her role as female coloniser is further highlighted, as she herself falls, so to speak, prey to a Western mind, a process which culminates in her radical isolation. This development is foreshadowed from the novel's very beginning: "I signify something, I do not know what" (*IHC* 10), Magda laments. "There is no act I know of that will liberate me into the world" (10).

One can conclude, therefore, that Magda is the perfect example of a postmodern subject: displaced, non-unified, forged in discourse, and also very conscious of her position. Based on Probyn's aforementioned choice of terminology, one might call her a 'pastiche protagonist': an elaborate construction of different pieces of knowledge, patched together by Coetzee; or, as Head has argued, "an artificial postmodernist product" (*Coetzee* 69). "I create myself in the words that create me" (*IHC* 8), she states at the beginning of the novel, but as can be seen in her futile attempts to reach the sky-gods, these words ultimately fail her. One could therefore even argue that her heritage is not the only cause for her being displaced, but that she, in fact, suffers from a double displacement, which is due to the implausible, artificial knowledge bestowed on her, forcing her to critically assess and endlessly reflect on this heritage, only to find all her thinking ultimately futile.

"I am a spinster with a locked diary, but I am more than that. I am an uneasy consciousness, but I am more than that too" (*IHC* 4), Magda claims,

and it is certainly possible that this excess, which is not further described, refers to the meta-level of her self-construction. Indeed, as Lyotard has argued, "the identity of writing" ("Answering" 80) is at stake in postmodernism, as the reader falls "victim to the excess of the book [...] or of literature" (80). Magda, hence, can be regarded as embodying this assertion, especially when contrasted with Lyotard's definition of modernist literature, in which merely the "identity of consciousness" (80) is questioned. This distinction is a crucial one, as it is all too easy to doubt Magda's consciousness and label her a madwoman, which, however, would not do justice to her character. Instead, its excess, its metalevel, must always be considered as well. *In the Heart of the County*, therefore, should not be regarded as a mimetic account of a psychosis - but always as more than that.

3.2) Body

In the Heart of the Country's complex narrative structure, as well as Magda's multi-layered character construction, are also closely linked to the role of the body. Since Magda's conflicted longings for a different history are not sustained, her narrative eventually returns to the status quo, a development (or rather non-development) that is also mirrored in the treatment of the body. When Magda thus implores her father: "Speak to me! Do I have to call on you in words of blood to make you speak? [...] Must I carve out my beseechings with a knife on your flesh?" (*IHC* 78), she aptly exemplifies both the novel's focus on corporeality, and its importance in the context of history, language and power. Ranging from the motif of birth, to murders, afterbirths and occupied bodies (both literal and symbolical), it becomes finally obvious that Magda displays both an inability and a decisive reluctance to employ the motif of the body as a counterweight to the dominant discourse, which, in the end, leads to a resurrection of the father.

3.2.1) Birth and Afterbirth

Broadly speaking, Magda's life is confined by two major power structures, which both have direct impact on her body: on the one hand, she has to bear the history of colonialism, not in the specific context of South Africa, but in the form of power relations established by colonial rule and enacted in the microcosmic existence on their lonely farm. Intertwined with this structure is patriarchal rule, realised both as her father's direct control of her, as well as on the level of phallogocentrism; in the context of Lacanian psychoanalysis, this term refers to a world in which only the masculine is linked to reason (*logos*), and therefore privileged in the production of meaning (Green and LeBihan 245). Through the workings of both, Magda is confined to the intermediary position of the female coloniser, whose power is considerably smaller than her male counterpart's, and whose role is therefore one of compromised complicity. Due to the absence of her mother, who was "a frail gentle loving woman [...], one such as any girl in my position would be likely to make up for herself" (*IHC* 2), and died when giving birth to Magda, these structures are further intensified.

An embodiment of both colonial and patriarchal rule, it is not surprising that her father does not pay much attention to Magda. "To my father I have been an absence all my life" (*IHC* 2), she complains. At a later point in the novel, she even claims that he bestows such a condition upon everyone, himself not excepted: "My father creates absences. [...] The absence of himself above all – a presence so cold, so dark, so remote as to be itself an absence, a moving shadow casting a blight on the heart" (41). As Hania Nashef (49) has argued, this has a considerable impact on Magda. Having internalised the patriarchal view that femininity is both inferior to the masculine, and can, furthermore, only be defined in relation to the latter, she needs her father in order to facilitate her own identity. By wilfully denying her any love or recognition, however, he renders himself practically absent, with the result that Magda loses any stable sense of self (Nashef 49), and therefore struggles to conjure up an identity through autosuggestion (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 65).

Thus, both colonialism and patriarchy are taking their toll on Magda, as her options are very narrowly confined: in order to gain a subject-position, traditional rules would have to be obeyed, first and foremost marriage and subsequent reproduction. According to Attwell (*J.M. Coetzee* 60), therefore, Magda sees herself as "lost to history" (*IHC* 3) due to her existence as an "angry spinster" (4), which makes it impossible for her to accommodate to these demands. On a more specific level, Poyner (38) and Nashef (53-55) argue that Magda's alienation stems from her failure to become an Afrikaner *vrou en moeder*, a wife and mother. At one point, she even refers to herself as a "miserable black virgin" (*IHC* 5), a description which negates both the childbearing demands of patriarchy as well as colonialism's imperatives of white supremacy. When she imagines giving birth, it is therefore only logical that her fantasy is a highly disturbing one:

Who could wake my slumbering eggs? And who would attend my childbed? My father, scowling, with a whip? [...] Out of his hole he pokes his snout, son of the father, Antichrist of the desert come to lead his dancing hordes to the promised land. They whirl and beat drums, they shake axes and pitchforks they [sic] follow the babe, while in the kitchen his mother conjures over the fire, or tears out the guts of cocks, or cackles in her bloody armchair. (*IHC* 11)

Thus, Magda realises that perpetuating the line under her father's rule would necessarily amount to an affirmation and intensification of already distorted power-structures, with consequences that would be nothing short of sickening. "Labouring under my father's weight, I struggle to give life to a world but seem to engender only death", she laments (*IHC* 11). Given the fact that this passage also signifies a distortion of the myth of Mary's sacred virgin birth, Magda demonstrates that the universalising powers of Christian metanarratives are not applicable to the time and place she lives in, and that they therefore do not engender life, but death. "We are the castaways of God as we are the castaways of history" (147), she resignedly concurs. As such, it is not the saviour, but satan, who is born, his prospective mother being not a saint, but a mad witch, who summons spirits over a fire, and reads in animals' intestines. Her whole description, hence, is as perturbing as it is corporeal, proving that

the body, in this instance, can be rightfully regarded as a defamiliarising agent.

However, we must not forget that Magda's relationship with her father (or absence thereof) is not only one of hatred, but also of futile love (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 62). This conflicting, ambivalent attitude towards him has apparently culminated in Oedipal undercurrents (63): "when I think of male flesh, white, heavy, dumb, whose flesh can it be but his?" (*IHC* 9), she asks. However, rather than evoking any sexual connotations, the description sounds resigned and slightly repelled, seemingly signifying anything but actual desire. As such, the references to Oedipus rather seem to demonstrate Magda's awareness that she can only establish a subject position by becoming a mother. Since her father is the only white male in her life, she can solely be granted entry into discourse by him. Hence, the question is ultimately one of discursive power, which becomes obvious in Magda's reaction to the new bride.

According to Attwell, the arrival of her father's wife poses a threat to the only social identity Magda has ever known (*J.M. Coetzee* 62), which is also the reason why she is highly disturbed by it. The wife certainly conforms to the traditional image of a woman and mother: she is "a big-boned voluptuous feline woman" (*IHC* 1), with "a wide slow-smiling mouth" (1) and "full dark lips" (9) who is "at peace with her body" (10). In a stark contrast, Magda, detesting her body, perceives herself in abject terms, and writes about "my bony frame [...], the coat of fur up to my navel, the acrid cavities of my armpits, the line of black moustache" (11). Regarding herself as nothing more than a jumble of unattractive components, she is far from her perceived ideal, which is embodied by the other woman. In one passage, in which Magda sees "sleeping figures" (9) in her father's room, but paradoxically finds the new wife awake (indicating this story to be imaginative), the latter "raises a finger in cryptic gesture. Does she warn me to silence? Does my candid body amuse her?" (9). While Magda is not sure how to interpret the scene, these initial connotations nevertheless suggest her fear of being silenced, not only by her father, but also by his wife, whose power stems from living in accordance with the structures imposed on her. Furthermore, this scene also demonstrates that she perceives her body as the main cause of her feared displacement.

Magda's temporary solution, then, is both radical and centred on the body: In a desperate attempt to free herself from both her displacement and her father's rule, she decides to slaughter both "antagonists" (1), thereby issuing a challenge to colonialism (Head, *Coetzee* 52) and also to patriarchy. Attwell, too, regards her murder as "a desperate rebellion against [the] death kiss of the father, against the rule of what he and his history represent to her" (*J.M. Coetzee* 62). And indeed, only when her father, to his last piece of flesh, has disappeared, will Magda be free from the power structures weighing her down: "Until this bloody afterbirth is gone, there can be no new life for me" (*IHC* 16), she declares. The corpses, therefore, have to be disposed of, yet this proves to be a difficult endeavour: If buried by the river, Magda muses, they would wash out, if sunk in the dam, they would contaminate the water. As such, the remains of their presence would persist. However, before Magda can further contemplate this dilemma, her father is again depicted alive, showing that neither colonial rule (Hughes 69), nor patriarchy are easily dispersed with. In contrast, the murdered bride, not being in a similarly powerful discursive position, remains dead.

3.2.2) Writing/Reading Rape

As far as the second killing of the father is concerned, far from being another rebellion against colonial rules, it can instead be regarded as a reaction against their breeching, since Magda seeks to censor the affair between him and Klein-Anna, thereby punishing miscegenation (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 62-63). This affirmation of traditional structures can, arguably, also be considered the reason that her father's death is, this time, a long and painful one. His absence, too, lasts longer than after the first murder, which might indicate a retribution for having violated the colonial laws he is supposed to uphold and perpetuate. Thus, the status of colonialism as a systematic illness is portrayed: even the male coloniser, the one in power, cannot act against its structures without being sanctioned. The fact that Magda executes this punishment also indicates that she, herself, has internalised the rules acting upon her, and tries to uphold

them, even though she realises that the system is a corrupted one.

"In his belly there is a hole big enough to slide my thumb into" (*IHC* 71), Magda describes her father's wound, illustrating his waning and her (temporarily) growing power through a reversal of the traditional symbolism of masculinity and femininity. Yet, when she tries to bury him after his death, she has difficulties fitting his body into the hole of the grave, having to climb into it first, so she can then pull the bundle into which she has sown his corpse, "a great grey larva" (101), inside - albeit "for what hibernation, with what cell-food, toward what metamorphosis I do not know" (101). Thus, colonial structures lie dormant, but rebirth is regarded as a possibility, although its exact form remains uncertain.

What is more, by killing her father, Magda has also facilitated a change in her own role, dug her own grave, so to speak. While the power structures upheld by colonialism collapse, patriarchal rule remains, and is now facilitated by Hendrik. Therefore, Magda loses the power she held as a female coloniser, and is only defined through her role as a woman. Obviously, the rape scenes are the most intense and most disturbing display of Hendrik's power, even though critical opinion diverges on their exact significance. According to Attwell, Coetzee's repeated depiction of the rape (five times altogether) proves it to be not an actual event, but merely a "colonial fantasy" (*J.M. Coetzee* 67) of Magda's: "Writing in the wake of the Soweto Revolt, Coetzee chooses to stress Magda's *failure* to transcend her alienation" (67). Partly disputing this assertion, Attridge (*Ethical* 667) is of the opinion that, in fact, the five passages can be grouped into two stands, one about Magda's fear of being raped, her fantasy, and the other about the actual rape.

In contrast, Hughes, ignoring the resistance she effects, falsely and quite problematically claims that Magda "allows the rape and encourages it" (143). Poyner, on the other hand, asserts: "What seems clear is that the narrative self-consciously plays into and parodies the colonialist fantasy of black-on-white-rape, which remains a pathological anxiety of white South Africans today" (39). Taking a rather different stance, Head argues that the repetition of the rape should be understood not as a negation, but as an intensification of Magda's

status as victim, but also focusses on the allegorical dimension. According to him, the motif of bodily invasion signifies "that the colonizer is necessarily the instigator of revolutionary counter-violence" (*Coetzee* 59).

This critical discordance is indicative of the scene's inherent ambiguity, and indeed, its significance is complex. Of course, as the negative reception of *Disgrace* within South Africa has undoubtedly shown, the depiction of (or, in Lucy's case, even the allusion to) a black man raping a white woman is highly problematic, no matter how unreliable or unlikeable the narrator might be. However, what some of these opinions do not take into account is the fact that, while reading the rape passages, is it hard not to sympathise with Magda's plight. Even though the whole novel might be nothing more than the product of her bored fantasies, there still lies a certain danger in denying rape the status of an event, or regard it as only parody or allegory, especially when it is depicted in the first person singular, as to increase its immediacy for the reader. While these dimensions should not be denied, reading rape *only* as a substitute for something else, and not (at least partly) for itself, sends a very doubtful message.

While it is certain that Magda does not realise her own complicity in upholding colonialism, and is therefore, on one level, responsible for perpetuating the circle of violence in which she finds herself, the depiction of rape adds another layer of complexity to this problematic. Here, the forces of history and the body collide in what, in a colonial context, is without question a highly symbolic act; however, it is also a display of the body falling victim to the forces of history, or of history played out through the forces of the body. As Hughes has argued: "Coetzee outlines trans-historical themes such as pain, hunger, sexuality, disease and death which are intertwined with 'history' and power, but remain separate from it in the way that the body's experiences are different from historical records" (74).

What is more, one must not forget that it is not only a crumbling colonialism, but also patriarchal rule, which is exercised upon Magda; thus, there are two metanarratives at work here, one painting Magda the complicit instigator, the other regarding her as a victim. The reader finds him-/herself,

therefore, confronted with a purposefully constructed ambiguity – it is impossible not to blame Magda, and it is impossible not to develop an affective reaction to the depiction of her pain. Thus, Coetzee illustrates the conflicting nature of metanarratives, but also, and interestingly so, the limits of a postmodern framework. By using bodily experience as a counterweight to the unstable narrative constructed by Magda, the reader is torn between a theoretical reading and, in simple terms, an impulsive reaction to the intense depiction of a suffering human being.¹⁸ In a way, what all of Coetzee's novels are concerned with, as displayed in *Elizabeth Costello*, is a sympathetic imagination, which one might call her "belief in frogs" (*EC* 217)¹⁹. As Costello states in front of a Kafkaesque jury, "the life cycle of the frog may sound allegorical, but to the frogs themselves it is no allegory, it is the thing itself, the only thing" (217). Hence, the rape scenes impressively illustrate both the conflict between this basic level of sympathy and the novel's historio-political context, and the impossibility of being affected by only one of these dimensions.

3.2.3) Symbolism: Bodily Occupation

On a symbolic level, the dominance of metanarratives is demonstrated through the disturbing motif of the body being occupied from within, which, again, resembles the depiction of rape. In one passage, echoing with sexual undertones, Magda imagines herself being taken over by the law, speculating whether it is standing "fullgrown inside my shell, its feet in my feet, its hands in my hands, its sex drooping through my hole" (*IHC* 92). Then, she asks herself whether, once she starts to speak, "the lips and teeth of the law will not begin to gnaw their way out of this shell, until there it stands before you [...], its soft

18 On the motif of pain in Coetzee's novels Hughes has asserted that its echo "can be termed 'mimetic', as purely physical self-defining apogees of pain without overt denotative value" (20). This seems to be an oversimplification, as its precise value lies in the tension it creates between ratio-based denotation and an affective reaction; mimesis, in this context, seems to be the wrong term, since the condition of pain itself, as argued in Chapter 3, exceeds language, and is therefore beyond representation.

19 See Head's article, "A Belief in Frogs: J.M. Coetzee's Enduring Faith in Fiction" (2006), for a different reading of this motif.

skin hardening in the air, while I lie sloughed, crumpled, abandoned on the floor?" (92). According to Head, this grotesque image refers to the law of language (*Coetzee* 55), that is, to a discourse which denies Magda full access, but which still consumes her whole being. The metaphor is a fitting one: after all, it is due to her body that her social role has been assigned her, that she is excluded by the power-structures established through a phallogocentric discourse, and that as such, the words which she speaks are not fully her own. One can, however, interpret this scene as the law of metanarratives in general, as they, too, fully consume Magda, who has internalised their rules. At any rate, it is certainly possible to agree with Head, who argues that this scene should be read simultaneously as both "a kind of rape from within" (55) and a "monstrous birth, destructive of the female" (55); on the one hand, thus, Magda's voice is violently taken over, while on the other, the law is established at the expense of her body.

However, far from being solely in the position of the victim, Magda then continues to perpetuate this pattern herself, when, right after she has been raped by Hendrik, she imagines, in what appears to be an act of counter-violence to patriarchy, exerting her own power over Klein-Anna, narrating how she "would like to climb into Klein-Anna's body" (*IHC* 118), to "spread myself gently inside her" (118), albeit not to bite through and eventually shatter her, but simply to "wait mindlessly for whatever enters" (118). While this description is less violent than the law's invasion, it is nevertheless possible to detect a dark undercurrent based on Magda seeking approval from Hendrik, which shows the wish to gain the status of Klein-Anna in their relationship triangle, as to be able to construct her identity under his patriarchal rule. As such, Magda assumes the role of the female coloniser, aiming to control the only person left in the narrative who has even less power than herself.

This demonstration of colonial power is also exemplified on the level of symbolism, since it is the hermit crab with which Magda routinely associates herself. As the crab seeks out alien shells in order to live inside them, this usurpation can be read as indicative of the colonial situation itself, where people's land is forcibly taken away (Head, *Coetzee* 54). Thus, Coetzee

highlights that Magda herself benefits from the colonial situation. Although she is constrained by patriarchal rule, hers is still a part of complicity, which becomes obvious when she states: "Whose shell I presently skulk in does not matter, as it is the shell of a dead creature. What matters is that my anxious, softbodied self should have a refuge" (*IHC* 47). While it would be naïve to assume that a pre-colonial world could, even with all due efforts, ever be recovered, it is, at the same time, highly egoistical to enforce the framework of colonialism in order to guarantee one's own safety first and foremost. Therefore, climbing into Klein-Anna's body in order to protect herself constitutes an act of cowardice.

On the other hand, as Head notes, this motif might also indicate that Magda wishes to see the world through Klein-Anna's eyes (*Coetzee* 56). After all, she does attempt to genuinely talk to the latter in one scene, trying to make her understand her struggles to communicate: "I have never known words of true exchange, Anna. The words I give you you cannot give back. They are words without value" (*IHC* 110). Lamenting both woman's lack of representation within phallogocentric discourse, as well as the impossibility of finding a language beyond it, Magda rightfully blames the existence of metanarratives for her own plight. Yet, she again makes the grave error of assuming that a stable, universal language actually exists, thereby negating the existence of plurality and diversity. Thus, her attempts to get closer to Klein-Anna also prove to be unsuccessful. The latter's reaction to a kiss, which Magda presses against her forehead, is telling: "For a moment she struggles, then stiffens, then endures me" (112). Here, Magda is trying to establish a relationship with her through touch, but does not realise that she is, in fact, infringing on Klein-Anna's private space, who endures her simply because, as the colonised female, she has no other choice but to obey.

3.2.4) Writing Against the Body

Although Magda does, throughout large parts of the narrative, try to abolish patriarchal and colonial rule, her thought patterns are still very much

confined by the metanarratives acting upon her. Right after she has killed her father and the new bride, and thereby opened up a space for the demolition of traditional structures, the failure to subvert is already described in a passage in which she half-heartedly imagines committing suicide. However, it is not only the act of killing herself - "Of all adventures suicide is the most literary, more so even than murder." (*IHC* 14) - that is significant, but also the fact that it ironically employs the rhetoric of second wave feminism, more specifically French *écriture féminine*.

Based on Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, and prominently advocated by Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, this concept seeks to subvert discursive phallogocentric dominance, and takes the female body as its basis (Green and LeBihan 244). Given that woman is not part of language, and is always restricted and excluded by phallogocentric structures, the body serves as the prime instrument to challenge them. Woman, therefore, must insert the female body into writing, since the feminine aspects of language (the 'semiotic', in Kristeva's terms, as opposed to the Symbolic, where phallogocentric language is located), characterised by their ambiguity, have the power to subvert the dualist structures on which phallogocentrism is based (249). As Cixous has argued in her famous 1975 essay, "The Laugh of the Medusa": "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" (875).

Magda, however, being completely alienated from her body, cannot find any viable alternative in this plea. When she attempts to recover a feminine language by employing the traditional symbols of water and fluidity, her "dive for the abyss"²⁰ (*IHC* 14) ends thus: "I strike bottom all too soon, as far from the mythic vortex as ever. The first willed draught of water through my nostrils sets off a cough and the blind panic of an organism that wants to live" (14). While according to Probyn, this "mock suicide" (Para. 37) constitutes a parody of any attempts to recover a woman's language *outside* phallogocentric discourse, a quest that some strands of Anglo-American feminism tend to be

20 Of course, a similar dive is highly significant in *Foe*. See Chapter 4 for a discussion.

concerned with (Para. 39), it is also possible to interpret it as a subversion of *écriture féminine's* attempts of writing the body. French Feminism, after all, has been accused of essentialising tendencies, since its definition of woman relies, once again, on biology and especially on the reproductive organs (Green and LeBihan 250). Another important aspect, however, is the fact that Magda, while constantly worried about her body, is also highly estranged from it, which is why she fails to recognise any potential *écriture féminine* might have to offer her.

Such a tendency can also be detected in Magda's last desperate attempt at communication with the sky-gods, which is described thus: "I spent all my stones on a sketch of a woman lying on her back, her figure fuller than mine, her legs parted, younger than myself too, this was no time for scrupulosity. How vulgar, I thought [...], yet how necessary" (*IHC* 145). This single image encompasses multiple important meanings. First of all, it is strikingly obvious that she conceives of the gods as male, and, as a result of the long Western tradition of associating woman with the body rather than the mind, she tries to lure them down to earth by appealing to their sexual desires. Secondly, as the picture is composed using stones, a parallel is drawn between woman and land, which, disturbingly, issues an invitation to take possession of both. As such, far from any subversive potential, the stone body implies that Magda welcomes the rule of traditional power structures yet again, since the only history she can imagine is colonial. On another level, of course, her inability to communicate also demonstrates that applying Western theory in a postcolonial setting can be a difficult endeavour, since it might establish unequal power structures yet again.

As a result of both her oppressive surroundings and her disgust with her own body, Magda seems to try and alienate the latter, negating its drives in favour for reason, channelled through words, although she does not seem to be aware of the extent of this development. On the contrary, Magda speaks of her talent to penetrate life to its core, to grasp "the fire or ice of identity at the heart of things" (*IHC* 77). The assumption that such a core does, in fact, exist, of course mirrors her belief in universality and seemingly stable systems of

meaning, such as language. As May has pointed out, however, Magda's primary concern is "not the perception of things' occluded objective nature, but their transcendence by verbal means" (396). This insight is based on the fact that a similar imagery also appears in André Breton's *Second manifeste du surrealisme*²¹ in the context of what he terms "conversion" (Breton 124), that is, "the annihilation of the being into a diamond, all blind and interior, which is no more the soul of ice than that of fire" (124)²². Thus, surrealism is not concerned with the innermost self, but rather with its negation: the product of conversion, the diamond, "is radically discontinuous with, even essentially other than, the state of 'being' that precedes it" (May 397). Ironically, and despite her claim to the opposite, Magda, by writing her diary, is actively engaging in conversion, living in a world of disconnected signifiers:

Seated here I hold the goats and stones, the entire farm and even its environs, as far as I know them, suspended in this cool, alienating medium of mine, exchanging them item by item for my word-counters [...] Words are coin. Words alienate. [...] It is only by alienating the desired that language masters it. (*IHC* 28)

Thus, one can conclude that Magda, by writing in the language of the coloniser, her "father-tongue" (*IHC* 109), is alienated from the land, and therefore has to resort to conversion. However, it is not only the veld that she has become estranged from. Instead, she has started to abhor material things in general, most importantly her body and, as a consequence, her sense of self. Despite her passionate words about being able to fathom the core of things, she regards herself as "a being with a hole inside" (*IHC* 10), or "a hole with a body draped around it" (44), having "in my centre a hollow" (45) (May 398). Even her tears seem to be weightless, as they do not conform to the physical law of gravity; instead, "metaphysics keep them from falling on the page" (*IHC* 19). As such, one can concur with Hughes's claim that the novel's title has to be read in an ironic way, since Magda "has no sense of a 'heart' or unifying core"

21 Coetzee has published an essay on surrealism, "Surreal Metaphors", which was published in 1970. Breton's text featured prominently (May 396).

22 The translation given in May reads: "surrealism is not at all interested in [...] anything, in a word, that has not for its ultimate end the conversion of being into a jewel, with a soul that is neither of ice nor of fire" (Breton in May 396-397). Here, annihilation is not explicitly mentioned.

(69).

Thus, Magda tries to annihilate her body's interiority, and aims to turn herself into pure surface. Yet, it is important to note that she does not try to make her body disappear altogether, but seeks to render it lifeless instead, turning it into something without any autonomy or spontaneity (May 398). This difference is important insofar, as it signifies Magda's ambiguous relationship to the structures of colonialism and patriarchy: turning her body *into* a hole, a consciously intended (not imposed) absence, would have posed a challenge to discursive powers. Instead, the surface remains: "I am not interested in becoming one of those people who look into mirrors and see nothing, or walk in the sun and cast no shadow" (*IHC* 25), she claims, neglecting to realise that she is now merely a thing onto which meaning can be as easily projected as onto a living body. In one way, therefore, she agrees to being shaped, and focuses of the annihilation of herself, her emotions and desires.

As May has argued, this "thorough askesis of the body" (399) has rendered any non-Cartesian basis for the construction of a selfhood impossible. Consequently, Magda denies any sort of philosophy for which "the body rather than humanist propriety and convention" (399) could have been the basis. This is also illustrated in her decision to call the sky-gods machines, even though she admits that they might as well be insects (*IHC* 138). But, not wanting to grant any space to the bodily and irrational, she concludes: "If so the joke is truly cruel" (138). Thus, Magda does not only enforce the predominance of *ratio* in the dualist structure of body and mind, first postulated by René Descartes, but, by turning the body into a thing, practically annihilates any possibility of opposition. This elimination of all feelings and desires, perfectly mirrors Magda's conflicted views on the transcendence of colonial structures: killing her father, she tries to reach beyond them, but when she realises the full extent of her actions, the still-reigning patriarchal regime and the colonial counter-violence inflicted onto her, she starts to become unsure of this decision.

It is obvious, therefore, that for Magda, discursive presence and allowing her body's forces seem to be mutually exclusive: "Am I, I wonder, a thing among things, a body propelled along a track by sinews and bony levers, or am

I a monologue, moving through time [...]?" (*IHC* 68). Far away from the turbulences of civilisation, her home is a place where the "blind, subjective time of the heart" (3) reigns, where patriarchal and colonial power structures impose themselves onto bodies, shape them and take possession of them. This usurpation is reflected in Magda's dealings with time. Trying to keep track of it by consulting an almanac, she struggles to feel connected to the wider world: "my pulse will throb with the steady one-second beat of civilization" (3), she proclaims her literal efforts to make her own body conform to history, which is further underscored by the usage of the future tense. This description, however, also proves the futility of her endeavour: By rendering her interior void, and turning herself into surface, she has nothing to oppose the power-structures surrounding her. Later in the narrative, she realises this, conceiving of time either as cyclic or completely absent. "I lie here involved in cycles of time, outside the true time of the world" (39), she states, while at later point relaying that she was "[b]orn into a vacuum of time" (77).

What is more, Magda's choice of drawing on surrealist conceptions is also indicative of her self-hatred insofar as surrealism has often been judged masculinist, if not flat out misogynist. Critics have pointed out both its tendencies to objectify the feminine, and to mystify woman based on reports of hysteria (May 401), the significance of which lay in its being solely confined to women, as it was regarded as an illness of the uterus.²³ While May does argue that Magda actively employs conversion, thereby infringing on the masculine world of surrealist artists, it is first and foremost her self-hatred that is expressed through it (402). Therefore, using conversion against her own body can certainly not be regarded as a subversive gesture; one should read it, on the contrary, as the internalisation of patriarchal rule, the objectification of women resulting in Magda objectifying herself.

23 The term 'hysterical neurosis', which was used by the American Psychiatric Association until 1980, came then to be known as 'conversion disorder' (Owens and Dein 153). As *In the Heart of the Country* was published several years before the abandonment of the term, this coincidence seems to be a prime example of postmodern irony, especially as one widespread characteristic seems to be the feigning of symptoms (153).

3.2.5) Rebirth and Restoration

The power structures of colonialism and patriarchy, coupled with the failure to establish any alternative way of life, are the reason why Magda, utterly alienated from her own body, tries to imagine a rebirth for herself at one point, which is staged, interestingly, through the body of her father. The fantasy starts with Magda imagining herself inside her father's body, picturing herself as a tiny fish (*IHC* 77), which resides inside him with the aim of finding out his secrets, and relating that she would like to "creep through the honeycomb of your bones, listen to the turmoil of your marrow, the singing of your nerves, float on the tide of your blood" (77). A crucial distinction has to be established in this context, as the interior of the body in this passage is sketched in predominantly positive terms: the hard surface of the bone disguises a sweetness inside, the movement of the nerves is melodic, and it is possible to effortlessly glide along with the flow of her father's blood. It is the word 'marrow', though, in which additional significance lies, as it is the only part of the body which is portrayed in an exclusively negative light. This exception could be caused by the fact that the term can not only be employed to denote the inside of bones (which, in this example, has already been conceived of as a comb, thus rendering the description redundant), but is also used to refer to the human soul. Thus, while the rest of the body is intact, the marrow, where her father's conscience resides, seems pained.

The fabrication continues with Magda "com[ing] at last to the quiet sea where my brothers and sister swim" (*IHC* 77), who are, in the same paragraph, described as "white fish" (77), making it plain that she conceives of them as her father's sperm. Musing about her own birth, however, she is convinced of having been an "infant black shark" (77), out of place among the others, nothing but a cruel accident. There are multiple dualities at work here: on the one hand, the metaphor of the baby shark itself, which forms a sharp contrast to the white fish, evokes vulnerability and danger at the same time, which is precisely the role of the female coloniser in a hegemonic system (the former in relation to the coloniser, the latter to the colonised). On the other hand, the

shark is not an organic part of her father's body, but an intruder, a foreign element amiss among all the potential children of colonialism.²⁴ This image underscores that Magda's identity is based heavily on her father, to the point where she even denies him any responsibility for her situation, but regards both herself and fate as the culprits. Furthermore, it is also clear that she perceives her failure to fulfil social norms as rooted in her own body.

Magda's subsequent plea, which displays her dissatisfaction with her own ambivalent position, makes her longing for a more clear-cut identity painstakingly obvious, and also recognises her father as the only one who can change it. Tellingly, no reference to a mother is made when Magda beseeches him to let her be born again: "Let me annihilate myself in you and come forth a second time clean and new" (*IHC* 77). Convinced that such a rebirth would render it possible for her to live according to social norms, she relays that she would then become "a pretty baby, a laughing infant, a happy child, a gay girl, a blushing bride, a loving wife, a gentle mother in a story with a beginning and an end" (77). Thus, a link is established between a stable, realist narrative, in particular the genre of the *plaasroman*, and the positions colonial society has carved out for her. Given the fact that, according to Lyotard, realism's main function lies in the prevention of doubt ("Answering" 74), so that the self will retain an illusion of stability (74), such a connection is only logical. In regards of Magda's complex psyche, Lyotard's description of realist art as "therapeutic" (74) is certainly also telling.

It is fantasies like these that foreshadow the novel's ending, her father's final return and the restoration of colonialism. All narrative uncertainties have vanished, all glimpses of madness are gone, and Magda is writing what appears to be an epilogue, evoking idyllic pastoral pictures: "the melancholy of the sunset over the koppies, the sheep beginning to huddle against the first evening chill, the faraway boom of the windmill" (*IHC* 150). The return to these traditional images proves that she is, essentially, unable to change her old ways. "If the truth be told, I never wanted to fly away with the sky-gods. My

24 This stark metaphor, and the alienation and underlying danger it seems to signify, is also mirrored in an uncanny description Magda provides of herself early in the narrative: "When all the lights are out I smile in the dark. My teeth glint, though no one would believe it" (*IHC* 4).

hope was always that they would descend and live with me here in paradise" (151), Magda claims, an explanation which allows for two readings. On the one hand, she might have been fooling the reader all along, and was never interested in venturing into the wider world or writing her own history to begin with. On the other hand, several pages before the epilogue, she is pleading: "I want the truth, certainly, but I want finality even more!" (142), indicating that the apparent peace she has made with colonial structures might have simply been one grand final act of rationalisation, a triumph of the mind over the body-turned-surface.

The control Magda exerts over the narrative, her choice to resurrect her father one last time, and the image of her being reborn through him, make it clear that *In the Heart of the Country* does not offer any potential of transcending metanarratives, be they colonial or patriarchal. What is certainly depicted, however, is Magda's fascination with both Hendrik and Klein-Anna, but also her inability to engage with them on a level that exceeds the old colonial structures; in Hendrik's case, this failure is additionally rooted in patriarchy. Tellingly, therefore, both Hendrik and Klein-Anna leave Magda, and instead of asserting their presence through their "unignorable being there" (Attridge, *Ethics* 13), decide to simply disappear from the narrative, to completely vanish from Magda's life, and turn their back on her conflicted attempts to overcome colonialism. In a way, their choice to leave can be regarded as an empowering gesture, since Magda has implored them to keep her company. Thus, they assert their authority by leaving, and in this sense, it is not their bodily presence, but their absence, which is certainly unignorable for Magda.

Arguably, this is the only solution that might offer Hendrik and Klein-Anna the possibility of life beyond colonial constraints, which Magda is unable to facilitate. After all, she has turned herself into a Cartesian subject, devoid of emotion, centred only on reason, which is why there is nothing to oppose her Western background and its universality. For Magda herself, "*In the Heart of Country* suggests not only the body's inescapability, but also its unlovability" (May 404). Magda, thus, is both unwilling and unable to appreciate the duality and diversity that an engagement with the Other requires, and, by trying to

incorporate Hendrik and Klein-Anna into her own world-view, fails to build a relationship with them. In the end, her unwillingness to allow for any alternative mode of thinking or life, is demonstrated once again, coupled with an ignorance of the metanarratives governing her, yet also with her characteristic self-consciousness that ironically undercuts her own words:

I have never felt myself to be another man's creature (here they come, how sweet the closing plangencies), I have uttered my life in my own voice throughout (what a consolation that is), I have chosen at every moment my own destiny, which is to die here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father's bones, in a space echoing with hymns I could have written but did not because (I thought) it was too easy. (*IHC* 151)

4) Waiting for the Barbarians: Burning, Tearing, and Hacking

Then when Greek fights barbarian or barbarian Greek we shall say they are at war and are natural enemies, and that their quarrel is properly called a "war"; but when Greek fights Greek we shall say that they are naturally friends [...].

(Plato, *The Republic* 187)

Published in 1980, Coetzee's third novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, shares numerous aspects with *In the Heart of the Country*, its direct predecessor: the focus on and resistance to historical forces, the importance of language in the construction of a world(-view), the questions of power and universality, an Other that resists contextualisation, and, of course, the motif of the body as central to all these concerns. Yet, even though the topics overlap, the ways in which they are approached differ decisively, since the present novel's protagonist, the Magistrate (capitalised, but without a name), manages to both question imperial structures and, unlike Magda, accept and embrace the changes effected by their demise, even though they leave him stranded in the unknown. Central to this "ethical awakening" (Head, *Coetzee* 72) are two major factors: the (equally nameless) barbarian girl, whom he regards as elusive, yet fascinating, and the limits of his own body, tortured and mocked by the imperial regime, referred to as simply the Empire.

In an outpost of this Empire, on the border to the lands inhabited by the so-called 'barbarians', the Magistrate's quiet life is abruptly interrupted by the arrival of Colonel Joll from the influential Third Bureau. Convinced that a barbarian attack is immanent, Joll tries to extract information from his prisoners by means of torture. One of his victims is the barbarian girl, with whose maimed body the Magistrate, "a moderately corrupt yet not brutal man" (Howe n.p.), displays a fascination he himself cannot quite account for. Consequently, he takes her in to live with him, and tries to make her talk about the torture chamber, but eventually reasons that he should bring her back to her own people. Upon his return to the village, however, the Magistrate is first branded a traitor for "treasonously consorting with the enemy" (*WB* 85), then tortured. It

is only when an expedition beyond the frontier, originally chartered to fight the barbarians, fails spectacularly, that Joll and his troops realise how gravely they have misjudged their situation, and hastily flee the outpost. Eventually, bereft of any military defence, only the Magistrate and some villagers remain, fearfully waiting for the barbarians to arrive.

4.1) Narrative and Themes

In a review of *Waiting for the Barbarians* for the *New York Times*, Irving Howe imagines what writing under Apartheid law must have felt like, given the “endless clamor of news about racial injustice, [...] the fear that one's anger may overwhelm and destroy one's fiction” (n.p.). As far as potential solutions are concerned, he reasons that “except for silence or emigration, there can be no relief” (n.p.). The present novel, thus, explores the potential of the former in a literary context, but does not see silence in a solely negative light; instead, it addresses the possibility of subversion which a refusal to represent can engender. In this context, the relationship between allegorical writing, the notion of universal truth, and the portrayal of torture is explored, whereas the construction of the grand narrative of history is juxtaposed with the question of Othering.

4.1.1) Torture, Truth and Allegory

Waiting for the Barbarians can be regarded as Coetzee's attempt of aptly representing the process of torture (Jolly 123, Wenzel 64), a matter which he perceives as both very complex and potentially problematic. In an article titled “Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa”, which was originally published in the *New York Times Book Review* in 1986, and then reprinted in *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee voices his concerns about the problematic fascination which the torture chamber has exerted over South African writers, himself not excluded (*DP* 363). Again, his argument is centred on the politics of

representation: Writing about torture in a realist manner, employing "this squalid subject matter for perversely literary reasons" (365) would, so to speak, simply produce a supplement to it, which, according to Coetzee, would equate to the novelist indirectly validating the obscenities committed. After all, realism's detailed illustrations of the torturers' methods are certainly capable of further intimidating an already frightened public (365). As Jolly has pointed out, the "hermeneutic of inquisition" (123), which finds its most extreme manifestation in the torture process, is similar to the logic underlying a novel's quest "to investigate, to interrogate, the act of torture it describes" (123).

Still, completely neglecting the thematisation of torture is equally impossible on an ethical level. Certainly, such a silence would have benefited the Apartheid regime, whose strategy, of course, was to hide all those practices which could upset the (white) electorate (*DP* 361) - a custom definitely not uncommon in most oppressive political environments. Equally conflicting is the question of how to aptly represent the person of the torturer, without completely dehumanising him/her, but also without the evocation of "a false portentousness, a questionable dark lyricism" (366). With both concerns, Coetzee argues, the responsible writer needs to find a middle way between two extreme positions:

When the choice is no longer limited to either looking on in horrified fascination as the blow falls or turning one's eyes away, then the novel can once again take as its province the whole of life, and even the torture chamber can be accorded a place in the design. (*DP* 368)

Coetzee's own efforts of representing torture centre, unsurprisingly, on postmodern ambivalences, which are already effected on the level of genre; since the world of *Waiting for the Barbarians* is even more opaque than Magda's realm, the novel is generally regarded as an allegory. On the one hand, the elusiveness immanent in allegorical writing has certainly benefited Coetzee in eluding the reign of censorship in South Africa, which many realist writers had to struggle with. On the other hand, however, allegory is, as Head has pointed out, not without its problems (*Coetzee* 23)²⁵. Drawing on the theories of

²⁵ In his article "Against Allegory: Waiting for the Barbarians, Life & Times of Michael K, and the Question of Literary Reading", Attridge also warns against a mere allegorical reading of Coetzee's fiction, since it

Stephen Slemon, he argues that traditional concepts of allegory, which work by setting a literary text against an already existing mastercode, need to be thoroughly scrutinised. The main problem, Head notes, is the unquestioned acceptance of the mastercode's structures (23); or, in other words, of the universalising patterns postulated by metanarratives. While one signifier is simply replaced by another in traditional allegory, the stable binary code between signifier and signified is still retained.

According to Slemon, a similar attitude can be discerned in the imperial mind itself, since it relies heavily on universal systems of meaning, which are then projected onto the colonised, and used as a justification for exploiting them (Slemon 161); the concepts of white supremacy, religion or progress come to mind in this context. Hence, Slemon advocates what he terms 'postcolonial allegory', a practice which "builds the provisional, discursive nature of history into the structure and narrative mode of the text" (160), as to ensure that its fictionality is always emphasised. As such, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and in turn postcolonial allegory, are actually best described by evoking Hutcheon's definition of postmodernism: They constitute a "self-conscious, self-contradictory, self-undermining" (*Politics* 1) form of allegory, since they dismantle, yet still depend on, the conventions of their genre. In other words, and in a typically postmodern fashion, postcolonial allegory inscribes as it subverts.²⁶

Thus, as far as the inscription of meaning is concerned, it is certainly not difficult to discern parallels between the events depicted in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and the political situation of South Africa at the time of its publication (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 73; Head, *Coetzee* 75; Van Zanten Gallagher 281). At the beginning of the novel, for example, the Magistrate finds himself in a position similar to that of South African liberals during Apartheid, namely one

reduces the novel's complexity; the reader therefore faces the danger "of treating it not as an inventive literary work drawing us into unfamiliar emotional and cognitive territory, but as a reminder of what we already know only too well" ("Against Allegory" 68).

26 Theresa Dovey even claims that *Waiting for the Barbarians* constitutes an "allegory of allegories" (138), arguing that "the novel's own deconstructive reading of allegory pre-empts the interpretive and allegorical activity of criticism itself" (148). Thus, it is also possible to read the novel as an analysis of the critical reading process.

of shameful complicity. The abandonment of the settlement at the end of the novel, too, echoes the emigration of white South Africans in the 1970s and 1980s, who chose to leave rather than take responsibility for the climate of violence which the regime had created. This accusation is mirrored in the heedless way in which the outpost is abandoned, and in the excuses made by those leaving it (Head, *Coetzee* 76). Attwell (*J.M. Coetzee* 73-74) also links the novel to the attention which South Africa received on an international level for its cruelty in the 1976 Soweto Riots, and, furthermore, to its responsibility for the death of Steve Biko in the following year, who suffered fatal injuries as a result of torture. As far as the latter's plight is concerned, Attwell even argues that "the novel's response [...] is in fact remarkably direct given Coetzee's nonreferential commitments" (74). However, while these conclusions are certainly valid and relevant, one must keep in mind that they do not constitute the only framework through which the novel can be read, since postcolonial allegory always exceeds one single interpretation.

According to Van Zanten Gallagher, it is "Coetzee's unusual combination of allegory [...] and a text full of gaps, absences and uncertainties" (278), which "represents in part his solution" (278) to the dilemma of how torture should be represented. Thus, she recognises postmodernism's political potential, which is effected by drawing the reader's eye to the level of representation itself. Far from offering a thoroughly positive evaluation of Coetzee's literary technique, however, Van Zanten Gallagher also asserts that it gestures towards an absence of morals, a prevalent lack in our current times, which allows us to ignore the existence of torture in the first place (278). Hand in hand with this criticism goes her claim that Coetzee thus addresses the "absence at the heart of contemporary literature since the advent of deconstructive criticism" (285). This judgement, however, seems slightly far-fetched, since it again conflates postmodernism with postmodernity, even though, as Hutcheon has emphasised, their relationship should not automatically be regarded as one of reciprocal affirmation (*Politics* 26). Van Zanten Gallagher, here, does not consider the fact that the novel's ethical potential virtually depends on the negation of realist codes, since it is precisely the discovery of a postmodern world (or rather:

postmodern worlds), and the subsequent negation of its grand- and metanarratives, which allow the Magistrate to grasp the error of his former ways. They enable him to reflect on his own privileged position of power, and to develop not simple curiosity, but genuine sympathy for the barbarian girl.

Lance Olsen, however, does have similar reservations about postmodern writing. On the one hand, he correctly identifies the character of the Magistrate as having become, by the end of the novel, a poststructuralist: "The Magistrate believes [...] in the idea that 'meaning' and 'truth' must be allowed to float free" (Olsen 53). As many critics before him, however, Olsen equates such deconstructionist tendencies with a lack of ethical and political responsibility, when he argues that the Magistrate's realisations amount to "a giving up, a frustration, a despair before the arbitrariness of language" (55). Paradoxically, it is Van Zanten Gallagher who criticises Olsen for this stance in precisely the same article as quoted before. In accordance with Head's interpretation of *Waiting for the Barbarians* as a personal journey that cumulates in heightened ethical values (Head, *Coetzee* 72), she argues that Olsen's reading falsely negates precisely this sense of awakening (Van Zanten Gallagher 281). Also in response to Olsen, however, Barbara Eckstein asserts a more general, but equally invaluable, point: "Neither inside nor outside the context of this novel is responsibility contingent upon authority or certainty" (Eckstein 176). If anything, the opposite is the case, as both these attributes are wont to mask an ideological bias.

The precise cause for this critical disagreement are the wooden slips, which the Magistrate finds in the desert sand, and "on which are painted characters in a script I have not seen the like of" (*WB* 15)²⁷, but which he hopes to decipher one day, speculating that they might constitute "a map of the land of the barbarians, or a representation of a lost pantheon" (17). This information, he hopes, will enable him to write a history of the outpost. However, after the Magistrate's fall from grace in the eyes of the Empire, Joll accusingly claims that they constitute a hidden barbarian message, and the

27 This, of course, can also be read as a metacommentary on the fictional nature of the novel, which is, after all, populated by characters following a certain plot, a script.

Magistrate is consequently ordered to translate them. Yet, after having failed to make sense of the barbarian girl, and thus having recognised the nature of language as arbitrary, he offers a mock-reading of the poplar. Employing irony as a subversive tool, he criticises the Empire for its inhumane practices:

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.

It is the same with the rest of these slips. [...] They form an allegory. [...] Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire - the old Empire, I mean. (*WB* 122)

Here, the deconstruction of universal meaning is effected on two different levels: on the one hand, the novel's own allegorical nature is self-consciously commented on, while on the other hand, the monopolisation of signifiers by those in power is portrayed. Violence, after all, can be framed in different ways: some might call it warfare, while others might see it a justified mission against a barbarian enemy, or simply as an act of vengeance for the perceived misdeeds of the Other. Eventually, those in control of discourse-construction also decide which reading is made prevalent, as can be observed in the Empire's continuous practices of Othering the barbarians.

As Head has argued, reading the slips as foreshadowing the demise of the old Empire is especially significant (*Coetzee* 87). Joll, after all, is looking for a stable narrative himself, namely the barbarians' declaration of war against the Empire, which would constitute a reason for attacking them. Neglecting to realise that not the barbarians' aggression, but merely his own practice of Othering forms the basis for the Empire's violent actions (87), Joll ventures beyond the border, only to be defeated. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the Colonel is embedded in the system of an old-style-allegory (87), in which only the signifier is substituted, but one stable signified remains. However, the ambiguity of the slips "performs a formal 'decolonization' of the allegorizing impulse itself" (87), challenging its universalising tendencies by interrogating its actual structures. Taking these considerations into account, it is

possible to agree with Van Zanten Gallagher's argument that the different interpretations, which the Magistrate attests to the wooden tiles, signify "the hope that in storytelling - impotent, opaque, and uncertain as it might be - oppression and torture might be unveiled" (281); certainly a potent argument, but certainly also one that is decisively based on the positive potential of postmodern techniques.

4.1.2) History and Othering

Even though Coetzee's attempts at deconstructing allegory are decisively postmodern, one can definitely detect a move towards a stabilisation of form if one compares *Waiting for the Barbarians* to *In the Heart of the Country* (and also to Coetzee's debut, *Dusklands*). As Attwell has stated, Coetzee's descriptions, narrative voice and treatment of time have become decisively more conventional (*J.M. Coetzee* 70); but far from a relapse into a thoroughly realist mode of writing, this shift actually "represents the achievement of a certain self-assurance by Coetzee, who seems to have exorcised at last the ghost of realism" (70). This ghost, according to Attwell, can be observed in Magda's conception of history as "an absolute horizon to consciousness" (75), which is both shunned and desired, but ultimately unalterable, and whose rules she finds herself unable to conform to. The Magistrate, however, comes to realise in the course of the novel that history is, in fact, a discursive construct, a narrative carefully designed by those in power. "What has made it impossible for us to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air, like children? It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history" (*WB* 146).

This outburst displays his yearning for a different conception of time, namely one not governed by civilisation, but by nature: "the static time of the oasis" (*WB* 157). The Magistrate's position is further emphasised by the initial description he provides of himself, which centres both on the passing of night and day, as well as on the lazy joys of the body: "I watch the sun rise and set, eat and sleep and am content. [...] I have not asked for more than a quiet life in quiet times" (8). Towards the beginning of the novel, the Magistrate also tries

hard to ignore the initial sweep of violence Joll has brought to the outpost, which he does by focussing on the surrounding nature; his observations speak of pure idyll, and the horrors of torture lie already forgotten, having been cancelled out by the beautiful and picturesque:

The sun still hangs bronze and heavy over the water. [...] In the fields the farmers are loading the two huge old hay-wagons. A flight of mallard wheels overhead and glides down towards the water. Late summer, a time of peace and plenty. I believe in peace; perhaps even peace at any price. (*WB* 15)

Ironically, the rhetoric employed in the last sentence echoes the attitude of Joll, who is in favour of preventive war. In the Magistrate's case, however, peace at any price does not refer to any outward aggression, but, plainly speaking, to a self-imposed ignorance. Refusing to acknowledge the Empire's preparations for warfare, he aims to live outside the grand narrative of history - which, of course, does not render his behaviour any more justifiable on an ethical level.

The Magistrate's harmonious descriptions of natural beauty, and the fact that the novel follows one single seasonal cycle, also indicate clear parallels to pastoral literature (Head, *Coetzee* 88). However, Attwell (*J.M. Coetzee* 86) recognises that natural time is not thoroughly affirmed in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, as is the case in conventional pastoral, nor is it suggested as a solution for the problems caused by the Empire and its history. Instead, its prime aim is to simply *show* that an alternative conception of time can exist, and through this mere portrayal, a de-doxifying, counter-discursive force to the grand narrative of conventional history can be established. As Attwell recognises, "historical time is a construction imposed on formless chronicity, as part of the work of culture; fiction can restore the perspective in which the constructedness of time becomes apparent" (86). Such a reading is also supported by the fact that the Magistrate, initially, hopelessly idealises the natural world, whereas the plot development itself actually centres on the hardships it causes: the winter makes the journey to return the barbarian girl difficult, and the Empire is eventually defeated as a result of Joll's inability to

gauge the hostile conditions beyond the frontier²⁸. Again, Coetzee subverts the conventions of the pastoral, in order to expose history as a culturally specific phenomenon.

However, the Empire's Western mindset does not only manifest itself in an unfaltering belief in the grand narrative of history, but also, and crucially so, in the practice of Othering. Of course, these two topics are intertwined, since the creation of an Other is necessary in order to construct the Self, and therefore to document one's collective identity - to write history - in the first place. The importance of Othering in the present novel is already announced by the intertextual references which its title evokes (Head, *Coetzee* 74): Written by the Greek poet C. P. Cavafy, and originally published in 1904, "Waiting for the Barbarians" narrates the imminent downfall of the Roman Empire. Opening with Rome's anticipation that the so-called barbarians will shortly arrive, the poem depicts a society waiting in paralysed stasis; legislature is suspended for the day, and the orators are quiet. Yet, when by nightfall, the enemy has still not appeared, rumours are being voiced that "there are no barbarians any longer" (Cavafy 18). Eventually, the concluding line shows an understanding for the dynamics of Othering: "They were, those people, a kind of solution" (18). By defining an exterior enemy, the Roman Empire has obviously neglected the problems in their own midst, and focussed instead on defining themselves against the barbarians.

Coetzee's Empire works along an equally destructive dynamic, as the character of Colonel Joll indicates; he has come to the outpost, as Rosemary Jolly notes, "in search of the (for him) fundamental confrontation between the Empire and the 'barbarian' other that will afford him meaning" (125). Applying the theories of Abdul JanMohamed, laid out in his article "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature", Jolly shows that Joll, such as all colonisers, uses his military power in order to gain recognition from the Other. Yet, what the Colonel fails to realise is that he is essentially seeking definition not against an independent enemy, but merely

28 One notable exception is the novel's last scene, in which a snowman serves as a rather positive symbol. See Chapter 6.2.5. of this thesis for this motif.

against the product of his own construction (Jolly 124), thereby effecting “a narcissistic self-recognition” (124). It logically follows that in Joll's eyes, the Empire is equated with all that is 'good', whereas the native Other is constructed as purely 'evil', a conception which engenders hatred towards the native. Therefore, the wish to exert power over him/her is even more intensified (124). The coloniser, thus, “becomes the prisoner of the projected image” (JanMohamed 86), practically caught up in his/her own myths and stories, which he/she, in their most gruesome manifestation, then projects onto the prisoners in the torture chamber²⁹.

Joll's desire to construct an enemy, and his subsequent hunger to defeat him/her, can already be detected in the novel's opening pages, when, after the Magistrate has verified that crime in the village is practically non-existent, Joll seems almost frustrated (Jolly 125). About the two only prisoners, a boy and an old man, the Magistrate explains: “There was a raid not twenty miles from here. That is unusual. Normally they keep well away from the fort. [...] They say they had nothing to do with the raid” (*WB* 2). It seems like a strange coincidence that such an uncharacteristic raid should occur only shortly before Joll's arrival, which indicates that the Colonel might have been involved in it himself, having staged it in order to justify his proceedings against the barbarians. Such a reading is further supported by the boy's wounded face, and by his reaction to the Magistrate's question of who beat him. “He is not listening to me” (3), the latter thinks. “He stares over my shoulder, [...] at Colonel Joll” (3). But even though the Magistrate reasons that it must be Joll's sunglasses which fascinate the boy, it seems more accurate to read his reaction as a silent accusation, coupled with an acute fear of actually voicing it. Apart from the Magistrate's own process of resolute denial, this scene also indicates that Joll is determined to find something - anything - which he can utilise as a means to effect “the originary imperialist/barbarian confrontation he desires - the urtext of

29 While his elaborations on the constructions of the native Other are certainly valuable, JanMohamed does generally not approve of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, arguing that the novel is characterised by a “studied refusal to accept historical responsibility” (92), and that it, “like all 'imaginary' colonialist texts, attempts to mystify the imperial endeavour by representing the relation between self and Other in metaphysical terms” (92). Such a practice, according to JanMohamed, then leads to a representation of the native as inferior (92). Again, the political potential of postmodern texts does not seem to be taken into account in this reading.

colonization" (Jolly 125). The prisoners' guilt, therefore, would enable him to justify an attack against his opponents.

4.2) Body

Generally speaking, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is concerned with exposing the constructed nature of all narratives, as manifested in traditional conceptions of history, the notions of a non-arbitrary language and universal truth, or the codes of allegory. Intrinsically linked to these concerns is the motif of the body, especially in the context of torture, which the character of the barbarian girl, who remains a mystery to the Magistrate throughout the whole narrative, exemplifies most prominently. Indeed, frustrated by his inability to interpret her body in any meaningful way, he even develops an affiliation with the torturers' philosophy: "[H]ow natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other!" (*WB* 46), he exclaims. By the end of the novel, however, he has accepted the instability of all representation, whereas the positive consequences of this development are enacted, first and foremost, through the dream sequences.

4.2.1) The Body as Text

When the Magistrate first encounters the barbarian girl, whom he sees on a street corner, begging, he is unable to understand why she does not look directly at him. "I wave a hand in front of her eyes. She blinks. I bring my face closer and stare into her eyes. She wheels her gaze from the wall on to me" (*WB* 28). Only later, he learns the cause for this puzzling behaviour: She is solely able to see from the side of her eyes, due to an injury inflicted by her torturers. This scene depicts the first of the Magistrate's efforts to decipher her body, and also the first of his recurring failures, since, in fact, he has been in her vision all along; the moment when her gaze seems to finally settle on him, however, she is actually looking away, possibly uncomfortable at having her face

scrutinised from such a close proximity. If we juxtapose this scene with the novel's opening page, it becomes very clear where the Magistrate's allegiances lie: He immediately believes that Joll is, indeed, able to see through his sunglasses (an invention hitherto unheard of in the outpost), but doubts the girl's explanations, proving that her words do not, by any means, count as much as his.

In addition to her impaired vision, the barbarian girl also has "swaddled, shapeless" feet (*WB* 30), and it is obvious that her ankles have been broken. Generally speaking, the Magistrate's difficulties at contextualising her body are due to these wounds. When asked to relay the proceedings in the torture chamber, however, she remains persistently silent. Yet, the Magistrate, increasingly intrigued, claims that "until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (*WB* 33). Thus, he apparently relies on the conception that behind every maimed part of her body hides a certain truth, which can be relinquished, in the same way that deciphering the poplar slips still seems like a possibility at the beginning of the narrative. Between the pieces of wood and the girl, a link is also established on a symbolical level: The Magistrate massages her with almond oil, and further recounts his "coating the slips one by one in linseed oil and wrapping them in oilcloth" (*WB* 169). Hence, his handling of the girl's body might as well point towards the practices of an archaeologist who tries to preserve his artefacts (Dalbye 26). Preservation, however, does not lead to insights, and the Magistrate is unable to integrate either into any form of universal narrative.

In other words, the girl is postulated as a text to be deciphered, which, according to Head, "links the treatment of individual experience and repression directly to broader questions of discourse and power" (*Coetzee* 85). In this context, Attwell draws on a concept established by Roland Barthes in *S/Z*, namely the distinction between 'writerly' and 'readerly' texts (*J.M. Coetzee* 79). The 'bird-woman', a prostitute whom the Magistrate likes to visit, can be regarded as a readerly text, since she is easy to decipher, and does not develop any agency of her own; yielding to the Magistrate's "quiet affection" (*WB* 24), she is "committed to the closure system of the West, produced according to the

goals of this system, devoted to the law of the Signified" (Barthes 6-7). The barbarian girl, on the other hand, is best described as a writerly text, since she interferes "before the infinite play of the world is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system" (Barthes 5). Persistently refusing to reveal all of what happened in the torture chamber, she thereby avoids to be pinpointed to only one interpretation, subsumed under only one overarching narrative (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 79). Yet, both Joll's men and the Magistrate have tried to turn her into a readerly text, to make her surrender to authority; the former through the affliction of physical pain, the latter through his insistent questionings (79). Only reluctantly, the Magistrate realises this connection between himself and her torturers, acknowledging that his actions echo with a sinister undertone: "I behave in some ways like a lover - I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her - but I might equally well tie her to a chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate" (*WB* 46).

In Joll's case, of course, the desire to write the Other is not only restricted to the girl, which is most vividly displayed in a gruesome scene, in which the bodies of captured barbarians are literally written on: First, using charcoal, the word ENEMY is drawn onto their naked backs in capital letters, then they are hit with canes. "The game, I see, is to beat them till their backs are washed clean" (*WB* 115), the Magistrate concurs. Here, the contradictory logic of Othering is strikingly demonstrated: on the one hand, the Colonel is branding his prisoners as barbarians, as enemies, while on the other hand, he painfully punishes them for the identity he himself has constructed. On a similar level, the Magistrate, musing about whether he actually desires the barbarian girl or not, remarks that with her, "it is as if there is no interior, only a surface" (46); however, this postmodern observation does not provoke the insight that he himself is the one projecting meaning onto this surface. As far as Othering is concerned, therefore, the distance between him and Joll is certainly, as the Magistrate himself suspects at one point, "negligible" (29).

4.2.2) Against Interpretation

What renders the Magistrate's initial interest in the barbarian girl different from Joll's, is that he does not care about her life before she was forcefully brought to the village. Instead, he is solely interested in the marks inscribed upon her by the Empire (Head, *Coetzee* 85). This crucial difference is convincingly demonstrated by the Magistrate's attitude towards the barbarians whom Joll has captured, which is characterised by his unwillingness to understand the Other. Complaining about their filth and the noise they make, he notes at one point: "There is an ugly incident when a soldier tries to drag one of their women indoors, perhaps only in play, who knows, and is pelted with stones" (*WB* 21). Even though the soldier is clearly the aggressor in this scene, the Magistrate is quick to explain his actions away, implying that the barbarians simply misinterpreted his actual intentions.

Furthermore, the Magistrate becomes highly aggravated when the prisoners are unwilling to leave the village after they have been instructed to do so, causing him to wish that "this obscure chapter in the history of the world were terminated at once, [and] these ugly people were obliterated from the face of the earth" (*WB* 26). While his actions, as opposed to his words, do display basic human kindness (he gives instructions to feed them, send them to a doctor, and, very idealistically, "to restore the prisoners to their former lives" (26)), they seem to be rooted first and foremost in a sense of reluctant duty. Therefore, far from any feelings of genuine sympathy for the barbarian girl, the Magistrate aims to decipher her body precisely because, as Head (*Coetzee*, 85) has noted, he seeks to understand the actions of the Empire, in which he himself, by not acting against them, is complicit. Wenzel, too, argues that he thus aims to "determine his own position within the imperialist regime" (66).

Most importantly, however, the marks on the girl's body, "the marks of a readerly reader" (Head, *Coetzee* 85), also seem to undercut any simple process of Othering (Wenzel 66). Since her wounds have been caused by the Empire, the Magistrate no longer sees her as fully barbarian, but treats her as if she were "domesticated" (66), very much like the silver-fox cub which he buys for

her, and which he subsequently compares her to: "People will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms, a fox and a girl" (*WB* 37). In addition to his perpetuation of a highly problematic stereotype, which regards the colonised as not fully human, but as irrational and driven by bodily desires, he also overlooks one important factor: He might call her wild, but this is not the quality which he finds appealing about her; on the contrary, he is concerned with the imprints of civilisation, of the 'non-barbarian', on her body. While it would be easy to turn her into an Other if she did not bear the Empire's indecipherable scars, the marks prevent him from doing so, which also means that constructing a stable self is impossible for him. Furthermore, acknowledging his failure to categorise her would, so to speak, culminate in a chain-reaction. It would lead to the Magistrate admitting to the arbitrary codes of all representation, which would mean that the poplar slips could never be deciphered, and a history of the outpost never written (Wenzel 66); consequences which he comes to accept only slowly as the narrative develops.

Thus, and paradoxically so, her position as a torture victim also empowers the barbarian girl, since her wounds are what has sparked an interest in the Magistrate in the first place. And indeed, it is possible to locate the tortured body's subversive potential precisely in the fact that it has been inscribed by the Empire (Dalbye 24). The body's powers, its counter-discursive potentials, lie in its mere being-there, and are established by a presence that cannot be categorised, or, similar to postcolonial allegory, by a signifier without a clear signified. This peculiar value of the tortured body is, as Dalbye (24) shows, already exemplified towards the beginning of the novel, when an old man taken captive by Joll dies during his 'questioning', and the official report reads:

During the course of the interrogation contradictions became apparent in the prisoner's testimony. Confronted with these contradictions, the prisoner became enraged and attacked the investigating officer. A scuffle ensued during which the prisoner fell heavily against the wall. Efforts to revive him were unsuccessful. (*WB* 6)

When the Magistrate inspects the corpse, however, he is confronted with the man's crushed lips, broken teeth, and even an empty, bloody eye-socket. Thus,

the wounds of the body contradict the Empire's detached narrative, since the obvious signs of torture born by the corpse are not (and could hardly) be accounted for by the official discourse. As such, the maimed body exercises power over imperial language, the signs written on the flesh establishing a subversive subtext (Dalbye 25). While, as the Magistrate has to realise, it is impossible to reconstruct what exactly happened in the torture chamber by merely looking at the maimed body, it is nevertheless obvious that it has, indeed, been tortured. As Dalbye correctly notes: "While the body represents a certainty, a witness to its own experience, the experience continues to avoid articulation" (26). Therefore, the hurt body is a peculiar sign – it gestures towards something which cannot be reconstructed itself, and thereby asserts its authority through silence.

It is only when the Magistrate ventures beyond the frontier to return the girl, that he is finally forced to re-evaluate his previous judgements, as the following dialogue, which takes place upon the appearance of the barbarians, illustrates:

'Speak to them,' I tell her. 'Tell them why we are here. Tell them your story. Tell them the truth.' [...]

She shakes her head, keeps her silence.

'Tell them what you like. Only, now that I have brought you back, as far as I can, I wish to ask you very clearly to return to the town with me. Of your own choice.' I grip her arm. 'Do you understand me? That is what I want.' [...]

She shakes her head. 'No. I do not want to go back to that place.' (*WB* 77-78)

Thus, it becomes obvious that, even though the Magistrate has insightfully compared his own practices to the torturers', he has never truly believed in this similarity; otherwise, he would not have been so naïve as to assume that she might return to the outpost with him. Of course, gripping her arm while making this demand also constitutes one last attempt at controlling her, and his plea that she should tell 'the truth' shows that his belief in stable meaning systems is, at this point of the narrative, still intact.

Consequently, although the Magistrate is already slowly starting to acknowledge his own privileged role in the construction of meaning, he does

not yet blame the power structures inherent in metanarratives, but the fallibility of memory and the desires of his body, stating that "hereafter, I know, I will begin to reform her out of my repertoire of memories according to my questionable desires" (*WB* 79). Eckstein (193) also notes that the Magistrate regrets not having learned the girl's language only after he has lost her (*WB* 78). Furthermore, he merely realises towards the end of the novel that she has managed to converse just fine with the kitchen staff (166), proving that he was never interested in her voice, but simply in the information needed for interpreting her scars, in order to gain access to her (and, consequently, also his own) history (Eckstein 193).

4.2.3) Pain and Truth

While the first part of the novel is primarily concerned with the Magistrate's relationship with the girl, the second focusses on his own role as an antagonist to the Empire. His realisation that all systems of signification are, in fact, unstable, is rooted in his own experiences with torture, and especially in the relationship between language, power and pain. Thus, it is not surprising that one of the theories most applied to *Waiting for the Barbarians* (see, for instance, Eckstein, Dalbye, Hughes 42-54, and Wenzel) are based on a book which explores precisely these topics, namely Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*. Published in 1985 and a rather controversial work³⁰, it is yet widely considered seminal. An exploration of the dynamics of the torture process, it specifically focusses on the interplay between interrogating the prisoner, and inflicting intense pain onto him/her. Thus, Scarry writes about what the *Oxford English Dictionary* refers to as 'judicial torture': "The infliction of excruciating pain [...] by a judicial or quasi-

30 *The Body in Pain* has been criticised for being "contextually thin, and intractable" (Bourke 6), and, most importantly, for drawing "ahistorical" (6), therefore universalising, conclusions. Therefore, while Scarry's arguments certainly provide a valuable framework in order to explain the characters' motivations in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, being aware of their shortcomings is equally important. A thorough discussion of Scarry's theories (drawing on concepts established by Hannah Arendt, Jean-Paul Sartre and Susan Bordo), can be found in Eckstein's "The Body, the Word and the State: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*."

judicial authority, for the purpose of forcing an accused or suspected person to confess, or an unwilling witness to give evidence or information" (278). While in other instances, torture might be inflicted because of a sadistic "delight in watching the agony of a victim, in hatred or revenge, or as a means of extortion" (*OED* 278), it is only its judicial counterpart which additionally links the process to the imperative of extracting valuable information (Eckstein 177).

And indeed, we are confronted with judicial torture in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, as the character of Joll, sent by the Empire, demonstrates. His work, according to the Magistrate, is "to find out the truth" (*WB* 3), and Joll himself describes his mechanism thus: "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" (5). Truth, therefore, is intrinsically linked to the infliction of pain. According to Scarry's theory, however, this connection cannot yield the desired effect, since pain erases any possibilities of coaxing the truth out of a victim: In the moment of severe pain, one is unable to think or communicate, since one's world, self, and voice have, as the book's title suggests, been 'unmade'. Consequently, pain "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language" (Scarry 4); simply put, one is in too much pain to comprehend, let alone answer.

It is obvious that Joll, however, seems to have found a false sense of certainty and remains convinced that his methods work, although he actually confuses the truth with a confession caused by pain (Head, *Coetzee* 82): "There is a certain tone [which] enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth. Training and experience teach us to recognize that tone" (*WB* 5). Thus, it is clear that Joll believes in both the concept of universal truth, and the stability of language, through which this truth can be communicated. What he does not recognise, however, is his own position of power, which grants him not only military, but also discursive control. The torture process, therefore, can be regarded as the culmination of both, since the Other is subsumed and constructed both by the Empire's language and the infliction of pain. The Magistrate himself experiences language cancelled out by pain, when he is

beaten after his return from beyond the frontier: "I hide my face in my hands and stamp around in a circle trying not to shout, trying not to fall. What I wanted to say next I cannot remember" (*WB* 117). Furthermore, the end of his agonies is also framed in terms that echo Scarry's terminology: "I take my fingers from my eyes and a grey world re-emerges swimming in tears" (*WB* 118).

Through his ordeals, the Magistrate also comes to realise that pain is beyond signification, which is shown when Mandel and his soldiers stage his mock-hanging. Given the choice whether he would prefer to wear a woman's smock, or go naked, the Magistrate opts for the former, and thus has the options of being "symbolically 'reduced' either to a woman or to an animal" (Wenzel 68). However, as Wenzel insightfully notes, the pains of his body "so overshadow the intended patriarchal shame of the feminine clothing covering the body that the magistrate subsequently describes himself as 'beast' rather than as woman" (68); to be specific, he already refers to himself as a "great old moth" during the hanging itself (*WB* 133), and as "a filthy creature" (136), "a dog" (136) and "a beast" (136, 137) afterwards. Thus, the fact that he is wearing women's clothes, while a source of glee for the watching crowd, ceases to matter to himself, the intense pain cancelling out all questions of representation, including the construction of gender. In a similar vein, his cries of pain are, by one onlooker, dismissed as "barbarian language" (133), when in fact, they constitute everything but language, and are nothing more than the frightened roars of "a body that knows itself damaged perhaps beyond repair" (132-133). Finally, therefore, he understands the power relations inherent in all discourse.³¹ Yet, Coetzee also ensures that the Magistrate is not only painted as a victim, but also as someone who has used his privileged discursive position to his own advantage: One can discern a definite resemblance between the Magistrate doubting the barbarian girl's blindness, and Mandel's behaviour

31 Even though he stands accused of conspiring with the barbarians, the Magistrate is never actually tortured for information - most probably because his voice has already ceased to matter to the Empire anyway. "But my torturers were not interested in degrees of pain" (*WB* 126), he relates, showing that he is merely tormented as a display of their power. "They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well" (126).

during the hanging: "'He can't hear you,' someone says. 'He can hear,' says Mandel" (132).

Coetzee himself address the motif of the body in a *Doubling the Point* interview, stating: "The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt" (248). The cause of these trials, he explains, are "the endlessly sceptical processes of textualisation" (248). On the one hand, this certainly applies to *Waiting for the Barbarians*, since pain cannot be translated into words, cannot be textualised, yet is definitely unignorable, and thus a source of certainty for the one experiencing it. On the other hand, for someone trying to understand another's pain, which includes both the Magistrate and the reader him-/herself, the body in pain can also be regarded as a decisively postmodern element, a disturbing factor of realist codes and metanarratives; the pain of another creates an absence, it evokes something which can never be represented, only guessed at. Thus, *Waiting for the Barbarians* addresses one of the prime concerns of postmodernism, namely the attempt to "present the fact that the unrepresentable exists" (Lyotard, "Answering" 78).

Again, it seems to be a question of appreciating the Other as itself, and also a question of affective response: One does now have to *know* someone else's pain, does not have to experience it, in order to develop sympathy – which the Magistrate only realises after having been tortured himself.³² To the statement about pain quoted above, Coetzee also makes sure to parenthetically add: "(One can get away with such crudeness in fiction; one can't in philosophy, I'm sure.)" (241). Whether this remark applies to Scarry's theories or not, it might, however, assert the authority of literature, and refer to the fact that pain is, quite simply, a body's instinctive response, something which lies beyond *ratio*, and thus also resists being theorised. Therefore, even though the barbarian girl remains opaque for both the Magistrate and the reader, her body becomes a symbol that negates the need for universalising answers.

32 In this respect, the way the villagers behave towards the Magistrate mirrors how he used to treat the barbarian girl: They are kind to him, and offer him food, but want to hear stories about the torture chamber and the regime in return. The Magistrate is aware that they expect this arrangement to be mutually beneficial: "So I sing for my keep" (*WB* 139), he resignedly concurs.

4.2.4) The Body Turned Machine

While being tortured, the Magistrate becomes painfully aware of his body's limits. However, a general sense of bodily discomfort, which results in tiredness and dissatisfaction, can already be detected towards the beginning of the novel, when he states: "I feel old and tired, I want to sleep" (*WB* 22), and "I sleep like a dead man" (24). Furthermore, he dislikes his body, pointing out "my thin shanks, my slack genitals, my paunch, my flabby old man's breasts, the turkey-skin of my throat" (33). Generally speaking, thus, he is well aware of the consequences of age, which also seems to be one of the reasons for wanting to spend a quiet life in the outpost. As such, his body forms a sharp contrast to those of the young, trained, and seemingly invulnerable soldiers of the Third Bureau. Thus, while the Magistrate is only too conscious of his mortality, and increasingly so as the narrative progresses, the men sent by the Empire seem almost convinced that such a fate could never befall themselves.

While Van Zanten Gallagher points out that both Colonel Joll and his lieutenant Mandel are characterised by a "moral vacuum" (283), Eckstein is more specific in her description, arguing that they can best be described as "superhuman (therefore subhuman)" (191). This term, referring to the context of World War II and the Nazis' definition of the ideal man, encompasses technological superiority (as Joll's sunglasses demonstrate), apparent agelessness (the glasses, he emphasises, protect him from wrinkles), efficiency, neatness and - of course - absolute lack of conscience or sympathy (Eckstein 191). Mandel, who is described as "a good-looking man, with regular white teeth and lovely blue eyes" (*WB* 84), especially seems to embody the Aryan quintessence of beauty (Eckstein 191), and the Magistrate muses that he probably "drives his body like a machine, [...] ignorant that it has its own rhythms" (*WB* 84). According to Hughes, this attitude is reminiscent of what Marxist critics Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari thematise in their 1972 book *Anti-Oedipus*, namely that capitalism causes the body to be reduced to a mere instrument; consequently, the subject comes to think of his/her body as "an abstract entity that has no inside and exists as a type of machine" (Hughes 34),

which is true for both Joll and Mandel (34-35).

Of course, this emphasis on achieving complete control over one's body forms a sharp contrast to the pain inflicted in the torture chamber, and further intensifies the continuous process of Othering. While the members of the Third Bureau construct themselves in an almost unnatural way, and govern their actions with machine-like precision, the torture victim is utterly reduced to his/her body, made to feel intense pain and to surrender all control. Thus, a parallel is established between the torture victims and Joll's hunting practices; he tells the Magistrate that after one drive he rode in, "a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot" (*WB* 1), proving that he kills animals not for nourishment, but for "an objective, quantitative measure of superior power" (Eckstein 191), whereas, in contrast, the Magistrate himself talks about the beauty of native fishing practices (*WB* 1), and at a later point in the novel finds himself unable to shoot a buck (42). In a similar vein, the Magistrate imagines that Mandel looks like someone "[w]ho has been told that one can reach the top only by climbing a pyramid of bodies" (92).

It is only at the end of the narrative, after he has returned from barbarian territory and lost a large number of his men, that Joll, hurriedly trying to leave the outpost and start his journey back to the capital, displays any sign of weakness: his "dark lenses are gone" (*WB* 160), and when the Magistrate grasps his arm to make him stay, Joll "is no stronger than a child" (161). For the first time, too, the latter acknowledges the frailty of human bodies, his own not excluded: "We froze in the mountains! We starved in the desert!" (161), he exclaims, sounding almost surprised about his body's susceptibility to cold and hunger, and no longer like a machine of the Empire. Interestingly, the barbarians, unlike the Empire, have not actively left any imprints on their enemies' bodies, but have effected their fate simply by leading them into the desert and then disappearing. Again, this illustrates the Other's only means of resistance within the dominant discourse: a consciously constructed absence.

4.2.5) Dreaming of Transcendence

The Magistrate's journey towards a changed world-view is best exemplified in his dreams, which is also where, according to May, bodies announce their "presence, primacy and power" (116). Specifically, May argues that the body's significance lies precisely in the fact that it resists any form of interpretation, while still insisting on being present and unable to ignore. The dream sequences are especially important in this context, because they not only establish the power of the silent body, but also link it to the possibility of transcending current power structures, and gesture towards a different, yet not fully utopian, future. Similar to Attwell's claim that *Waiting for the Barbarians* constitutes Coetzee's first book in which the protagonist recognises history as a discursive construct (*J.M. Coetzee* 70), it is also possible to discern a decisive shift in the treatment of the body.

While *In the Heart of the Country* draws on a modernist depiction of bodies, especially in the context of Magda's ascetic impulses (May 408), the opposite is the case in the present novel, in which the body is portrayed as "a thing that resists modernist consciousness" (410), or, to be more specific, effects its deconstruction. It is possible, therefore, to discern a parallel between the Magistrate's initial reaction to the barbarian girl's injured body (and, incidentally, also to the poplar slips), and modernism's impulse of creating a surface which, however distorted, still relies on the notion that it can be interpreted, and that one might eventually uncover a hidden deep structure. However, when the Magistrate tries to penetrate to this secret, it becomes painfully clear to him that he has fallen prey to an illusion: the body is only rendered meaningful in discourse (May 408), and its only component that can be considered essentialist, namely its pain, is incommunicable, thus unrepresentable. Therefore, as May argues (408), the body of another is, in this sense, pure surface, consisting of signs which the Magistrate cannot, and will never be able to, interpret 'correctly'; simply because 'correctly' does not exist.

Even before the Magistrate has understood the impossibility of deciphering the barbarian girl's marks, his subconscious already seems to

suggest the futility of his efforts, which manifests itself most prominently in his early dreams. While they usually centre on a child sitting in the snow and building a castle, he/she turns into the barbarian girl as the story progresses. In his first dream, however, she is not recognisable yet:

Only one figure remains, a hooded child sitting with its back to me. [...] The face I see is blank, featureless; it is the face of an embryo or a tiny whale; it is not a face at all but another part of the human body that bulges under the skin; it is white; it is the snow itself. Between numb fingers I hold out a coin. (*WB* 40)

According to May, this scene asserts the body's authority, since it appears to be "pregnant with itself" (*WB* 408); it "does not give way to a thing beyond bodies [but] only to one of its own aspects – another one of his parts" (408). However, 'pregnant' does not seem to be the precise term to describe its state, given the fact that the word evokes connotations of immanent birth; yet, the body in this scene does not amass more and more parts, but simply changes its form. Thus, it is best described as continually morphing, always altering itself, and thereby resisting any definite interpretation. Clearly, the Magistrate is unable to project any coherent meaning onto the body, because it keeps changing too fast for him to make sense of what he sees; he seems to be merely associating, not knowing whether he should attest the shape any anthropoid quality, or whether it might be an animal after all, whereas in the next moment, it seems human again, but no longer a face. Thus, the body is unrecognisable, but equally unignorable.

Eventually, however, the flesh itself fades away and turns into snow, which constitutes a rather ambivalent motif: on the one hand, the child's body has yielded, apparently disappeared, while the Magistrate's coin can be read both as a symbol of (monetary) power, but at the same time also as a burial gesture, reminiscent of the coins which are, in some cultures, placed on a person's eyelids after his/her death. Yet, the body turned to snow also evokes connotations of wilfully held silence, but continuous presence, and is numbing the Magistrate's fingers; as such, it constitutes an inversion of him oiling the girl's body, with the decisive difference that he is only concerned with her body's surface, while the cold brought about by the snow has the potential to

affect, and potentially hurt, his insides as well. Arguably, the refusal to enter into given power structures (symbolised by the coin) constitutes a gesture of empowerment. At the same time, however, it also encompasses the realisation that the child can only assert his/her authority by adopting a silent presence.

Such an interpretation is also supported by the fact that the Magistrate has difficulties remembering the barbarian girl's face when he is not with her: "I realize that if I took a pencil to sketch her face I would not know where to start" (*WB* 50), he claims. When he is paying a visit to the bird-woman, and thinks about the barbarian girl laying alone in his own bed, he is equally unable to remember what she looks like. Instead a grotesque image suddenly appears in his mind, "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" (*WB* 45). This image constitutes a powerful display of the body's stubborn refusal to signify, and portrays a distortion that goes far beyond the torturer's marks. Indeed, this closed body can be regarded as a defence against the dominant discourse, and against being Othered, which it effects by "enforcing its unreadability" (*May* 410) like a fist. What is realised here is, in fact, the postmodern unravelling of metanarratives, and their tendency to monopolise meaning by deceptively positing a seemingly stable connection between signifier and signified.

Yet, both his dreams and his visions start to change once the Magistrate has become the Empire's enemy, and has had pain inflicted upon himself. A very clear indication of his altered mindset can, interestingly, be observed when he is being hanged from the tree by Mandel. In his pain, he sees the old barbarian, whom he has met in the desert, as well as the barbarian girl.

I watch his lips. At any moment now he will speak: I must listen carefully to capture every syllable, so that later, repeating them to myself, poring over them, I can discover the answer to a question which for the moment has flown like a bird from my recollection. (*WB* 131-32)

However, the vision fades and the old man never actually speaks. On the one hand, of course, his silence signifies the subaltern's inability to express

him-/herself within the constraints of the dominant discourse³³, as elaborated on by Spivak, but on the other hand, the Magistrate shows an actual willingness to listen, which he has never displayed during his time with the girl, and which undoubtedly constitutes a step into the right direction. Yet, his aim to memorise every single word, only to then carefully dissect the entity of the awaited speech, also evokes associations to the poplar slips, and to his tendency to look for one single truth. Nevertheless, what seems most significant in this context is the Magistrate forgetting his own question: While he used to interrogate the barbarian girl only about the torture chamber, not about anything else, he does not issue a specific query to the old man. Thus, aside from his subaltern status, the latter would, in principle, be free to reveal what he himself deems important, and the Magistrate would listen attentively, which is why this scene, even though it still bears traces of the Magistrate's belief in totalising systems of meaning, should be considered as a definite turning point for his character.

From now on, the dreams start to become more positively connotated: While in earlier instances the barbarian girl is shown building a snow fort empty of people, which constitutes a "forewarning of the town's demise, the flight of its inhabitants" (Head, *Coetzee* 91), this dark undercurrent changes after the Magistrate's public beating, issued after his unsuccessful appeal to the villagers' basic human kindness. Thus, when he dreams of the girl offering him a loaf of bread she has baked, he is overcome with gratitude about her generosity. Equally, the bread's "coarse steaming broken crust" (*WB* 120) also suggests a gesture of peace – the symbolic breaking of bread. Furthermore, it is important to note that, due to lack of other facilities, Joll keeps his prisoners in a store room, which is attached to the local granary (2). "Now that life has returned to normal the room is in use again" (38), the Magistrate remarks in Joll's absence, not yet suspecting the horrors that will befall the outpost after his return. The breaking of bread, therefore, also signifies that the torture ordeals will soon find an end, and that the barbarians are the ones who will initiate this change.

33 In this context, May states: "That the lips do not move does not mean that they cannot move" (412), meaning that the old man's silence might have been deliberate. While this is one possibility, we also have to note that the barbarian girl herself seems to be waiting for him to speak (*WB* 132), indicating that, would there have been a reason not to talk, she would have known and acted accordingly.

At first glance, however, the novel seems to end on a dreary note: "I think: 'There has been something staring me in the face, and still I do not see it'" (*WB* 169), the Magistrate concurs. Yet, these thoughts do not account for his actual actions, which are eventually characterised by an awareness of his own faults and misbehaviours, and thus his changed ethical stance, which can be observed in the novel's last scene, which is an echo of the previous dream sequences. The Magistrate walks onto the village square, and sees children building a snowman, which makes him feel "inexplicably joyful" (170). Watching them complete "the great round body" (170), "rolling a ball for the head" (170), and "fetch things for the mouth and nose and eyes" (170), he is witnessing them negating the practices of the Empire: Instead of wounding bodies, and of literally taking them apart, the children are building one. Given the fact that the barbarian girl dissolves into snow in one of his former dreams, the current scene can be regarded as an attempt of rebuilding relationships with the barbarians. According to Attwell, there is "at least a limited possibility" (*J.M. Coetzee* 87) that the children "represent a future community, creating the conditions for a reconstructed subject" (87), even though the novel does not define this subject's exact nature (87). Thus, it is only logical that the body is again drawn upon, signifying an opaque presence that cannot be exactly defined, but simply exists.

Significantly, the Magistrate notices that the snowman is lacking his arms, but refrains from saying anything to the children, because he does not want to interfere with their work. As Head has noted, he thus "refrains from projecting his own scheme" (*Coetzee* 92), as used to be his practice with the barbarian girl. In this context, another scene from the novel's beginning is of relevance, namely the Magistrate standing in the desert at "the hour when, according to lore, ghosts awaken" (*WB* 17), and waiting for a sign that would reveal to him the history of this former settlement: "I put my ear to the ground as the children had instructed me, to hear what they hear: thumps and groans under the earth, the deep irregular breathing of drums" (17). However, he is unable to perceive anything, which is due to the demands he has made beforehand: He wants to hear the noises precisely because he believes he can

uncover a lost history, and, as with the girl, this narrow-minded approach effectively prevents any possibility of identification with an Other.

In the novel's last scene, the Magistrate's attitude has effectively changed. Even though he claims that he feels "like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere" (WB 170), the developments in the dream sequences contradict this statement, working against this linear narrative of progress. In fact, the lessons he has learned in the dreams have manifested in his behaviour (Head, *Coetzee* 92): Thus, while the Magistrate specifically mentions that "[t]his is not the scene I dreamed of" (WB 170), he nevertheless concedes: "It is not a bad snowman" (170). On the one hand, this comment relativises the positive connotations of the dream in which the barbarian girl offers to break bread with him, signifying that such a commitment to peace might still lie very far in the future. Of course, a snowman without arms³⁴ can be considered a more ambiguous and somewhat less utopian symbol, but on the other hand, the Magistrate's acceptance of its unfinished body signifies a move towards the appreciation of alterity, and away from his desires to contextualise and write the Other. Furthermore, the fact that the snowman is built by children also suggests that one may hope for such a development in the future.

Thus, similar to Hendrik and Klein-Anna, the barbarian girl also decides to leave the narrative, and thereby vanish from the Magistrate's life, having remained indecipherable throughout. But unlike Magda, the Magistrate has learned his lesson, and resists the urge to flee to the structures of his former life; the barbarian girl, the opaque body of the Other, having functioned as a catalyst for his awakening. Thus, when attempting to commit his experiences to paper towards the end of the novel, he finds himself simply unable to. Instead, all he can muster are lines inspired by pastoral (Head, *Coetzee* 88), referring to the outpost as "paradise on earth" (WB 169), which is similar to Magda's description of her home at the very end of *In the Heart of the Country*.

³⁴ It is, of course, possible to speculate about the meaning of 'arms' not only in the context of the body, but also in the sense of weapons, suggesting the possibility of a world without pain. However, given that Coetzee's symbolic gestures tend to be very complex and nuanced, such an interpretation seems almost too simplistic.

However, while her narrative ends with the typical idyll of the *plaasroman*, the Magistrate contemplates what he has written, then declares: "It would be disappointing to know that the poplar slips I have spent so much time on contain a message as devious, as equivocal, as reprehensible as this" (*WB* 169).

But while the Magistrate's newly found distrust in totalising and idealising systems of representation seems to leave him completely disillusioned at the end of the narrative, the dream sequences paint a different picture, since their symbolic quality evokes the possibility of a better tomorrow and an appreciation of the Other, which lies beyond its role in the dominant discourse. Thus, it is possible to concur with Head, who argues that Coetzee not only dismantles the grand narrative of history, but that the Magistrate's arrival at a new sense of ethical awareness is based on a dialectic between postmodernism on the one hand, and his original, Eurocentric set of morals on the other (*Coetzee* 73). Through the interplay of these two structures "a synthesis, an alternative postcolonial ethic might emerge" (73). The mystery of the barbarian girl, as well as the Magistrate's own pain, and the symbolic potential of the snowman also prove that the body plays a crucial role in such a process. "The body in Coetzee means not only pain, but possibility. It discloses, if nothing else, the possibility of disclosure, thereby stirring a distinctly ethical curiosity" (May 415).

5) Foe: Where Bodies are their own Signs

Islands, water, azure, verdure, one glimpse and vanished, endlessly,
omit.

(Beckett, "Imagination Dead Imagine" 63)

First published in 1986, *Foe* is best described as a novel about narrative control, primarily revolving around the questions of speech and silence. Looking at the cover of the 1987 paperback edition issued by Penguin Books, one can see these themes already foreshadowed by means of one simple graphical trick: While the rest of Coetzee's name is printed in white letters, the 'oe' is both grey and out of focus, seemingly blurring into the black background. Does this link him to the author Daniel Defoe, *né* Daniel Foe? Or might it constitute an allusion to *Robinson Crusoe*, the co-text which Coetzee carefully dissects through the eyes of female narrator Susan Barton, who encounters an old and apparently resigned Cruso (Coetzee's spelling) when she is stranded on the island?

Generally speaking, a definite connection between Cruso/e, De/Foe and Coetzee himself can be detected based on the privileged discursive position enjoyed by all three. However, while in 1719, Defoe turned Crusoe into the emperor of his own island-kingdom, thereby perpetuating the myth of the brave and laborious white settler, and also published his epistolary narrative as a true story³⁵, Coetzee himself routinely attempts to shed his authority as a white male writer, thus establishing a deliberate negation of his privileged discursive position, which constitutes a necessary step on his quest to aptly represent the Other. Therefore, even though both Susan Barton and Friday occupy marginalised positions in the discourse of their time, they struggle against being reduced to their traditional roles in a White Man's myth of exploration and colonisation.

"At last I could row no further. My hands were blistered, my back was

³⁵ Defoe's desire to make his story appear factual becomes already obvious in the novel's title page; the first edition bears the words 'Written by himself' underneath the title, and does not make any mention of its actual author ("Robinson Cruose 1719 1st edition").

burned, my body ached. With a sigh, making barely a splash, I slipped overboard" (*F* 5). Coetzee's fifth novel thus opens with Susan, the narrator of the book's first three sections, washed ashore on the island which Cruso and Friday inhabit. Her background is vague, and she prefers not to talk about it; the reader merely learns that she spent the previous two years in Brazil, unsuccessfully looking for her lost daughter, and that on her return to Europe, a mutiny forced her from the ship. Stranded on the island with Cruso and Friday, Susan finds their life monotonous, and regards the stranded Englishman as ignorant and apathetic. Although all three are eventually rescued, Cruso dies on the way to England, whereas Susan seeks out Daniel Foe, a reputed writer, whom she asks to turn her memoir - "The Female Castaway", she imagines its title (67) - into a book. It soon becomes obvious, however, that Foe is more interested in her life in Bahia than in any truthful account of her time on the island, which is why, when she is confronted by a girl claiming to be her daughter, Susan suspects Foe of having sent her. Their argument remains unresolved, however, since *Foe* takes an abrupt turn in its fourth and last section, which is written in the first person perspective of an anonymous narrator: After having found both Susan and Foe dead, s/he dives into a shipwreck at the bottom of the ocean, to "a place where bodies are their own signs" (157). There, s/he is awaited by Friday, whose "silent and enigmatic presence [...] overwhelms the narrator at the end" (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 104).³⁶

5.1) Narrative and Themes

In one sense, Coetzee's whole *oeuvre* can be considered, as Attwell has termed it, "situational metafiction" (*J.M. Coetzee* 3), referring to the fact that all his novels encompass a high degree of textual self-referentiality, yet also allude to the historical South African context (in however veiled a manner) (3). Yet,

³⁶ Incidentally, this might also be the place depicted by the Penguin Book cover, though one only realises this after having read the whole story. On the top of both its front and back page, nebulous light seems to be shining through the darkness, indicating that we might be underwater, in Friday's realm. As such, the paratext established by the cover design perfectly echoes *Foe's* overall concerns, since it depicts the status of the subaltern, who cannot be aptly represented in discourse, but whose presence, as proved by the novel's ending, still remains (see part 5.2.3 of this chapter).

one can certainly agree with Head, who considers *Foe* Coetzee's "most obviously metafictional text" (Coetzee 112), a conclusion drawn on the account that Coetzee's previous works are not as deeply rooted in one single "*Ur-text*" (114). Even though *In the Heart of the Country* is characterised by countless references to other works, both fictional and theoretical, while *Waiting for the Barbarians* draws on Cavafy and also evokes a decisively Kafkaesque despair before the Law, *Foe* constitutes a veritable rewriting of a classic; or, to be more specific, a merging of two classical books³⁷.

5.1.1) Against History, Against the Canon

Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*³⁸, which was published in 1719, came to be regarded as an important part of the Western canon, while also perfectly embodying the philosophy of imperialism (Head, Coetzee 113). Albeit a piece of realist fiction, it was originally marketed as a true story, claiming both authenticity and historical accuracy, a strategy which certainly accounts for a large part of its initial appeal. Even though *Robinson* was ultimately revealed to be of fictional nature, this information did not quench its popularity – instead, the book contributed heavily to Defoe's status as one of the founding fathers of the English novel. Lesser known than Robinson's tale, but also an important reference point of *Foe*, is that of *Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress*³⁹, which was also written by Defoe and first published in 1724. Featuring a female protagonist, it relates the story of a 'fallen woman' abandoning her children,

37 Coetzee picks up a similar motif in *The Master of Petersburg*, published in 1994, a novel which also draws on the life and work of a great writer, namely Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky, who features as the book's protagonist. Furthermore, the text is based on an excluded chapter of the latter's novel *Demons*, "At Tikhon's", which was withheld by its editor (Head, Coetzee 149). Again, Coetzee thus displays an involvement with stories that have been excluded from the public eye.

38 The novel's full title reads: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With An Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pirates.*

39 Again, this title was abbreviated, while the original one reads: *The Fortunate Mistress: Or, A History of the Life and Vast Variety of Fortunes of Mademoiselle de Bealeu, Afterwards Called the Countess de Wintelsheim, in Germany, Being the Person known by the Name of the Lady Roxana, in the Time of King Charles II.*

who chooses the pseudonym Roxana over her real name: Susan.

In order to provide a framework for Coetzee's appropriation of these two texts, Hutcheon's acclaimed concept of 'historiographic metafiction' proves fruitful; and indeed, Hutcheon herself discusses *Foe* as a prime example of this genre in her seminal 1988 study *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (107-108). Characterised by the ability to be "intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" (5), historiographic metafiction generally "works to situate itself within historical discourse without surrendering its autonomy as fiction" ("Metafiction" 4) - an aim which echoes Coetzee's distinction between a relationship of either supplement or rivalry as far as fiction and history are concerned. As Hutcheon (*Poetics* 106) continually emphasises, historiographic metafiction seeks neither the reconciliation of these two distinct forces, nor does it aim for a dialectic relationship between them. In a typically postmodern gesture of self-consciousness, this genre instead ideally "offers a sense of the presence of the past" ("Metafiction" 4), albeit "a past that can only be known from its texts, its traces - be they literary or historical" (4). Thus, the postmodern dictum of emphasising silences and contradictions is adhered to, while the possibility of historical knowledge itself is questioned, and any definite solutions negated (*Poetics* 106).

Again, Coetzee's own strategic employment of postmodern techniques comes to mind, its ultimate aim being the demythologisation of history itself. By rewriting *Robinson Crusoe*, one of the major works of the Western literary history, *Foe* also gestures towards the power relations which shape the canon itself: Throughout the whole novel, Susan is very well aware of her inability to publish her story due to being a woman (bemoaning that she has "no art" (*F* 40)), while Foe, her alleged saviour, proves reluctant to accept her version. Instead, he pressures her to incorporate the narrative of the search for her daughter, arguing: "The island is not a story in itself" (*F* 117). Although their conflict is not resolved and Foe's authority not asserted within the novel itself, the historical Defoe's publication of *Robinson Crusoe* as the story of a brave adventurer, and of *Roxana* as the narrative of a woman living outside society's norms, suggests, as Head notes, that Susan was simply erased from the former

novel, and placed in the latter (*Coetzee* 115). Thus, Foe has eventually triumphed over Susan, has distorted her narrative, and taken her voice away.

On an extratextual level, therefore, *Foe* illustrates the White Man's discursive superiority in regards to the production and distribution of literary texts, and woman's denied access not only to the canon, but to the practice of writing as such. Instead of making her own story known, Susan is being written in accordance with the metanarratives deemed appropriate in early 18th century England: Crusoe becomes the colonialist hero of the island myth, while the story of Roxana, even though picaresque in nature, concentrates on her abandoning her daughter and living as a prostitute. Thus, Susan's narrative ceases to challenge both Cruso's and Foe's authority, but is reduced to a rebellion against traditional "codes of economic subjugation and sexual fidelity in marriage" (Head, *Coetzee* 115); a rebellion, however, which is staged only to be eventually condemned at the end of *Roxana*. In this sense, *Foe* draws attention to "a repression of female experience which is rechannelled according to the desires of the patriarchal author" (115). By interrogating the status of a book that used to be considered fact, but eventually proved to be mere fiction, Coetzee's historiographic novel specifically engages with the construction of literary history, and, through this dismantling of the canon, draws attention to the practices of representation in general.

However, the underwhelming reception of *Foe* within South Africa suggests that Coetzee's approach to fiction was, yet again, deemed highly irresponsible, even cowardly, given the country's devastating situation at the time of its publication. As previously discussed, critics condemned *Michael K* for its seemingly apolitical message; thus, it is perhaps not surprising that similar concerns were raised about *Foe*. Michael Marais's dismissive remark that even though "the country was burning, quite literally, in many places" (83), Coetzee's interests lay with "writing about the writing of a somewhat pedestrian eighteenth-century novelist" (83), serves as an apt example of the general critical tenor. And indeed, compared to its predecessors, *Foe* is undoubtedly even further removed from the gritty and brutal everyday life of Apartheid South Africa. One must not forget, however, that this apparent removal only

exists on a surface level; after all, *Foe* does address questions of colonialism, power, and the subaltern status of the Other, all of which were certainly relevant at the time of its publication. Thus, as far as allegorical interpretations are concerned, numerous different readings referencing the South African context exist, which again underscores Coetzee's employment of postcolonial allegory and its manifold potential signifieds. On a very obvious level, Friday's silence points towards the repression of the black citizen during the Apartheid reign (Head, *Coetzee* 119)⁴⁰; yet, as Huggan notes, it might also refer to the "politics of censorship" (13) effected by the regime. In a somewhat narrower reading, Attwell (*J.M. Coetzee* 104) claims that the character of Susan references the life of author Olive Schreiner, and the "feminist self-affirmation" (106) she effected by publishing *Story of an African Farm* in 1883⁴¹. On a broader level, Robert M. Post reads Susan's character as the epitome of the white South African liberal, who supports the struggle of the black population, yet with a "mixture of compassion" (Post 145) and "fear" (145).

In a literary context, however, *Foe* can be regarded as practising the postcolonial tradition of writing back, since it challenges "the assumptions of the centre to a prior claim to legitimacy and power" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Empire* 245) insofar as it reworks a classic piece of literature and the imperial metanarratives it perpetuates. As Tiffin has stated, drawing on *Foe* as an example, the practice of writing back does not only extend to the "English canonical text, but to the whole of the discursive field within which such a text operated and continues to operate in post-colonial worlds" (98).⁴² Of course, the question of narration is significant in this context: Susan, a white Englishwoman, might not seem fit for such an endeavour, since she embodies the discursive power of the female coloniser; but then neither does a male

40 Indeed, "Coetzee's Friday is pointedly black, whereas Defoe's is tawny, distinct from 'the Negroes': the change appears to reinforce a sense of the novel as an allegory of modern South Africa" (Head, *Coetzee* 119).

41 For a thorough discussion of this reading, see Attwell (*J.M. Coetzee* 104-106).

42 While the hyphenated spelling of "post-colonial" is often understood in a solely temporal sense, describing "the period after the colonies become independent" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, *Empire* xv), it is, in this context, employed "to designate the totality of practices, in all their rich diversity, which characterise the societies of the post-colonial world from the moment of colonisation to the present day" (xv).

author with Afrikaaner background, who writes his novels in English and was educated in the US and Great Britain. For Coetzee, thus, the character of Susan serves as a textual vehicle to both shed his own authority, but also to avoid writing *for* the “wholly other” (Spivak, “Theory” 4) as embodied by Friday; instead, he aims to occupy a semi-marginal position by adopting a female voice (Probyn, Para. 26).⁴³ Indeed, as we shall see, Susan does try to dismantle the patriarchal metanarrative, yet is still invested in other universalising concepts, namely those of imperialism and universal truth. Naturally, the colonial imperative, as displayed in her preconceived idea that a castaway should try to shoulder the ‘White Man’s burden’ and bring civilisation to the earth’s forlorn corners, is primarily manifested in her relationship with Cruso.

5.1.2) Patriarchy and Imperialism

Coetzee’s challenge to totalising narrative begins, of course, with the choice of a female narrator for his postmodern Robinsonade, which is especially significant since, as Spivak has noted in a comment that could be applied to the Western canon in general, women in Defoe’s novel are both rare and without much agency (“Theory” 7). Dennis Donoghue, too, points out that the world of *Robinson Crusoe* is “a man’s world; women appear only as terrified anonymities, domestic servants in Cape Verde, or the honest widow in London who holds Crusoe’s money for him” (n.p.). Thus, the presence of a female narrator in such a context can already be considered a subversive act in itself, especially since Susan, who refers to herself as a “free woman” (F 131)⁴⁴, refuses to have either her life or her story compromised and restricted by male

43 However, such an appropriation of the female voice is not without its problems. Probyn, for example, has criticised that Coetzee’s novels cannot be regarded as feminist, since he uses femininity mainly as a textual ploy, as a means of compromising his own authority. The question of woman writing is thus subordinated to the postcolonial endeavour. For a full discussion of this topic, see Probyn’s article “J. M. Coetzee: Writing With/Out Authority”. Also see Chapter 5.2.3 of this thesis for a further discussion.

44 At an earlier point of the narrative, in a dialogue about Brazil, Susan talks to Foe about “whores [...], or, as I prefer to call them, free women” (F 115). As such, her declaration that she is a free woman herself echoes with a second connotation. Yet, it is also possible to regard it as the feminist reclamation of a phrase generally thought to be derogatory, a technique commonly employed by marginalised groups.

authorial figures.

Generally speaking, Susan's relationship with Cruso is best described as an initial power struggle, yet a struggle which wanes as their time on the island progresses. Curiously, however, upon their first meeting, she immediately refers to herself as "his second subject, his first being his manservant Friday" (*F* 11), while she also describes him as "a truly kingly figure" (37) and "the true king of the island" (37) at a later point of the narrative. Thus, even though Susan hardly takes his opinions seriously, she nevertheless instantaneously recognises him as an authority figure, and maybe would have continued to do so, had it not been for Cruso's peculiar style of governance, which can best be described, in Patrick Hayes's terms, as "anti-Enlightenment and feudal" (282). Indeed, his explanations for his wishes are arbitrary (283), and seem only to function as demonstrations of his power; it is this lack of reason which undermines his efforts at controlling Susan. Most strikingly, this mindset manifests itself in his wish that Susan stay inside his hut, an instruction clearly echoing the realm of the *oikos*, the private home, to which women have traditionally been confined in patriarchal societies. Justifying his decision, Cruso argues that the apes, which roam the island, pose a threat to women, prompting Susan to ponder the logic behind his scheme: "I wondered at this: was a woman, to an ape, a different species from a man?" (*F* 15). Thus, Cruso blaming his random reasoning on seemingly natural differences perfectly exemplifies the essentialist patriarchal custom of blaming culturally constructed differences on nature, thus rendering them seemingly unalterable.

Furthermore, the fact that Cruso keeps promising to make shoes for Susan, but never follows through with this undertaking, also suggests that he prefers her inside the encampment and aims to restrict her freedom of movement. Equally, his reaction to Susan's own efforts at constructing sandals for herself is certainly telling:

"A little patience and you would have had better shoes than that," he said. This was very likely true, for the sandals were clumsily made. Yet, I could not let his words pass. "Patience has turned me into a prisoner," I retorted. Whereupon Cruso wheeled about angrily and picked up the skins from which I had cut my shoes and hurled them with all his might over the fence. (*F* 25)

Thus, Cruso evidently objects to Susan's agency, and to her discovering that the apes, despite his claims, do not pose an actual danger to her. Basically, his ability to kill apes (which he tries whenever he encounters them (*F* 21)), and the subsequent skinning of their bodies, seem to have become, to Cruso, violent proof for being able to exert power over his kingdom, which he now fears threatened by Susan. Apart from his own sandals, the rest of Cruso's makeshift clothes are also made of apeskin (8) - constituting a representation of his power - and as are the blankets in the hut (19), which Susan dislikes because of their strong smell. On a symbolic level, thus, she resists being held down by Cruso's orders, preferring to literally trample them down in her leather sandals.

What renders life on the island potentially precarious for Susan is certainly the absence of any official laws, "except the law that we shall work for our bread, which is a commandment" (*F* 36), as Cruso informs her. Shocked by all the cruel possibilities which such an attitude might cause, Susan nevertheless realises that, even though she herself does not work, there have never been any actual consequences for not obeying the island's one and only law. As Dana Dragunoiu (313) points out, this is, in fact, the case with all of Cruso's orders; contrary to his initial outbursts, he never actually hinders her moving around freely (although whether he would succeed at all is another matter, Susan being physically stronger than himself (*F* 30)). Thus, despite his efforts to establish a patriarchal structure at first, and even though one must not forget that his law still stands in principle, he quickly loses interest in attempting to actively exercise any power over Susan.

In fact, while Defoe's hero is best described as "the archetypal imperialist, governed by economic self-aggrandisement" (Head, *Coetzee* 114), Coetzee's counterpart does not seem particularly invested in anything other than his daily work: He occupies himself with building terraces, a labour which Susan classifies as "stupid" (*F* 35), since it does not actually benefit themselves, and is merely meant for "those who come after us and have the foresight to bring seed" (33). As Attwell (*J.M. Coetzee* 107) has argued, such an attitude

constitutes an echo of the colonial tradition, insofar as it evokes notions of pastoralism, in which the land "is humanized when inscribed by hand and plough" (Coetzee, *White Writing* 7; also see Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 107). Reading Cruso's enigmatic labour from an existentialist point of view, however, Dragunoiu (314) emphasises that he seems content enough with this simple task, never showing any indication to strive for more. Additionally, the terraces might be overgrown and crumbling before, and if, anything is ever planted on them (especially given the "unceasing wind" (*F* 53) on the island).

Thus, it is possible to argue that in the symbol of the terraces "the rejection of the colonial venture is coupled with the inability to dissociate oneself from it, and the absence of answers about a way to proceed is combined with the obligation to continue" (Dragunoiu 323). In this sense, Cruso's Sisyphus-like behaviour (314) is more ambivalent than one might assume at first glance, and constitutes a partial refusal of the colonial impetus; while he does treat Friday as his servant, and initially tries to control Susan, his settler activities are confined to paving the way (or rather, the ground) for those to come. Partially, therefore, his attitude echoes the Magistrate's hope of living "a quiet life in quiet times" (*WB* 8), far from the trials and tribulations of the wider world, and outside the grand narrative of history. In fact, he tells Susan that "not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart" (*F* 33), indicating a resistance to her preconceived ideas about him.

Thus, while Cruso's attempts at establishing an island-kingdom verge between lax and non-existent, Susan, in contrast, displays much more fervour in this respect. Her continual reflections on how poor an example of an adventurer Cruso makes prove that her own world-view is very much embedded in imperialist myths. Apart from his indifference to being rescued (*F* 13), she also criticises his unwillingness to try and recover some tools from the wreck of his sunken ship, as well as his lack of interest in keeping track of time (16), or in writing a journal to commit his experiences to paper ("Nothing I have forgotten is worth remembering" (16), he claims, indicating that he does not aim to write history). Furthermore, the stories Cruso tells about his own upbringing and Friday's origins are, as Susan bemoans, contradictory, which she

regards as a sign that "age and isolation had taken their toll on his memory" (12). While probably a realistic estimation, it is still deeply ironic that Susan, who stubbornly resists yielding any information regarding her own background to Foe, should think that she is entitled to a knowledge of Cruso's past. Yet, she disdainfully claims: "It was as though he wished his story to begin with his arrival on the island, and mine to begin with my arrival, and the story of us to end on the island too" (34). Of course, as far as the publication of "The Female Castaway" is concerned, Susan herself expresses precisely those wishes about her own narrative, which renders her criticising Cruso's unwillingness to disclose his life-story hypocritical.

5.1.3) Truth and Storytelling

Consequently, it is possible to agree with Head, who argues: "The main paradox of Susan Barton [...] is that she can be shown to resemble Foe" (Coetzee 116). Chris Bongie, too, points out that, since she "pursue[s] essentially the same *authoritative*, and *authoritarian*, projects" (264), yet resists these traits in Foe, Susan is "at once opposed and linked" (264) to him. Addressing her manuscript's prospective editor for the first time, Susan asks: "Do you think of me, Mr Foe, as Mrs Crusoe or as a bold adventuress?" (F 45), before asserting: "Think of me what you may, [...] it is I who have disposal of all that Cruso leaves behind, which is the story of his island" (45). While such a confident statement, to Susan, serves as a self-affirmation of her own independence, it also designates an illustration of her conviction that only one 'true story', only one objective narrative, exists about the island episode, signifying that the principle of storytelling, as understood by her, is not construction, but mimesis. Interestingly, her principal belief in such a grand, overarching truth never falters throughout the novel; instead, Susan prefers to frame her manuscript's shortcomings in terms of gaps and silences, which, according to her world-view, could in principle be filled in, and would thus enable a complete representation of what she deems the truth. Hence, she

believes that Friday's inability to speak is merely a physical matter, which, if overcome, would complete the truth of her story.

Therefore, entangled in the grand narrative of emancipation, which promises the existence of one universal truth (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 38) she also comes to interpret Foe's insistent questionings not as a sign that he might betray her, but simply as curiosity, as a natural part of his craft: "I am growing to understand why you wanted Crusoe to have a musket and be besieged by cannibals. I thought it was because you had no regard for the truth. I forgot you are a writer" (F 94). Thus, Head is undoubtedly correct when he suggests that Foe "expose[s] the dangers of a naive perception of realism" (Coetzee 127), since the notion of objectivity effectively obscures the existence of any discursive power-dynamics. By rendering all representation a question of mere knowledge, not of power, Susan's universalising ideas do not only limit the positions of Crusoe and, of course, Friday, but essentially also her own.

Yet, although Susan's simple-minded insistence that she "will not have any lies told" (F 40) is certainly highly problematic in a postcolonial context, it at least constitutes an effort to genuinely convey her thoughts and impressions of the island. Foe, in contrast, tries to manipulate her narrative in order to render it more exciting and thus more profitable. Therefore, when the captain of the ship which returns her to England tells Susan that "the booksellers will hire a man to set your story to rights" (40), he warns her at the same time that "their trade is in books, not the truth" (40). However, while Susan does suspect that Foe might prefer the story "without a woman" (72), she is also aware that her choices are limited; contrary to Crusoe's island, where patriarchy existed predominately in theory, there are few options for a female castaway in 18th century England. Impoverished and homeless, Susan acknowledges that she depends on Foe, who is, after all, a well-known author. Realising that "the moon of our island was larger than the moon of England" (43), and thus evoking a traditionally female symbolism, she is conscious of her power waning. When she is almost assaulted by two drunk soldiers, she even decides to "pin my hair up under my hat and wear a coat at all times, hoping to pass for a man" (101). Thus, her return to her home country also signifies a relapse into

patriarchal structures, and it is therefore first and foremost due to a lack of other opportunities that she decides to trust Foe after all. Susan's conception of writing further underscores her dilemma:

To tell the truth in all its substance you must have quiet, and a comfortable chair away from all distraction, and a window to stare through; and then the knack of seeing waves when there are fields before your eyes, and of feeling the tropic sun when it is cold; and at your fingertips the words with which to capture the vision before it fades. I have none of these, while you have all. (*F* 52)

As Peter E. Morgan (89) has pointed out, this quote can be considered ironical on a metatextual level, since the first few chapters of *Foe* practically prove Susan's ability to write in an engaging manner, despite her manuscript having been written "by candlelight in a windowless room, with the paper on my knee" (*F* 127). Arguably, the irony is further heightened by the fact that she is, unbeknownst to herself, constructing a postmodern narrative, full of silences and impenetrable signifieds, such as Cruso's contradictory stories and Friday's opaque silence; however, due to her unyielding belief in truthful representation, she fails to be content with her writing.

What is more, Susan and Friday move into Foe's empty house while he is hiding from his bailiffs, where she encounters the environment she deems necessary for the production of stories. For a short time, therefore, she assumes the position of power usually reserved for Foe: "[Y]our pen, your ink, I know, but somehow the pen becomes mine while I write with it, as though growing out of my hand" (*F* 66-67). However, while Morgan regards this as a positive development, stating that "there is, after all, a possibility that a woman's text, or 'herstory' can have primacy" (90), one must not forget that such a primacy is solely realised on a private level, not as far as publication, and therefore discursive representation, is concerned. Additionally, the usage of Foe's pen further emphasises that Susan is writing within the boundaries of a phallogocentric discourse, thus employing words which perpetuate a power-structure from which she is automatically excluded.

5.2) Body

When he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2003, Coetzee delivered what Attridge refers to as a "fiction-as-lecture" (*Ethics* 196), told from the perspective of Robinson Crusoe, and revolving around his life after his return to England⁴⁵. Interestingly, Crusoe's problems seem rather similar compared to Susan's situation:

When the first bands of plagiarists and imitators descended upon his island history and foisted on the public their own feigned stories of the castaway life, they seemed to him no more or less than a horde of cannibals falling upon his own flesh, that is to say, his life [...]. ("Nobel Lecture: He and His Man" n.p.)

Thus, Coetzee likens these false biographies, which are apparently written about Crusoe in abundance, to the repulsive and carnal practice of cannibalism. It is therefore not surprising that body and narrative are also closely linked in *Foe*, although the focus of their interconnectedness is slightly different. On the one hand, a relationship between substantiality, desire and writing is evoked, while on the other hand, the mutilated body of Friday clearly constitutes the novel's most complex enigma: a presence that cannot be interpreted.

5.2.1) Substantiality and Desire

As Attwell has noted, Susan's quest to have her story told "begins as a desire for substantiality" (*J.M. Coetzee* 109). And indeed, it is not difficult to discern such a connection, given Susan's belief that "[t]he truth that makes your story yours alone [...] resides in a thousand touches" (*F* 18), that is, a in thousand little details, which complete one's individual narrative, and, most importantly for her, render it more plausible for others. Of course, the word 'touch' already signifies the importance of the body in this context, and Coetzee continues to employ this metaphor throughout the novel, as illustrated by

⁴⁵ In this story, Crusoe receives letters from someone referred to merely as 'his man', but who seems to be Daniel Defoe himself. Thus, Coetzee's Nobel Prize Speech constitutes yet another historiographic text based on Robinson Crusoe.

Susan's contemplations on the perceived shortcomings of her manuscript:

When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without substance, a ghost beside the true body of Crusoe. Is that the fate of all storytellers? Yet I was as much a body as Crusoe. I ate and drank, I woke and slept, I longed. (*F* 51)

Here, Coetzee addresses the absence of the author in realist writing, which eschews any self-reflexiveness, but claims objectivity based on the mimetic principle. Defoe's style of writing, as Head has noted, particularly seeks to "conceal artifice and to appeal to verisimilitude" (*Coetzee* 114). Only pretending to provide his readers with a truthful account, Defoe's aim was thus to hide his own presence, to turn into a ghost, so to speak. Attempting to write an autobiographical story, Susan, in contrast, evokes a genre which necessitates her own presence in her prospective novel.

Yet, what renders this endeavour difficult is, of course, her insistence to adhere to established codes of writing, even though her story is highly unconventional, therefore clashing with the metanarratives of her time, and the literary conventions they have engendered. As a consequence of this discordance, her voice is eventually swallowed by phallogocentric discourse. Susan's plea to Foe to "[r]eturn to me the substance I have lost" (*F* 51) thus signifies, on the one hand, her intense wish to have "The Female Castaway" rendered fit for publishing, while on the other hand, her desire to seem as interesting a character as Crusoe. Given the fact that, while on the island, she found him mostly dull, this request seems slightly paradoxical, yet can be accounted for in the framework of *écriture féminine*, which advocates that phallogocentric language can be challenged through the ambiguity of the female body, which therefore needs to be incorporated into writing (Green and LeBihan 249)⁴⁶.

Writing the body, therefore, becomes imperative to Susan. However, while she equates substantiality with a mode of storytelling that is both realist and a reflection of universal truth, Foe, apparently, answers this request in a

⁴⁶ Also see Chapter 3.2.4 of this thesis.

different way: In a highly ironical move, he confronts her with a girl claiming to be her lost daughter, who literally constitutes a substantial presence from Susan's alleged past⁴⁷. At first, she vehemently attempts to send the girl away, but then experiences a change of mind in the novel's third part, referring to her as a "substantial ghost, if such beings exist" (*F* 132), which indicates that, while she still does not believe her story, the girl's power over her is growing. Indeed, after having touched and kissed her (131), Susan starts to become confused about her own identity. Due to her custom of connecting substantiality to both truth and the practices of 'proper' (realist) authorship à la Foe, she draws the logical conclusion that her alleged daughter might constitute a veritable part of her story, one of her "thousand touches" (18). Experiencing a bout of ontological uncertainty, a typical symptom of the non-essentialist, deconstructed subject of postmodern writing (Head, *Coetzee* 117), she claims: "Nothing is left of me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong?" (*F* 133).⁴⁸ Having internalised the conventions of realist writing, which, on a psychological level, function "to preserve various consciousnesses from doubt" (Lyotard, "Answering" 74), Susan, like Magda, is utterly lost and bewildered when confronted with their obvious failure.

Since the corporeality of the body is thus linked to universal truth and mimesis, it is probably not surprising that desire also constitutes a central motif in *Foe*. And indeed, Head emphasises the relationship between desire and narrative control (*Coetzee* 116), while Morgan's statement that Susan "links discourse with sex" (84) concurs with Hughes's assessment that she "empowers herself in relationships through sex" (155). Thus, in a last desperate attempt to both regain control over her story, and assure herself of her own stable identity,

47 While Susan is convinced that Foe sent the girl, he never actually confesses to this; however, any other explanations seem highly improbable.

48 In this context, another reference to one of Defoe's works can be detected, namely "A True Revelation of the Apparition of One Mrs Veal". As opposed to *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*, which are yet to be written, "Mrs Veal" constitutes a realised text in the world of *Foe* (Head, *Coetzee* 117-118). When Susan reads this story to Friday, she does not question its truth-value, but instead reads it as documentary realism (118), and thus as proof of how a written record can make a person famous; ironically, however, "Mrs Veal" is a ghost story, which means that it is not concerned with substantiality, but with its exact opposite.

Susan decides to sleep with Foe, and likens her role to "the Muse when she visits her poets" (*F* 139). Referring to the latter as "both goddess and begetter" (126), she signals both her objection to being regarded as a mere passive source of inspiration, and her intention to retain the mastery of her story. In Attwell's opinion, she thereby manages to "effect a reversal of gender roles on Foe" (*J.M. Coetzee* 110), while Dragunoiu, in contrast, argues that Susan simply "objectifies herself, catalyzing her own exclusion from the story" (320). Yet, even though Foe does eventually distort her narrative, the notion that their sexual encounter could be the reason for this betrayal, mirrors and perpetuates the dismissive attitude about female desire ever-prevalent in Western discourse, and must therefore be regarded as rather problematic.

However, Attwell's claim nevertheless reads too optimistic: Evidently, the gender reversal, which Susan tries to effect, only exists on a surface level. Although she labels Foe her "mistress" (*F* 152) or "wife" (152), while he refers to himself as "an old whore" (151), these terms constitute, essentially, floating signifiers, temporary descriptors which bear no connection to their actual lives. While Susan employs them in order to assert her authority, Foe apparently embraces such a parlance in order to lull her into safety, to make her *feel* in control, even though she is certainly not. Consequently, it is only logical that, in the middle of the night, "Foe's body seemed to grow as he slumbered; there was barely a handsbreadth of space left me" (*F* 144): He is becoming more and more substantial, whereas her power is shrinking.

This development is also reflected in the inextricable link which *Foe* establishes between the act of giving birth and the practice of writing (Hughes 96). In the novel's second part, for instance, Susan tells her alleged daughter that she is motherless, but "father-born" (*F* 91), and that her father is Daniel Foe (91), indicating that she is nothing but a character in a story of his making. While Susan herself aspires to a similar power, she realises that her strength lies not in authorship but "in my power to guide and amend. Above all, to withhold. By such means do I still endeavour to be father of my story" (123). Although she is conscious that silence can be an empowering force, Susan fails to realise that Foe, while certainly curious about her life, has never intended to

stay true to her story. Thus, her refusal to disclose all information about herself ceases to be subversive, because her background is, simply put, not as relevant to Foe as she thinks. By telling her to "wait to see what fruit I bear" (152), Foe therefore already foreshadows his cruel intentions.

5.2.2) Mutilation

In her desperate battle for agency, Foe constitutes Susan's ultimate, yet by no means only obstacle. Whereas her concerns are initially focussed on the impending distortion of her narrative, she soon worries that she needs to supplement her story with further details about the island, in order to render it more attractive for its prospective readers. Insisting on "not hav[ing] any lies told" (F 40), she thus begins trying to gauge Friday's background; in particular, her fascination is focussed on the mystery of his possibly missing tongue⁴⁹. As Spivak has noted, "Susan wants to know him, to give him speech, to learn from him, to father his story" ("Theory" 13), proving that in her treatment of Friday, she mirrors Foe's behaviour towards herself, yet is too preoccupied with her own story to fathom this parallel. Her own processes of Othering are undercut, however, not only by Friday's silences, but also by the abject horror which his mutilations cause her to experience.

Indeed, according to Mark Mathuray, Susan's horror at discovering the absence of Friday's tongue can be explained by employing the concept of abjection (162)⁵⁰. Established by Kristeva in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on*

49 While Susan treats the absence of his tongue as a fact, MacLeod (8), in a fine article, raises the point that she has never actually seen its stump: "I looked, but saw nothing in the dark save the glint of teeth white as ivory. [...] 'Do you see?', [Cruso] said. 'It is too dark,' said I" (F 22). Since most critics have taken the loss of Friday's tongue for granted, MacLeod regards this collective reaction as a prime example of how critical discourse establishes its own metanarratives (10). Thus, "Friday's tongue isn't allowed to be a story in itself, but is instead conscripted for critical purposes at the expense of what (the evidence suggests) he actually might be" (10).

50 In fact, Mathuray's own argument is based on a concept which he refers to as "*the stalled sublime*" (161), and which entails all characteristics of the Kantian sublime, yet without the eventual release through transcendence. Of abjection, he claims that he regards it as "a version of what I call *the stalled sublime*"; yet, these two concepts seem strikingly similar, especially since Kristeva notes that "the abject is edged with the sublime. It is not the same moment on the journey, but the same subject and speech bring them into being" (11). Interpreting Kristeva's writings, Becker-Leckrone, too, argues that the main difference between abject and sublime lies in the fact that the former does not transcend the horror it inspires (39). Therefore, the exact differences between the stalled sublime and the abject

Abjection, which was originally published as *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* in 1980, the notion of the abject "notifies us of the limits of the human universe" (Kristeva 8). Located at the margins of both the self and our cultural norms, it describes one's inability to distinguish between subject and object, between self and Other, and also designates the subsequent crisis of identity caused by such a failure (Becker-Leckrone 33). While abjection, generally speaking, refers to a "dynamic that resists definition" (36), it always draws the subject towards "the place where meaning collapses" (36), and is, above all, rooted in his/her eternal fear of death, that is, the fear of becoming object (33). Yet, the abject paradoxically always inspires both "abomination and fascination" (Kristeva 167), thus appalling the subject, while simultaneously drawing him/her towards itself.

After Cruso has informed Susan about Friday's missing tongue, she starts "to look at him with the horror we reserve for the mutilated" (*F* 24). Though he used to be merely a "shadowy creature" (24) and a "dull fellow" (22) to her, she now begins actively "flinching" (24) when he approaches. Since she even starts to wipe things he has touched (24), Susan obviously comes to equate his missing tongue with a diffuse sense of his being unclean. Interestingly, Head has pointed out that she thus expresses revulsion "at the *fact* of [his mutilation] rather than the circumstances" (*Coetzee* 120), which indicates that she abhors Friday's possible tonguelessness primarily because it signifies "a void at the heart of her narrative which destabilizes her pursuit for control" (Mathuray 160). Since the abject causes a breakdown of binary structures, and thus of meaning, she is unable to construct Friday as the Other, and, in turn, fails to perpetuate the notion of a stable, essentialist self. Thus, Friday's mutilated body certainly constitutes an agent of violent defamiliarisation for Susan, since it not only "increase[s] the difficulty and length of perception" (Shklovsky 12), but almost negates them completely.

Back in England, she confesses to Friday that "[w]hen your master asked me to look, I would not" (*F* 85), explaining that she was too revolted of what she might have seen; yet, this disclosure does not make much of a difference, since the sheer possibility that he might be mutilated seems to be enough to

provoke an abject reaction in her. In this context, Mathuray argues that to Susan, "Friday's lack of tongue functions as a cipher for emasculation" (169), and therefore "erases the gender distinctions that are crucial" (169) to her. Such an interpretation is supported by the possibility that Friday might be a eunuch, a question which is very obviously raised when Susan watches him dance in Foe's robe:

The whirling robe was a scarlet bell settled upon Friday's shoulders and enclosing him; Friday was the dark pillar at its centre. What had been hidden from me was revealed. I saw; or, should I say, my eyes were open to what was presented to them.

'I saw and believed I had seen, though afterwards I remembered Thomas, who also saw, but could not be brought to believe till he had put his hand in the wound. (*F* 119)

As with his tongue, she cannot translate his apparent castration into words. While Head suggests that such a blankness gestures towards Susan's inability to aptly describe the Other, and proposes that "Friday's possible double-mutilation achieves a mythic status which cannot be adequately addressed in a discourse other than his own" (*Coetzee* 121), it rather seems that such a behaviour can be traced back to issues of self-preservation and control. Since in this context, abjection is clearly linked to the absence of the phallus, and since Susan frames her own narrative power first and foremost in terms of her sexuality, she is startled by Friday's lack, which places him (at least in her world-view) outside of the system of sexual desire, and therefore outside of her reach. This becomes especially obvious when she links the "craving [...] to have our questions answered" (*F* 79) to "our desire, when we kiss someone, to feel the lips we kiss respond" (79), and also when she describes his narrative as "a child waiting to be born that cannot be born" (122).

However, as Mathuray (169) has noted, Susan's revulsion can also be traced back to her recognising a similarity between Friday and herself. Since she herself is "marginal and marginalized" (169), or, in Head's terms, "half-colonized" (*Coetzee* 120), Susan, too, is faced with the threat of being silenced, and it is this similarity which also engenders horror in her. Indeed, she states that in Friday's presence, she cannot talk "without being aware of how lively were the movements of the tongue in my mouth" (*F* 24), indicating that she,

figuratively speaking, lives in fear of having her tongue taken away, of being silenced. Equally troublesome is her statement that arguing with Foe is as "thankless" (144) as arguing with Cruso, which is why "I held my tongue" (144). Such a reaction can almost be read as a Freudian slip, and while it merely signifies her keeping quiet on an idiomatic level, one might, of course, also interpret it as her holding on to her tongue, scared of having taken her voice away. Thus, despite her claim that her silence differs from Friday's, because his is "helpless" (122), while her own is "chosen and purposeful" (122), Susan's voice is, in fact, continually threatened by patriarchal rule.

A similarity between Susan and Friday is also established on an intertextual level: In a perceptive article, Graham Huggan reads *Foe* as referencing the Greek myth of Philomela⁵¹. While several different versions of this ancient story exist, Huggan (12) discusses the one most commonly remembered, as rendered in the *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*: Philomela, daughter of King Pandion of Athens, is raped by Tereus, her sister Procne's husband. In order to prevent her from incriminating him, Tereus then proceeds to cut out Philomela's tongue, thus forcing her to stay silent. By embroidering a tapestry, however, she still manages to make herself understood, which causes Procne to kill Tereus' son in revenge, and to cook his flesh to serve her husband as a meal. When Tereus then attempts to murder both sisters, the Gods take mercy on them, turning Procne into a swallow and Philomela into a nightingale, so they can escape his wrath. Due to the sins he committed, Tereus is then turned into a hoopoe.

Arguably, it is this myth which illustrates the common ground of both Susan's and Friday's plights. While Philomela can, in one sense, be regarded as the archetype of the oppressed female, it is also possible to read her, as Huggan (12) does, as a personification of the colonial condition. The motif of rape, while commonly regarded as a means for the male to assert his power

51 As Huggan has noted, employing the myth of Philomela, a European master-code, can be considered potentially problematic in a postcolonial context (19); and, of course, such a danger always exists when Western narratives are thus evoked. Yet, by establishing a link between Friday and Philomela, and thereby crossing the boundaries of gender and race, it seems as if Coetzee attempts to broaden the myth's spectrum through both the deconstruction of binary oppositions, as well as the incorporation of the non-Western Other. Therefore, his appropriation of Philomela's story can be regarded as an example of responsibly writing back to a narrative of the 'old world'.

over the female, has also come to be understood as a prominent metaphor for the act of colonialism, in which woman assumes the status of the forcefully annexed land (Young 67). In contrast, the song of the nightingale carries a more positive significance, since it alludes to an expression beyond the dominant discourse and outside of speech. Susan, however, eventually fails in this respect, having her story corrupted by Foe, while Friday essentially effects a negation of traditional power structures, which is demonstrated in the novel's elusive and opaque section IV⁵². Additionally, and contrary to the myth of Philomela, it is not the female, but the male nightingale who produces the species' characteristic song ("Nightingale", n.p.), which further underscores the subversive potential of Friday's character. What is more, Cruso muses at one point whether "they wanted to prevent [Friday] from ever telling his story" (*F* 23) – 'they' being whoever allegedly cut out his tongue. Huggan's reading, therefore, focusses on Philomela's story "as a paradigm for the reenactment of colonial encounter, for the articulation of a violent history of dispossession and deprivation which circumstances dictate must be told in *another way*" (12). As he correctly points out, Friday's lack of speech causes him to employ counter-discursive strategies; however, unlike Philomela, he does not seek to be understood, but to puzzle, which he does through his unreadable gestures, such as his dance, and his playing of the flute (*F* 119). However, his most subversive strategy is certainly his silence, which should not be read as passive disinterest, but rather constitutes a stubborn refusal to signify.

Friday's deliberate silence becomes especially obvious when Susan tries to teach him how to write: Instead of the word 'ship', he proceeds to draw the letters "s-h-s-h-s" (*F* 146), an onomatopoeic reproduction of the sound made to beseech someone to silence. At this point, even Susan herself cannot ignore his behaviour any longer: "Could it be that somewhere within him he was laughing at my efforts to bring him nearer to speech?" (146), she wonders. And indeed, when left alone, Friday starts to write "eyes, open eyes, each set upon a human foot: row upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes" (147), which, when Susan tries to take away his slate, he rubs clean with his spittle. According to Head,

52 See part 5.2.4 of this chapter.

this uncanny image “convey[s] not only the displacement of the enslaved and the colonized, but also the sense of bearing witness” (*Coetzee* 123); Friday thus asserts that, although he does not speak, and does not yield his meaning, he is always present, indecipherable, but watching. Furthermore, by the end of the novel's section III, he has commenced writing the letter 'o' over and over again (*F* 152), signifying that he literally constitutes a hole in the narrative (Poyner, Para. 42), a postmodern absence that lies beyond representation; or, as Attwell has noted, “omega, the sign of the end” (*J.M. Coetzee* 114) - that is, the place where all interpretation comes to a halt.⁵³

5.2.3) The Body Underwater

The full extent of the ever-present speech/silence dichotomy, however, is only realised in the final pages of *Foe*, which can certainly be considered the novel's most ambiguous, and thus also most postmodern gesture - its “final metafictional frame” (Head, *Coetzee* 124) or “metafictional excursus” (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 115). Very abruptly, an anonymous narrating persona is introduced; a change which, in a novel highly concerned with narrative control, is undoubtedly as significant as it is unexpected for the reader. According to Head, this new narrator, who seems to be writing from a “higher”, omniscient position” (*Coetzee* 123) might stand for Coetzee himself (124). Such a reading is supported by the fact that section IV, generally speaking, highlights the inability of aptly representing the Other, yet does not present a solution for this problematic. In one sense, therefore, it is possible to read it as an allegory of the concerns Coetzee displays throughout all of his fiction: Trying to shed his own authority, he seeks to construct a space where the inability of the Other to express him-/herself can be staged.

However, since *Foe* certainly “builds the provisional, discursive nature of history into the structure and narrative mode of the text” (Slemon 160), the

⁵³ Ironically, Defoe's Friday refers to the worship of his god as “saying *O*” (Spivak, “Theory” 15); Coetzee thus replaces religious belief, which is continually evoked in *Robinson Crusoe*, with endless ambiguity.

novel can be regarded as a prime example of postcolonial allegory, which eschews the notion of one decisive signified, rendering any allegorical reading merely provisional. The above interpretation, therefore, can only be considered one amongst many. Furthermore, the narrator's anonymity certainly plays a decisive role in providing Coetzee with a "suitable reflexive vehicle for distancing himself from the appropriative gesture" (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 115) of narrating the final pages; pinpointing the narrator's identity would thus constitute an unproductive act of closure. Hence, it might be more fruitful to shift the question to those who have been silenced: After all, the fact that Susan no longer controls the narrative means that her attempts at writing her own story have failed. Since her narrative is therefore essentially "one of failure, however poetically rendered" (Probyn, Para. 34), Probyn accuses Coetzee of having silenced Susan with an authoritative gesture (34-35). Yet, she overlooks that Susan's character is flawed insofar as her unyielding belief in universalising truths prevents her from recognising her own Western-centric point of view. Due to this bias, she is unable to investigate the politics of representation in the way that the unnamed narrator can. Furthermore, the question arises whether (and how) a successful white feminist rewriting *and* a claim for the wholly other can be united in the same text. Thus, one can definitely agree with Spivak, who argues that, on one level, *Foe* seems to be concerned with "the impossible politics of over-determination (mothering, authoring, giving voice to the native 'in' the text; a white male South African writer engaging in such inscriptions 'outside' the text)" ("Theory" 18).

Indeed, the novel's ultimate inability to speak on behalf of both women and the colonial Other is addressed through the motif of the body. In the first part of section IV, when the narrator enters Foe's lodgings, what he first encounters is the dead body of a "woman or a girl" (*F* 153). She might be Susan's alleged daughter, though no name is mentioned, indicating that she might constitute a symbol for woman in general. Her body is clad in a "long grey dress", (153), while her "face is wrapped in a grey woollen scarf" (153) which the narrator fails to unwrap, because it is "endless" (153); a clear indication of the tendency to reduce women to their bodies, and of the

realisation that a genuine representation of woman as individual is impossible within the dominant, phallogocentric discourse. Furthermore, the woman/girl "weighs no more than a sack of straw" (153), is almost insubstantial, and therefore powerless. Through this motif, Coetzee acknowledges the marginalised position which women have been forced to occupy, even though Friday, not Susan, is the prime agent of subversion in *Foe*.

As Head had noted, section IV seems to be providing the reader with two different endings (*Coetzee* 124). In the first one, a dead couple, presumably Susan and Foe, are depicted lying in the latter's bed; Friday, in contrast, is shown to be weak, but alive. On the one hand, such a development can be interpreted as Friday's triumph over those who wanted to take his voice away: Evidently, he has outlived them. What is more, the narrator discovers that "[f]rom his mouth, without a breath, issue the sounds of the island" (*F* 154). Thus, it is made clear that "[t]he history that Susan was unable to tell is there; the story of the island is still Friday's possession" (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 115). Since there is no one left to distort his narrative, this scene can be regarded as "a metaphor for the post-colonial moment" (Head, *Coetzee* 124), and thus as a decisively positive development. On the other hand, however, Friday is only barely alive, which, of course, renders the subversive potential of this scene questionable. Additionally, the sound of his body is "faint and dry, like leaves falling over leaves" (*F* 154), an indication that his substance is waning, and, on a metafictional level, that the pages of a book are closing onto him, signifying that he is still threatened by someone else's narrative. Hence, his situation seems less like empowerment than like impending death.

In the second part of section IV, the narrator climbs the stairs to Foe's abode a second time, as if to imply that he⁵⁴, as Head argues, is not content with the first ending (*Coetzee* 124). Since a plaque on an outside wall of the house bears the words "*Daniel Defoe, Author*", it is possible to conclude that *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana* have already been written, and Susan's narrative forgotten (125). And indeed, the narrator discovers the latter's manuscript in a

54 While the narrator's gender is never explicitly mentioned, it seems safe to assume that, since Foe stages the impossibility of woman's representation, Coetzee has not chosen a female persona for these last pages.

chest in De/Foe's house, and, in a surreal/postmodern moment, finds himself suddenly diving down to a shipwreck in the waters not far from Crusoe's island. This motif seems reminiscent of the poem "Diving into the Wreck", which was written by feminist author Adrienne Rich. Her narrator's dive is based on a motivation to find "the wreck and not the story of the wreck / the thing itself and not the myth" (Rich 62-63), which also seems to be the anonymous narrator's endeavour in *Foe*. Both texts, after all, evoke the element of water in order to signify the immersion into another discourse, beyond the constraints of white phallogocentric language⁵⁵.

Generally speaking, the ocean in *Foe* is a place where unwritten stories reside, "a book of myths / in which / our names do not appear (Rich 92-94). Hence, Coetzee's narrator finds "Susan Barton and her dead captain" (*F* 157), with whom she was abandoned during the mutiny at the beginning of the novel. Their corpses "float like stars against the low roof" (157) of the ship, their bodies trying to ascend - yet, they remain captured inside the wreck, their bloated bodies full of water. Thus, their situation signifies that they have been silenced by Foe; furthermore, they also lack the means to survive in the "deep element" (Rich 43). Susan's position, in this context, is the most devastating one, since she is unable to survive in both endings, her semi-marginal status indicating that she can neither live above, nor beneath the sea. Yet, both her own body as well as the captain's signify a certain affinity with the world above the surface - they are literally drawn towards the dominant discourse, and actively seek representation.

Friday, in contrast, has protected his silence throughout the whole novel. When the narrator finally discovers him, he is alive and well, and his body, as opposed to Susan's, still carries weight. However, while he is not threatened by water at all, he is "half buried in sand" (*F* 157); the sea, the narrator informs us, is dirty, "like the mud of Flanders, in which generations of grenadiers now lie dead" (156), and he needs to keep moving, in order not to sink (156). Since Friday has never yielded his thoughts to Susan or Foe, he is not in danger of

⁵⁵ This symbolism is already established at the beginning of *Foe*, when the incessant wind on the island gets too strong to bear for Susan, and she seeks shelter by dipping her head under the water "to know what it was to have silence" (*F* 15).

being re-/written in accordance with someone else's narrative, which is why he has not drowned. Yet, he faces another difficulty, namely being immersed, quite literally, in the sand of time - being forgotten. Thus, Coetzee illustrates the plight of the subaltern that cannot speak, who must decide between either a compromised representation in a discourse he/she will never fully belong to, and a self-imposed absence. Friday, evidently, has chosen the latter option.

However, the fact that Friday has not yet been swallowed up by the ocean floor is certainly a positive sign; and indeed, far from being an obstacle, the body is instead portrayed as a powerful force in the novel's closing paragraphs. When the narrator speaks to Friday, he soon realises that "this is not a place of words" (*F* 157), since they are instantly "caught and filled with water and diffused" (157) - a description which mirrors the distortion of the Other's words in the dominant discourse. This connection is symbolised via the narrator's "stub of candle" (156), originally used to give him light in Defoe's house, which evokes notions of the stub Susan imagines Friday to have instead of a tongue. And indeed, the narrator claims that he holds it up "like a talisman, though it sheds no light" (156), signifying that he, not Friday, is the one out of his element in the wreck, the one who cannot make himself understood. He realises: "This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday" (157), but does not know how to speak the body's language, which becomes obvious when he, in a fashion that is both naïve and highly patronising, traces Friday's teeth with his fingernail, "trying to find a way in" (157).

Yet, like the narrator, the reader is never given Friday's story, since to do so "would be an appropriation of his wholly 'otherness'" (Probyn, Para. 41), and therefore equate to Susan's attempts to father his story. Hence, Friday's secrets are locked away inside his body, and when he finally opens his mouth, he 'speaks' in a discourse which the narrator is not part of, thus remaining an enigma to the novel's very end. The closing lines of *Foe* very clearly evoke the counter-discursive powers of the body, and, at the same time, constitute both a gesture towards a "post-colonial utopia, through the symbolic release of Friday's 'unending' history" (Head, *Coetzee* 126), and "a deferral of authority to the

body of history, to the political world in which the voice of the body politic of the future resides" (Attwell, *J.M. Coetzee* 116):

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

Thus engulfed in a discourse beyond his understanding and control, the narrator falls silent.

6) Conclusion

Far from adopting an apolitical stance and retreating into an intellectual haven removed from the actualities of Apartheid South Africa, Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Foe* in fact display both a critique of the power-structures established by the Apartheid regime, as well as a zealousness to address questions beyond this immediate climate of political oppression. Focussing on the nature of grand- and metanarratives, and therefore on the power-structures inherent in all representation, yet never losing sight of the South African context, Coetzee's novels prove what Lyotard and Hutcheon argue in a theoretical context - namely that postmodernism need not necessarily be evasive and aloof. On the contrary, it can be employed in a decisively political, and, on a broader level, ethical context. Thus, even though the achievements of postmodernism and postcolonialism should not too hastily be conflated, it is obvious that Coetzee has highly benefited from the impulses of the former in order to further the projects of the latter. Instead of succumbing to the mimetic principle and the conflicted truths of realism/"illusionism" (Coetzee, *DP* 27), his novels emphasise that history, too, is merely a discursive construct.

Although Magda, the Magistrate and Susan Barton all desperately yearn for universal structures, the body guarantees that a recourse to stable meaning is impossible. While Magda seeks to be part of a different history, any possibility of genuine change is destroyed by her belief in both a universal sign system and the stability of language. On a corporeal level, her failure is staged especially through the prominent motif of bodily occupation, which mirrors the colonial power-struggle. In order to negate this dynamic, Magda tries, but fails, to annihilate the interior of her body, and when Hendrik, Klein-Anna, and eventually also the sky-gods leave her, the narrative returns to the novel's beginning, reestablishing the status quo. Thus, even though the Other's body cannot be described as an unignorable presence, it is its palpable absence, and the resulting lack of company, which Magda cannot evade.

In contrast, the Magistrate's story in *Waiting for the Barbarians* describes

his "ethical awakening" (Head, *Coetzee* 72), since he realises that the truth he seeks, both about the barbarian girl and the wooden slips, is, in fact, non-existent. His journey towards this discovery, however, is a painful one - after all, it is his own experience of being tortured which leads to his altered world-view. Thus, while the barbarian girl, in a gesture similar to Hendrik and Klein-Anna's, disappears mid-narrative, her unreadable body still functions as a catalyst for the Magistrate's transformation. Eventually, this development becomes obvious in the dream sequences, which are then mirrored by one of the last scenes of the novel: Children are depicted building "not a bad snowman" (*WB* 170) - a hopeful act rooted in the body, signifying a tentative belief in a better future.

Finally, in *Foe*, Susan Barton not only believes in the concept of universal truth, but also in the qualities of realist writing: She beseeches author Daniel Foe to alter her narrative according to the conventions of storytelling. Her attempts to father her story of the female castaway eventually prove to be unsuccessful, however; on the one hand, she is betrayed by Foe, while on the other hand, Friday refuses to yield his meaning and thus grant narrative control to Susan. Indeed, the apparent lack of his tongue, reminiscent of the Greek myth of Philomela, even provokes an abject reaction in her. By staying deliberately silent and indecipherable, Friday finally outlives both Foe and Susan, having escaped the dominant discourse to "a place where bodies are their own signs" (*F* 157), a realm beyond language, and a potential post-colonial utopia.

Therefore, the paradoxical importance of the body as a defamiliarising and de-doxifying agent in Coetzee's novels cannot be denied, and further underscores his project to establish literature as a potent rival, not a supplement, to history. Indeed, through the rejection of all grand- and metanarratives, his writing proves that "the idea of literariness can create an alternative expressive space, which is 'human', not in its appeal for universality, but in its claim for independence, non-conformity, alterity" (Head, *Coetzee* 162). Centring these developments on the body, Coetzee constructs novels which quite literally advance, in Nadine Gordimer's words, "to the nerve centre of being" (Gordimer in Coetzee, *WB* Blurbs).

7) Works Cited

- Attridge, Derek. "Against Allegory: *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Life & Times of Michael K, and the Question of Literary Reading." *J.M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. Ed. Jane Poyner. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2006. 63-82.
- , "Ethical Modernism: Servants as Others in J.M. Coetzee's Early Fiction." *Poetics Today* 25.4 (2004): 653-671.
- , *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2004.
- Attwell, David. *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. Cape Town: U of California Press, 1993.
- , "The Problem of History in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee." *Poetics Today* 11.3 (1990): 579-615.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.
- , Eds. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Barthes, Roland. *S/Z: An Essay*. 1970. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: Hill and Wang, 1974.
- Becker-Leckrone, Megan. *Julia Kristeva and Literary Theory*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005.
- Beckett, Samuel. "Imagination Dead Imagine." *First Love and Other Stories*. New York: Grove Press, 1974.
- Boehmer, Elleke. *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature*. New York and Oxford: OUP, 1995.
- Bongie, Chris. "'Lost in the Maze of Doubting': J.M. Coetzee's *Foe* and the Politics of (Un)Likeness." *Modern Fiction Studies* 39.2 (1993): 261-281.
- Bourke, Joanna. "Pain and the Politics of Sympathy, Historical Reflections, 1760s to 1960s." Utrecht University. Inaugural Address. 8 June 2011. Web. 15 Nov. 2012. <http://igitur-archive.library.uu.nl/oratie/2011-1101-200606/Bourke_Joanna_oratie.pdf>.
- Breton, André. "Second Manifesto of Surrealism". 1930. *Manifestos of Surrealism*. 1962. Trans. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1972. 119-94.

- Briganti, Chiara. "A Bored Spinster with a Locked Diary: The Politics of Hysteria in *In the Heart of the Country*." *Critical Essays on J.M. Coetzee*. Ed. Sue Kossew. New York: G.K. Hall, 1998. 84-99.
- Chapman, Michael. *Southern African Literatures*. 1996. Scottsville, South Africa: U of Natal Press. 2003.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs* 1.4 (1976): 875-893.
- Cavafy, C. P. "Waiting for the Barbarians." 1904. *Collected Poems*. Trans. Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard. Ed. George Savidis. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992. 18.
- Coetzee, J. M. *Disgrace*. 1999. London: Vintage, 2000.
- . *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*. Ed. David Attwell. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard UP, 1992.
- . *Dusklands*. 1974. London: Vintage, 1998.
- . *Elizabeth Costello*. 1999. London: Vintage, 2004.
- . *Foe*. 1986. London: Penguin, 1987.
- . *In the Heart of the Country*. 1977. London: Vintage, 1999.
- . "Into the Dark Chamber: The Novelist and South Africa." *The New York Times Book Review* 12 Jan. 1986 late city ed.: Section 7, Page 13. Web. 17 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzee-chamber.html>>.
- . *Life & Times of Michael K*. 1983. London: Vintage, 1998.
- . "Nobel Lecture: He and His Man." Nobelprize.org. 2003. Web. 15 Oct. 2012. <http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2003/coetzee-lecture-e.html>.
- . *The Master of Petersburg*. 1994. London: Vintage, 2004.
- . *Waiting for the Barbarians*. 1980. London: Vintage, 2004.
- . *White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa*. Johannesburg: Radix and Yale UP, 1988.
- . "The Novel Today." *Upstream* 6.1 (1988): 2-5.
- Dalbye, Ellinor Bent. "The Silence of the Suffering Body: Counter-discursive Practices in J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Age of Iron*." MA thesis. University of Oslo, Oslo, 2007. DUO: Digitale utgivelser ved Universitetet i Oslo. Web. 21 June 2012. <<http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-18512>>.
- Donoghue, Dennis. "Her Man Friday." Rev. of *Foe*, by J.M. Coetzee. New York

Times 2 Feb. 1987 late city ed.: Section 7, Page 1. Web. 20 July 2012.
<<http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/11/02/home/coetzee-foe.html>>.

Dovey, Teresa. "Waiting for the Barbarians: Allegory of Allegories." *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*. Eds. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson. London: Macmillan, 1996. 138-151.

Dragunoiu Dana. "Existential Doubt and Political Responsibility in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *CRITIQUE: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 42.3 (2001): 309-326.

Eckstein, Barbara. "The Body, the Word, and the State: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 22.2 (1989): 175-198.

Glenn, Ian. "Game Hunting in *In the Heart of the Country*." *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*. Eds. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson. London: Macmillan, 1996. 120-137.

Gordimer, Nadine. Blurb. *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee. 1980. London: Vintage, 2004.

-----". "The Idea of Gardening." Rev. of *Life & Times of Michael K*, by J.M. Coetzee. *New York Review of Books* 2 Feb. 1984: 3-6.

Green, Keith and Jill LeBihan. *Critical Theory & Practice: A Coursebook*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Guirand, Félix. *Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology*. London: Batchworth, 1959.

Hayes, Patrick. "'An Author I Have Not Read': Coetzee's *Foe*, Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*, and the Problem of the Novel." *Review of English Studies* 57 (2006): 273-290.

Head, Dominic. "A Belief in Frogs: J.M. Coetzee's Enduring Faith in Fiction." *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. Ed. Jane Poyner. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2006. 100-117.

-----". *J.M. Coetzee*. Cambridge: CUP, 1997.

Howe, Irving. "A Stark Political Fable of South Africa." Rev. of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, by J.M. Coetzee. *New York Times* 18 April 1982. Web. 15 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.nytimes.com/1982/04/18/books/coetzee-barbarians.html>>.

Hughes, Conrad Lawrence Marquard. "The Treatment of the Body in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee." Diss. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2007. Wits Institutional Repository on Dspace. Web. 20 March 2012. <<http://hdl.handle.net/10539/5764>>.

Huggan, Graham. "Philomela's Retold Story: Silence, Music, and the Post-

Colonial Text." *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 25.1 (1990): 12-23.

Huggan, Graham and Stephen Watson. Introduction. *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee*. Eds. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson. London: Macmillan, 1996. 1-13.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1988.

-----, "Circling the Downspout of Empire." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 130-135.

-----, "Historiographic Metafiction - Parody and the Intertextuality of History." *Intertextuality and Contemporary American Fiction*. Eds. Peter O'Donnell and Robert Con Davis. Baltimore: John Hopkins UP, 1989. 3-32.

-----, *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.

JanMohamed, Abdul R. "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 59-87.

Jolly, Rosemary. *Colonization, Violence, and Narration in White South African Writing: André Brink, Breyten Breytenbach, and J.M. Coetzee*. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 1996.

Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. 1980. Trans. Léon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1993.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis." *Écrits: a Selection*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. London: Tavistock, 1977. 30-113.

Lyotard, Jean-François. "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" 1982. Trans. Régis Durand. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. By Jean-François Lyotard. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984. 71-82.

-----, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. 1979. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1984.

MacLeod, Lewis. "'Do We of Necessity Become Puppets in a Story?' or Narrating the World: On Speech, Silence and Discourse in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *Modern Fiction Studies* 52.1 (2006): 1-18.

Malpas, Simon. *The Postmodern*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2005.

Marais, Michael. "Death and the Space of the Response to the Other in J.M.

- Coetzee's *The Master of Petersburg*." *J. M. Coetzee and the Idea of the Public Intellectual*. Ed. Jane Poyner. Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2006. 81-99.
- Mathuray, Mark. "Sublime Abjection." *J.M. Coetzee in Context and Theory*. Eds. Elleke Boehmer, Katy Iddiols and Robert Eaglestone. London and New York: Continuum, 2009. 159-172.
- May, Brian. "J.M. Coetzee and the Question of the Body." *Modern Fiction Studies* 47.2 (2001): 391-420.
- McHale, Brian. "What was Postmodernism?" *Electronic Book Review*. 20. Dec. 2007. Web. 16 June 2012.
<<http://www.electronicbookreview.com/thread/fictionspresent/tense>>.
- Morgan, Peter E. "Foe's Defoe and *La Jeune Née*: Establishing a Metaphorical Referent for the Elided Female Voice." *CRITIQUE: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 35.2 (1994): 81-96.
- Nashef, Hania A.M. *The Politics of Humiliation in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee*. New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2009.
- Ndebele, Njabu. "Turkish Tales, and Some Thoughts on S.A. Fiction." Rev. of *Anatolian Tales*, by Yasher Kemal. *Staffrider* 6.1 (1984): 24-25, 42-48.
- Nicol, Bran. "Introduction: What We Talk About When We Talk About Postmodernism." *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel: A Reader*. Ed. Bran Nicol. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2002. 1-12.
- "Nightingale." BBC Nature Wildlife. BBC, n.d. Web. 20 Dec. 2012.
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/life/Nightingale>>.
- Olsen, Lance. "The Presence of Absence: Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*." *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 16.2 (1985): 47-60.
- Owens, Colm and Simon Dein. "Conversion Disorder: the Modern Hysteria." *Advances In Psychiatric Treatment* 12 (2006): 152-157. Web. 15 Oct. 2012. <<http://apt.rcpsych.org/content/12/2/152.full.pdf+html>>.
- Plato. *The Republic*. 380 BCE?. Trans. Desmond Lee. 1955. 2nd ed. London and New York: Penguin, 2007.
- Post, Robert M. "The Noise of Freedom: J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*." *CRITIQUE: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 30.3 (1989): 143-54.
- Poyner, Jane. *J.M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship*. Farnham and Burlington: Ashgate, 2009.
- Probyn, Fiona. "J. M. Coetzee: Writing With/Out Authority." *Jouvert: A Journal*

Of Postcolonial Studies 7.1 (2002). Web. 2 Dec. 2012.
<<http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v7is1/probyn.htm>>.

"Robinson Crusoe 1719 1st edition." Title Page of *Robinson Crusoe*, 1st ed. (1719), by Daniel Defoe. Wikimedia Commons. n.d. Web. 15 Dec. 2012.
<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robinson_Cruose_1719_1st_edit_ion.jpg>. JPG file.

Rich, Adrienne. "Diving Into the Wreck." *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New, 1940-1984*. New York: Norton, 2002. 101-103.

Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World*. 1985. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.

Sim, Stuart. Introduction. *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*. Ed. Stuart Sim. London: Routledge, 2011. viii-x.

Slemon, Stephen. "Post-Colonial Allegory and the Transformation of History." *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 21 (1988): 157-168.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" 1988. *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 24-28.

-----, "Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's *Foe* Reading Defoe's *Crusoe/Roxana*." *English in Africa* 17.2 (1990): 1-23.

Tiffin, Helen. "Post-colonial Literatures and Counter-discourse." *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 95-98.

"Torture." *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. Oxford: OUP, 1989.

Van Zanten Gallagher, Susan. "Torture and the Novel: J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians*." *Contemporary Literature* XXIX.2 (1988): 277-285.

Watson, Stephen. "Speaking: J.M. Coetzee." *Speak* 1.3 (1987): 21-14.

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

Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. Routledge: London & New York, 2003.

8) Index

- abjection42, 105, 106, 107
- absence ..27, 30, 40, 42, 43, 52, 56, 62, 78, 80, 84, 96, 97, 102, 105, 107, 110, 114
- aesthetics8, 9, 20, 31
- allegory ..20, 21, 25, 33, 44, 45, 46, 59, 60, 61, 62, 64, 65, 67, 69, 73, 93, 110, 111
- "Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?" . .6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 20, 32, 39, 55, 103
- anti-illusionism24, 25
- Apartheid18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 29, 59, 60, 61, 92, 93, 116
- Attridge, Derek2, 18, 20, 25, 27, 31, 32, 34, 44, 56, 101
- Attwell, David .2, 18, 19, 20, 21, 29, 31, 36, 38, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 61, 62, 65, 66, 70, 71, 81, 85, 89, 93, 96, 97, 101, 104, 110, 111, 112, 115
- Barthes, Roland11, 70, 71
- body ...2, 26, 27, 29, 30, 39, 40, 41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 58, 65, 69, 70, 72, 73, 74, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 85, 86, 87, 89, 101, 102, 103, 104, 106, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117
- Boehmer, Elleke14
- Breton, André51
- Cartesian subject15, 38, 52, 56
- Cavafy, C. P.67, 90
- Chapman, Michael16, 18, 21
- colonialism 2, 13, 14, 17, 20, 29, 30, 33, 34, 36, 37, 40, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 48, 50, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 93, 94, 97, 108, 109, 111, 112, 114
- defamiliarisation26, 30, 41, 106, 117
- Defoe, Daniel2, 88, 90, 91, 94, 96, 102, 103, 112, 114
- Derrida, Jacques23
- desire . 8, 15, 21, 27, 37, 42, 50, 51, 52, 65, 68, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 86, 92, 101, 102, 103, 104, 107
- Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*22, 24, 31, 59, 60, 78
- doxa11, 12, 30, 37, 66, 117
- During, Simon16, 17, 18, 27
- Eckstein, Barbara63, 75, 76, 79, 80
- écriture feminine*49, 50, 102
- Enlightenment5, 14, 95
- female coloniser ...37, 38, 40, 44, 47, 54, 93
- Foe*89, 91, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117
- Gordimer, Nadine19, 20, 118
- grand narrative . .4, 5, 6, 10, 13, 16, 17, 21, 26, 35, 37, 59, 66, 67, 87, 97, 99
- Head, Dominic 1, 17, 19, 25, 27, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 37, 38, 43, 44, 46, 47, 48, 58, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 66, 67, 70, 72, 76, 84, 85, 86, 87, 90, 91, 92, 93, 96, 98, 99, 102, 103, 106, 107, 109, 110, 112, 114, 117
- historiographic metafiction91
- history 2, 3, 4, 5, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 26, 29, 35, 37, 39, 40, 41, 43, 45, 50, 53, 56, 59, 61, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 69, 72, 73, 75, 81, 85, 87, 90, 91, 92, 97, 101, 109, 110, 112, 114, 117
- Huggan, Graham19, 93, 108, 109
- Hughes, Conrad Lawrence Marquard 26, 31, 43, 44, 45, 51, 75, 79, 103, 104
- Hutcheon, Linda ...3, 10, 11, 12, 15, 18, 25, 30, 33, 61, 62, 91, 116
- In the Heart of the Country* ..29, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 54, 55, 57
- irony14, 33, 64, 100
- Jolly, Rosemary59, 60, 67, 68, 69
- Kristeva, Julia49, 105, 106
- Lacan, Jacques34, 40, 49
- Life & Times of Michael K*19, 21, 92
- little narrative6, 14
- Lyotard, Jean-François ...4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 16, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 27, 30, 32, 38, 39, 55, 78, 99, 103
- Marais, Michael92

- May, Brian27, 50, 51, 52, 53, 56, 80, 81, 82, 83, 87
- metanarrative1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 14, 17, 21, 26, 27, 30, 36, 41, 45, 46, 47, 48, 56, 57, 61, 63, 74, 78, 83, 92, 93, 94, 102
- metaphysics36, 51
- modernism8, 9, 10, 17, 18, 81
- parody12, 14, 33, 45, 49
- pastiche34, 38
- pastoral30, 55, 66, 67, 86
- phallogocentrism . .40, 47, 48, 49, 100, 102, 112, 113
- Philomela108, 109
- plaasroman30, 55, 86
- postcolonial . .13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 50, 61, 62, 73, 87, 93, 99, 110
- postmodern2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29, 30, 31, 33, 37, 38, 46, 60, 61, 62, 63, 65, 71, 78, 83, 91, 94, 99, 100, 103, 110, 112
- postmodernism 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 27, 30, 39, 61, 62, 78, 87, 91, 116
- Poyner, Jane30, 34, 41, 44, 110
- Probyn, Fiona34, 38, 49, 94, 111, 114
- progress5, 17, 61, 86
- rape30, 31, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 108
- realism6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 55, 60, 62, 65, 78, 90, 99, 102, 103
- Rich, Adrienne113
- Robinson Crusoe* ...88, 90, 91, 94, 101, 112
- Roxana: The Fortunate Mistress* .90, 91, 92, 112
- Scarry, Elaine75, 76, 77, 78
- Schreiner, Olive93
- sexuality . .42, 45, 46, 50, 92, 103, 104, 107
- Shklovsky, Victor26, 106
- silence 2, 10, 42, 59, 60, 68, 70, 74, 81, 82, 83, 88, 89, 91, 93, 98, 100, 104, 105, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 113, 115
- Slemon, Stephen61, 110
- South Africa ...1, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 25, 27, 29, 40, 44, 45, 59, 60, 61, 62, 89, 92, 93, 111, 116
- Soweto Riots18, 44, 62
- Spivak, Gayatri15, 16, 83, 94, 105, 111
- subalterity 2, 15, 16, 17, 27, 83, 84, 93, 114
- substantiality ...19, 101, 102, 103, 104, 112
- supplement and rivalry ...23, 24, 35, 60, 91, 105
- surrealism51, 53, 112
- the canon90, 91, 92
- "The Novel Today"22, 23, 24
- the Other 2, 5, 9, 15, 16, 17, 20, 22, 27, 28, 31, 32, 42, 44, 45, 47, 48, 54, 56, 58, 59, 60, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 71, 72, 73, 76, 78, 80, 83, 85, 86, 87, 88, 93, 101, 105, 106, 107, 110, 111, 112, 114
- The Postmodern Condition* 1, 4, 5, 6, 30, 99
- Tiffin, Helen13, 14, 16, 17, 93
- torture 2, 58, 59, 60, 62, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 73, 74, 75, 76, 78, 79, 80, 83, 84
- transcendence2, 20, 26, 51, 52, 80
- truth .1, 2, 5, 17, 22, 23, 26, 32, 55, 56, 59, 63, 69, 70, 74, 76, 84, 94, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 117
- universalism1, 5, 10, 14, 16, 17, 25, 35, 36, 37, 41, 48, 50, 56, 58, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70, 76, 78, 94, 99, 102, 103, 111, 117
- Waiting for the Barbarians*58, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 97, 118
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig6

Zusammenfassung

Obwohl postmoderne Literatur gerne als apolitisch betrachtet wird, so handelt es sich, zumindest im Fall des Nobelpreisträgers J.M. Coetzee, um ein eindeutiges Vorurteil. Für Coetzee, dessen schriftstellerische Tätigkeit über weite Strecken während der Südafrikanischen Apartheid stattfand, bedeutete postmodernes Schreiben zu dieser Zeit tatsächlich eine Möglichkeit, die Autorität von Literatur im Rahmen eines oppressiven politischen Regimes zu bewahren. Während Realismus sich, in seinen Augen, den Diskursen von Geschichte und Geschichtsschreibung unterordnet, ermöglicht postmodernes Schreiben die Chance, die Aufmerksamkeit der Lesenden auf die Repräsentationsebene an sich zu lenken (Coetzee, „The Novel Today“ 3).

Coetzee's Romane sind daher prinzipiell gekennzeichnet von einer „incredulity towards metanarratives“ (Lyotard, *Postmodern* 11), dem übergreifenden Kennzeichen postmoderner Literatur. Metanarrative können generell, Lyotards Auffassung folgend, als jene Geschichten definiert werden, die einen umfassenden Wahrheitsanspruch für sich geltend machen, allerdings tatsächlich auf Machtstrukturen basieren (35). Um diese aufzuzeigen, bedient Coetzee sich dem Körpermotiv, wobei die Funktion des Körpers in seinen Romanen, im weitesten Sinne, am besten mit Viktor Shklovskys Konzept der Defamiliarisierung skizziert werden kann: „to make objects 'unfamiliar', to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception“ („Art as Technique“ 12).

Auf inhaltlicher Ebene wiederum legen Coetzees ProtagonistInnen eine intensive Preokkupation mit dem Körper an den Tag: Während die eigene Korporealität meist als hinderlich empfunden wird, so wird der Körper des Anderen wiederum als Objekt der Faszination dargestellt, das es zu besitzen oder und entziffern gilt – ein Wunsch, an dem alle ProtagonistInnen allerdings scheitern. In *In the Heart of the Country*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* und *Foe* wird der Andere Körper demnach insofern zu einem Instrument der Negation von Metanarrativen, als er seine Bedeutung niemals preisgibt. Stattdessen stellt er eine ständige, gleichsam beinahe unübersehbare, und kontinuierlich

enigmatische Präsenz dar, welche nicht in das diskursive Weltbild der ProtagonistInnen eingegliedert werden kann, und dadurch deren Anspruch auf Universalität negiert. Dieser postmoderne Ansatz ermöglicht es Coetzee, auf die Instabilität von Bedeutungssystemen an sich hinzuweisen, und dadurch, im besten Fall, seine eigene Skepsis gegenüber Metanarrativen auf die Lesenden zu transferieren. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird diese Dynamik anhand von *In the Heart of the Country* (1976), *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), und *Foe* (1986) demonstriert.

Curriculum Vitae

Name	Lisa Edelbacher
Geburtsdatum	19. 07. 1987
Staatsbürgerschaft	Österreich
E-Mail	lisa.edelbacher@gmail.com

Ausbildung

Seit Oktober 2006	Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Universität Wien
Oktober 2006 - November 2011	Studium der Publizistik und Kommunikationswissenschaft an der Universität Wien, mit Bakk.phil abgeschlossen
Oktober 2008 - Januar 2009	Erasmus-Studienaufenthalt an der University of Nottingham, Großbritannien
September 2005 - Juli 2006	Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz
September 1998 - Juli 2005	BG und BRG Mattersburg Matura mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg absolviert

Berufserfahrung

Seit Oktober 2010	Sachbearbeiterin beim Österreichischen Austauschdienst (OeAD-GmbH), Abteilung Erasmus-Referat Wien Betreuung von Studierenden im Rahmen des Erasmus- Programms für europäische Mobilität (Studienaufenthalte und studienbezogene Praktika), Beratung und Unterstützung der hochschuleigenen International Offices bei der Durchführung von Erasmus, Stipendienauszahlungen, Übersetzungstätigkeiten
August 2010	Praktikum beim Österreichischen Austauschdienst (OeAD-GmbH) Recherche für eine Gender-Statistik des BMWF, GutachterInnensuche für EZA-Stipendienprojekte
November 2009 - März 2010	Barista in der Coffeeshop Company Schärf
Oktober 2008 - Januar 2009	Praktikum an der University of Nottingham, Department of German Studies Lehrtätigkeit (Wöchentliche Kurse "Deutsche Konversation" und "Österreichische Kultur- und Landeskunde")
Juli - September 2006 & 2007	Au Pair in Hilton Head, South Carolina, US