

TELLING STORIES

Invasion and Isolation in J. M. Coetzee's *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*



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Chapter 1

In this chapter I will provide an introduction to J. M. Coetzee and his works as well as a historical background for South Africa. In addition to this, I will give an explication of the relevant terms and some theoretical approaches. At the end of the chapter my thesis statement will be announced.

J. M. Coetzee: An introduction

The white South African author J. M. Coetzee has, despite his reluctant and taciturn manner, made quite an imprint on contemporary literature. Twice a Booker Prize winner (1983 and 1999), and having received perhaps the most prestigious award of all, the Nobel Prize of Literature in 2003, in addition to a number of other prizes, it is safe to say that Coetzee's novels have made an undebatable contribution to world literature. Coetzee's works are usually not very long, and consequently, every word becomes all the more central. It is on *words* and *meanings* Coetzee places his emphasis, and more importantly, on the *ambiguities* found in these.

Growing up in an English-speaking Afrikaans family in Cape Town and Worcester in South Africa during the height of the apartheid era, John Maxwell Coetzee (1940) faced problems of identification at an early age. As he explains in his autobiographical novel *Boyhood*:

Because they speak English at home, because he always comes first in English at school, he thinks of himself as English. Though his surname is Afrikaans, though his father is more Afrikaans than English, though he himself speaks Afrikaans without an English accent, he could not pass for a moment as an Afrikaner (Coetzee, 1998, 124).

Despite the fact that Coetzee as a child saw himself as English, he felt excluded from complete identification in a country controlled by a regime founded on racial and cultural distinctions. His upbringing included racial stereotyping, but the notion that the English were "good", or that the Coloured were handy because they were uneducated, came into conflict with the world as he experienced it. Contradictions such as these might have influenced Coetzee's interest in, and questioning of, meaning and expectations.

Boyhood depicts Coetzee's problematic and ambiguous relationship to his parents. He blames them for having made him *unnatural*: "He is grateful to his mother for protecting him from his father's normality, that is to say, from his father's occasional blue-eyed rages and threats to beat him. At the same time he is angry with his mother for turning him into

something unnatural, something that needs to be protected if it is to continue to live” (8). His mother is at once “the rock on which he stands” (35) and the cause of his abnormality; his father is partly absent, serving in the war, something that contributes to making their relationship awkward and distanced. These experiences seem to have informed Coetzee’s works, as many of his novels deal with problematic parent/child relationships and in these cases the complete absence of one parent. This is found in novels such as *Dusklands* (the Vietnam Project), *In the Heart of the Country*, *Life and Times of Michael K*, *Age of Iron*, *The Master of Petersburg* and *Disgrace*.

After finishing his BA Honours in English and Mathematics in 1961, Coetzee moved to London where he worked for a while as a computer engineer. His experiences from his time in England are depicted in his other autobiographical novel *Youth* (2002). Pervading the text is the protagonist’s eagerness to put South Africa behind him, but at the same time it is clear that this task is impossible: South Africa always remains an inescapable past which cannot be erased by crossing oceans or national borders.

In 1965 Coetzee relocated to the University of Texas where he began working on a PhD on Beckett. It was here he started writing his first novel *Dusklands* which was published in South Africa in 1974, two years after his return to South Africa, where he worked as a professor of English Literature at the University of Cape Town. The novel is divided into two parts, “the Vietnam Project” and “the Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee”. In “the Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee”, Coetzee self-reflects by using his own identity and his family’s history to present a version of South African history. His interest in history and metafiction¹ is thus established as early as with his first novel. Coetzee’s second novel *In the Heart of the Country* was published in 1977 and addresses issues of gender as well as the colonial experience of South Africa. Originally the novel was written in both English and Afrikaans (English in thought, Afrikaans in dialogue), but upon its publication outside South Africa, Coetzee had to translate the Afrikaans parts into English. *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) was the novel that would grant Coetzee international recognition. Following this, *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) won the Booker Prize, establishing Coetzee as one of the world’s greatest novelists of today. His other novels include *Foe* (1986), a response to, or a re-imagining of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), where the female protagonist Susan Barton makes an attempt at telling her own story; *Age of Iron* (1990) which deals with apartheid South Africa on its deathbed; *The Master of Petersburg* (1994), a highly

1 I will provide a definition of metafiction or ‘narcissistic’ narrative later in this chapter.

metafictive novel featuring Fyodor Dostoevsky, which can be read as a reaction to Coetzee's loss of his 23-year old son; *Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life* (1997); *Disgrace* (1999), which offers a bleak outlook on post-apartheid South Africa; *Youth: Scenes from Provincial Life II* (2002), *Elizabeth Costello* (2003); *Slow Man* (2005); and *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007). His later works have a more essayistic tendency, and as the author protagonist of *Diary of a Bad Year* who has some close resemblances to Coetzee himself puts it: "now the critics voice a new refrain. At heart he is not a novelist after all, they say, but a pedant who dabbles in fiction" (Coetzee, 2007, 191). This can be seen as Coetzee's answer to his critics. On the surface, works such as *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year* can come across as a collection of dictative essays where Coetzee introduces his own opinions through his protagonists. What Coetzee actually does in these novels, is setting the stage for a debate between the characters, and his own opinions need not be that of the protagonists (nor any of the characters for that matter). Again we encounter Coetzee's emphasis on the problem of meaning, and how one scene can be interpreted in many different ways. Coetzee's style has doubtlessly changed from the publication of his earlier works and until today. His works have always been metafictional more or less, but these later works, where the protagonist becomes almost impossible to separate from Coetzee himself, seem only to underline the fact that it is indeed not him voicing these opinions, as flaws and weaknesses within the different views are pointed out and brought into the light.

Coetzee not only has the renown of a great novelist, he is also considered an important literary critic and scholar. His many essays include everything from cricket and animal rights to censorship and the literary traditions of South Africa. As an interview object, Coetzee is far from ideal. Most of the time he lets his novels speak for themselves and refuses to comment about them in much depth. A correspondence interview by Philip R Wood demonstrates this reluctance in Coetzee. Wood poses questions which take up the space of several pages, whereas Coetzee's answers can be as short as one line (Wood, 1994, 181-195). Further, Coetzee did not collect any of his Booker prizes, contributing to his reputation of being an arrogant intellectual. Coetzee himself has always been critical of the novelist who becomes the "guru", and a major problem in his novels is often that of meaning and interpretation, thus it would be wrong of him to impose a specific reading or interpretation onto his works. Similar to how he sets the stage for debate in some of his works, this is also what he hopes to produce in his readers.

It is interesting to note how Coetzee often employs a confessional style in his novels, in many ways contrasting his own reluctance to speak. With the appearance of his

autobiographical novels *Boyhood* and *Youth*, Coetzee seemed to finally lift the curtain about his personal life, and he does this without romanticizing his former self. In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee declares that “truth is something that comes in the process of writing” (Coetzee, 1992, 18), thus it can seem as if Coetzee focusses more on the truth of fiction and the fictionality of truth, rather than the truth of reality, rendering his own self-criticism harmless in that sense. Quoting Nietzsche, Coetzee states: “we have art so that we shall not die of the truth. In South Africa there is now too much truth for art to hold – truth by the bucketful, truth that overwhelms and sways every act of imagination” (99). Perhaps this bounty of truth is finally what contributed to driving Coetzee away from South Africa; in 2002 he moved to Adelaide, Australia, where he was appointed honorary research fellow and is now a citizen.

Theory and criticism

J. M. Coetzee’s writing fits into different paradigms of literary studies and theories. Writing in the postmodern era, one can with profit interpret his novels in the light of deconstruction and poststructuralism. Writing from a position of postcolonialism, in terms of growing up in a (former) colony, it is always of relevance to see how colonialism constitutes a backdrop for Coetzee’s works. These different literary approaches cannot be entirely separated from each other in Coetzee’s fiction. Deconstruction and postcolonial theory have certain emphases in common, such as blurring boundaries and deconstructing binary oppositions. As most writers, Coetzee is critical of being put into a box of “postmodernism”, “postcolonialism”, or even as a (South African) writer. One of Coetzee’s foremost critics, David Attwell, says the following:

For although Coetzee might well be described as working within the culture of postmodernism, he certainly does not do so in the spirit of abandonment that seems to typify much of what goes under the name. Rather, reflexivity here is a mode of self-consciousness which, informed by Coetzee’s learning, is directed at understanding the conditions – linguistic, formal, historical, and political – governing the writing of fiction in the contemporary South Africa. (Coetzee, 1992, 3).

He goes on to say that the influences of European modernism and linguistics takes on a special shape when encountering the colonial history combined with the situation of apartheid, constituting “a form of postcoloniality felt on the bone”. Here it is interesting to note Coetzee’s diversity as a novelist. He is clearly both informed by, and attracted to, the European literary tradition, but at the same time he feels the need to find a different kind of

literature for the South African story. This makes his fiction stand out as experimental in form and startling in content, while at the same time having a familiar feel.

Coetzee has been accused by critics and fellow South African writers alike for attempting to distance himself from the historical context of the country. According to Susan VanZanten Gallagher, there is a tendency in South Africa to label writers by how their works “fit into the political struggle” (Gallagher, 1991, 11), and here one finds a strong bias in favour of realism as the correct mode of speaking against apartheid and oppression. Nadine Gordimer, who is perhaps the most famous contemporary South African writer, has on several occasions criticized Coetzee for dealing with the politics of the country through allegory and metafiction rather than social realism. Gallagher continues to argue that novelists are judged on the basis of how many of their works have been censored or banned (8), which is meant to reflect upon their involvement and/or sympathy with the struggle. As Coetzee himself puts it: “I regard it as a badge of honor to have had a book banned in South Africa, and even more of an honor to have been acted against punitively” (Coetzee, 1992, 298). Having failed to obtain this honor, he admits that his “books have been too indirect in their approach, too rarefied, to be considered a threat to the order” (*ibid*). In many ways Coetzee’s novels may come across as unobtrusive, yet his works have a tendency of getting under the reader’s skin. Despite the *honor* connected with being banned or censored, this *honor* says little about a work’s power or ability to move the reader. Thus Coetzee’s “unrealistic” approach to themes of oppression does not indicate that his works lack the ability to provoke debate. The amount of debate raised by some of his novels, such as *Disgrace*, shows that Coetzee is successful at bringing sensitive issues in South African society into the light. In that respect, it is a loss for the South African nation that Coetzee has made an Australian of himself and no longer contributes to the political debate in South Africa through his works.

To return to the question of historical relevance, it seems beside the point to argue that a work of art that does not work within realism is equivalent with not dealing with history. Numerous articles have been written in Coetzee’s defence following the accusations towards him. Gallagher’s whole volume, *A Story of South Africa* (1991), is, as its subtitle proclaims, an analysis of “*J. M. Coetzee’s Fiction in Context*”. In her work, she argues how Coetzee through his rejection of realism and through his use of allegory manages to deal with history in a way that is relevant to the South African context. She emphasizes how Coetzee’s novels speak back to the colonial history of South Africa.

Samuel Durrant is another critic who underlines Coetzee’s connection to history. In his article “Bearing Witness to Apartheid: J. M. Coetzee’s Inconsolable Works of Mourning”

(1999), Durrant investigates to what degree Coetzee's novels help people come to terms with the experience of apartheid. The article emphasizes how literature can offer an alternative way of working through collective history, and Durrant uses *Waiting for the Barbarians* to show how the body tells a story. Referring to Jacques Derrida, a distinction is made between 'healthy' and 'unhealthy' mourning, or what Paul de Man calls 'true mourning', which relates strongly to remembering and forgetting: "Successful mourning enables the past to be assimilated or digested; one remembers in order to forget. By contrast *true mourning confronts* an indigestible past, a past that can never be fully remembered or forgotten" (Durrant, 437, emphasis added). Thus Durrant can conclude as follows: "Whereas a *realist account* of apartheid would turn apartheid into a digestible historical narrative, allowing us to mourn and then to move on, Coetzee's novels resist this process of verbalization and relentlessly force us to confront the brute, indigestible materiality of the suffering engendered by apartheid" (460, emphasis added). In Durrant's argument, we find a direct response to those who accuse Coetzee of not dealing with South Africa's history of apartheid in a valuable way.

Over time there has been a shift in focus on Coetzee's fiction. Earlier critics, such as Gallagher, have emphasized the allegorical aspects of Coetzee's novels, whereas post-apartheid writings and criticisms seem to some extent to have moved beyond these notions and entered the realm of metafiction and deconstruction as important points-of-departure. Coetzee's metafiction, or what some refer to as narrative narcissism, has been present throughout his oeuvre, and this trait seems to become more and more apparent. My definition of these related terms draws on Linda Hutcheon's: "Modes and Forms of Narrative Narcissism: Introduction of a Typology" (1996). A metaphysical or narcissistic novel is a self-reflective novel which comments back on the process of its own creation. It has been argued that narcissism is innate in the genre of the novel itself in its need to remind the readers that they are reading fiction. It presents its own creative process, emphasizing man's exercise of language and meaning. This is particularly interesting when considering Coetzee.

The metafictional work also makes special demands of the reader. Not only do the readers have to recognize intertext and genre references, they also have to recognize new codes in the novel. Upon reading metafiction, the text demands a hermeneutical way of reading, where the reader also participates in the writing process. In Coetzee's novels, the protagonists are often readers and/or writers themselves, and make stories through their reading and writing. The post-structuralist critic J. Hillis Miller in "Line", an excerpt from the article "Ariadne's Thread" in the anthology *Narratology*, talks about the ambiguity found in

the 'line' of the narrative. When reading, we read in a linear way, but the meanings found move in a labyrinth, and neither the writer nor his/her foremost critic(s) will ever know all the possible meanings. Thus the task for the reader of metaphysical literature is impossible. I will return to a closer reading of Hillis Miller in my chapter on *In the Heart of the Country*.

Metafiction is often preoccupied with a question of identity, but it seems impossible to answer who you really are. Not only is there an ambiguity in meaning, there is also one in identity. This is connected to another trait found in narcissistic literature: the blurring of role boundaries. Examples of this in Coetzee is the reversal of roles, shifting power balance, and a play with characterization.

As early as *Dusklands* (1974), we are introduced to this narrative strategy in Coetzee, where the author/narrator/translator/protagonist all share the same last name, and their identities seem to overlap somewhat. Following his debut, almost all of Coetzee's protagonists have been writers, or are at least narrators of their story, and in *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007) the author/narrator/protagonist identifies himself as the author of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Self-reflexivity as found in Coetzee comes across as self-critical. Coetzee admits to going back to look with a critical eye on his writings, and he also seems to speak back to his fictional works through his critical works. In *White Writing* (1988) Coetzee talks about the tradition of white writing in South Africa, as it has been developed over time. His novel *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) seems in many ways to be a response to the white male tradition. Further, *Doubling the Point*, a collection of articles and interviews compiled by David Attwell represents an interesting companion to Coetzee's fictional and critical works. I would also like to argue that Coetzee's most recent novel *Diary of a Bad Year* constitutes an important commentary on his earlier themes. Thus Coetzee's self-referential traits are not confined within each work of fiction, but transcend them and negotiate between them.

Michela Canepari-Labib's *Old Myths – Modern Empires* (2005) attempts to read Coetzee's novels first and foremost through the scope of postcolonialism. Her project is similar to Gallagher's, in that it acknowledges Coetzee's connection to the historical context of South Africa, but her emphasis leans towards a deconstructive reading and seeing as her work is of a more recent date, she covers his later works as well. To an extent, Canepari-Labib deals with the issues I find to be of great interest when reading Coetzee: the themes *isolation* and *invasion*. Canepari-Labib does not investigate the relationship between them per se, and her analysis is mostly concerned with seeing them separately, but her reading of the novels contributes to shedding some light on these problems. The problems surrounding these themes will be my main emphases throughout my thesis.

Colonial/Postcolonial theory

Whether one calls it postcolonial or post-colonial, the theory of postcoloniality is as diverse and complex as the countries it has affected. In this paper I will use the term postcolonial to refer to the theory of postcolonialism, and the term post-colonial when referring to a country liberated from colonialism. Postcolonial literature and theory manifest themselves differently from country to country, but the post-colonial experience itself ensures that they have certain elements in common. Ania Loomba stresses that “if it is uprooted from specific locations, ‘postcoloniality’ cannot be meaningfully investigated” (1998, 19), thus it is important when studying postcolonial literature to make distinctions according to place. In John McLeod’s terms, an important distinction to make is that between colonialism and postcolonialism (2000, 32). Colonialism includes, amongst other things, the internalization of certain forms of *representation* through language. It is not given that these internalizations magically disappear when a country becomes independent: “Colonialism’s *representation, reading practices* and *values* are not so easily dislodged” (*ibid.*). McLeod goes on to say that postcoloniality is achieved through challenging the assumptions imposed by colonialism. In literature the “given” truth is questioned in multiple ways: the idea of the “empire writes back” is one of the many examples, found in Coetzee’s *Foe*. Another is rewriting the myths imposed by the oppressors, visible in *In the Heart of the Country*. As has already been established, Coetzee questions “truth” and meaning in his novels as well as in his articles and essays. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee investigates the silence of torture and its victims, as well as examining the language of authority, which in this novel does not quite correspond with an “objective” perception of the truth. The myth of the empty land in South Africa was central to justifying the Afrikaners’ right to the land, and this led to the *silencing* of the Other. In a number of his works, Coetzee deals with the silent Other, most literally so in *Foe*, where the black Friday has had his tongue cut out. Coetzee’s works then are central to writing back, or to the rewriting taking place in postcolonial South Africa. As is visible, reading and writing are important parts of both imposing colonial values onto someone else, and also of freeing oneself from these and finding a new identity.

Ania Loomba points out how the term ‘colonial’ wipes out the history of a place before colonization (17). Loomba shows how the term itself, as it is defined in the *OED*, illustrates this, being described as a settlement in new country which maintains bonds to the parent state. What is significant, however, is how “[t]his definition, quite remarkably, avoids any reference to people other than the colonisers, people who might already have been living in those places where colonies were established. Hence it evacuates the word ‘colonialism’ of

any implication of an encounter between peoples, or of conquest and domination”(1-2). Thus we find that the term itself participates in the “colonial” act of silencing the Other. The colonial mission has to a large extent silenced or given a new voice to the Other, a voice which to begin with has not been theirs, and whose aim it has been to impose a set identity unto the Other. Often this comes in terms of binary oppositions, where the identity enforced upon the Other is the negative opposite to the colonial masters. A myth that justifies the exploitation of the oppressed is created. According to John McLeod, colonial writing of the Other relates to representation and interpellation: “Colonialism, then, is an operation of discourse, and as an operation of discourse it interpellates colonial subjects by incorporating them in a system of representation./ ‘interpellation’ means ‘calling’; the idea is that ideology calls us, and we turn and recognize who we are” (37). Thus both the colonizer and the colonized are under ideology’s sway, responding and gaining identity and a sense of self through its call. The individual is rendered powerless against ideology. However, there is also a certain sense of assent and dissent involved. If we consider Loomba’s argument, Gramsci’s theory of hegemony also has its place in the issues of imposed identity: “Hegemony is power achieved through a combination of coercion and consent”; one gains power over someone through “creating subjects who ‘willingly’ submit to being ruled” (29). This is connected through ideology in the following way: “Ideology is crucial in creating consent, it is the medium through which certain ideas are transmitted, and more importantly, held to be true” (*ibid.*). Thus yet again ideology comes to the aid of the colonizer and the possessors of power.

As I mentioned above, in the encounter between the colonizer and the Other, myths are created. The colonizers write the myth of the Other, and Coetzee points out an example of this in *White Writing*, showing how the writing of the ‘Hottentot’ as amongst other things lazy and idle contributes to creating Othering and racism. By European standards, Coetzee goes on to say, being idle was considered ungodly (20), and here we find the entrance of ideology. Because the Europeans brought with them an ideology of hard work and labour, the natives fell short of this paradigm. This ultimately set them apart as embodying a vice which could infect the Europeans too if they did not maintain their superiority. An important part of creating a myth of the Other was to ensure a separate *unitary* identification for the colonizers vis á vis the colonized. In *Beginning Postcolonialism*, John McLeod introduces a number of critics on the subject, amongst others Homi Bhabha who is one of the world’s foremost contemporary postcolonial critics. According to Bhabha, there is a doubleness in this separateness between the colonizer and the colonized. As we have seen, there is a desire to keep the colonized Other outside Western knowledge. However, there is also an attempt to

domesticate colonised subjects and abolish their radical ‘otherness’, bringing them *inside* Western understanding through the Orientalist project of constructing knowledge about them. The construction of ‘otherness’ is thus split by the contradictory positioning of the colonised simultaneously inside and outside Western knowledge. (McLeod, 52-53).

Thus we can see that the aim for the writing of the Other is in part to make the Other knowable and “harmless”, possible to grasp and to put into a paradigm. But the distance is still maintained, because the “colonisers must never admit that other peoples are not really very different from themselves, as this would undercut the legitimacy of colonialism” (*ibid.*). The same we find in neo-colonial South Africa with the introduction of apartheid, where the cornerstone philosophy promotes separate development for separate “races” or “tribes”. Whereas the thought so far might not sound so bad, the problems start when one begins to consider the division of land and the idea of the “homelands”, a myth created by the South African government.

The idea of nation and what constitutes one, is central to postcolonial criticism. Similar to how the colonizer writes the myth of the Other, the myth of the nation is also *constructed*. The theory of the nation connects to geographical borders and how these are both connected and random. In terms of Africa, an important thing to note is how the borders of the African countries were drawn by the colonial masters, with no regard to the borders already set by the people living there, thus disrupting already advanced social and political structures (McLeod, 75). Centuries later, when the Afrikaans government of South Africa commenced the homeland policy, indigenous people were relocated to rural areas of the country based on where their homeland was *supposed to* be, where that specific tribe, according to the government, originated. However, this homeland policy did not send the Afrikaans back to the Netherlands nor the British back to England. The argument of the Afrikaans, that they are entitled to the land on the grounds that they have been in South Africa for 300 years or so, becomes devoid of meaning when it is placed next to the expulsion of the already marginalized peoples who are no more at home in the townships and inhospitable areas set aside for them than the white population would be. This constitutes what Etienne Balibar refers to as *internal racism*: “directed at those who live within the nation but are not deemed to belong to the imagined community of the national people due to their perceived ‘race’” (McLeod, 112). I will talk more about the question of race later in this section.

Benedict Anderson is another critic McLeod cites on the theory of the nation. He argues that a common language understood by all parties is central for the construction of the

nation (72). In South Africa, this has been problematic due to the ambiguous feelings invoked by Afrikaans. I will talk about this briefly in my section about South Africa below. Something to note, however, when talking about the construction of the South African nation, is how the notion of *unity*, of a unitary language, a unitary history, which under normal circumstances contributes to a feeling of unity within the nation, did the exact opposite. As we will see in my summary of South African history, the unitary history and language was reserved for the Afrikaans population. Today however, in the New South Africa, we can clearly see the attempts to create a unitary sense of identity through the creation of new national symbols. This includes a new flag, new monuments, and an acknowledgement of the diversity of cultures and languages. English has become the language negotiating between all the 11 official languages of South Africa. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has also been central in writing a new history for the country, allowing all the voices and stories of both the oppressor and the oppressed to be heard.

As we have seen, and as I will consider in more depth in my section on South Africa, nation is considered a *construct* in postcolonial theory. However, ideas which can contribute to constructing the nation, such as identity and race are also considered social *constructs* which have been imposed by ideology. The notion of identity and nation are often interdependent, and race and identity have a similar relationship. The construction of identity also involves the construction of the Other as we noted above. We are then faced with the question of *borders* and as McLeod argues, the “placing of imaginative borders between nations is fundamental to their existence, not least because borders divide the nation’s people from others outside” (74). Borders and constructedness recall the literary theory of *deconstruction*. Perhaps a product of postcolonial theory, it deals with issues of race, gender, class and binary oppositions as we find them in life as well as literature. Race is problematic; even today vast amounts of people are discriminated against on account of the colour of their skin. According to John McLeod, racism is “the *ideology* that upholds the discrimination against certain people on the grounds of perceived racial difference and claims these constructions of racial identity are true or natural” (110-111, emphasis added). McLeod continues by saying that the construction of race helps justifying certain political and social advantages, and this is very clear in the *baasskap*, or *boss-ship* of South African apartheid politics. In postcolonial theory, a distinction is made between ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’. The latter is not used for the same ends as the former, but is rather a means of describing diversity than to justify oppression.

If we consider South Africa in the light of postcolonial theory, their history of apartheid and neo-colonialism constitutes what Nicholas Visser refers to as ‘postcoloniality of a special type’ (1997). In his article with the same title, Visser is critical to the ‘centrist’ or ‘moderate’ version of postcolonialism found in South Africa. Pointing to David Attwell as a promoter of this special type of postcolonialism, Visser questions what remains in the theory after you extract Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak from it. His main problem with South African postcolonialism seems to be with the relationship between ‘race’ and ‘class’. Visser emphasizes the primacy of ‘race’ in South African postcolonial theory, which, he argues, has taken the place of ‘class’ found elsewhere. In his conclusion, Visser notes that the restoration of “those issues to their rightful and necessary place... is unlikely to be accomplished by any theoretical orientation prefixed by *post-*, whether hard or soft, strong or weak, excessive or moderate” (1997, 94). Whether we agree or disagree with Visser’s argument on how postcolonialism should be conceptualized in South Africa, he makes some important points concerning the role of race to the theory: “Postcolonial theorists may insist that racial identity is always constructed, but the identity constructed is always somehow racial” (86). His critique is that of the devaluation of class compared to race in South Africa, and the perhaps obsessive emphasis on race. We have already noted that postcolonialism will differ from place to place, depending on different experiences. Considering that South Africa is a country in which race has been the chief denominator, one can defend a postcolonialism which deals primarily with race. Coetzee attempts to distance himself from racial paradigms and stereotypes through making as few references as possible to colour of skin. However, racial distinctions seem impossible to evade altogether, and Coetzee in his writing is somewhat evasive in representing Black or Coloured voices.

Postcolonialism in South Africa is problematized further still in its relationship to race and class. According to Gillian Whitlock

The unique polarization and institutionalization of class and racial politics, and of apartheid and resistance, in South Africa have led some critics to argue that discourses of post-colonialism are inappropriately applied to literature written by whites. The hold of the post-colonial label on ‘white writing’ in the South African context is a particularly uneasy one. (1996, 67).

In this example, a reversed racism is found. The experience of apartheid and colonialism, though perhaps most keenly felt by non-whites, is a shared experience of the nation and should not be limited on racial grounds. Citing Tim Brennan, Whitlock includes into her article the idea that Nadine Gordimer and J. M. Coetzee are examples of writers who hold a

mediating role between the colonizer and the colonized, but are also placed within the category of the European Empire novel (66). Gordimer has always been clear on the fact that she considers herself part of the struggle, something which is hard to overlook when reading her novels. Coetzee has a different approach; his novels often portray the feelings of marginalization and estrangement caused by apartheid to people of any colour and background in South Africa. The role suggested by Brennan finds support in Bhabha's notion of the diaspora and hybrid identities. According to Bhabha, the border represents a place where "past and present, inside and outside no longer remain separated as binary oppositions but instead commingle and conflict" (McLeod, 217). New possibilities are found at the border; especially for notions of identification, and it is important to note that this new way of looking at identification rejects binary oppositions and moves away from old concepts of it. Coetzee's works offer an attempt to find new notions of identification. Both *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *In the Heart of the Country* undertake a border crossing in terms of identity. Magda crosses the border into the land of authority through authorship. The magistrate enters the territory of the Other. In one of Coetzee's later and most acclaimed works, one of the main characters realizes that the way she has been thinking about identity has been wrong and is no longer applicable to the New South Africa:

What if ... what if *that* is the price one has to pay for staying on? Perhaps that is how they look at it; perhaps that is how I should look at it too. They see me as owing something. They see themselves as debt collectors. Why should I be allowed to live here without paying? Perhaps that is what they tell themselves (*Disgrace*, 2000, 158).

Lucy, who is a white South African, shows in this passage that she is able to put herself into the position of the Other, of seeing herself through their eyes and in that sense be critical to herself as the "I". However, this can also be seen as the process of suppression, where Lucy is made Other by her rapists, and submits to their construction of her.

South Africa

South Africa. What was once the *Republiek Van Suid-Afrika* and apartheid is now Rainbow Nation. But is the new myth any truer than the ideology of apartheid? The utopia seems to have become a dystopia for the Afrikaans people. Having begun to declare their independence from the colonial rule of Great Britain as early as in 1910 through the creation of the Union, the Afrikaners seem to have taken a wrong turn somewhere. Through the apartheid regime the Afrikaans people continued oppressing and discriminating against the Black (African),

Coloured (mixed) and Indian population of South Africa. The National Party, mainly an Afrikaner nationalist party, won the 1948 election, ensuring the legal birth of apartheid. In the decades that followed, restrictions and laws were passed which made the border between the white 'masters' and the natives even larger. What experiences spurred this desire for utter isolation from the other peoples of South Africa?

The first Europeans to settle in South Africa were the Dutch in 1652. Originally intended as a garden which could supply the ships of the Dutch East India Company on their route East, Jan Van Riebeeck's settlement started out humbly populated and the settlers were discouraged from moving beyond the allocated area. According to Coetzee in his introduction to *White Writing*, this attempt was unsuccessful, despite the fact that the hinterland of the Cape settlement was "barren, inhospitable, and sparsely peopled by primitive Hottentots and Bushmen" (1988, 1). As settlers had to start making a living outside the Garden, they started moving beyond the parameters, invading the space of the natives, and putting their living conditions under pressure. Consequently the natives were forced out of their regular space, whereupon thefts and bloodshed ensued. The Dutch settlers, rather than seeing themselves as thieves of the land, considered the Bushmen and Hottentots to be villains, and they wrote the myth of the native as Other; as lazy and savage people who could hardly be counted among the race of men. But race was to become alpha and omega for the Boers. Consisting of mostly uneducated people, the Bible and especially the Old Testament became the Law; interpretation, however, was left to the men. The notion that their story resembled that of Moses and the Exodus soon turned into an idea that it was God's will that they should master this land. Thus their hunger for more space, more isolation, led to the Great Trek in 1835, which took them into Zulu territory and ultimately the Zulu Wars. Here 500 Boers defeated an army of 10000 Zulus. Until the end of apartheid, Afrikaners celebrated this victory, and considered it their national day.

However, the Afrikaners not only fought the natives for territory. When the British took an interest in South Africa in the end of the 18th century, the Dutch guarded what they considered their territory jealously. In 1806 the Cape became a British colony, and vast changes were introduced. As the Boers settled on the land, they made sure to keep a good distance to their neighbours. Unlike the British, they refrained from creating towns and villages which needed organizations and administrations (Kristiansen, 1996, 29), and the farms were ruled by the patriarch. In South African pastoral, two dream typographies dominated:

...a network of *boundaries* crisscrossing the surface of the land, marking off thousands of farms, each a separate kingdom ruled over by a benign patriarch... But there is a rival dream topography as well: of South Africa as a vast, empty, silent space, older than man, older than the dinosaurs whose bones lie embedded in its rocks, and destined to be vast, empty and unchanged long after man has passed from its face. (Coetzee, 1988, 6-7, emphasis added).

Clear lines can be drawn from this to the South Africa of today by considering something one cannot fail to notice upon visiting this country: the walls. You see them all over South Africa. Tall concrete walls crowned with barb wire to keep intruders away. They come in all shapes and sizes, and you see them everywhere. Fencing in expensive Johannesburg mansions, shops, cheap houses and hotels, and even the townships to keep them out of sight of humanity. Tomm Kristiansen traces the walls of South Africa back to the hedge Van Riebeeck planted in 1652, seeing it as a symbol of and a foreshadowing to apartheid with one aim: to keep the Others out (1996, 18). In *Doubling the Point* (1992), Coetzee also states that part of this “walling in” relates to keeping the unpleasant out of sight, to refuse to identify with the Other:

If people are starving, let them starve far away in the bush, where their thin bodies will not be a reproach. If they have no work, if they migrate to the cities, let there be roadblocks, let there be curfews, let there be laws against vagrancy, begging, and squatting, and let offenders be locked away so that no one has to hear or see them. If the black townships are in flames, let cameras be banned from them. (361).

Norwegian journalist and writer Tomm Kristiansen argues that because the Boers missed the Enlightenment as well as the many social changes occurring in Europe after leaving the Netherlands, they were far behind the British in their way of dealing with the natives (1996, 36). Anything but eager to share or relinquish their power to the colonial masters, the Boers quickly came into conflict with the new intruders. Instead of turning to farming as a means of making a living, the British created towns and villages where people could learn a trade or exchanged goods, and trading was not limited to whites only (38). During the 19th century, large deposits of both gold and diamonds were discovered, and conflicts ensued as to who had the rights to it all. Transvaal and the Orange Free State, both Afrikaner territories, were suddenly invaded by foreign investors and fortune hunters (55). The desire for wealth and power finally led to a series of wars between the British and the Afrikaans which took place in the years 1899-1902. The Boers lost the war, and in many ways the farming era ended for them, pushing them into the cities where they experienced poverty and unemployment. According to Coetzee, South African history, as it was

represented during the apartheid, located “the historically significant conflict as between Boer and Briton”, and consequently silenced and obliterated the strives between black and white (1988, 6). Despite loosing, the Anglo-Boer war lead to a new nationalistic unitary feeling for the Afrikaans, paving the way for the Nationalist Party’s 1948 election victory and the introduction of apartheid legislations.

There are several things to be said about the apartheid regime. In many ways it can be seen as what Fanon refers to as ‘Neo-colonialism’. This is found when the middle class of an allegedly post-colonial country exploits their superior education and power for continued oppression of the lower classes, following the pattern of colonialism (McLeod, 89). Another thing to note is how the *construction* of nation and the myth of the nation have been so central. Language is considered a defining feature of the nation (McLeod, 72), and the Afrikaans language, which is considered “child Dutch”, was the language the neo-colonial masters wished to be the common language of South Africa. To the Black and Coloured population, Afrikaans was considered the language of the oppressors. When the Afrikaans Medium Decree was introduced, a decree which meant that everyone had to be taught in Afrikaans in school, school children themselves took action, and started what was to be known as the Soweto uprising in 1976. However, this was far from the first protest against the apartheid regime. The Sharpeville Massacre of 1960 is the most known of the many attempts at peaceful protest which ended in bloodshed for unarmed civilians. Several political parties were banned and many of the most central anti-apartheid activists were either imprisoned at Robben Island, such as Nelson Mandela who later was to become the first black president; killed, such as Steve Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement; or exiled, such as ANC leader Oliver Tambo. Anyone who spoke out against the regime, or who had what the regime called “communist sympathies”, risked being banned. According to Gallagher, banning “imposes a wall of silence” around the banned person, and this person “may not write or publish anything, may not be quoted or cited in any publication..., may not communicate in any way with another banned person, is confined to a location...” (32). Banning, then, was the apartheid regime’s way of isolating their enemies completely.

Despite the government’s attempts to undermine the integrity of the ANC and other political opponents, the ANC continued fighting for the struggle, and the aim of achieving what the Freedom Charter of 1955 declared: “that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white”². Finally, in the end of the 1980s, a spark of hope was kindled. Negotiations

² <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/charter.html>. Accessed Dec 8th 2007.

ensued between the president P. W. Botha and Nelson Mandela, and were continued with the following president F. W. de Klerk, who later was to be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Nelson Mandela. According to Tomm Kristiansen, these changes occurred due to international pressure through amongst others, *isolation* politics (11) both in terms of economic sanctions, as well as sporting and cultural boycotts. These until now, last white presidents of South Africa, realized that apartheid had no future, South Africa could not continue in their state of isolation (13). Thus at the turn of the decade, several reforms were passed, including the unbanning of the anti-apartheid political parties and the release of political prisoners. In 1994 the New South Africa saw the light of day with their first democratically elected president Nelson Mandela, and the new Rainbow Flag. A consequence of the changes induced by the end of apartheid is that a lot of Afrikaans people now flee the country, feeling that it is no longer theirs. For Coetzee himself, this feeling of questionable citizenship was present as early as his childhood, perhaps touching upon a complex in the Afrikaans consciousness:

not everyone who lives in South Africa are South African, or not a proper South African./ The farm will never belong to him, he will never be more than a visitor... *I belong to the farm*: that is the furthest he is prepared to go, even in his most secret heart. But in his secret heart he knows what the farm in its way knows too: that Voëlfontein belongs to no one. The farm is greater than any of them. The farm exists from eternity to eternity. (*Boyhood*, 18, 96).

There is a tradition in South African literature where the farm represents, or is parallel to the country of South Africa itself. In his essay collection *White Writing*, Coetzee talks about how the *plaasroman* amongst others, have participated in justifying white land ownership and the construction of an inseparable bond between the Afrikaans man and the land. Thus his thoughts in *Boyhood* underline the need for the Afrikaner to *construct* a bond and a justification to a land he in his secret heart *knows* does not belong to him.

Definition of the terms ‘isolation’ and ‘invasion’

According to the *OED*, both the term ‘invasion’ and ‘isolation’ have several meanings which are applicable to different spheres in life. ‘Invasion’ can mean “the action of invading a country or territory as an enemy; an entrance or incursion with armed force; a hostile inroad”; “a harmful incursion of any kind, e.g. of the sea, of disease, moral evil, etc.”; “the spreading of pathogenic microorganisms or malignant cells that are already in the body to new sites”; “infringement by intrusion; encroachment upon the property, rights, privacy, etc. of any one. Esp. in phr. *invasion of privacy*”; “assault, attack (upon a person, etc.)”; and “the spread of a

plant or animal population into an area formerly free of the species concerned". As we can see, this term holds mostly negative meanings, suggesting on the one hand the spreading of moral degeneration and disease, and on the other, colonialism and intrusion on other people's lives. 'Isolation' can mean "the action of isolating; the fact or condition of being isolated or standing alone; separation from other things or persons; solitariness"; "the obtaining of a chemical element or compound as a separate substance"; "the complete separation of patients suffering from a contagious or infectious disease, or of a place so infected, from contact with other persons"; "the separation of a person or thing from its normal environment or context, either for purposes of experiment and study or as a result of its being, for some reason, set apart"; "a defence mechanism whereby a particular wish or thought loses emotional significance by being isolated from its normal context"; and "the limitation or prevention of interbreeding between groups of plants or animals by geographical, ecological, seasonal, or other factors, leading to the development of new species or varieties". This last meaning relates directly to the apartheid politics of South Africa. 'Isolation', then, also comes across as a negative term, but the isolation could be both voluntary or involuntarily. Common denominators found in the terms 'invasion' and 'isolation' are their relationship to disease, nation and space. Both appear to happen on a physical as well as a psychological level.

If we consider the term 'invasion', it covers the colonial aspects of Coetzee's writing, something that pervades several of his stories. Colonization relates to the "I": the seeing/perceiving "I" or "eye" of the colonizer, the one who sets the standard, who sees the *Other*, and makes the agenda through his or her own point-of-view. This can be connected to the role of the author or narrator. Thus writing itself can be seen as an act of colonization, of imposing one's authority through culture/meanings/language onto someone else.

In *In the Heart of the Country* the author/narrator is always changing the story. The problem of language is central in this work, as the narrator Magda finds herself unable to speak the master language and gain command over her servants. We find that she is always experimenting in her thoughts. The changing versions of her story can be seen as thought-experiments. Further, she is also guessing how things are, *invading*, so to speak, the nuptial bed of both her father and his new bride, as well as that of Hendrik and Klein-Anna. Her fantasies allow her to use the authorial imagination to write her versions of incidents. It is *her* story, and even if she lacks authority in the "real" world, in her story it is she who decides what is going on. Thus we find that she can as quickly kill her father as she can bring him back to life.

Waiting for the Barbarians offers colonial invasion in the literal sense, in addition to imposing ones meaning onto others. The plot evolves around a colonial frontier settlement. Here we find the outer invasion of Empire upon the place the story is set, in addition to a more symbolic one of Colonel Joll and the soldiers upon the settlement, even if they are all servants of Empire. The magistrate of the settlement attempts to invade the mind and soul of a barbarian girl through reading the marks on her body. Further, torture, which is a central theme in the novel, is also a form of invasion, an attempt to penetrate a person's mind. The colonialists "write" the natives as Other and barbarians, both in a symbolic and a literal way, this is especially visible when Colonel Joll writes "enemy" on the back of the natives, and then precedes to whip it off. Colonel Joll is convinced that to be a barbarian also constitutes being guilty, being untruthful and so forth, and he uses this to justify his torture. The magistrate, on the other hand, has a view of the natives which contradicts Joll's views. The natural response to this is for Joll to decide that the magistrate must be guilty too, and thus he is *made* guilty, *written* as whatever colonel Joll wants him to be. This is reflected in the wooden slips the magistrate has attempted to read, and which Joll demands a translation of. The magistrate, aware that Joll is already convinced of his guilt, and also of the "guilt" of the slips (Joll believes they are used to send messages between the magistrate and the barbarians), offers Joll a translation which is exactly along the lines of what Joll "wants" to hear (at least in the magistrate's opinion). This is the same as the philosophy of "if you call me a bully, a bully I will be". Further, we can also see how the magistrate attempts to read/write the barbarian girl through his own value system. Unable to put himself in her shoes, so to speak, his attempted invasion of her remains outside her body alone. Whereas Joll was able to penetrate her through the use of torture, the magistrate could not symbolically or sexually. At one point, he asserts that he will not let her go until he has understood her, solved the riddle of her, but the broken body is impossible for him to puzzle back together again, and finally he takes her back to her own people.

We can also see that colonialism and invasion is presented as a disease or physical flaw in several of Coetzee's other works. There is something rotten *In the Heart of the Country*; the community presented in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is one of apathy and hatred where even little children will be entertained by the torture of others, something which bears witness to an infected society. In *Disgrace*, the body of the raped Lucy has the signs of society's infection written upon it, and the question is if whether her growing belly is a sign of healing or of getting worse. Coetzee has made more of a point of this in other works such as *Foe* and *Age of Iron*. In his later works, these issues seem to be more subdued, and the

notion of invasion does not have as strong physical symptoms. In *Diary of a Bad Year*, we have entered the modern world, and the virus which has infected is on the narrator's computer, rather than in his body. Age, however, is a factor his body is unable to withstand, something which he seems painfully aware of. This echoes the expectation of death found in *Age of Iron*.

Colonization is also closely linked to isolation. The aim of colonization is to impose one's culture/language/meaning onto the Other. However, the colonialists also isolate themselves from the Other and from the culture that is natural for the place. Colonialism represents an attempt to assimilate the locals/natives to the culture of the oppressors. Thus the oppressors themselves feel the need to assert their own identity and set themselves apart from the natives through for example Othering. Apartheid is the epitome of this. Identification, as we can see, is central in such a society. An example from apartheid is the pass laws, where people needed to have identity cards confirming their racial status. Here we see how identity is constituted through language. The classification of race allowed people to enter places or be excluded from them due to this. Thus identity was literary established through language, where one word would determine people's liberties. However, the classifications were not necessarily fixed, as the apartheid system had its branch of people who worked on determining and revising the labels. A person who was classified as White one day could be labeled Coloured the next. Parent and child need not have the same limitations/liberties. No heed was paid to people's own opinions of their identities, and the increased number of racial classifications, such as Coloured, Cape Coloured, Indian, White, Black, etc, seemed to accomplish nothing but the "divide and conquer" policy of the apartheid regime³.

'Isolation' in Coetzee often connects to being estranged from other people. Coetzee's protagonists seem to be in a situation where they find themselves *marginalized* for some reason. Most of them are misfits. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate is isolated both in terms of the location of the town, and as a magistrate, where he has to play a role he does not necessarily recognize himself in. Thus we see in him an estrangement from the self as well as other people, considering that he seems to have no equal in the settlement. A question I come to through reading this text is: "where is the Other "I" am to gain my identity from?" In a number of Coetzee's novels, we are facing an identity crisis, and the problem is often found in the inability of the protagonists to determine on an Other they can contrast themselves to, and thus assert their own identity. A tendency found in Coetzee is that the

³ These racial classifications involved a hierarchy with the White at the top followed by Coloured and Indian, and finally the Black. One would also find hierarchies within the specific "races".

protagonists have formerly been able to identify themselves one way or the other, but some action or encounter spurs an identity crisis within them, changing their world view. This again relates to the impression one gets through reading Coetzee; that there is no fixed meaning or truth. *In the Heart of the Country* depicts both a farm situated in the middle of nowhere, and a girl who lacks a firm sense of self, an equal to identify with, and an Other to represent someone to identify in contrast to. Here we also find a gendered isolation; the mother is dead and the remaining women are all servants. Being surrounded by empowered males, and trapped within male colonial discourse, Magda herself is prevented from speaking the master's language. An attempt is made from Magda's side to cross the border between the "I" and the Other. Despite her inability to speak the language of the oppressor, she also fails to share the language of the servants, even if hers is also an experience of the oppressed, and even if she claims to have spoken "like one of [the servant's children] before I learned to speak like this" (section 16, 7).

From this explication of the terms I wish to focus on, it is evident that they are in many ways connected. My argument is that there is some kind of relationship between 'invasion' and 'isolation' as they are found in Coetzee. I have already shown how colonization links the two when considering the colonizer and the colonized Other, and how a product of the *invading* act of colonization is the need to *isolate* the colonizer from the colonized. Simultaneously this isolation leads to a new invasion, one which writes the myth of the Other, justifying the colonizer's acts and at the same time assuring that he identifies in opposition to the Other. Another example of how these terms relate to each other is found in how 'isolation' prevents Magda from speaking the master language or gain a shared language with Hendrik and Anna, yet through 'invasion' she attempts to attain this. Asserting that "I am I", Magda at once tries to make room for an own identification for herself, where she is not responsible for the actions of the group of people she is associated with, as well as claiming authority which can only be claimed through the master language she in the same utterance wants to distance herself from. Further, this utterance in itself is the ultimate example of the problem of 'invasion' and 'isolation' as it both represents the outward claim of a separate identity as well as the linguistic level of having the authority to speak the master language.

The relationship between these themes can also be seen as a question of *borders*. 'Isolation' is found in people who maintain their own personal borders; have borders imposed upon them; or find themselves unwilling to cross other people's borders. 'Invasion' is found when a border is crossed, and the isolation of the character is violated somehow. Thus these borders work on many different levels. Not only are we talking about cultural and social

borders acknowledged both by the “I” and the Other, but also borders drawn by the “I” of authority, the colonizer or oppressor. But borders are not only drawn by the colonizer on behalf of the colonized. Borders are also drawn for the colonizers themselves. A unitary identity is being written for the “subjects” or the oppressors to build a connection. This means that the magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, for example, finds himself in a situation where he is inside the paradigm of the oppressor. Reaching the point where he wants to tear himself apart from this identity, he can no longer pretend that he does not know the role which has been constructed for him by the Empire. Thus what happens is that upon rejecting the identity constructed for him, he suddenly finds himself outside the paradigm of the oppressor, and as such, he has now crossed a border and is seen as Other, or barbarian by the Empire. The idea of a constructed and closed identity for the oppressors, is very visible when considering South Africa.

Thesis statement

In his writing or *rewriting* of South African history, which I would like to suggest Coetzee does in *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee deconstructs and exposes not only the myth of the Other but also the myth of a unitary identity for the colonizing “I”. I will focus on this by looking at themes of isolation and invasion in these novels. A chapter will be devoted to a close reading of each of the novels. In my definition of the terms invasion and isolation, I noted that invasion happens on both a physical and a psychological plane: outside and inside. Each of the novels demonstrate an invasion on the personal level: rape or torture. Both constitute a writing on the body, and in both cases, female bodies are written upon. The personal level of abuse can be seen as a representation of the abuse and oppression on a more collective level. Invasion through acts of rape or torture is an attack both on the body and the mind of the victims. The invading act implies an isolating instance; the perpetrator isolates his victims both on a physical and a psychological level while performing the act itself. The outcome of the invasion is also a further isolation; the victims are isolated *because of* the physical and mental scars they now carry. What I am trying to get at, is that there is a notion in Coetzee’s novels that something is to be *gained* from isolation and invasion. For the state trying to control its citizens, it might be the “truth”, or it might be a demonstration of authority and power. For the author writing a story, it might also be the “truth”, or indeed a demonstration of authorial power. But the truth, as we shall see, has all to do with memory and above all, *power*, and there is no better way to achieve this but through “divide and conquer”, or put in other words: through isolation and invasion.

Coetzee argues that all writing is autobiographical, and I will talk about this in more depth in chapter 2. To write autobiographical involves writing, or *rewriting*, history and truth. The truth represented depends upon the narrator's point of view. This relates to seeing, and to power and authority in seeing. Who has the right to narrate/represent? What are we allowed to see? What do we have the authority to see? What do we have the authority to represent? In what I have referred to as the writing or *rewriting* of South African history, Coetzee does not attempt to write *the* story of South Africa, but he focusses on one story, or voice, at a time. He literally then looks at one voice in isolation from the myriad of voices found in the nation, and places his emphasis on how the history of South Africa has been written on their bodies. We find a connection in Coetzee's writing between his criticism and his fiction. Often he returns to issues of colonialism/post-colonialism, South African history, the tradition of white writing in South Africa, and his own family history.

I think a study of Coetzee in this context is important because the themes I am considering have been so central and so pervading throughout his writing career. Making up part of the limited number of writers who have had a Nobel Prize bestowed upon them, Coetzee is naturally an author who has been under much scrutiny and criticism. Whereas I find the focus of other critics interesting, my approach is one which to my knowledge has not been dealt with directly before. The link between isolation and invasion is one of the first aspects that strike me when reading Coetzee. Critics touch upon these (the isolation of the characters, the role of the writer and Coetzee's confessional style, the colonial background, etc), but not so much on the relationship between them, as I will do.

Chapter 2

In the Heart of the Country

In this chapter I provide a close reading of *In the Heart of the Country*, with a particular emphasis on how the themes of isolation and invasion manifest themselves in the text. In the course of the novel, Magda employs thought experiment and genre expectations to deconstruct a traditional notion of her history and identity. Her quest for an own identity and history, demands an assertion of authority and power, one that closely resembles the colonial act of invading space, language and people.

Life on the farm

Written in 1977, *In the Heart of the Country* is Coetzee's second novel. The novel is divided into 266 numbered sections, scenes, or diary entries (the critics seem not to agree on this point), split over no more than 151 pages, yet the story does not seem brief. Coetzee's brilliantly intense language strips away any redundant description, and what we are left with is the plain story of Magda's life, one of the 'forgotten ones of history'. The story is very complex, evolving around the narrator Magda, who lives with her father on a desolate farm in the South African karoo, "on the road from no A to no B in the world" (Coetzee, 2004, section 41, 21). True to form, Coetzee begins the story with no introduction, throwing the reader into the action of the father's return with his new bride. Coetzee wastes no time nor words in acquainting the reader with the subject matter of his novels, writing *in medias res*. The aforementioned intensity of Coetzee's writing allows the reader to get into the novels' situations in the first few pages; in this case as quickly as the first section, all in all 17 lines. Here the 1st person narrator reveals herself as an unreliable narrator as well as self-reflecting on the writing of what later is suggested is her 'locked diary', handing out roles and stating who plays what part, and embroidering on what she describes yet admits to not having seen herself. The reader is not only introduced to the narrator and her conception of the antagonists, embodied in her father and his new wife, the story is also placed in terms of a setting, as well as in relation to a literary convention. We learn that we are in a colony, in a geographically isolated place. The attire of the bride and groom and the manner of transportation, the "dog-cart drawn by a horse" suggests that we are in the late 19th to early 20th Century. It is also suggested that we find ourselves in a farm novel, or *plaasroman*, in the South African context. The ambiguity pervading the novel, as well as Coetzee's oeuvre, is also stated in this section. Listing the characters that Magda suggests will be starring in this

story, it is unclear whether or not she counts herself amongst the antagonists: “I am the one who stays in her room reading or writing or fighting migraines./ My father is the one who paces the floorboards back and forth/ And then, for a third, there is the new wife, who lies late abed. Those are the antagonists” (section 1, 1). As we can see, Magda does not say that she is the protagonist of the story, but do not all stories need a protagonist? Or perhaps hers is a story similar to *Vanity Fair*⁴, devoid of heroes? Or perhaps, because it is in fact *her story*, does Magda automatically, due to the expectations of the novel form, find herself as the protagonist of the story regardless of whether or not she states it? Whatever is the answer to the question, the ambiguity is there by intent, perhaps to warn the reader that Magda is no classical heroine or Cinderella, but more similar to Circe in the *Odyssey* with whom she will much later compare herself, or Lady Macbeth in Shakespeare’s play. What is also interesting to note about the above passage, is how Magda seems to be informed by literary conventions, in not only her naming of the characters and the antagonists, but in stating “*for a third*, there is the new wife”, seemingly under the conviction that there must be a third character or role in her story. This preoccupation with roles, and conventions found in different genres of the novel, is something which will be found throughout *In the Heart of the Country*.

Along with Coetzee’s earlier works, including *Dusklands* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *In the Heart of the Country* has been read as an allegory. As such, it has been interpreted as a work that puts the nail in the casket for the old order of life in South Africa, without really offering a positive outlook on the future with the new order. In this thesis, I will not emphasize the allegorical readings of Coetzee’s novels, but it is still important to note, as so much attention has been paid to this. However, as I mentioned in my introductory chapter, critics seem to increasingly discount and move away from such a reading. Further, Coetzee has a preoccupation with language, which would have been more visible if I studied the original version where both Afrikaans and English make up the language of the novel⁵. Many critics have underlined this bilingual trait which has been lost in its English translation. The shift between English in thought, or what Magda refers to as her ‘monologues’, and Afrikaans in dialogue, emphasizes the border between the outer and inner world, and the isolation of a character in contrast to the social act of transgressing borders and distances through conversation with others. Further, it also writes us into the colonial situation of South Africa and into the cultural setting of the *plaasroman*, as well as invoking the language confusion Coetzee himself describes in *Boyhood*. The impression one gets of the Afrikaans language

⁴ William Makepeace Thackeray, 1847-1848.

⁵ The South African version was published after the British, by Ravan Press, Johannesburg in 1978.

and its function through reading the works of Coetzee, is that inherent in the language is a master/slave dichotomy. Thus the language choice contributes in emphasizing the relationships we encounter in *In the Heart of the Country*. As Coetzee-as-child/John puts it in *Boyhood*: “Afrikaners are afraid to say *you* to anyone older than themselves”, something which to him signifies speaking like a ‘whipped slave’ (49). In a scene from *In the Heart of the Country*, we can see how it is connected. Magda “recalls” the arrival of their servant Hendrik and the conversation he had with his father on that day:

‘Where are you from?’
‘From Armoede, my baas. But now I come from baas Kobus. Baas Kobus says the baas has work here.’
‘Do you work for baas Kobus?’
‘No, I do not work for baas Kobus. I was there looking for work. Then baas Kobus said that the baas has work. So I came.’ (section 41, 22).

As we can see, this way of speaking, mocked by Coetzee-as-child, is not only followed slavishly by Hendrik, but also by Magda’s father when speaking about ‘baas Kobus’. Personal pronouns seem to be exchanged for titles and names, and the speaker is consequently reduced to the position of a child, the language itself forcing the speakers to humiliate themselves. The exchange comes across as almost comical, the one seemingly aping the other. At the conclusion of this job interview, Magda concludes, ambiguously: “How satisfying, the flow of this dialogue. Would that all my life were like that, question and answer, word and echo...” (section 42, 22). Here, Magda touches upon issues of language and communication that I will discuss in more depth later. The dialogue represents opposites which simultaneously mirror and reflect each other. Opposites in the one asking the question, the other providing the answer, and mirrors in the words being echoed, passed back and forth between them. This is central to the writing of the Other and the master/slave relationships that are so relevant when discussing postcolonial literature. I will not go into much detail about a postcolonial reading, other than to emphasize that the colonial background is very important for the understanding of the novel. Since I am working with the English version of the novel, and since my knowledge of Afrikaans is lacking, I will not discuss in any more detail the significance of Afrikaans in the story either. What I will do in this chapter, however, is use some critics to comment on different perspectives in my analysis of the novel. Susan VanZanten Gallagher provides background information on the *plaasroman* and comments on form and gender issues. I am employing Hayden White for comments on form and narrative, with special attention to the writing of history. Michela Canepari-Labib’s reading of the text is influenced both by postcolonial and post-structural theory and emphasizes issues of gender, race and

identity in the text. J. Hillis Miller is a post-structuralist theorist and I use him to talk about form and narrative as well as issues of deconstruction. Finally I also use J. M. Coetzee as his own critic to underline certain parts of my argument.

Her story

Some critics have referred to *In the Heart of the Country* as a feminist work. Indeed, published in one of the peak eras of international feminism, and dealing with subject matters of gender and power, one would find it odd if such a reading did not gain any currency. The novel is indeed preoccupied with gender, but despite its employment of a feminine voice and that it makes up the telling of a female story where there has formerly been only silence, it does not seem likely that feminism is Coetzee's main target with this novel. Certainly one can argue that Magda has all the features of the stereotyped 'madwoman in the attic', a trait Coetzee makes no attempt to disguise. However, the novel introduces an opposite stereotype as well, namely the 'Angel of the house', which in literature refers to a Victorian image of the ideal woman⁶. As such, it is a British ideal, somehow contrasting with Magda's Afrikaans identity. However, in Victorian literature, the opposite character of the angel was the whore⁷. Although Magda does not fit the paradigm of the whore, there are times when she expresses a desire to. In her sexual relationship with Hendrik, where she becomes the other woman, her inexperience makes her desire that knowledge, and at the end of the novel when she attempts to attract the attention of the flying machines, she makes an image of herself as a "woman lying on her back, her figure fuller than mine, her legs parted, younger than myself too" (section 257, 145). Magda talks about the angel in the following way: "The Angel, that is how she is sometimes known, The Angel in Black who comes to save the children of the brown folk from their croups and fevers. All her household severity is transformed into an unremitting compassion.../ Her stores of compassion are boundless. She needs to be needed. With no one to need her she is baffled and bewildered. *Does that not explain everything?*" (section 13, 5, emphasis added). The section suggests that Magda as easily could have been an Angel of the house, as she could inhabit her current role, she just needs "someone else to give [her] a lead" (section 35, 17). It is unclear whether or not Magda, when talking about the Angel is referring to a parallel self, a fantasy, a character from a book, or perhaps her father's

6 An essay by feminist writer Virginia Woolf entitled "Professions for Women" (1942) explores the restrictions imposed on the female writer by the image of the Angel in the house. Woolf argues that every professional woman must kill the Angel to liberate herself from this and other phantoms.

7 Magda's name, however, gives associations to the fallen Magdalena who is redeemed by Christ in the *New Testament*.

new wife; but the detail that she wears black (Magda herself also wears black) hints not so much of being a herald of death⁸, but rather that it is a version of herself, if she were only needed. Her final question, emphasized by its rhetorical and negational ‘not’, would normally induce the reader to nod and say: ‘yes that does explain everything’, but the story of Magda is a lot more complicated than that, and the attentive reader will feel cheated by such a one-sided explanation. One can agree that the need to be needed is a central one in Magda’s character. This is evident in her almost obsessive view of the few people around her.

In the following section, she states how she would have made a better daughter had her father only needed something (section 14, 6). Thus her need to be needed is connected to certain people, and is not the all-embracing compassion of the Angel. Here she also reveals her need to be needed as obsessive and perverted: “enthralled by my need to be needed, I circle him like a moon” (*ibid.*). Similar to other of Coetzee’s protagonists (if one may call them that), Magda seems to be stalking the people she wants recognition from, spying on them ‘through a chink in the curtain’. Her misdirected desire to be needed by her father writes her right back into the conventions of the Afrikaner patriarchal tradition, one which I will return to shortly.

One also finds female agency in this novel, if not somewhat misplaced, and Magda’s determination to write her own story could indeed be seen as agency, had she not constantly reminded the reader that she finds such employment too difficult: “I struggle to give life to a world but seem to engender only death” (section 24, 11). Though asserting that “given time I can do whatever a man can do” (section 180, 99), she cancels out the female empowerment project in the very same section: “with the gawky movements of a woman I throw a stone at him. It falls short”. Coetzee, though consciously employing a female voice which bears the traits of the classical madwoman, seems to have an objective that does not primarily include the feminist project, but rather his own project of writing a new story for Magda, one in which she is allowed to realize and actualize herself in whichever way she chooses. Caroline Rody sees the text as employing feminism to “challenge the limits of the postmodern. It represents a female subjectivity “written” into patriarchy and postmodern self-reflexivity at once” (1994, 165). Later in this chapter I will show how patriarchal oppression limits Magda’s writing and communication abilities, and how self-reflectivity becomes a means of escaping this.

Susan VanZanten Gallagher argues that in Afrikaner consciousness, the role of the woman holds a special place. Showing how the myth of the sacrifice and strength of the *vrou*

8 The ‘herald of death’ figure is found in other of Coetzee’s novels including *Age of Iron* and *Diary of a Bad Year*.

has participated in writing Afrikaner identity through pointing to “national” monuments connected to Afrikaner history, Gallagher argues that Magda’s story “attempts to break out of the patriarchal hierarchies in which traditional Afrikaner history is based” (1991, 84). Through according an elevated role to the *vrou*, the patriarchal Afrikaans society writes the woman not only as the child bearer who is “responsible for both continuing the Afrikaner race and sustaining its purity” (89), it also ensures that “her role is strictly defined and subordinate” (90). Thus we see that the parallel between the Victorian ‘angel’ and the Afrikaaner *vrou*, is one where women are written as having a subordinate role while being placed on a pedestal. In both cases, it seems equally important to exorcize and deconstruct this role to liberate women from the confined space assigned to them⁹. Gallagher’s description and reading of Magda’s character is in stark contrast to the ideal of the Afrikaans *vrou* (94). Whereas Gallagher makes the argument that Magda’s rebellion is found in her “endeavors to write herself by constructing her own history” (96) through trying out different alternatives, my proposition is that what Magda does is *experiment*. Magda’s diary entries, scenes, or meditations, though varying in content, on several occasions repeat the same action, but with certain changes. This strikes me as Magda playing with the form and the genre of her “writing”.

The notion of a thought experiment, a philosophical concept applied when one uses imaginary situations to “understand the way things really are” (wikipedia: “thought experiment”), does not seem to explain Magda’s objective of launching herself unbound into fantasy and imagination. However, despite the impression that Magda desires to write herself as far away as possible from her own situation and truth, when considering Coetzee’s view on truth and fiction, as we began to examine in chapter 1, this takes on a different light. In an interview with David Attwell, Coetzee distinguishes between two types of truth: truth to fact and a “higher” truth (Coetzee, 1992, 17). Truth to fact seems to be of less interest when writing, and following Coetzee’s argument, the so-called higher truth “is something which comes in the process of writing, or comes from the process of writing” (18). Later in the volume, Coetzee argues “all autobiography is storytelling, all writing is autobiography” (391). If we then consider *In the Heart of the Country* in the light of this argument, we can say that Magda is the author of her own story, writing her autobiography, as it were. The notion that this is a kind of autobiography is enforced by Magda herself in the novel, when she says: “I want my story to have a beginning, a middle, and an end/ I must not fall asleep in the middle

⁹ See footnote 6 on Virginia Woolf p. 33.

of my life” (section 89, 46). As we can see, there seems to be a clear parallel between the notion of story and life, and Magda wants a story that does not put her to sleep. If Coetzee is right, that any autobiography is merely a *selection* of truths, then how is Magda any different when she makes *her* selection?

Historian and critic Hayden White introduced in *Metahistory* (1973) his revolutionary thesis on history’s relationship to literature. In his 1978 article “The Historical Text as Literary Artifact”, White provides a summary and continuation of the main arguments from his book. White claims that there is in fact little difference between the work of the writer and the work of the historian, and the tools they employ are the same (White, 2001). A common assumption about narratology, that “all discourse is narrative”, is in line with White’s argument that in telling the historical “facts”, the historian makes choices similar to those made by the writer of fiction. White supports his claim with Northrop Frye’s statement that fiction contains “pre-generic plot-structures” (1714) allowing us to “understand *why* a particular story has “turned out” as it has” (*ibid.*). The pre-generic plot-structure refers to a recognition by people in our culture of what constitutes different genres; whether the history is tragic, comic, ironic or romantic. One of the choices the historian faces, is what to include and what to exclude from the body of facts he has to work from. This is starting to sound suspiciously similar to Coetzee’s notion of autobiography and confession, which in many senses is a form of history writing:

You tell the story of your life by selecting from a reservoir of memories, and in the process of selecting you leave things out. To omit to say that you tortured flies as a child is, logically speaking, as much an infraction of truth to fact as to say that you tortured flies when in fact you didn’t. So to call autobiography – or indeed *history* – true as long as it does not lie invokes a fairly vacuous idea of truth. (Coetzee, 1992, 17, emphasis added).

Being an intellectual and an excellent literary critic, it is more than likely that Coetzee is familiar with the ideas proposed by White. In his article, White notably goes on to say that the “events are made into a story by the suppression or subordination of certain of them and the highlighting of others, by characterization, motific repetition, variation of tone and *point of view*” (1715, emphasis added), which, he concludes, are elements we expect to find in a novel or a play. My emphasis on point of view is one White pounces on repeatedly: “historical events are value-neutral” (*ibid.*), but they get value inscribed into them by the representation the historian chooses. Magda’s point of view, then, determines what form her story takes.

The author, according to Coetzee, has to accept the following fate; “everything that you write...writes you as you write it” (17), or as Magda puts it: “I create myself in the words

that create me” (section 18, 8). Thus Magda’s thought experiments become a means for her to share the author’s fate. Not only does the written word write you into being, it helps write an identity for you. Magda, as Gallagher has argued, attempts to write her own story, the *true* story of her life. Having no past experience from such an endeavor, Magda gropes her way forward aided by the light of the novel conventions, attempting to penetrate the darkness in order to decide which way is the right one for her story to take. But Magda’s story is not written in retrospect, as many autobiographical novels are¹⁰: “My life is not past, my art cannot be the art of memory. What will happen to me has not yet happened. I am a blind spot hurtling with both eyes open into the maw of the future, my password ‘And then?’” (section 89, 47). This not only emphasizes the idea that a text writes you as you write it, or the problems posed in *Tristram Shandy*¹¹ about autobiography, it also works as a disclaimer where Magda indirectly admits to her lacking knowledge where her past is concerned. Whereas the historian has the advantage of knowing the outfall of the narrative (the narration of history is that of past events), Magda always seems uncertain of the future, and ultimately what will be the outfall of *her* narrative. Several times she either questions how the ‘tale will end’, or expresses a longing for the end to come, something which suggests that Magda wants to be able to foresee the end of her story by looking at the evidence of her current life. Consequently she attempts, like the reader of the fictional or historical text will do, to predict the end or outcome through “pre-generic plot conventions”, or genre expectations. This is evident for instance when Magda has killed her father and his new wife, and is contemplating what to do with the bodies. Drawing on her knowledge of plot and story, she states:

...I am *sure* that, in time, I will find boulders with holes through them, worn by the dripping of water in a bygone ice age... In the wagonhouse *there are bound to be* yards of providential chain, hitherto invisible, *now suddenly leaping into sight*, and casks of gunpowder, faggots of sandalwood. But what I now find myself wondering is whether it is not time for me to find a strong-thewed accomplice who, without pause for question, will swing the corpses on to his shoulders and stride off to dispose of them... (section 35, 17, emphasis added).

As we can see, Magda is convinced that things will work out almost on their own; she only has to wait and see what form the solution will come in.

The idea that thought experiments take place on an imaginary plane, as seen in the excerpt above, accounts for Magda’s many lapses in logic and discrepancies in her story. As

10 Coetzee’s own autobiographical novels *Boyhood* and *Youth* are also written in the present tense.

11 The experimental novel *The life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-1769) by Laurence Sterne questions amongst other things how one can write the story of one’s life. Today, the novel is considered by some critics as being ahead of its time in terms of narrative strategies, and it is seen as a forerunner to post-structuralism.

we will see in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, torture is used to place the investigated prisoner under pressure, so as to reveal ‘the truth’ through ‘contradictions’ in his ‘testimony’. In *In the Heart of the Country* we find a similar pattern which applies most clearly when the narrator experiences traumatic situations. When talking about these situations, divergences and lapses, as well as literary clichés and conventions “borrowed” from different genres of the novel are particularly easy to detect. This causes us to question the truth of Magda’s narration. Examples of this can be found in sections 19, 20, 25 and 26 (sections 21 through 24 makes up a jarring departure from the present action and breaks with the linearity of the story) when Magda invades her father’s room, killing both him and his new wife with “not the meat-cleaver as I thought it would be, but the hatchet, weapon of the Valkyries” (section 25, 11-12, emphasis added). There are so many things to detect in these sections. Not only from what I quoted above, where we find both the notion that the parricide is preconceived, or at least premeditated, but also the proof that Magda seems to be informed by myth, with all its signifying weight, in her choice of weapon. When she kills her father a second time later in the novel, she uses yet another weapon, and seeing these two killings next to the fact that she has thought of it before this point (which is the first we have heard of it), suggests that both killings of him could be thought experiments and not real acts. However, what is real or not remains highly ambiguous even at the conclusion of the novel. But to return to the example above, there are many inconsistencies which can be pointed out. Magda is unable to decide on whether her father sleeps on his back or with his face down (sections 25 and 26, 11-12); whether the “glutted widow” is making gestures to her, or if she is asleep (section 20, 9). The imagery connected to the new wife is repeated, and seems to have embedded itself into Magda’s mind when she is thinking of her. Certain body parts are also repeated to an almost obsessive degree: “I watch the *full lips* of the *glutted widow*”/ “to her *full dark lips* the *glutted widow* raises a *finger* in *cryptic gesture*”/ “her *full ironical lips*”/ “a *cryptic hand*”/ “*full ironical lips*” (section 19-20, 8-9, emphasis added). It is almost as if Magda is playing with the words, repeating them again and again as one would perhaps find in a poem. But it also underlines that her story is unreliable.

As noted above, Magda’s unreliability as a narrator is made evident in a pattern that is found in this text when a particularly stressful event occurs. She writes it as if she is taking a leap into fiction and fictional expectations. Thus, once she has ‘done the deed’, Magda is drawing on her experiences from novel reading, in guessing what will happen next: “I am... calming myself too in preparation for what must be a whole new phase of my life. For no longer need I fret about how to fill my days. I have broken a commandment, and the guilty

cannot be bored. I have two fullgrown bodies to get rid of beside many other traces of my violence. I have a face to compose, a story to invent” (section 26, 12). This is not the only time Magda expects her life to take a new and better turn. She knows from the stories she has read that intrigue and action follow murder, and she expects that her days, and thus also her life story, will be filled with contents similar to what is found in detective or crime novels. However, her last comment, that she has “a face to compose, a story to invent”, calls attention to the creative activity of writing and composing, as a means of making up an alibi and a story of the murders which puts the blame outside herself. And indeed, the novel as a whole seems to constitute an alibi and an explanation of Magda’s situation, one where the blame is placed on the oppressive and destructive society Magda ‘belongs’ to. Thus we find that *In the Heart of the Country* to a large degree is a novel about writing novels, and in that sense is a metafictional text, an idea I will get back to later in this chapter. The references to creativity, in terms of being a composer, a writer, a painter or an actress in a play pervade the text as a whole. Thus Magda’s thought experiments resemble Coetzee’s experimental form of the novel, and as such mark a parallel to Coetzee’s writing project.

Returning to Gallagher who we have left behind for a while, she makes an important point relating to the issues of inconsistency discussed above. Gallagher argues that Magda is questing for alternative stories to her own, by searching for a credible past, conjuring up siblings which to her dismay, she finds have left no mark on her (Gallagher 97). As a possible explanation, Magda asserts that they could have been stepbrothers: “it certainly has more of the ring of truth” (section 93, 51). The familial bond Magda is searching for, or thought experimenting with, appears to grow out of stories she has read. Especially her favourite brother, the golden Arthur, sounds like he is taken straight out of a fairy story, and her reminiscence of her childhood play with him similarly has a strong fictional quality, as she ends it with a disclaimer: “I thrust this memory farther and farther from me, till today it recurs to me with all the remoteness of a fairy-tale. End of story. There are inconsistencies in it, but I have not the time to track down and abolish them” (section 93, 52). Thus whilst rummaging through relics and traces of the past, looking for a clue as to who she really is in terms of family and human bonds, she seems also to be searching through different story conventions, looking for the place her story belongs.

However, not only the golden Arthur is conjured up in terms of the fairy-tale. A section devoted to the story of the schoolhouse immediately informs one of what to expect in terms of genre: “The schoolhouse. Once upon a time this was a real schoolhouse” (section 92, 49). The initial “the schoolhouse” looks like a title for the paragraph or story she is about to

tell. Earlier in the novel, sections have been introduced in the same way, as a means of preparing the reader for what the next section is about. Examples are found in section 2: “the new wife”; section 43: “the mirror”; section 45: “Hendrik”; section 82: “the past”; and so forth¹². Not only does the example above contain what resembles a title, it also has the fairy-tale opening of “once upon a time”. In addition the section is another example of Magda’s indecisions; here she cannot determine whether or not her grandfather, her father or herself has been a pupil at the schoolhouse. After questioning in her mind whether or not she could have attended the school, she concludes “my learning has the reek of print, not the resonance of the full human voice telling its stories” (section 92, 51). Here she comments on her own employment of literary allusions and fiction in the writing of her story. The implication is that she knows the theory but not really the practice. However, at the end of the section, Magda changes her mind, determined that she must have had a teacher, relentlessly providing the ultimate catch 22: “how else could I have learned to read, to say nothing of writing?” (*ibid.*). Contradicting her earlier assertion that she “never had a tutor” (section 41, 21), Magda again reveals an indecision or ignorance of her own story. Her ignorance and naiveté aside, Magda’s knowledge of literary conventions and philosophical works, indicates that she must have had at least some minimum of education as well as access to quite a store of books.

As Magda states as early as in the first section, her activities consist of “reading or writing or fighting migraines” (1). The solitariness of her life seems to spur her imagination and her writing, since “nothing ever happens on the farm” (section 18, 8). She often has moments of self-reflection, yet she continually leaps to conclusions on the basis of imagination. The descriptions she gives of her own person, consisting of repeated negative visions of herself as a “black widow”, a “spinster”, an “absence”, a “zero, null, a vacuum”, a “mad hag”, as “dour and sweaty and stupid with anxiety”, as “black” and being a “hole” seem only to reflect what she is lacking. Further, she talks about how she could have tried to improve her appearance through changing her diet, pulling out some teeth and plucking her eye brows, yet she remains in her self loathing, attracted as she is to the “gloomy, the hideous, the doom-ridden” (section 44, 25). Justifying her imagination due to her isolated existence, she states: “deprived of human intercourse, I inevitably overvalue the imagination” (section 32, 15). Not only is this yet another example of Magda’s self-reflection, it also tells us something about her state of mind. Admitting that she is waiting for visions, pressing her

12 We also find examples where the final sentence of the section seems to provide a conclusion about the contents of the entry, such as “life on the farm” (section 8, 3); “the psychology of servants” (section 17, 8); “those are Hendrik’s ambitions” (section 46, 26); “the psychology of masters” (section 66, 36); and so forth.

knuckles into her eyes, what Magda is suggesting is that she creates a new world due to the lack of companionship in her own. She has in a sense split herself in two, so that she can have some human contact: “the woman in the nightcap watching me from the mirror, the woman who in a certain sense is me, will dwindle and expire here in the heart of the country unless she has at least a thin porridge of event to live on” (section 44, 25). This excerpt is a key to understanding the novel, and gives us some insight into Magda’s motivation for writing her story. Since ‘nothing ever happens on the farm’, Magda must stand for the feeding herself. However, this image also seems to comment back on the historical role of the females, who are all absences and zeros in the Afrikaner tradition of the *plaasroman*. Simultaneously identifying herself with basis in Afrikaner society, as well as distancing herself strongly from it, Magda refuses to ‘dwindle and expire’, refuses to go out without a trace, to “die back into the silence [she] came from” (section 116, 65).

Magda’s self-awareness of her role both in terms of this concrete story, and in terms of her historical significance becomes evident through her statement: “If I am an emblem then I am an emblem/ ...I signify something, I do not know what” (section 23, 10). To signify and to have meaning, both returning issues in Coetzee’s oeuvre, takes on a special weight in this novel. Magda is looking for an identity, but seems willing to sacrifice it and accept it if her role in the scheme of things is to be an emblem, to have a meaning outside herself. On the other hand, Magda states a clear longing to not signify but merely be, similar to the lives of insects surrounding her. Yet she has reached the conclusion that she cannot transgress those limits; she cannot both signify and not signify at once: “There is no act I know of that will liberate me into the world. There is no act I know of that will liberate the world into me” (section 23, 10). As Gallagher points out, “the natural world exists only as being; she exists as consciousness” (97), explaining the impossible leap between the world and herself. However, one can also read the example above as a comment on Magda’s toils as a writer. As we saw earlier, Magda struggled with giving life to her world, and here she finds that the natural world alone cannot give life to her. She will not be transformed into an “elementary state” of “pure anger, pure gluttony, pure sloth” (section 28, 13), but neither does she have the tools to tame the world and thus have authority over it. Her struggle to find and gain this is part of what makes up the whole novel. Notice also the use of the word ‘act’, which again refers to the creative activity. At a later stage in the novel, she muses how her “acts, played out *within the macabre theatre of myself*, remain mere behaviour” (section 35, 17, emphasis added), underlining the ambiguity between “real” acts and what takes place only in her mind. Thus we see that Magda’s quest for her own story is impossible to sever from her search for identity in

terms of a written identity, a gendered identity, a cultural identity, as well as a racial identity. Her search, which to a large extent includes fictional escapes, makes the reader as well as Magda herself question the authenticity of her story.

The woman watching me from the mirror

The many inconsistencies and lapses in the novel, which in essence lead Magda to question what is real, eventually induce her to question her own identity and authenticity: “I seem never to have been anywhere, I seem to know nothing for sure, perhaps I am simply a ghost...” (section 38, 19). Her continued use of words such as ‘seem’ and ‘probably’, reminds the reader that it is fiction that we are reading. At the same time, these questions about existence are real to Magda. Her isolation has prevented her from having her identity recognized and confirmed by others: “I who... have never beheld myself in the equal regard of another’s eye, have never held another in the equal regard of mine” (section 18, 8). This holds a sad truth. It has been argued, and continues to be argued, that Magda writes her own story, performing some sort of rebellion and statement of independence from the tradition of the *plaasroman*, the Afrikaans way of life, and the conventional female experience of life in the colonies. Yet what choice has she? Being the ‘absence’, the ‘hole longing to be whole’, who is to write this story *for her*? Magda has no choice but to create herself in her words, or accede to the fate of the other colonial daughters like her, and disappear in silence. Despite all this, Magda seems convinced that she is real, and asserts her identity as being authentic: “A phantom, I am no phantom. / I touch this skin and it is warm, I pinch this flesh and it hurts. What more proof could I want? I am I” (section 100, 59). True to form, her assurance is only momentary. In section 122 she returns to question her own existence in terms of whether or not she is ‘body’ or ‘monologue’ and concludes that her identity is not as clear to her as she might wish. Her isolation might be the reason why she creates, as I suggested above, a *split* self, one which can look back at her from the mirror and affirm her identity. Recalling what she considers her childhood self, she suggests that she might have been watched over by a double who perhaps “split off from me when I was very very young” (section 86, 44). In the present time of the story, Magda admits that looking into the mirror, she “sometimes even talk[s] to it, to her” (section 43, 23). The “her” Magda speaks to is literally created in her image. Similar to how she writes herself, she has the power to write who is looking back and reflecting her. The creative process which is similar to God’s creative act in that the artist too creates in his own image, is often emblemized in giving birth. In the novel, Magda parodies this relationship:

I can imagine too falling pregnant after many moons, though it would not astonish me if I were barren, I look like the popular notion of the barren woman, and then, after seven or eight months, giving birth to a child, with no midwife and my husband blind drunk in the next room, gnawing through the umbilical cord, clapping the livid babyface to my flat sour breast; and then, after a decade of closeted breeding, emerging into the light of day at the head of a litter of ratlike, runty girls, *all the spit image of myself*, scowling into the sun, tripping over their feet, identically dressed in bottlegreen smocks and snubnosed black shoes; and then, after another decade of listening to their hissing and clawing, packing them off one by one to the outside world to do whatever it is that unprepossessing girls do there, live in boarding-houses and work in post offices perhaps, and bear illegitimate ratchildren to send back to the farm for sanctuary. (section 88, 46, emphasis added).

Magda's conception of her own image, as reflected through the image of her potential daughters, is startlingly negative, and the images surrounding the pregnancy and birth itself are nothing like the often elevated imagery found when describing the poet or writer's noble calling.

Through the example above, Magda also reveals herself as a narcissistic narrator. As we saw in chapter 1, narcissism or metafiction, as it applies in the narrative act, basically looks back on its own creation, and is a self-reflecting type of literature (Hutcheon, 1996). A common trait in narcissistic narrative is an impossible quest for identity. Identity is not set, and we have already seen how Magda questions her own. However, asserting identity for Magda becomes all the more important when she in reality has no one to recognize her as a separate and separating self, that is as character or as author. Refusing to be placed in a box by others of either genre of story, nor where she as an individual belongs, she asserts herself through repeating "I am I". Seemingly an important mantra or refrain, the idea of her own individual identity, which she shares neither with her father or her "race", becomes alpha and omega for Magda, and explains why she wants to gain a position of inbetweenness. In an argument with Hendrik, Magda makes a desperate attempt to be seen and recognized through her words: "I am not simply one of the whites, I am I! I am I, not a people" (section 228, 128). Despite her demand to be seen as an individual, as liberated from the colonial history and the master language of South Africa, Magda fails to see Hendrik in terms of his individuality, and reveals this when she in a fit of anger calls Hendrik a hotnot, filth and coward (section 180, 99). Here she lapses into colonial nominative language aimed at asserting power over him, and at putting him in his place. As she states earlier: "we have our places, Hendrik and I, in an old, old code" where he keeps his 'station' and she her 'distance' (section 48, 27). Although

Magda later attempts to break out of the traditional code, she finds that she is unable to, and as we shall see, Hendrik is also trapped within this discourse.

Needing recognition, Magda attempts to reach through her isolation and find someone to identify with by evoking a unitary identity despite her desire to have value as an individual. A gendered sense of unitary identity is one of her approaches. The farm holds a certain idea of gendered spaces. The kitchen, for instance, represents a female space in the novel, and also in many different novel conventions. Thus when her father begins to make love to Klein-Anna, changing his 'pattern', and invading the female space by making his own tea in the mornings, all the women tense and Magda literally has to hold her tongue in the presence of the representative of colonial power. The invasion of the female space takes on a double meaning. The father's real target is a sexual invasion of Klein-Anna. The women all know this, and they also know that they are powerless against it. Later Magda tries to write herself both as a sister and as a "co-wife" of Klein-Anna, but I shall return to that idea below. Unitary identity is also found in intertextuality, and Magda draws witch-like power from the notion that others have done the same as her when she is about to slaughter her father and his wife: "All kinds of people have done this before me, wives, sons, lovers, heirs, rivals, I am not alone" (section 26, 12). Through intertextuality, Magda conjures up characters from different stories, linking herself to a different tradition than the *plaasroman*. Intertext is also a metafictional trait, which demands the participation and vigilance of the reader. However, I will discuss this in relation to the reader's role in narcissistic narratives below. In sum, the idea of a unitary identity suggests an act of claiming and asserting an identity, and I will return to this later when I discuss invasion in the novel in more depth.

The problems of identity in narcissistic narratives also attribute a special role to the reader. As stated in chapter 1, boundaries are blurred, and certain roles are deconstructed. The reader finds the distinction between author/protagonist/antagonist hard to make out. However, the boundaries are also blurred between reader and writer. According to Linda Hutcheon, inherent in the narcissist form, is a demand of the reader to participate in the writing and making of the story (1996). The reader is consequently forced to acknowledge the fictionality of the world he participates in the creation of. Whereas in the novel, Magda is looking into the mirror and seeing only her 'Other' self looking back, the story itself negotiates between the writer Coetzee on the one hand, and the individual reader, making the mirror Magda gazes into represent a parallel to the story itself. As I have discussed earlier, Coetzee states how a story writes you as you write it. Similarly, the readers also write the story as they are reading it. The writer thus mirrors himself through the reader and gets recognition through this

process. Magda, on the other hand, has no one to reflect her identity, which is why she creates an ‘Other’ self. This interactive writing and reading we find in the figures of the author and the reader, makes up an outer mutual invasion. Through his text, the author writes the work into the mind of the reader, constituting a form of invasion of the reader’s mind. The reader, on his side, invades the text, and adds his own meanings to it. Magda holds the place of the writer in the novel, and is equally interested in invading through her writing. Since there is no one to respond to it however, her invasions, as her thought experiments, happen on an imaginary plane, and I will discuss this later.

To return to the discussion of Magda’s self-questioning or identity formation, it seems that this, finally, is only part of her rhetoric. The doubleness we encounter, for instance that between ‘body’ and ‘monologue’, exists on two different spheres, and reveals to us the borderland that Magda lives in. Her attempt is to be the median, to find a way of negotiating between the body and the monologue. Her isolation in the one spurs her desire to invade and gain recognition from the other. Her language seems limited from that of the body, as is most visible in the way she acts with Klein-Anna. After killing her father a second (and final?) time, Magda attempts to find a new way of communicating with Hendrik and Klein-Anna, one which is derived of the constant groping and the “listening for those overtones of the voice, those subtleties of the eyebrows that tell them my true meaning” (section 18, 8). Asking Klein-Anna to sleep in the house with her when Hendrik is away, Magda makes a feeble attempt at a more equal communication, but her physical approach is an awkward one: “I find her head and press my lips against her forehead. For a moment she struggles, then stiffens and endures me./ I am doing my best in this unfamiliar world of touch” (section 203, 112). But her attraction towards Klein-Anna is not only limited to her idea of a sister with whom she can identify. She in fact wants to *be* her, to take possession of Klein-Anna, and in no uncertain terms invade, albeit gently, what she perceives of as a simpler mind. Unfortunately, however, Magda is not alone in her desire for Klein-Anna.

Oh rose thou art sick¹³

The first imaginative killing of the father is followed by a pivot where the novel seems to rewind itself, to start again. Magda has rejected one of her thought experiments, and has decided to wipe the slate and start anew. The story has changed. It is Hendrik who has just

¹³ From William Blake’s *Songs of Experience* (1794). Magda talks about life before the colonization of South Africa: “the golden age before the worm arrived, on the wings of the howling storm no doubt” (section 39, 20).

brought home his wife. Since they already have an Anna, Magda names her Klein-Anna. Names seem to hold an idea of identity. Because Hendrik's wife is a servant, or perhaps because she is brown, she is automatically an Anna. When talking about the schoolhouse that became the residence of their other servants Jacob and Anna, Magda comments: "...one day [the schoolhouse] was turned over to Anna and Jacob, or to the Anna and Jacob who came before them" (section 92, 50), suggesting that their names are not really important; they will be 'Anna' and 'Jacob' no matter what. The servants simply have to accept that they have had an identity imposed upon them. In most cultures, naming is important, as it shows where an individual belongs and sometimes what fate expects him. Thus the uprooting of one's real name for a new name, a servant or slave name, can lead to a split in the self. Whereas the real name indicates that you have value as a human being, the servant or slave name strips you of these values. Interesting then to note that Hendrik, when he first arrives at the farm, names himself and is not renamed by the *baas*. The writer has the power and authority to name, same as the colonial masters. Naming then, writes or imposes an identity on you, and the author, in the writing process, rarely chooses names randomly.

Whereas the names of servants seem to function only to assert one's dominance and claim ownership over them, the names of 'proper citizens' are more important. Towards the end of the novel, when Magda finds herself abandoned on the farm, visitors arrive ("more visitors than I can name"), looking for her father who, according to Magda "rode out one ill-fated day and never came back" (section 233, 132). These visitors inform Magda that the "name cannot be crossed off the list...until the remains are discovered" (*ibid.*). Thus Magda finds, to her surprise, that she cannot simply cross out her father's name as she had thought. Her father, tucked away in the hole Magda has made for him, cannot be written completely out of the story (history) she is writing. This might account for his sudden reappearance in the final sections of the novel, where he seems to be neither quite alive nor dead, what with Magda feeding him and 'folding' him away for the night. Thus we find that even if Magda tries, she cannot *unname*¹⁴ her father. Unable to deconstruct him and the relationship between them, he remains the eternal "No!" and the enforcer of imposed identity and oppression¹⁵. On the other hand, her inability to *unname* him becomes an inability to set him free. He is still trapped within her discourse. In that sense, she keeps the promise or threat she gives him

¹⁴ Ursula K. Le Guin's short story "She Unnames Them" (1985) is about a woman who *unnames* the creatures around her, and in this process breaks down boundaries and binary oppositions between them, and finds herself feeling closer to them at the conclusion of her *unnaming*.

¹⁵ Virginia Woolf in "Professions for Women" (footnote 6, p. 33) talks about how the female writer has to deal with phantoms; Magda herself fears to be left alone on the farm with the "ghosts" (section 236, 133).

before his death: “You and I will live together in this room till I have my way, till the crack of doom, till the stars fall out of the sky” (section 136, 78).

Naming as claiming is also important in the novel. In fact, we do not get to know Magda’s name until two thirds into the novel. Magda is trying to get a closer, more sisterly relationship to Klein-Anna, and asks her to call her by her name:

‘Tell me, Anna, what do you call me? What is my name?’ I breathe as softly as I can. ‘What do you call me in your thoughts?’

‘Miss?’

‘Yes; but to you am I only the miss? Have I no name of my own?’

‘Miss Magda?’/

‘But now I am just Magda, and you are just Anna. Can you say Magda? Come, say Magda for me.’

‘No, miss, I can’t.’ (section 203, 111).

This awkward exchange both demonstrates how deeply set the language restrictions are for Klein-Anna, and how much Magda desires to be seen and recognized by her. If we return to the women’s first meeting, the encounter cited above seems to be predicted: “ ‘Come, Anna, there is nothing to be afraid of. Do you know who I am?’/ ‘Well, who am I?’/ ‘Miss is the miss.’/ ‘Well, come on then! ... Anna!’/ But Anna, my old Anna, has, it seems, been hovering in the passage all the time, listening” (section 58, 32). As we can see, the minute Ou-Anna is detected as being present and witnessing the “dialogue”, Magda expresses dismay and aborts her attempts of making Klein-Anna speak her name (which, judging by section 203, seems to have been the aim). Ou-Anna, then, reveals the taboo of what Magda tries to do. Both scenes are strikingly awkward and strange, underlining perhaps the unnaturalness of Magda wanting to be recognized and *named* by Klein-Anna.

Naming relates not only to claiming someone and asserting power over them, it also relates to creation. In creation myths, the god(s) gives names to objects, and in being named, the objects are filled with life. The creation, in turn, reflects and gives life to the god(s). The writer does the exact same thing in his writing and through the (poetic) imagination: “I have never been to Armoede, but with no effort at all...I can bring to life the bleak windswept hill...all held in unity under the sun, innocent, but to me only names, names, names” (section 38, 19). What Magda is arguing, is that she can, despite never having seen nor visited the place, bring it to life through authorial power and her imagination. Thus naming relates strongly to narcissistic fiction.

We have seen how naming works as a means of suppression, and in accepting a name given to you by someone else, you accept the terms that come with it. For Hendrik and his

new wife's sake, that means accepting what the *baas* sees as his right and property. Magda makes a point of explaining that Hendrik is not a slave, he is a hired hand, paid for his work. However, the old colonial privileges seem not to have been wiped out on this account. Magda presents several drafts or versions on her account of her father's approaches towards Klein-Anna. Invading Hendrik's cottage, Magda's father is ready to make more claims than on his property. Certain that he must have bribed Klein-Anna in some way, Magda speculates with what, first suggesting that he gives her a "brown paper packet, ...full of candies, hearts and diamonds with mottoes on them" (section 67, 36), then repeating this in her next section: "he takes a brown paper packet, which he gives her. It is full of candies, what they call hearts and diamonds" (section 68, 36). Deciding that sweets are not scandalous or stereotypical enough, Magda modifies her version again: "...I catch a flash of silver. For an instant the coin lies open in her palm, a shilling or even a florin" (section 69, 36). The impression that Magda has actually witnessed the exchange is rejected in the following section, when her interpretation of her father's behaviour is identified as the cause of her thought experiment: "I do not need to lurk behind the shutters to know his guilty thoughts" (section 70, 36). However, the coin and the sweets only have symbolic meaning, as the *baas* would not have to buy Klein-Anna to take her. The *baas* does not see himself as an invader of Hendrik's privacy and space because he sees himself as the master of it all: "to announce her as his concubine, his property", and Magda wonders if Klein-Anna "merely part[s] her thighs...because he is the master, or are there refinements of pleasure in subjection which wedded love can never give?" (section 99, 57). Here we find both a return to the issue of gender as well as the master/slave dichotomy. The idea of 'pleasure in subjection' is one which Magda will explore for herself later. As for her father, what he does recognize is that as long as he has his way, he is still their *baas* and master. Magda on her side, literally thrives on pain and gets her own perverted pleasure through subjecting to his will, to be cast in the role of the victim.

Much later in the novel, Magda considers the idea that the real cause for her father's invasion of Klein-Anna is grounded in his desperate need to 'provoke them out of their slavishness': "...from people who bent like reeds to his whims he was asking, in his way, for an affirmation of his truth in and for himself?/ Did Hendrik not see in the seduction of Anna my father's last attempt to compel from the lips of a slave...words such as one free being addresses to another" (section 250, 141-142). Hendrik's words echo in our minds reading this: "what can brown people do?" (section 222, 122). If Magda's father indeed wanted to provoke Hendrik into speaking the language of the free man, what kind of affirmation was he looking

for? It can only be to escape the role of the master for himself, to not have to play this role any longer.

Regardless of his reasons, a transaction has been made, one which both Magda and Hendrik are notified of, however indirectly. On the fatal night of Klein-Anna's seduction, Magda finds Hendrik crying outside, drunk from the brandy her father has bought him with. Earlier, Magda tells us that her father wants her to "take to [her] bedchamber with a migraine and stay there" (section 72, 37), which reveals her thesis that her father needs her and the others' opposition to both "hold the girl away from him, to confirm his desire", as well as "to be powerless against that desire" (*ibid.*). This can be tied to the idea often encountered in postcolonial theory of getting identity and recognition from others. Trapped in the dichotomy of master and servant, both parties have roles to fill and are mutually dependent on each other to play their parts successfully. Her father, holding the role of the master, is both entitled to desire Klein-Anna and then to live out that desire, whilst also knowing it is not morally correct. Neither Klein-Anna nor Hendrik have any power to prevent his siege, being only 'brown people'. Despite her feeling of being needed to fill the role of opponent and chaperone, Magda gives in to her father's wish in the very next section, finding more than a little pleasure in her misery. Even if she has taken to her room, she is not prevented from invading their privacy: "My father is exchanging forbidden words with Klein-Anna. I do not need to leave my room to know" (section 74, 38).

The new "friendship" between Magda's father and Klein-Anna results in alienating Magda even further. Excluded from the imagined community of women, the new notion of a family unit is a closed door to her:

He is merely an aging man who has had little love and who thinks he has found it, eating bread and peaches with his girl, waiting for the coffee-water to boil. *No scene more peaceful can be imagined*, if one ignores the bitter child straining her ears behind the door at the far end of the house. It is a love-feast they are having; but there is one feast which is nobler than the love-feast, and that is the *family meal*. *I should have been invited too*. I should be seated at that table, at the foot properly, since *I am mistress* of the household; and *she, not I, should have to fetch and carry*. (section 98, 56-57, emphasis added).

Not only is Magda not invited to join in their community, she also fears that had she been there, her place in the household would have been a different one. Her father would have wooed Klein-Anna at the expense of Magda's identity, and her place as mistress of the house would have been usurped.

To Magda, her father's interest in Klein-Anna is a rejection of herself. His invasion of Klein-Anna presupposes Magda's increased isolation. Not only is she isolated in terms of human contact, she is also isolated in lack of experience. She is inhibited from taking part in what is going on between Klein-Anna and her father, excluded as she is "from a room I have never been good enough to enter" (section 100, 58). Although Magda makes more than incestuous suggestions when talking about her father: "when I think of male flesh, white, heavy, dumb, whose flesh can it be but his?" (section 21, 9) she also reveals her inexperience of sex. Describing what she imagines would be sex with some other lone soul like her, she admits to her inexperience directly, yet holds on to a claim that her imagination allows her some sort of insight: "what I lack in experience I plainly make up for in vision" (section 88, 46). Her sexual view seems to affirm male dominance. In the above example, she is thinking of a potential husband, for "whom I would vow to bend to a little lower, *slave for* a little harder than another woman would" (*ibid.* emphasis added). Later, when she repeats her father's pattern with Hendrik, and is "colonized" by him, she solemnly states that "this is a woman's fate" (section 208, 116). As we shall see, this makes up a reversal of the master/servant relationship in the text, where victims of humiliation find themselves repeating oppressive behaviour against others. Despite Hendrik's invasion and claim of two wives, the old and the new, Magda is more isolated than ever, and her view on sex remains the same: "Must I weep? Must I kneel? Are you waiting for the white woman to kneel to you? Are you waiting for me to become your white slave?" (section 228, 128).

Regardless of the way she sees herself in relation to sex, she also has an idea that there is a different experience of it. This is why she after her initial rape by Hendrik wants to take over, or master Klein-Anna:

I would like to climb into Klein-Anna's body, I would like to climb down her throat while she sleeps and spread myself gently inside her...my skull in the benign quiet of her skull...there to wait mindlessly for whatever enters them... the parts of a man, not angry now but gentle, rocking in my bloodwarmth, leaving me with soapy seed, sleeping in my cave (section 211, 118).

On the one hand she is prejudiced against Klein-Anna, taking her mindlessness for granted. On the other hand, Klein-Anna represents some kind of ideal which Magda can only dream of living up to. Like her father, Magda attempts to find a way to 'buy' her, but her ability to communicate properly with people is too rusty. Magda expresses desire to be one of the wives of Hendrik of the old days: "two wives who...adapted their bodies to his desires, slept tight against him, the old wife on one side, the young wife on the other, that is how I imagine it"

(section 39, 20). However, her imagination is thwarted by the reality of colonialism. Instead of living the life of the old days, Hendrik structures his life on the master model of wife and concubine.

How are the mighty fallen

The reversal of roles is one of the issues critic Michela Canepari-Labib, in her reading of *In the Heart of the Country* emphasizes. This is a recurring motif in many of Coetzee's works, including *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Disgrace*. Seeing Magda's father as the colonizer in the novel, a power vacuum occurs upon his death, one that is seized upon by the servants (2007, 81-82). This triggers a conflict between the colonial power, represented by the father, and in some degree inherent also in Magda, and *gender*. Hendrik and Magda's father might be on different scales on the colonial barometer, but they share masculine power exerted over the feminine lack thereof. Or, as Caroline Rody puts it: "with the white master absent, Hendrik's gender superiority overrides Magda's racial superiority" (1994, 175). What prevents Magda from taking up the power of colonialism is to some extent her isolation. Lacking both money and the authority gained through having the chromosome pair XY, in addition to being friendless, Magda finds herself helpless in trying to exert power over Hendrik, and with him, Klein-Anna. According to Canepari-Labib, this isolation not only leads to a reversal of roles where Magda finds herself doing the household chores along with feeding Hendrik and Klein-Anna out of her stores, but also to a regression which takes her further away from the possibility of human communication (84).

The death of Magda's father, which in its grotesqueness foresees the further humiliation of his line, makes Magda realize that it is an act which cannot be called back, the story is irrecoverably changed, "the snake has come and the old Eden is dead" (section 135, 77). As with the fall from grace, history has been altered, innocence has been lost, and the 'old old code' Magda and Hendrik have lived by, is shifting, both in terms of race and gender. What Magda discovers, is that she stands alone against all of the accusations of the servants. She is no longer in control of the story as she was: "I have no understanding of changing forms" (section 136, 77). Thus the death of her father introduces a number of shifts in roles.

Following the father's death is a series of sections where Magda's ascent to colonial power is revealed. Unfortunately, this ascent to power is short-lived and Magda seems to lose confidence as quickly as she gains it:

I sit at the kitchen table waiting for my coffee to cool. Hendrik and Klein-Anna stand over me. They *say* that they are waiting to hear what to do, but

I cannot help them. There is nothing to do in the kitchen since no one eats meals any more. What there is to be done on the farm Hendrik knows better than I. / Therefore it is not true that Hendrik and Klein-Anna are here waiting for orders; they are waiting to see what I will do next (section 151, 88, emphasis added).

The suggestion is that Hendrik and Klein-Anna are testing out what they can expect from Magda. They claim to be awaiting orders, but they already know their jobs. The fact that Hendrik knows it better than Magda could hint that he already has an advantage over her. In the following section, however, Magda seems to find her voice, replaying the above section in a different version: “I sit at the kitchen table waiting for my coffee to cool. Over me stand Hendrik and Klein-Anna. ‘The smell is getting bad’, says Hendrik. ‘Yes, we will have to make a fire’, I reply. I am thankful, in times of trouble, to have a trusty helper” (section 152, 88). The perception of Hendrik as a trusty helper seems sudden. After the fatal night of the parricide, Hendrik has mostly represented an absence, leaving Magda alone to fend off the flies from her father’s body. Now he suddenly aspires to be a helper in Magda’s project, seemingly filling the role of the helper Magda wanted to stumble upon after her first killing spree.

Seeing Hendrik as helper gives Magda a new sense of community, but it is one which proves to be false. Longing for a unitary identity, the next sections begin with either ‘Hendrik’; ‘Hendrik and I’; or ‘we’. Magda’s toil alongside Hendrik gives her hopes of a new life, a chance to communicate with Hendrik and Klein-Anna in a better way. At the same time, we can clearly see that Magda is growing in self-esteem; she is working with Hendrik, doing masculine chores, focusing on necessary work. The pinnacle is reached in section 163 which begins with the same setting as the ones quoted above: “It is going to be a difficult day, I tell them, a day for waiting/ There are clouds massing to the north, I tell them/ We must beware in general, I tell them, of the revival of insect life that attends the rains.../ The birds are our allies, I tell them” (section 163, 91). Here, we see Magda at her height, speaking something akin to the master language, *telling* the servants what will happen. To the South African situation, colonial power depends upon language in a very direct way. Thus when Magda begins to struggle and get lost in the language, she also loses power over the servants. Note how her choice of words shifts from the use of ‘I tell them’ to less certain variations: “The lips are tired, *I explain to him*/ I am exhausted by obedience to this law, *I try to say*/ The law has gripped my throat, *I say and do not say*/ *How can I say, I say*, that these are not the eyes of the law that stare from behind my eyes...” (*ibid.* 91-92, emphasis added). Magda’s confidence is faltering, perhaps the way Hendrik is looking at her while she speaks signals

that she is not getting through to them, that the distance between them is in fact too great. This section then, foreshadows the beginning of the end for their newfound relationship.

Continuing her descent, Magda makes the mistake of overreaching herself, like her father did before her. Her desire for community leads her to enter a locked and windowless room in the house together with Hendrik and Klein-Anna. Recovering relics of the past, Magda literally dresses Klein-Anna up in the ‘sad noble clothes of bygone times that I would love to wear’, inducing Klein-Anna to ‘insist on a pair’ of the too narrow shoes: “Up and down the stoep struts Klein-Anna mastering the shoes” (section 166, 93). The symbolism is impossible to overlook. The act of forcing open the locked room, and of dressing Klein-Anna up in borrowed robes, which consequently leads Klein-Anna to assert herself through the demand and mastering of the shoes, both represents the transgression of physical and symbolical borders. Recalling Magda’s fury at Klein-Anna’s usurpation of her father and her place at the kitchen table, Magda is now the one to place Klein-Anna on a sort of pedestal.

The bottom of the hole has not been reached yet, however. Still holding power over the servants, Magda tells them to sleep in the house in an attempt to invade their privacy. The invasion goes both ways, but again it is she who invites them into the space and place of mastery. Further, the burial of her father represents a burial of the language of oppression. Unable to adopt it, Magda has lost a tool for controlling the servants. Although helping her dig the hole and move the father’s body, Hendrik refuses to test if the grave is big enough for a person, and he will have nothing to do with the burial. Thus it falls on Magda to do both on her own. The hole is too narrow to push the rigid body into, and Magda’s only solution is to “pull him in, to climb in first and pull him after me” (section 182, 100). The act becomes a symbolic act of burying herself along with her father, as well as a burial of the order her father has represented. Already the following day, less than hours after Magda’s emergence from the grave, her power is taken away from her in Hendrik’s demand to get paid.

Money is a currency which gives authority, and without it the power scale is imbalanced. We have seen how Magda’s father, through paying both Hendrik ‘in cash and kind’ and Klein-Anna in sweets, asserts his power over them. But the man who has wielded the purse is gone, and with him, it seems, so has the money. Confined as she has been in the kitchen and in her room, Magda knows nothing of her father’s money or where it has been kept. Naive of the symbolic power of money, Magda fails to see why Hendrik has any more need of money than what she does. Under threat of being abandoned, of again facing an isolated existence, Magda promises that Hendrik will get his money. In the meanwhile,

Hendrik claims his due by helping himself from the stores of food and from the sheep, whereas Magda, unable to pay, finds herself changing places with the servants:

The floor shines as it never shone when it was left to the care of servants/
My knees are tender from kneeling at the bathside, my hands raw from the
scrubbing-board. My back aches, my head reels when I stand up/ My house has
been set in order...and I have done it myself. Next comes the farm. ...the sheep
must be shorn. If Hendrik refuses to do that task I will, my energies are
boundless; I will put on my sunbonnet and go out with my sewing-scissors and
catch the sheep by their hind legs and trap them between my knees and shear
them one by one, day after day, until it is all done (section 187, 103-104).

Without Hendrik's help, the farm is falling into decay, as Magda prioritizes keeping a clean house rather than doing the chores that would normally be his to do. Canepari-Labib points out that through letting the farm go wild, Magda shows that she is "unable to maintain the role of mistress and 'civilizer'" (2005, 82). Compensating for being unfit as such, Magda becomes obsessed with the notion of keeping a clean house, of managing on her own, but "things will not grow dirty fast enough" (section 193, 105). This Lady Macbeth-like obsession with cleanliness is only rivaled by the magistrate's in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, where cleanliness becomes a purification ritual which also works to compensate for shortcomings in the character.

Without currency, Magda literally has no value, and Hendrik suggests that "miss can give us something else" (section 194, 106). This is the point where Canepari-Labib suggests that the roles are truly reversed in the novel. Through her attempt to get a closer relationship with Hendrik and Anna, Magda "leaves the position of 'mastery' empty, and since her father is not there to step in and occupy it for her, that position is taken by the two servants" (82). Thus it is evident that the isolation Magda is feeling leads directly to the servants' invasion of both her possessions and her body. Hendrik asserts the right to clad himself in her father's good clothes, 'becoming' the master as he does so. As such, he has the power to hurt her, to continue the cycle of humiliation found in the Afrikaans culture¹⁶, and he does this in the most sexual way. Canepari-Labib argues that "Magda now considers Hendrik and Anna her two enemies, and...she becomes their prey" (83). This is supported in the text, when Magda says: "bored with each other, they have turned on me for sport" (section 197, 107). This idea seems to predict some of the actions of *Waiting for the Barbarian*, where the magistrate finds himself the 'scapegoat' and 'clown' of the town, but I will get back to that in the next chapter.

16 Gallagher cites J. M. Coetzee on the practice of humiliation in Afrikaner culture, and concludes: "those who have been humiliated merely wait their turn to hold authority and continue to participate in the same authoritarian system" (1991, 92).

However, the sport does not end with mere humiliation. The rape scene, set when Hendrik returns empty-handed from the post-office on his quest for payment, is the most forceful act in the novel. In my introductory chapter, I emphasize how the physical rape is the main invasion in the novel. There have been several incidents of physical violence before in the text, but all of them have a somewhat distanced and passive quality. The rape scene is also distanced, but her repetition of this scene seems even more obsessive. Here we find the ultimate loss of colonial power and reversal of roles, where Magda is reduced to the currency of slavery: the currency of the body. Hendrik finds an optional way of demanding payment, and in turn he changes his identity in relation to Magda. The rape has some parallels in the story. Firstly it recalls the scene of the *baas* with Klein-Anna. Then it recalls a scene which happens on the night when Hendrik is gone¹⁷. Magda encourages Klein-Anna to sleep in the kitchen, and does not leave as she gets ready for bed, literally giving her no choice but to undress in her presence. This fascination with Klein-Anna's body has been noted before. It is a body that has other experiences written on it, and perhaps this is the cause for Magda's fascination. Once she lies down, Magda insists on lying with her until she falls asleep, and the scene strikes the reader as very uncomfortable for Klein-Anna. Magda continues asking questions about Klein-Anna's sex life, but begets no reply, to which she thinks: "this is not going to be a dialogue, thank God, I can stretch my wings and fly where I will" (section 203, 110). Occurring whilst Magda still has authority over the servants, Klein-Anna has no choice but to accept Magda's request and exploitation, similar to what she had to do with the master. The implication is that the 'brown' body is for free, open for the master's scrutiny. One cannot help but feel that Magda is in some ways using or abusing Klein-Anna in this section. Although she does not really *do* anything, there is an invasion both of space and intimate zone at work here. And even if Magda gets no answers to her questions, she still penetrates the sacred bond between the married couple. But however uncomfortable this scene makes us, it does not prepare us for what is to come.

As I discussed earlier, scenes of trauma are repeated with different variations. According to J. Hillis Miller in an excerpt reprinted in *Narratology* (1996) there is a notion of 'line' in any narrative which constitutes a 'labyrinth of meanings'. He argues that there is an aspect of repetition found in stories, including repetitions of motifs, other texts and repetitions of elements of the text itself. The "critic may be unable to decide, of two repeating elements,

17 It is interesting to note how both her father and Magda "hit" on Klein-Anna after having sent Hendrik on a "Uria's post" or on some 'godforsaken task', leaving Klein-Anna helpless against her 'predators'. Surely the language they use with her must echo each other: the attempt to persuade her not to fear, along with the urge of calling them by their names.

which is the original of which, which the ‘illustration’ of the other” (1996, 292) etc, and this is one of the problems we face when reading the different versions of the events Magda narrates. Of the traumatic scenes recounted, the rape scene is by far the worst. Though some of the scenes can easily be said to be the same scene, others differ so much as to lead one to question if it is not another scene, another rape. Sections 205-212 seem to cover one, or possibly two rape scenes. Magda’s initial account is of being raped on the kitchen floor. In what could be another rape scene the same day, or her new version of what happened, she is raped in her bed in her own room. With each version, Magda seems more articulate with Hendrik, going from ‘please, please!’, ‘weeping with shame’, and looking like a ‘bitch’, ignorant as it were of ‘what happens next’ in section 205, to increasingly more experienced and articulate in the following sections. Section 206 gives us the whole rape scene, from beginning to end, where he “draws himself out and away”. In section 207 Magda rewinds to the rape act, ranting at him of his hatred of her and throwing accusations at him. Section 208 shifts to the bedroom. Whereas the previous sections showed Hendrik’s invasion of her body and of the female space, he now invades even her bed, forcing her to undress, whereas Magda seems to accept what she calls a ‘woman’s fate’. In section 209 we find another struggle, where Hendrik has to ‘break [her] open’: “ ‘Open up,’ he says, those are his first words to me; but I am cold, I shake my head and clench myself, I clench everything together, I have nothing to give him, I am beyond being persuaded, even the tears can find no way out from behind these knotted eyelids”. Then follows the actual forced entry, and some lines suggesting that Magda is not quite present in the moment: “ ‘Don’t be afraid,’ he says. Are those his words?/ ‘It won’t hurt,’ he says./ ‘Everyone likes it,’ he says harshly. Are those his words?”. Magda keeps questioning the words she believes to have heard, underlining the issue of blurred boundaries. It can sound as if the words she hears, or believes she hears, are the words she expects to hear in the current situation, words she uses to calm herself. These words might not come from Hendrik but rather from Hayden White’s concept of ‘pre-generic plot convention’, originating in her expectations, thus the words are not his but imposed by her into the situation. Recalling White’s argument, that generic conventions carry an ‘ideological burden’, suggests that the words Magda recounts comes not from Hendrik’s lips but rather from the expectations towards the genre. At any rate, in the process of writing this, the words, regardless of their origin, are now hers, her words. She is thus still commenting upon her own writing act. In *Life and Times of Michael K*, one of the characters also contemplate how words work to erase boundaries between who utters and who conceives of the words: “It seemed more like Robert than like him, as he knew himself, to think like that.

Would he have to say that the thought was Robert's, and had merely found a home in him, or could he say that though the seed had come from Robert, the thought, having grown up inside him, was now his own? He did not know" (Coetzee, 1985, 130). This underlines the possibility that Magda has indeed not heard Hendrik say this, but her expectation of hearing it convinces her that she has.

After the rape, Magda considers if his invasion of her body has robbed her of herself:

A body lies on top of a body pushing and pushing, *trying to find a way in*, motion everywhere. But what does this body want inside me?! What deeper *invasion* and *possession* does he plot in his sleep? That one day all his bony frame shall lie packed inside me, his skull inside my skull, his limbs along my limbs, the rest of him crammed in my belly? *What will he leave me of myself?* (section 210, 117, emphasis added).

Magda here presents her idea of the ultimate possession: of Hendrik taking over her body, filling it with his own. This returns us to the idea of blurred boundaries. As we saw above, the rape act blurred the distinction between who is speaking, who is in power of the situation. An invasion of her body not only blurs distinctions between their bodies and speech, it also has to do with identity. Borders of gender and race literally come together and are deconstructed, changing Magda's perception of the roles in the story. Magda's world and body has now been colonized by Hendrik; he has moved in, filled her with his seed, changed her through his invasion and ultimately changed the course of her story. The invasion of her body directly leads to an invasion of her mind. Caroline Rody argues that "the binary racist structure of colonialism can... infect a white person's sense of identity" (1994, 169) Thus the colonial taint, or the humiliation pattern, which after the death of the *baas* finds a new bearer in Hendrik, has now successfully infected Magda who in turn will try to infect Klein-Anna. Earlier we saw that Magda desired to invade and fill Klein-Anna's body. This means that what Magda perceives as the worst invasion and deprivation of self is something she herself wishes to impose on Klein-Anna, continuing the aforementioned humiliation pattern. This suggests that Magda wants to be in power of any blurred boundaries taking place. In a later attempt to assert her own power, Magda answers the question she posed at the end of section 210: "I am pressed but not possessed, I am pierced but my core is not touched. At heart I am still the fierce mantis virgin of yore. Hendrik may take me, but it is I holding him holding I" (section 227, 127). Since everything, in her mind, evolves around her, and since Magda is the one who writes and gives life to her world, her claim of authorial power as a means of redeeming herself is necessary for her writing project.

One would think that after all that has happened, Magda will avoid Hendrik like the plague. Yet she does the complete opposite thing. Inviting the couple to sleep in the house, Magda makes herself available as Hendrik's Other woman: "I do not see what it is in me that causes his excitement, or if I do recognize the cause, I hope that in time it will change for the better" (section 217, 120). The cause seems to be a combination of taking power and the taboo of the white woman¹⁸. As she later remarks: "sometimes I think it is my humiliation he wants" (section 221, 122). The implication is that Magda has now found the 'pleasure in subjection' she earlier questioned. Hendrik does not want a lover, he merely wants what the rapist is after: power and subjection. Magda is easy prey, waiting for him to come, eager to please him, in some ways replacing Hendrik with her father in her mind. Desperate for recognition, she wants his feedback, to know if he likes what they do: "'Hendrik, why won't you let me light a candle? Just once? You come in the night like a ghost – how am I to know it is really you?'/ 'Who else would it be?'/ 'No one ... I just want to see how you look. May I?'/ 'No, don't!' (section 218, 121). Hendrik's insistence on keeping it in the dark not only suggests his unwillingness to give Magda recognition, through looking at her eye to eye, it also keeps it secret. The motif of keeping things in the dark versus shedding light on them, is found to be most central in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Whereas Magda wants to shed light on the events, to write them into being, Hendrik wants them kept in the dark, always giving them a dream-like and fictional quality.

To compensate for not gaining recognition and companionship with Hendrik despite their physical encounters, Magda again establishes a notion of unitary identity in both a gendered and intertextual way: "this too happens to women, they lie waiting for men who do not come, I have read of it, let it not be said that I do not undergo everything, from the first letter to the last" (section 219, 121). Magda here reveals her perverted sense of what events are important enough to make up her notion of living from 'beginning to end', 'from the first letter to the last', referring to acts of violence as 'what is happening'. Bored by the farm life, any act of hers which causes a *reaction*, seems to be worthy of a life and consequently to be narrated. And what is striking through reading this novel closely, is how Magda consciously sets out with a project of cause and effect, to produce reaction. Considering her provocation and subsequent killings of her father, her claiming of both Hendrik and Klein-Anna, her invitation for them to live with her, all seem to move in one direction: of plotting events and

18 According to Gallagher, "the Afrikaner woman came to represent the ultimate symbol of purity for the Afrikaner race./ Although some areas allowed mixed marriages, all specifically forbade illicit sexual intercourse between white women and any "native"; no similar law forbade such sexual relations between white men and black women" (90).

sequences where there are none, and of being recognized where no recognition is found. J. Hillis Miller in “Line” talks about the difficulties the critic encounters, mentioning especially the ‘breakdown of distinctions’¹⁹, including that between “the notion that the novel copies something and the notion that it makes something happen” (1996, 292). In my mind, this is a clear paradox we find in the novel. Magda tells us initially that nothing ever happens on the farm; then she proceeds to make things happen. But despite her many attempts to invade in order to be recognized, she fails and fails again, finding herself increasingly more isolated, until finally there is no one else but herself and what remains of her father.

The metaphysical conquest

Throughout this chapter I have been making references to the novel as a metaphysical or narcissistic text, and it is time I expand upon that idea. Earlier I argued that Magda’s invasions happen on an imaginary plane. This because she takes on the role of the omniscient narrator, focalizing²⁰ *on behalf of* the other characters and thus other points of views. Often we find Magda describing conversations or actions that she in reality would have had no access to. In this sense, she is invading their minds, bodies and space through her imagination. She uses the sensual imagery of smell, ‘sniff’ and the popular genre of detective fiction to account for her intimate knowledge. One certainly detects a repeated pattern of deductive reasoning, as I in part have shown, of asserting how things are connected, by considering certain clues, and stating ‘that must have happened’, or ‘it cannot be otherwise’. Whereas in some sections, it is clear that Magda’s assertions are mere speculation, she in other passages sounds much more confident:

Hendrik wishes to start a line, a humble line of his own in parallel to the line of my grandfather and father, to speak only of them. Hendrik would like a house full of sons and daughters. That is why he has married. The second son, he *thinks*, the obedient one, will stay behind, learn the farmwork, be a pillar of help, marry a good girl, and continue the line. The daughters, he *thinks*, will work in the farmhouse kitchen. On Saturday nights they will be courted by boys from the neighbouring farms, come epic distances across the veld...and bear children out of wedlock/ Those are Hendrik’s ambitions (section 46, 26, emphasis added).

19 This can also be seen as the ‘blurring of boundaries’ often found in post-structuralist and post-colonial theories.

20 A ‘focalizer’ is the character or narrator whose point of view is expressed. In a novel, there can be several focalizers, and we recognize one when we see something through the eyes of a certain character or voice. Narratology differentiates between an internal and an external focalizer; the internal being a character *in* the world of the story, whereas the external narrator is outside the world of the story.

From this section, one would think that Magda has intimate knowledge of Hendrik, that he has told her what he *thinks*, but a few lines further down, Magda nullifies it by admitting “I know nothing of Hendrik” (section 48, 27). Her representation of him is based on the same deduction method she uses to conclude how things are connected.

J. Hillis Miller talks about issues in narrative relating to the one creator of the text: “my exploration of the labyrinth of narrative terms is in its turn to be defined as a perhaps impossible search for the center of the maze, the Minotaur or spider that has created and commands it all” (292). It is so interesting to note the spider, which is one of the repeated metaphors and images Magda uses to describe herself: “...spinning my trail from room to room” (section 8, 3). Here it seems that Magda is, or wishes to be, the spider in command of it all. Yet throughout the story, she seems to get lost in her many threads. Expanding upon his spider image, Hillis Miller goes on to say: “The Minotaur, as Ruskin saw, is a spider, Arachne-arachnid who devours her mate, *weaver of a web that is herself*. This *ubiquitous* figure both hides and reveals an *absence*, an abyss” (292, emphasis added). As seen in my discussions above, throughout the novel, Magda returns to the idea that she is writing herself into being. In this part of this chapter, I also have shown how Magda represents, or tries to represent, the omniscient narrator, being everywhere at once. Further, the notion of absences is recurrent in the novel; Magda herself is an absence, at least to her father and to the world; her father is a black hole; people and places as a whole are absent in the story.

As the omniscient narrator, Magda wears a variety of ‘shells’, which is what the author is doing when he writes different kinds of literary texts:

It is the hermit crab, I remember from a book, that as it grows migrates from one empty shell to another. The grim moralist with the fiery sword is only a stopping-place, a little less temporary than the haggard wife knitting on the stoep, a little more temporary than the wild woman of the veld who talks to her friends the insects and walks in the midday sun, but temporary all the same. Whose shell I presently skulk in does not matter, it is the shell of a dead creature. (section 90, 47).

Magda migrates between different roles as she goes along; the Valkyrie, the avenger, the Other Woman, the witch and so forth. Her identification with the hermit crab also underlines her own isolation and the idea of being inside something snug, similar to her perfect ease when she was inside the hole that was to be her father’s grave. Further, in this passage she admits to changing shells as she grows, but as we saw in section 136, Magda claims that she has no ‘understanding of changing forms’. Perhaps this suggests that Magda, as she grows in her story, can take on different shells, but the form, as imposed on her, is something she wants

to control, but is not always able to. It writes her as she writes it. Evidence of this is found when Magda talks about imagination: “The magic of imagining the worst has not worked. The worst is here” (section 97, 55).

Another metafictional trait becomes apparent when Magda on her father’s second (!) death bed is willing to give up her authorial power and stop entering forbidden rooms, if she can only get a fresh start again: “Show me your heart just once and I swear I will never look again, into your heart or any other, be it the heart of the meanest stone²¹! I will give up this kind of talk too, every word of it! When the words come I will set fire to them!”(section 136, 78). The image here refers to the written word, rather than merely inner meditations. This Shakespearean monologue changes towards the end of the section, when Magda, having received no revelation of the heart from her dying father, refuses to let him die: “Do you think you can die without having said Yes to me? Do you think I cannot breathe the breath of your lungs for you or pump your heart in my fist?/ You and I will live together in this room till I have my way, till the crack of doom, till the stars fall out of the sky. *I am I!* I can wait!”. Despite this assertion of authorial power, Magda does not manage to wrench a ‘yes’ from her father’s lips. Neither does she keep her promise/threat of staying in the room until she has her way, nor of keeping him alive in her macabre way. Here, she seems more than willing and by far powerful enough to keep her father alive by any means possible. But in the section below, Magda seems weary: “why is it left to me to give life not only to myself, minute after surely minute, but to everyone else on the farm, and the farm itself, every stick and stone of it? I said once that I slept, but that was a lie./...that cannot be true. How can I afford to sleep? If for one moment I were to lose my grip on the world, it would fall apart” (section 137, 79). This echoes the fate of Lady Macbeth who started sleepwalking after Macbeth’s bloody deeds: “I have seen / her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon / her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, / write upon’t, read it, afterwards seal it, and again / return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep”²².

Despite her assurance that she does not sleep, busy as she is with keeping life in her world, there are gaps in the text she cannot account for, days passing without her noticing. Thus, when she recounts her father’s death, she starts: “A day must have intervened here. Where there is a blank there must have been a day during which my father sickened irrecoverably” (section 149, 86), and she makes several theories as to how she might have

21 In section 84 on p. 42, Magda states the following: “At some point on the line from youth to man to husband to father to master the heart must have turned to stone”.

22 Shakespeare, William. *Macbeth*. Ed. A. R. Braunmuller. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997. Act V, scene I.

spent her day. In the next section, however, she admits that she “seem[s] to exist more and more intermittently. Whole hours, whole afternoons go missing” (section 150, 87). As her father’s life leaves him, it seems, so does part of Magda’s authorial power. More and more characters disappear out of the text. First Anna and Jacob, who suddenly leave without a trace. Then her father, whose traces they burn. Next is Hendrik and Klein-Anna who also just disappear. We can also of course count the new wife who is eliminated from the story, the siblings or step-brothers and sisters that Magda wonders if she has had, but of whom there is no trace. And of course the mother, who Magda has a sense of, but this sense has a very stereotypical quality. Thus towards the end of the novel, Magda’s world is narrowing down more and more, until the flying machines again seem to open it up a crack.

Before moving my argument on to language and the problem of meaning, I want to take a little time out and look briefly at what I have investigated thus far. One of the things I have emphasized is the novel’s concern with creative activity, and especially how the text in so many ways speaks back to its own coming into being. The literary references are scattered all over the text, a conscious move by both Coetzee and Magda. Not only as literary text, but as a feminine manifesto of sorts, where Magda asserts her own independent identity from the tradition of the *plaasroman* and other novel conventions. Her consciousness becomes apparent through her persistent use and exploitation of the different genre conventions, for so in turn to discard them one by one as inappropriate to the telling of her story. In the search for identity and her own story, aspects which here are interdependent, I suggest that Magda makes use of her own version of thought experiment to help her uncover the truth. In Coetzee’s novels, truth becomes a relative term. However, Magda not only uses genre expectations in order to discard them, she is also trying to find the right form for her story. As I noted in Hayden White’s article, the notion of writing history (Magda seems to be *rewriting* history), takes on a certain angle, depending on who is telling the story. Magda’s discarding of certain genres suggests that she finds the histories which have been formerly “telling her story” to be lacking. In this sense she disagrees with the former points of views and generic modes which have told “her story”. Through writing an own story for herself, Magda claims authority. However, she cannot escape completely the traditions imposed on her by her father or the code of the Afrikaans society. Thus she finds that she can liberate herself from the expectations towards her, whereas the servants are still subjected to the colonial law of oppression and humiliation. Written as female, the father’s death does not lead to the fulfillment of Magda’s romantic hopes or ideological utopian vision of a life shared with Hendrik and Klein-Anna. The oppressive system, so deeply inscribed in the servants,

continues its mission in Hendrik, and Magda, as we shall see, fails in deconstructing the binary oppositions of master/slave, male/female, and so forth. The language of oppression cannot be erased from their consciousness, and that is one of the things I will turn to below.

In chapter 1, I talked briefly about Coetzee as a deconstructionist writer. In terms of post-structuralism, Magda as writer is interesting. Post-structural theory and criticism places an emphasis on words and the relationship between signifier and signified. As I mentioned above, Magda has the deductive reasoning of the detective who both reads the *signs* and draws conclusions on these grounds. However, post-structuralism deconstructs the relationship between them. Magda herself talks about this, as we have seen. Her desire is on the one hand for the simple: to be pure being, be part of nature, to inhabit Klein-Anna, and so forth, and on the other to continue being consciousness and monologue. Magda further sees the distance between what she writes, and the objects themselves: “Seated here I hold the goats and the 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 for item by my word-counters” (section 50, 28). Thus even if her words write the objects in her world into being, they also alienate them. This question of language is one that is dealt with throughout the novel, and I will continue considering its significance.

We have already seen how language is a means of asserting authority and mastery over someone else. Magda, although claiming her authority in the novel, admits that she is excluded from certain kinds of language: “I can believe there is a language lovers speak but cannot imagine how it goes” (section 195, 106). The key seems to lie in her ability to “imagine how it goes”, which explains how she can so frequently speak and understand other ‘languages’, or literary forms, rather than her ‘father tongue’ (i.e. the *plaasroman*). Her explanation that “what passes between us now is a parody” (*ibid.*) refers not only to the dialogue she has with the servants, but also comments on her writing and the fact that she is *parodying* different literary forms. Thus Magda can write scenes which sound like ‘bucolic comedy’, for instance, all for play and parody, and drag in ‘universal truths’ and philosophical intertext as a way of helping the reader see how “the novel already interprets itself” (Miller, 1996, 293). Further, as I commented on earlier, Magda focalizes on behalf of the other characters, and it can seem as if this relates to the parody. The pervading silence of Hendrik and Klein-Anna, who hardly have any lines, makes them in a sense the puppets Magda must speak for through her ability to ‘imagine’ what they must be thinking and saying through their silences, underlining the parody in that she is in fact speaking with and to herself when she is speaking with them. An illustration of her interpreting silence is found when she is

“eavesdropping” on her father and Klein-Anna, and “hears” the words of the other through the silences of the first: “He believes that he and she can choose their words and make a private language. Their intimate *you* is my *you* too./ How can I speak to Hendrik as before when they corrupt my speech? How do I speak to them?” (section 74, 38). This passage predicts the corruption of Magda’s own language and her post-rape exchange of forbidden words with Hendrik. The notion of a ‘private’ language within the shared language suggests a further gap between the word and the meaning of the word, and I will presently look at this in its relation to the problems of understanding and how meanings are imposed by the language of oppression.

As we saw above, Magda interprets silences, and connects meaning and understanding to the unspoken and unarticulated. The concept of ‘understanding’, then, comes across as strikingly ambiguous, and the word “understand” is used in interesting places. The post-structuralist distance between signifier and signified, is one which many critics have noted is found in the language of oppression itself, and especially in the language of apartheid and the South African state during the apartheid years. Interpretation of meanings does not pend upon the actual words, but rather what these words are *hiding*. This is similar to how Magda, when listening in on her father and Klein-Anna, knows only of the second voice due to the silences of the first. The lesson seems to be not to take things at face value, and that ‘understanding’ comes not from the words alone. To take a rather illustrating example from the text, Magda attempts to make the drunken Hendrik help with her father. Unsuccessful at rousing him from his stupor, Magda makes use of other means to make him understand. Bringing the rifle along, Magda makes some headway:

‘Hendrik, get up at once or I shoot. I am sick of your games. The baas needs you.’

When one truly means what one says, when one speaks not in shouts of panic, but quietly, deliberately, decisively, then one is *understood* and obeyed. How pleasing to have identified a universal truth. (section 133, 74, emphasis added).

Magda’s irony is not lost on us; the universal truth Magda has found, is that with threat of violence, people can be made to obey mostly anything. This is a point I shall return to in my discussion of *Waiting for the Barbarians*. For now we will remain in the heart of the country and the problems of understanding found there. It seems to me that the word “understand” is used when the people in the novel mean something else than what they are actually saying. This is often found in connection with the language of the oppressor, where the person who is in power of the situation defines the terms of understanding.

In the article “The Agony and the Allegory: The Concept of the Foreign, the Language of Apartheid, and the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee” (2001) by Rebecca Saunders, Saunders talks about the problem of meaning, primarily as it relates to allegory in connection with the language of oppression. According to her, “the language of apartheid is characterized precisely by that “fundamental dislocation of words from their objects” that identifies allegory” (232), and further that they “through careful context management, insures – that they be read literally”. Not all will have access to this particular kind of understanding, and as I mentioned above, it seems that where the word “understand” appears in the text, the context is manipulated to make the other person do what the speaker wants. In the novel, this is particularly evident in relation to her father. On the night of Klein-Anna and Magda’s father’s rendezvous, Magda tries to enter the room, but the door is locked:

‘It’s late child. Let us rather talk tomorrow. Go and get some sleep.’

He has spoken. Having found it necessary to lock the door against me, he has now found it necessary to speak to me.

I thump heavily again. What will he do?

The lock snaps open. Through the crack his arm snakes out at me milky white above the dark hair. Instantly he has my wrist in his grasp and crushes it with all the strength of that great hand./

‘Go to bed! Do you understand what I say?’

‘No! I don’t feel like sleeping!’ (section 103, 59-60).

Yet again we see that violence as it is often found in the novel, is employed to promote *understanding*. Magda in this instance refuses to understand, refuses to participate in the meaning he wants to impose on her. Her initial refusal to understand by her persistence at the door, makes it necessary for her father to show her, through violence, what she fails to grasp. We saw the exact same thing when Magda brought the rifle after failed attempts to raise Hendrik.

In the very short article “Fictional Beings” (2003), Coetzee himself makes a philosophical explication of what it means to understand. Using the example of a tennis coach teaching a young player a certain move, Coetzee emphasizes the dialectics between the nonverbal demonstration and the verbal explanation of how to do it. The player has not understood it until he is able to do it himself: “when you got the stroke right, and could repeat it, I saw that you had finally understood the meaning behind my words” (par. 2). The person in power is in this case the coach, and he determines the context for understanding. Once a player has understood the move, he is able to do the stroke without thinking of the words behind it, thus “he has made X his own” (par. 6). Applying this to fiction, Coetzee argues that the same process goes on when we read a story. Although Coetzee’s explication is interesting,

it is very brief and lacks some complexity. Coetzee seems to leave out the ambiguity he is so careful to preserve in most of his fiction. No reference is made, for instance, to there being different ways of understanding. Coetzee's argument that he, through continued reading of *The Sound and the Fury* is "better and better able to "do" Benjy" (par. 9), leaves out the possibility that other readers might "do" Benjy in a different way. Literary theory and method show us how we through different perspectives, can understand a text in a variety of ways. However, what in my mind is more important to note which Coetzee does not comment on, is that the tennis coach, or any kind of authorial figure, through their attempt to make their students understand, impose their perception of correct understanding onto the students. This relates to Saunders' view that the language of apartheid or the oppressor controls the context. Of course the agents of oppression are often victims of the same system themselves, and are just as chained to the roles assigned to them. This controlling of context then, is not necessarily a conscious act. This we will see in more detail as it relates to *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Applying these issues to *In the Heart of the Country*, we find that in the example above, Magda's father controls the context through which he demands understanding from Magda. Magda does the same thing when she wants Hendrik's help to bury her father. Appealing to the hesitant Hendrik, Magda says: "Hendrik, I want to speak *frankly*. We can't wait any longer. It is hot, the baas must be buried. There are only you and I who can do it. I can't do it by myself, and I don't want *strangers interfering*. This is a *family matter*, something *private*. Do you *understand* what I am saying?" (section 178, 98, emphasis added). Magda begins her speech by telling him that she wants to speak frankly. However, what follows hardly seem to cover the truth. In persuading Hendrik to understand, she attempts to trap him in this language which has a split between signifier and signified, in a sense invading the language. Thus Magda is now doing what she accused her father of doing: tainting the language by changing the meaning of words.

In Saunders's conception of the language of apartheid, she also talks about the foreign: "to be foreign is *not* belonging to a group, *not* speaking a given language, *not* having the same customs; it is to be *unfamiliar*, *uncanny*, *unnatural*, *unauthorized*, *incomprehensible*, *inappropriate*, *improper*" (218); i.e. the characteristics in common for most of Coetzee's main characters! In short, the foreigner is excluded from understanding. As I have shown, Magda is excluded from understanding the language of love, and from entering the forbidden rooms of both her father, and Hendrik and Klein-Anna. The exclusion drives her to invade these spaces, but with fatal results. As is visible in the novel, the rooms that are "open" to Magda are the kitchen, the bedroom and the living room. When someone exits the story, however, Magda

gains access to the spaces previously closed to her. Ou-Anna and Jacob leave, allowing her to enter the schoolhouse. Upon the death of her father, Magda enters the 'locked' room. Magda even seems to shoot her father to be admitted to his bedroom! However, bodies also come to stand for a space which can be invaded, and Magda invites Hendrik and Klein-Anna into her home, into her *web*, so that she can impose upon them there. After the rape, when Magda "becomes" the Other woman, she tries to speak the language of love, but fails and gains no recognition or understanding. She remains a foreigner to them, and they remain foreign to her, and lo and behold! they exit the story too. The foreignness is apparent in the way Coetzee uses the word 'understand' in this setting. Speaking to Klein-Anna, Magda first lets us know that she is relieved that this will not be a dialogue, then she states that Klein-Anna "hears only the waves of rage crashing in my voice" (section 203, 110), and finally she says: " '...I could have been a quite different person, I could have burned my way out of this prison, my tongue is forked with fire, do you understand; but it has all been turned uselessly inward/ I have never known words of true exchange, Anna. The words I give you you cannot give back. They are words without value. Do you understand? No value' "(*ibid.*). The question 'do you understand' becomes a mockery considering that Magda knows that Klein-Anna does not follow her talk, rendering it valueless. Both women are of course foreign to each other, but Magda recognizes in this section her own foreignness. Later, when she is in bed with Hendrik, Magda tells him: "'I don't know anything about this, Hendrik – do you understand? All I want to know is whether I am doing it right/ I don't know whether you like what we do. Do you understand what I am telling you?'" (sections 217-218, 120-121). The question is not whether or not Hendrik understands. What Magda is really saying is that *she* does not understand. Hendrik might penetrate her body, but she wants to penetrate his mind. She is unsuccessful in this endeavour and remains a foreigner to the servants. But as I have shown, the idea of language as the key to understanding is ambiguous and cannot be taken at face value. The concept of the foreign implies the split between words and meanings, a split which is exploited by the oppressor. Thus we find that through foreignness, which of course relates strongly to a sense of isolation, the oppressed is prevented from understanding and speaking a certain language. The authorial power, on the other hand, invades language and consequently controls the context of understanding.

Turning my life into a fiction

Finally I want to return to the question I looked at initially in this chapter of what kind of story this is. I have established that this is Magda's own story; she escapes into thought experiment to find the true story of the marginalized Afrikaans woman. As such, Coetzee does not endeavour to tell the whole South African story, but a *specific* female Afrikaans story. I have also entered the realm of metafiction, where I have seen Magda's story in terms of self-reflection and parody. It is evident that we are dealing with a highly ambiguous novel in every way. Seeing the story-references as Hillis Miller's "line", it is clear that they point in many different directions. Thus it seems that *In the Heart of the Country*, at the end, is a novel about authorship.

The novel has traces of, and draws on, a variety of influences. As we have seen, Magda herself seems insecure about what kind of story she is writing/is writing her: "what other tale is there for me?" (section 12, 5). At times she explores the morbidly comical, other times the ironic, and she does not always see this herself. After killing her father the first time, Magda sees her story as one of murder, and 'the guilty cannot be bored'. However, this quickly shifts to a different notion; still searching for the right form or convention to fit her story, the murder story has turned out disappointing thus far, and she makes an attempt at suicide: "Of all adventures, suicide is the most literary, more so even than murder. With the story coming to its end, all one's last bad poetry finds release./ Then the elegiac trance passes and all the rest is cold, wet, farcical./ I strike bottom all too soon, as far from the mythic vortex as ever" (section 31, 14). Her attempted suicide only produces farce, and fails to live up to her expectations. Toying with the notion of reader expectations and genre, Magda informs us of the typical solutions found in stories fitting certain paradigms, but she also demonstrates how they are faulty. I would like to argue that Magda's play with genre in many ways constitutes a *dialogue* with other novels and genres. An example of this found in the text, is after Magda's second killing of her father, when she talks about leaving the farm, taking the train, and speculates what she should say to the people in it: "...the stiff youth who looks so intently at me and might at any moment, depending on the century, be revealed as my long-lost brother or my seducer or even both?" (section 122, 70). Here she bases her expectations upon the century, connecting the novel convention to a certain period, and the reader cannot help but think of Charles Dickens and the Victorian novel. But this is not a Victorian novel. There are no uncles or aunts with fortunes who appear out of nowhere to bestow their wealth and affection on Magda. She remains alone on the farm where little changes. She later evokes other related conventions: "perhaps I can still run away to the city

disguised as a man” (section 129, 73). The idea of code-switching or code-changing, widely used in the Restoration theatre as well as in Olive Schreiner’s satire *The Story of an African Farm*, also brings to mind different genre conventions. But even if Magda’s story seems more akin to Schreiner’s work, having some parallels in terms of setting and subject matter, the novels are too different on other levels. Whereas *The Story of an African Farm* is closer to realism, Magda states that she has “no stomach for trotting from room to room performing realistic tasks” (section 137, 78), promptly crossing off realism from the list of possible readings of the text.

In the Heart of the Country appears to also have a dialectics between two dimensions. On the one hand you have a seeming stasis. The farm, as John in *Boyhood* puts it, “exists from eternity to eternity” (96), with no changes, the boredom constant, the clock keeps ticking, and as is found in Ursula K. Le Guin’s short story “Darkness Box”²³, the characters are trapped in a world where the same events repeat themselves. On the other hand you have quite a lot of action. So much seems to happen in the course of the novel. As we noted earlier, Magda is on a constant watch-out for how the story will end, and in this she also draws on novel conventions: “Would that the river came roaring down in flood and washed us away, leaving the earth clean! Perhaps that is how the tale will end, if the house does not burn down first” (section 129, 72-73). As we can see, the end of the tale, as Magda perceives it for us, must be grand, must have finality. Towards the end of the novel, when Magda is all alone on the farm, kept company only by the flying machines, Magda realizes that she has returned to a life where nothing happens. Although the machines send out messages that constitute universal truths, Magda realizes that the “communication” with the machines gives her little: “I am gagging on a diet of universals. I will die before I get to the truth. I want the truth, certainly, but I want finality even more!” (section 250, 142). Whereas the machines provide something with which to occupy her time, it makes for little compared to the “thin porridge of event to live on”, she earlier made for herself. She wants to go out with a bang, finality rather than truth. But the only finality she gets, is to have “uttered my life in my own voice throughout...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” (section 266, 151).

So finally, what kind of story is this? Certainly one of loneliness, of the consequences of oppression, of the invading force of literature and of longing for recognition. It is a story of

²³ *The Wind’s Twelve Quarters* (1975).

belonging and of searching through literature for belonging. It is a story which comments upon its own fictionality, its own coming into being. It is a story of stories. According to Hillis Miller, “the novel deconstructs itself in the process of constructing its web of storytelling” (294). Thus, when Magda hears voices speaking ‘universal truths’, we suspect that is of significance. Quoting Nietzsche, the voices from the flying machine speak: “*Lacking all external enemies and resistances, confined within an oppressive narrowness and regularity, man at last has no choice but to turn himself into an adventure*” (section 248, 139), to which Magda replies: “They accuse me, if I understand them, of turning my life into a fiction, out of boredom. /...as though I were reading a book, and found the book dull, and put it aside and began to make myself up instead” (139-140). This is a direct reference to the conventions of the *plaasroman*, and she goes on to ask: “which is the more implausible, the story of my life as lived by me or the story of the good daughter humming the psalms as she bastes the Sunday roast in a Dutch kitchen in the dead centre of the stone desert?” (*ibid.*). Magda provides no answer to this question, but the end of the novel, as we saw, affirms that she has lived her life on her own terms, and that she has refused to number amongst her silent sisters, those who constitute the other story. This brings us back to Hayden White’s question of writing history. In one sense, Magda is looking back at the history of writing the female experience in the *plaasroman*, a writing which is predominantly male. The point of view from which she sees the female story is a different one from the tradition, and she interprets the female silences in the *plaasroman* to be an act of rebellion rather than compliance. In this sense she invades and *makes her own* the form of the genre, grasping which literary devices will advance her project and assert an own identity for her.

In my investigation of the novel, I have looked into some of the ways in which isolation and invasion work together in the text. Using her writing as a way of entering locked rooms, bodies and experiences, Magda attempts to write herself out of her isolation, as well as to read the history written on other people’s bodies. We have also seen how the colonial background, personified in the father, has prevented Magda from communication with others. The writing process stands for a shared experience, a shared sense of community and belonging, but Magda, being an ‘emblem’ only gets close to this shared community through the story she tells.

At the end of the novel, Magda also comments on another Other story from the margins: “...when I could find no enemy outside, when hordes of brown horsemen would not pour out of the hills waving their bows and ululating, I made an enemy out of myself, out of the peaceful, obedient self who wanted no more than to do her father’s will and wax fat and

full of days” (*ibid.*). This passage predicts Coetzee’s next novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*, where the Empire anticipates the attack of the barbarian hordes. There we will find that even the Empire will make an enemy of itself. Magda’s story is not one of invading hordes of brown people, it is rather she that is the invading force. And rather than having others’ impose their (universal) truths on her, she tries to impose her own. With that, I find it suitable to leave the heart of the country in favour of the frontier, where the Empire struggles to prevent having their ‘imagination attacked by the terrorists’²⁴.

²⁴ *South Park*: “terrorists have attacked our imagination and now our imaginations are running wild”, Episode 163: “Imaginationland”.

Chapter 3

Waiting for the Barbarians

The previous chapter provided an analysis of a novel set at the core or heart of the colony. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee shifts his gaze from the centre to the margin or border land of the colony, which in many ways represents the location of colonialism's be-all and end-all. This geographical confrontation between the Empire and the barbarians is what Rosemary Jane Jolly calls the "nerve-center of the Empire" (1996, 123). As we saw at the end of chapter 2, Coetzee predicts his leap from working within and without the framework of the *plaasroman* to a different kind of literary genre or tradition. The "enemy at the gate"-story, or the story of the Other, is an alternative kind of writing or construction of a national feeling and identity, one which Coetzee dismantles and takes apart to the same degree as he did with *In the Heart of the Country*. My close reading of this novel will continue to focus on the manifestation of the themes of isolation and invasion, and I will do this by looking at certain borders in the text. As we saw in my introductory chapter, Homi Bhabha states that "the border represents a place where "past and present, inside and outside no longer remain separate as binary oppositions but instead commingle and conflict" (McLeod, 217). This leads me to argue in this chapter that Coetzee sets up a number of binary oppositions in the novel, which he then proceeds to unmask or deconstruct. One of the ways he achieves this is by using *verfremdungseffekt*, or the process of making the familiar foreign, accorded a crucial role in Rebecca Saunders' "The Agony and the Allegory: The Concept of the Foreign, the Language of Apartheid, and the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee" (2001). By employing this *verfremdungseffekt* Coetzee brings to light both that which is hidden or obstructed from view as well as that which we fail to see which is right in front of our eyes. In my analysis of *In the Heart of the Country* I pervasively followed the plot of the novel. In chapter 1, I already provide an outline the plot of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, so this chapter will to a larger degree follow important confrontations rather than the unfolding of the plot.

Good Fences Make Good Neighbours

Published in 1980, Coetzee's third novel *Waiting for the Barbarians* was the novel that brought him international acclaim. Its title is taken from the 1904 poem "Waiting for the Barbarians" by Costantine Cavafy. The Empire in both the novel and the poem is in a sense dependent upon an Other, a barbarian enemy to strengthen the national feeling of the state (Canepari-Labib, 153). Set in an unspecified time and place, the novel has more often than not

been read as an allegory with a strong focus on the South African security police and how the language of the novel reflects the language of the apartheid regime oppression. Dealing with issues of torture, the novel was scrutinized by the censors on its publication, but avoided being banned in part due to the setting's apparent remoteness from South Africa. In addition to this, the "likely readership will be limited to the intelligentsia" (McDonald, 2004, 290), i.e. the white population of the country, thus the novel was not expected to incite rebellion in the oppressed. Because of the novel's appeal to the intellectual elite, the possible radical-political interpretation of speaking out against oppression, for instance, is rendered harmless in that it was inaccessible to those who might respond to its "call"²⁵. Different from *In the Heart of the Country* both in style and subject matter, it still retains the simple language and straightforwardness that is one of the hallmarks of Coetzee's writing. Whereas *In the Heart of the Country* can be seen as quite a modern and innovative work, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is more traditional in its approach, especially in terms of its postcolonial criticism.

The structure of the novel is more precise than *In the Heart of the Country*. The book is divided into 6 chapters spread over 170 pages. Originally the chapters are divided into shorter segments with asterisks; in the Vintage 2004 edition I am working with, however, asterisks are dropped in favour of mere space. This appears to have been an alteration made by the publisher without consulting the author, thus the use of asterisks is the layout Coetzee intended²⁶. *In the Heart of the Country* is divided into 266 numbered sections. As we have noted before, this gives the novel a scenic quality. Similarly, the asterisks or spaces in the chapters of *Waiting for the Barbarians* function in the same way. This underlines the internal narrators' power over space and time in both novels. After finishing the novel, I am struck with the question of whether the whole novel in sum is how the magistrate "sings for his keep", or whether it is more of a selection from a journal, a 'diary of a bad year'. The time in the novel spans over more than a year where we move through the different seasons as they are perceived by the magistrate. "We lived in the time of the seasons" (169) the magistrate says at the end of the novel. Earlier he reflects on how changing seasons also mark the lifespan of empires, noting their rise and fall. A premise of Empire is that it is bound to go under, and forfeit the conquered lands back to the natives, or "barbarians", in this novel. Thus the neat, circular structure of the novel of order – chaos – order restored is reflected in the cyclic view of nature and culture, mirrored in the inevitability of Empire's fall.

²⁵ See McLeod's definition of "interpellation", my chapter 1, p. 15.

²⁶ E-mail correspondence with J. M. Coetzee on March 13th 2008.

I have already mentioned that the novel has been read as an allegory, and as such, it applies to the South African situation of the late 70s. Many critics have seen the novel in light of the death of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko as well as the unwarranted arrests and the consequent torture of Black and Coloured South Africans during the so-called state of emergency. Gallagher, Saunders, Durrant, Canepari-Labib and Jolly all emphasize such a reading of the text, and Coetzee himself encourages this in his article “Into the Dark Chamber” (Coetzee, 1992). Another parallel to the South African situation is the language of oppression, and how signs have been separated from their signifiers. This is what Rebecca Saunders talks about in her article, as seen in my brief discussion of it in the previous chapter. A lot of thorough work has been done on *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and especially how its themes reflect the South African oppressive system and its language. For that reason it will not be my focus in this chapter. I will also refrain from exploring the allegorical interpretations of the novel any further²⁷. I rather want to use binary oppositions found in the text as a starting point to see how Coetzee unravels and *unmasks* a set of the magistrate’s assumptions. These binary oppositions are often closely connected, and their ambiguity is revealed in the course of the novel. This relates strongly to issues of identity, which Coetzee makes problematic. The magistrate questions his own identity aligned with that of Colonel Joll, the policeman sent by the emergency powers to “investigate” and find the “truth” through torture, of the rumours of a barbarian uprising.

I will use some of the ideas proposed by Saunders as a way to enter the text and comment on some of the central issues in the novel. Although her main emphasis is on language, which is not what intrigues me the most about the book, she also provides an interesting discussion about the ‘foreign’; the Other. According to Saunders, the foreigner is “one who speaks a different language” (2001, 216). In this way, peoples are classified as foreign, or isolated from each other if they have different languages. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate despairs when Colonel Joll’s captives are not the barbarians he set out to find: “Did no one tell him the difference between fishermen with nets and wild nomad horsemen with bows? Did no one tell him they don’t even speak the same language?” (19). It is evident that the Other is not merely one kind of Other, but a diversity of Others. Colonel

²⁷ The allegorical interpretation of the novel focuses on how the Empire and the “barbarians” in the novel have a universal application and as such can refer to any conflict between Empire and Other. One critic who has opposed this view is David Attwell, quoted by Patrick Lenta, “Coetzee’s Empire will not stand for all Empires” (2006, 72). Lenta argues that “the novel offers allegorical terms for thinking about the relationship between torture, power and law beyond the South African context” (*ibid.*). In terms of South Africa, the novel has been read as an allegory of the apartheid laws and state of emergency as it struggles to establish a national identity (as seen in Gallagher, Jolly and so forth).

Joll, ignorant of the geopolitical dynamics of the frontier settlement, sees only in black and white: “prisoners are prisoners”. This renders him incapable of telling the difference between the foreigners. Thus knowledge of what distinguishes barbarians from the fisherfolk, is strongly connected to power, but it is also dependent upon space. In Saunders’ argument,

...the foreign is always relative to the inside, the domestic, the familiar, a boundary. No entity is inherently foreign; she who is a foreigner in one place is at home in another... no one escapes being foreign... Foreignness, moreover, can be a status that one assumes (as does the traveler), that is imposed on one (as under apartheid), or that exists somewhere on the spectrum between these positions. (218).

The concept of foreignness holds both the themes of isolation and invasion. Foreignness is rendered visible through acts of invasion because it imposes an idea of difference, separating, or isolating the oppressor and the oppressed from each other.

In the novel we find a number of foreigners. The town itself, being a colony, is in many ways foreign to the land, but through invasion it has made itself familiar. Thus the magistrate considers himself both a foreigner in the land and at home in it. After Joll’s arrival, his own knowledge of the place is superior, and Joll’s ignorance of border customs reveals him as a foreigner, but a foreigner with rights. In chapter 2, I refer to Saunders’ argument on control of context. This control of context is exactly what allows Joll and his soldiers from the distanced capital to be considered insiders, whereas the “barbarians” who in reality are more closely tied to the frontier settlement in both geographical and social terms, are seen as outsiders, as enemies. The “barbarians” he brings back into town, are written as Other, or ‘enemy’ by Joll, who in his actions represent colonial power and oppression. Further, when the magistrate and Joll leave town on their separate missions deeper into the borderland, they each find that they are foreigners in the territory. The magistrate tells Joll: “The barbarians you are chasing will smell you coming and vanish into the desert while you are still a day’s march away. They have lived here all their lives, they know the land. You and I are *strangers* – you even more than I” (12, emphasis added). Predicting his own and Joll’s expeditions into the borderland, they both find later that they can get nowhere near the “real” barbarians without their consent. Further, when the magistrate returns the girl to her people, he does not understand the language they speak, and is isolated from understanding. Admitting that he “cannot make out a word”, he regrets not making her teach him her tongue. For him to enter her language, however, he must in a sense invade her and force her to speak.

In the eyes of Empire, however, the only way to master the “barbarian” language is through pain²⁸.

Saunders continues to argue that foreignness is considered negatively, as something that lacks ‘identity’ and is placed “outside of proper meaning” (219). The problem of meaning, already discussed as central in *In the Heart of the Country*, continues to be an important issue in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Context and meaning, according to Saunders, have two ways of manifesting themselves: “While for hermeneutics (which insists on a master context that corrects error), context functions to regulate foreignness, but for the Russian formalists (who prompts us to shift through multiple contexts), it is central to producing foreignness” (221). Coetzee seems to be doing the latter in this novel. Setting the stage for the magistrate to “misinterpret, to be improper, to err” (*ibid.*), Coetzee not only places him in a state of disgrace (which I will return to shortly) and isolation, but also deconstructs through this shame the magistrate’s notion of identity. Through writing the “barbarian” Other as the enemy, the townspeople are included in a unitary identity of Empire. However, in the course of the novel, this unitary identity is revealed as dynamic rather than static. Those who are included in the unity shifts. Thus that which makes up the symbolical border between the so-called ‘civilized’ and the ‘barbarians’ is equally dynamic and unfixed. Underlined by the fact that the physical distinctions between barbarian and civilized are difficult to make out, the townspeople’s fear of the barbarians is spread in many directions and at times seems rather arbitrary. Alongside a deconstruction of the magistrate’s own role, we find a deconstruction of other binary oppositions, and I will look at some of them.

In Chapter 1, I spend some time on the theory of postcolonialism, both to draw lines to the South African situation, but also because it is applicable and relevant to Coetzee’s novels. Because *Waiting for the Barbarians* so literally deals with issues of colonialism, it makes sense to apply postcolonial theory when reading it. The isolated setting at a marginal outpost places it directly into a postcolonial discourse of power, of constructing nation, of Othering, and of belonging and non-belonging. Homi Bhabha talks about the national construct in “DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation” (1994). In Bhabha’s terms, the nation is a narrative strategy which “fills the void left in the uprooting of communities and kin, and turns that loss into the language of metaphor” (139). Talking about a “gathering on the edge of ‘foreign’ culture” (*ibid.*), Bhabha seems to be referring to the

²⁸ On the mock execution of the magistrate, we learn what is considered “barbarian” language: “I bellow again and again, there is nothing I can do to stop it, the noise comes out of a body that knows itself damaged perhaps beyond repair and roars its fright./ ‘He is calling his barbarian friends,’ someone observes. ‘That is barbarian language you hear.’ ” (132-133).

isolated state of the colonial invaders. In the course of his argument, Bhabha questions who can write or represent a nation, when the nation's heterogeneity leads to a split in the "narrative authority". However, a unifying factor is to join in common hatred. Quoting Freud, Bhabha states: "it is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left to receive the manifestation of their aggressiveness" (149). In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, this is clear in the way the townspeople are open to strangers as long as they are considered enemies of the "barbarians". According to Gallagher, the nation "achieves strength, unity, and identity" by creating notions of the Other, the enemy at the gate (1991, 132), and this is what the emissaries of Empire, in the form of Joll and Mandel, seek to gain. As such it is central to the creation of nationhood and the state. However, this achieved unity, this binding together in common hatred, inevitably leads to Bhabha's notion of a "loss of identity". As we shall see, this is what happens to the magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*.

In postcolonial terms then, we are dealing with a national construct, and with it the creation of the myth of the Other, or what Saunders referred to as "the foreign". According to Ania Loomba, the creation of the Other depends on binary oppositions, and "are crucial not only for creating images of the outsider but equally essential for constructing the insider, the (usually White European male) 'self'" (1998, 104). The magistrate contemplates the role of Empire in history, and sees himself as "the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, [Joll] the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow" (148). Here we find two opposing sides of colonial rule; both are necessary for the success of Empire. The magistrate represents a conservative view of colonial rule where the relationship with the natives is maintained for trading purposes, whereas Joll and Mandel represent a more radical view of Empire's demonstration of power before its subjects. According to the magistrate, "one thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era" (146), and he himself is "no less infected with it than the faithful Colonel Joll" (*ibid.*). There is a sense that both have had roles imposed on them by the Empire, that they are isolated from other people because of their specific stations. The realization of his place, or role, in the scheme of things seems to be what triggers a sort of obstinacy against Empire²⁹ and an identity crisis for the magistrate. The acts committed in his jurisdiction in the name of Empire, are acts that rob him of authority and that he wishes to distance himself from.

²⁹ Joll accuses the magistrate of not cooperating, and the magistrate himself seems to get some sort of satisfaction out of ending his "false friendship" with the Bureau: "I am aware of the source of my elation: my alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over, I have set myself in opposition; the bond is broken, I am a free man" (85).

Gradually his notion of identity shifts until he can no longer associate himself with the unitary identity of Empire. Isolated from this unitary identity, his own identity becomes increasingly connected with the barbarian girl's. Identifying with her becomes a form of escape from colonial identity. Several critics have argued that the magistrate sets out to mend the body that has been broken, but in my opinion the masturbatory quality of his actions toward the girl suggests a more selfish goal. I will go into more depth about this later. However, the motif of the girl's body, which in postcolonial theory "symbolise [*sic.*] the conquered land" (Loomba, 152), becomes inaccessible to the magistrate in his inability to remember what it looks like, and because he can find no way to penetrate the surface, and ultimately invade her. In this way, his attempt to identify with the colonized Other initially fails.

The girl's body represents a border the magistrate cannot gain access to, but which he relentlessly attempts to cross or invade. The novel is preoccupied with a number of borders the magistrate attempts to read, but finds himself unable to comprehend. An illustration of this is the wooden slips the magistrate has found on his excavation site. Having discovered ruins from a former settlement buried in the desert earth, the magistrate has spent years slowly uncovering the former civilization, making convicts take turns digging as a punishment. Amongst the ruins he has found a number of wooden slips, each inscribed with a sign. The magistrate speculates the meaning of these signs after isolating them, and it is later used against him when Colonel Joll expresses a suspicion that he is in coalition with the barbarians: " 'A reasonable inference is that the wooden slips contain messages passed between yourself and other parties' " (120-121). Many critics have read the scene when the magistrate "interprets" the signs for Joll as the magistrate simply telling Joll what he expects he wants to hear, but also as Coetzee's way of commenting on the ambiguity of language. What these critics have failed to note, however, is that Joll later cancels out the magistrate's interpretation in telling him that similar slips are, in fact, found in different border tribes and have been used for gambling. Thus Joll, by placing them within their rightful context, successfully renders them devoid of meaning, and his demand that the magistrate interpret the signs becomes mere parody of the magistrate's years of pondering their significance. What this illustrates is the magistrate's inability to read and understand that which is Other and foreign. Coetzee in *White Writing*, talks about how the people writing from the Cape colony understood the Hottentots out of a Eurocentric paradigm, whereas a more comprehensive understanding would demand a departure from European ways of looking at the world. Taking the example of "ceremonial urinating", the translation of this into European understanding implies a loss of complexity (1988, 14). As we saw in Chapter 1, Homi Bhabha's concept of both keeping

the Other other, but also translating them into “Western understanding” influences the perception of the Other³⁰. Or, in Coetzee’s terms, the differences are “perceived and conceived within a framework of *samenesses*” (Coetzee, 13). The magistrate, then, emerges as a typically Eurocentric anthropologist whose understanding is limited by the Western framework, where Western values are imposed on the Other as a means of understanding.

The magistrate’s attempt to read and identify with the Other leads him to return to the rooms of torture. The question of torture is impossible to evade in any meaningful discussion of the novel. Samuel Durrant, in his article “Bearing Witness to Apartheid: J. M. Coetzee’s Inconsolable Works of Mourning” argues that it is not torture itself that is the key here, but the *place* of torture, the room in which it happens (1999, 452). Coetzee supports this by saying that the novel is about “the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience” (Coetzee, 1992, 363). Inherent in Coetzee’s comment lies a premise of borders and space. Thus it is important to note how space and borders come to be significant in the novel. My focus, then, will be on issues of identity, borders, the body, power, and Othering. A motif which Coetzee keeps coming back to in his authorship is that of shame or disgrace as something which relates to the nation or place. In his latest novel *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007), the narrator Señor C makes a comment which in a sense encapsulates *Waiting for the Barbarians*: “Whereas the slave fears only pain, what the free man fears most is shame” (2007, 39). Shame is a sort of national shame connected to the politics of the country. As such, the decisions and actions of those in high office to a large degree affect its citizens: “Dishonour descends upon one’s shoulders, and once it has descended no amount of clever pleading will dispel it” (40), or, as the magistrate states in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, “When some men suffer unjustly...it is the fate of those who witness their suffering to suffer the shame of it” (152). These traumas haunting Coetzee’s fiction are strongly linked to the traumas of apartheid and colonialism, and as such relate to Durrant’s article. Coetzee’s obsessive return to certain themes and traumas in South African history then, becomes an unwillingness to forget. One of the points Durrant makes is how Coetzee, through his novels, refuses to remember the thing in itself, so that we might forget it and move on, but rather remembers the forgetting of the thing (1999, 447). As we shall see later, this is central in the novel, and also relates to the notion of the *site* of torture’s impact on the man, rather than *torture’s* own impact. His preoccupation with “the dark chamber” becomes an obsession. The

³⁰ See p. 15-16 in my chapter 1.

rooms in which the unspeakable takes place are closed to public view. Thus there is a border in terms of who gets to see and whose eyes are closed.

In his article “Into the Dark Chamber”, Coetzee suggests the torture room as a metaphor for the novelist’s imagination: “the novelist is a person who, camped before a closed door, facing an insufferable ban, creates, in place of the scene he is forbidden to see, a representation of that scene, and a story of the actors in it and how they come to be there” (1992, 364). The novelist then, has the ability to cross these boundaries through the use of his imagination. The magistrate, on the other hand, cannot even with the visible signs of torture on the girl’s body, nor after investigating the room in which it happened, imagine the girl without the marks, or the depth of Joll’s abuse of her. Not until he himself has entered the realm of torture, not as an onlooker, but as a victim, can he begin to understand and truly identify with the girl’s suffering and silence. The room comes to visualize a border between invasion and isolation. Inside, the victim is held in isolation. Joll or Mandel enter into the room, and in so doing invade both the room and the mind and body of the victim. Excluded, the magistrate is isolated outside the room and attempts to invade the room in the same way the novelist does.

The room itself gives nothing away: “I stare all day at the empty walls, unable to believe that the imprint of all the pain and degradation they have enclosed will not materialize under an intent enough gaze” (87). It normally operates as a storeroom, but is made into a prison and interrogation room by the invading emergency powers. The magistrate’s desire to invade the closed room makes him bring his lantern to haunt it at night. Joll makes clear that the magistrate is unwelcome there when he offers to assist in translating: ““We can all make ourselves understood. You would prefer me not to be there?” ‘You would find it tedious. We have set procedures we go through.’” (4). In a sense it can seem as if the exclusion itself is what spurs the magistrate’s interrogation of what has gone on in the room. His own eyes are prevented from seeing, his ears do not hear “the screaming which people afterwards claim to have heard from the granary”, so he questions his guards and the boy who was interrogated, trying to read the signs on his body. The confined space as the setting of interrogation is continued by the magistrate himself, as is illustrated in his relationship to the barbarian girl. In a way he stages his own reenactment of the torture room. His own chambers become the isolating prison of the barbarian girl. When he washes her feet in his attempt to piece her back together, the curtains are closed, preventing others from seeing what goes on in the room. Recognizing that his interrogations of her and her body might not withstand the light of day, a sense of secrecy and taboo is connected with his dealings with her. Yet the barbarian girl’s

body comes to represent a closed room in its own right, one which the magistrate desires to invade, but finds no way of entering. Incapable of looking *into* her, to find what *moves* her, she remains as a reminder of his failure and impotence.

To talk about binary oppositions as related to space and borders in the novel, I want to make some theoretical notes at this point. As emphasized by David Newman in his article “The Lines that Continue to Separate Us”, “borders reflect the nature of power relations and the ability of one group to determine, superimpose and perpetuate lines of separation, or to remove them, contingent upon the political environment at any given time” (2007, 32). From this we can see the border’s direct connection to colonial and postcolonial issues of imposing values, language, culture, religion and so forth, onto the oppressed, as well as creating the myth of the Other as we saw in Coetzee’s comment about the writing of the Hottentots above. Newman goes on to argue that “borders are indicative of the binary distinctions (us/them; here/there; inside/outside) between groups at a variety of scales” (*ibid.*). As such, this connects to Saunders’ conception of the foreign and how we are all foreign depending on setting. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* these binary distinctions are always changing. The townspeople’s view of those, who in the course of the novel, enter from without, keeps shifting, depending on what they represent. For instance, the soldiers Joll brings from different places of Empire, at one point represent “all that stands between us and destruction” (144). However, once the threat of the barbarian invasion leads the soldiers to retreat, the townspeople are quick to change their tune. Finally seeing the soldiers as barbarians, invaders, thieves, rapists and foreigners, their back is a welcome sight for the “faithful” townspeople living under the slogan “WE STAY”.

Along with bordering, *ideology*, which I discussed in chapter 1, to a large extent furthers the colonial mission. As Coetzee himself comments on in *White Writing*, ideology is crucial to the maintenance of power relations conditioned by colonialism, to prevent the settlers from falling into the same sloth as the natives. “The Dutch Boer in Africa was subjected to close and censorious scrutiny because his sloth, his complacent ignorance, his heartlessness towards the natives, his general slide into barbarism seemed to betray the whole imperial side” (1988, 3), writes Coetzee in *White Writing*. It does not seem far-fetched to suggest that thoughts like these inspired *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Justification of imperialism in general was found in the notion that “those deserve to inherit the earth who make best use of it” (*ibid.*). Of course this notion triggers the question of what it means to make the best use of the land, but since the colonialists were in control of the context, they

had a patent on the truth. The colonialist answer would probably be to *cultivate* the land and prevent it from growing *wild*, i.e. to protect it from the laziness of the natives.

In the novel, the room of torture is an ever-present border. It is a closed room, windowless, closed from sight, as it were. You cannot enter the room of torture other than as a torturer or a victim. As we saw above, the magistrate is unable to read the traces of torture when he brings his lantern and crosses the threshold. Since there is no way of peering into the room when acts of torture take place, the imagination fills in what can not be seen, and as such becomes a means of invading the space. This brings us to another issue the novel explores in depth: that of seeing or of hiding from sight and hiding one's eyes:

I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind? I could understand if he wanted to hide blind eyes. But he is not blind. The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them. He tells me they are a new invention. 'They protect one's eyes against the glare of the sun,' he says. 'You would find them useful out here in the desert. They save one from squinting all the time.'

(1).

These are the opening lines of the novel, underlining the importance of eyes in the story as a whole. The glasses described prevent the viewer from seeing Joll's eyes. Where Joll's own gaze rests is impossible to tell and as such he becomes a figuration of the Panopticon Michel Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish*, which I will return to later. The shades come to represent a way of avoiding recognition and scrutiny. Border theorist Wolfgang Müller-Funk connects the act of casting one's eyes down to a feeling of *shame*, which I discussed earlier: "Shame is quite clearly a phenomenon of borders and limits. As Simmel points out, casting down one's eyes is not a manifestation of us not wanting to look at somebody, but a way of saying we do not want to have that somebody looking at us" (2007, 83). Although he does not cast his eyes down *per se*, Joll, by wearing his shades, is protected from the scrutinizing gaze of others, protected from the kind of gaze he exposes others to. Joll's view of the world is darker, and he sees everything *through* the glasses, suggesting that his vision is obstructed in a way. This issue of seeing and being seen is one which I will come back to in depth later in this chapter. At this point, I will turn to a different notion of seeing, namely seeing pain as a key to truth.

Pain is Truth

That night one of the pack-horses refuses its feed. In the morning, even under the severest flogging, it will not rise./ While the others set out, I stay behind. I can swear that the beast knows what is to happen. At the sight of the

knife its eyes roll. With the blood spurting from its neck it scrambles free of the sand and totters a pace or two downwind before it falls. In extremities, I have heard, the barbarians tap their horses' veins. Will we live to regret this blood spent so lavishly on the sand? (67).

Flogging and the infliction of physical pain become the determinants of the horse's will to live and measure the truth of its exhaustion. Simultaneously, the magistrate presents the barbarian view of the world where one life is mutually dependant upon the other. This excerpt connects the discussion to Coetzee's "Into the Dark Chamber". In the article, he quotes a scene from Nadine Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter* where Rosa Burger sees a man flogging his donkey. In his reading of the passage, Coetzee emphasizes that it is "torture without the torturer" (367), returning to the problem the article focuses on, namely the representation of the torturer. In the novel, the magistrate, who through his use of the imagination and in his attempts to write the truth of the proceedings in the torture room, constantly returns to this question of evil and what kind of people Colonel Joll and Mandel are. On several occasions, both before and after his own experience of torture, the magistrate asks questions about their lives:

'How do you find it possible to eat afterwards, after you have been ... working with people? That is a question I have always asked myself about executioners and other such people. Wait! Listen to me a moment longer, I am sincere, it has cost me a great deal to come out with this, since I am terrified of you, I need not tell you that, I am sure you are aware of it. Do you find it easy to take food afterwards? I have *imagined* that one would want to wash one's hands. But no ordinary washing would be enough, one would require priestly intervention, a ceremonial of *cleansing*, don't you think?'/ 'I am trying to *understand* the zone in which you live. I am trying to *imagine* how you breathe and eat and live from day to day. But I cannot! That is what troubles me! If I were he, I say to myself, my hands would feel so *dirty* that it would choke me - ' (138, emphasis added.)

If the magistrate was expecting a genuine answer, his judgement fails him again. His "dark fascination" with torture not only spurs his obsession with the torture room, but also with the torturer. The idea that Mandel lives in a certain 'zone' suggests a symbolic border between him and other people, a space or place in which one can torture someone by day and "break bread with one's family" in the evening. The 'zone' sets him apart and isolates him from "ordinary" people in his ability to carry on. The magistrate attempts to further his distance from Mandel with his last sentence, underlining how they are different, yet we know that the magistrate feels that his hands have been sullied by torture. Revealing his own feelings of guilt and shame connected to the torture room in the reference to the need of cleansing, the magistrate refers back to his performance of cleansing rituals with the barbarian girl after her experience of

torture. As such, the magistrate echoes Christ in doing penitence for someone else's sins. I shall return to this important motif later in the chapter, however.

As we saw in the example about the horses, pain is used to push someone on, to push someone towards an edge of some kind. Torture then, comes to represent a transgression of outer, *bodily* borders to make someone's mind and soul be pushed towards the outer regions of their sanity and wholeness of mind. The implication is that there is a relationship between the outside and the inside, between the physical pain of torture and the psychological pain that accompanies it. Joll is working on the outer borders to open up the inner borders of a person. In the beginning of the novel, the magistrate does not fully appreciate the pressure of torture and what it does. Asking Joll how he can know whether a prisoner is telling the truth or not, Joll explains:

‘There is a certain tone,’ Joll says. ‘A certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth. *Training* and *experience* teach us to recognize that tone.’/

‘...I am speaking of a situation in which I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see – this is what happens – first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth.’

Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt (5, emphasis added).

One can ask oneself where and on who Joll and the other “devotees of truth, doctors of interrogation” have acquired the ‘training and experience’ they need to discern the tone of truth. Pressure, pain, and isolation lead to the admittance of guilt, to the so-called truth. But the truth Joll finds is the one he has already set his mind to hearing, the only truth he will accept is that of guilt. Recognizing this, the magistrate advises the boy under interrogation: “‘Listen, you must tell the officer the truth. *That is all he wants to hear from you – the truth.*’” (7, emphasis added). Patrick Lenta's article “Legal Illegality: *Waiting for the Barbarians* after September 11” argues that the truth Joll is looking for is one that is required to be true by the Empire. “Prolonged torture forces victims to try to comprehend the torturer's interest and present themselves in a way that is most likely to satisfy their torturers. After a time, the victim will say what he/she thinks the torturer wants to hear” (2006, 75). The magistrate, then, in this instance functions as a “good cop”, encouraging the boy to “confess”. However, when the boy has confessed, and told the “truth”, admitting that there is a “barbarian” uprising, the magistrate denies his own hand in it, and confronts the boy about it: “‘Do you understand what this confession of yours will mean?’/ ‘It means that the soldiers are going to ride out against your people. There is going to be killing. Kinsmen of yours are going to die, perhaps even your parents, your brothers and sisters. Do you really want that?’” (11). By asking the boy these

questions, the magistrate attempts to rid himself of the guilt and the moral responsibility that is his. The boy is as powerless to stop an attack on the “barbarians” as he is to withstand torture. And the magistrate who is equally unable to stop this attack does nothing but transfer the guilt, belonging to the Empire and to himself onto the boy, truly writing him as guilty. Later, when the magistrate tastes torture himself, he tells us: “I discover with surprise that after a little rest, after the application of a little pain, I can be made to move, to jump or skip or crawl or run a little further” (128). This echoes their treatment of the horses in the desert, when a little flogging determines the beast’s proximity to death. The magistrate speculates how far he must be pushed before he prefers to die rather than be exposed to further pain and humiliation, and concludes in a scene when he is literally pushed to the limits and facing death, that ““I want to live. As every man wants to live. To live and live and live. No matter what.”” (130). The magistrate finds himself in the same “zone” as the other victims of torture, where how to stay alive becomes the guide to truth. As such, he follows in the footsteps of the barbarian girl.

The girl enters the text in chapter 2, and leaves at the end of chapter 3. Yet she is a presence throughout the book, albeit a silent one. In the first chapter no reference is made to her, but we later learn that she was one of the “barbarians” interrogated by Joll. Her presence in town is a disturbing factor for the magistrate once the town returns to “normality” after Joll leaves. Her father died during interrogation, and her people have abandoned her; like the magistrate, she is a solitary and isolated creature. The magistrate, after discovering her, quickly takes up a peculiar relationship with her. Her *body* bears the marks of Joll’s third degree: her eye sight is damaged, leaving her with peripheral vision, and her feet have been broken. The scars on the outside, however, can only begin to reflect those on her inside. Moving her from living outside on the streets, he invites her to his chambers, and “draw[s] the curtains, light[s] the lamp” (29), and asks to see her feet. Like the torturer (who he compares himself to in this very scene), the magistrate prevents outsiders from seeing what is going on. The lamp, with its unforgiving light, makes it easier to scrutinize and see her, yet he can only see what is on the surface of her body. Then the magistrate commences his cleansing ritual of washing the girl’s feet. The magistrate’s obsession with the broken body is one which has been emphasized again and again by critics. According to Gallagher, the body tells its own story and comes to represent the truth that defies the Empire’s truth: “the testimony of the body belies the testimony of the word as given in the official record” (1991, 119). The magistrate’s search for truth, aligned with Joll’s search for truth, then, is similar as they both take advantage of and attempt to invade someone else’s body to find it. Durrant strengthens this argument by saying that the narrative desire in the text is “not so much for the body of the other as for the story that

the other's body seems both to mark and conceal" (1999, 453). In fact, the magistrate himself does not know what to make of his lack of sexual desire for the girl. In Durrant's reading, the magistrate "rather than attempting to penetrate and thus "possess" her, ...instead becomes absorbed in washing the surface of her body. ...the magistrate would like to make whole what has been smashed" (*ibid.*). I find this reading a little problematic, as it suggests that the magistrate is of a higher moral standing than he really is. His lack of sexual interest is not by his own choice, as is made clear by the text: "There are moments – I feel the onset of one now – when the desire I feel for her, usually so obscure, flickers into a shape I can *recognize*" (43, emphasis added). It is evident that the magistrate struggles to comprehend what he is seeing in her, and only sexual desire seems meaningful. Further support for this is found in the fact that the magistrate has no female acquaintances who are not, or have not been, his mistress. In this way it can seem as if the only use the magistrate sees in women, is for sex, asking how he "can believe that...a woman's body [is] anything but a site of joy?" (48).

Rosemary Jane Jolly's discussion of the novel provides a comprehensive reading of the girl's body, and her main argument is that the magistrate, in his obsession with torture marks, sets out on a "quest for truth involving torture" (1996, 127). Underlining the fact that his interest is in "her body as the *site* of torture" (*ibid.*, emphasis added), the magistrate attempts to read her as he would a text or the torture room itself. However, her body is foreign to him, and he fails to find a way to invade her and find the truth. In my reading of *In the Heart of the Country*, I postulate that Magda is experimenting, probing like the novelist to find the truth of her story. I would like to argue that experiment takes on a similar form in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The aim of experiment, as we saw in *In the Heart of the Country*, is to find the truth or the end of the story. This is what both Joll and the magistrate are doing, but the difference is that they already know the "truth". Joll uses pain to find the truth. The truth he is searching for is the barbarians' guilt, but he already *knows* they are guilty, so what he wants is an admission of guilt. When the magistrate enters the picture, the truth he is looking for is written on the barbarian girl's body. Working in the opposite direction of Magda-as-detective, the magistrate tries to read the marks on her body, trying to make them tell her story, similar to how he tries to read the story of former civilizations on the wooden slips. Knowing that the truth of colonial oppression is written on her body, he also searches for an admittance of truth from the girl herself, so that he will have no choice but to turn his back to Empire.

Frustrated at getting nowhere with the girl, the magistrate at one point seeks solace with one of the town's prostitutes, the Star, but even when he is embracing her, his thoughts turn to

the barbarian girl: “The body of the other one, closed, ponderous, sleeping in my bed in a faraway room, seems beyond comprehension. ...I cannot imagine what ever drew me to that alien body/ ...without aperture, without entry” (45). The girl’s foreignness is repeatedly emphasized by the magistrate, and the notion of opening and entry found here echoes *In the Heart of the Country* after Hendrik has raped Magda and she thinks: “A body lies on top of a body pushing and pushing, trying to find a way in.../ What is this man trying to find in me? What deeper invasion and possession does he plot in his sleep?” (117). Similar imagery is employed by the magistrate himself: “she cannot but feel my gaze pressing in upon her with the weight of a body” (60), emphasizing his own desire to invade her. We never get to know what the barbarian girl is thinking, but her thoughts both with Joll and the magistrate could easily have been the same as Magda’s. Significantly, a mere page before the magistrate tires of his “bondage” to the girl, he tells us that “I am like an incompetent school-master, fishing about with my maieutic forceps when I ought to be filling her with the truth” (44). Thus we find that the magistrate is no more looking for the real truth than Joll is. His relationship with her, then, becomes an exploitation of her body rather than an attempt to heal it. He uses it to find a reflection of his own truth, and to cleanse himself of the guilt he feels.

The feeling of bondage, or of being “enslaved” relates strongly to what the magistrate gets out of his relationship to the barbarian girl. He becomes dependant upon the girl’s body for sleep, losing himself in the rhythm of washing and caressing her, falling asleep or losing the concept of space and time. The girl’s innocence and ability to sleep blissfully is contrasted to his own feelings of guilt and his problems with sleep. The imagery connected to sleep is ambiguous; after Joll’s entrance into the magistrate’s life, and before the girl enters the scene, “sleep is no longer a healing bath...but an oblivion, a nightly brush with annihilation” (22). In one instance, the magistrate claims to us that he is sleeping “like a dead man”, but the girl whose bed he spends the night in, informs him that he was “tossing in [his] sleep”. He does not explain himself to her but he asks himself: “what can I possibly say? ‘Terrible things go on in the night while you and I sleep’? ...the world rolls on” (24). His words suggest his concern that the world so willingly closes its eyes to the fact that “somewhere, always, a child is being beaten”. To be awake, then, involves knowledge and responsibility: “I know somewhat too much; and from this knowledge, once one has been infected, there seems to be no recovering” (22-23). The magistrate has crossed an etymological border, a border of knowledge, and there is no going back. He expresses a desire to close his eyes to the actions done in the name of Empire, to go back to sleep, to be “as stupid and ignorant as a baby” (156), and to not have to deal with the responsibility of knowledge.

Through the “medium of her incomplete body”, the magistrate seeks salvation and escape. At one point the magistrate is convinced that “until the marks on this girl’s body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her” (33), but this conviction falters as his epiphany never comes. As we have already seen, the magistrate uses her to overcome a feeling of guilt and shame connected with the Empire’s dealings with the “barbarians”. As such, I will agree with Jolly’s view that the magistrate is in fact obsessed with marks of torture. This obsession, however, goes in the direction of saving himself rather than anyone else. What he wants to save himself from is the barbarity of the “civilized”. This he admits to after he has been arrested and Joll returns with more “barbarian” captives: “what has become important...is that I should neither be contaminated by the atrocity that is about to be committed nor poison myself with impotent hatred of its perpetrators. I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself” (114). Watching his fellow townsmen, women and children all participate in the beating of the “barbarian” prisoners, the magistrate is determined to be the “one man who in his heart was not a barbarian”, to not be invaded or infected by the disease that has overtaken the town. The “barbarians” in this instance, first have the word “ENEMY” written on their backs, then they are “washed clean” through beating. According to Jolly, “the marks of torture...come to constitute physical proof of guilt” (128). The magistrate is cleansed through violence same as the “barbarians”. As such, the marks on him literally write him as guilty, but by being guilty, he is also innocent, *free* from having to condone the acts of Empire. “A bestial life is turning me into a beast” (87), yet the torture Mandel performs on his body all prove to him that he is human: “They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it means to live in a body.../ They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal.../ I am now no more than a pile of blood, bone and meat that is unhappy” (126/ 93). Through being reduced to the basic humanity of being a body in pain, the magistrate is once and for all able to “assert [his] distance from Colonel Joll” (48).

As we can see, then, the magistrate identifies more and more with the barbarian Other. Physical abuse liberates him from participating in acts of torture. However, with the girl it is a different story. With her it is in a sense a cleansing through water, a masturbatory self-reflection where the goal for the magistrate is to remember her, for his sake rather than for hers, so that he can really be sure that he is different from Joll. “I must believe that I saw her on the day she was brought in by the soldiers/ I must believe she was unmarked as I must believe she was once a child” (36). To have noticed her before her mutilation becomes all the more important to the magistrate because it determines his proximity to Joll in terms of identification. The remembrance of *seeing* her, and *recognizing* her as human, and as innocent,

will rid the magistrate of the shame of participating in the crime of seeing the “barbarians” as less than human and closing his eyes to the interrogations in the granary. Homi Bhabha talks about the “silent Other of gesture and failed speech...the Stranger, whose languageless presence evokes an archaic anxiety and aggressivity by impeding the search for narcissistic love-objects in which the subject can rediscover himself” (166). The figure of the “silent Other” is one found often in Coetzee’s fiction, and in *Waiting for the Barbarians* it comes in the form of the girl. As such, she becomes the possibility for a new identification for the magistrate, representing the “narcissistic love-object” which the magistrate wants to identify with rather than the Empire’s unity. This makes her prone to being invaded and to have an identity imposed on her. The tension between the “silent Other” and someone who wishes to compel this person to speak is a recurrent opposition in Coetzee’s novels. The act of attempted forced speech is mirrored in the act of torture, where the torturer attempts to make the tortured speak the “truth”. In this way the magistrate is no different from Joll. The magistrate tells the cook that the torturers “thrive on stubborn silence: it confirms to them that every soul is a lock they must patiently pick” (141), inadvertently also referring to his relationship to the barbarian girl. The imagery here suggests that the picker of the lock does not have the key that fits the opening, but that he must find something suitable to do the trick. This puts us in mind of the tortured boy who has been cut as if his body were a lock: “he makes a curt thrust into the sleeping boy’s body and turns the knife delicately, like a key, first left, then right” (11).

The magistrate’s interest in the victims of Joll’s torture, culminates in the magistrate first treading Joll’s path, and then the path of the victims. His interrogations, or “cleansings” of the girl, where he reaches some sort of ecstasy through the broken body, in one sense become mere “pastime”, similar to how he becomes “pastime” for Mandel. Once he tires of the girl and of her lack of response, he “tortures” her by leaving her alone in his bed whilst seeking other girls or by continuing his “unhappy pleasures” with her which offers release to neither of them. Failing to recognize her as a “witty, attractive young woman” until few days before they part, the magistrate admits to himself that he “oppressed her with gloom” (68). Thus, in his attempt to rid himself of the guilt and shame brought on him by Colonel Joll, he literally transfers those feelings to the girl, tying it up with sexual miscommunication through his fetishized cleansing ritual. The washing, which on the surface seems such an intimate act, further underlines their isolation from each other; the one sleeping, the other completely lost in the motion of what he is doing. The magistrate’s exploitation of the girl is complete in his self-centered caresses, offering no satisfaction to her, and only seeking oblivion and sleep for himself. Jealous of the girl’s innocence, her apparent acceptance of what happened to her, the magistrate pretends to

be honest when he tells her to not “make a mystery of it, pain is only pain” (34). Later he is surprised when the girl refuses to return with him again, and even more so when the cook tells him that he made the girl very unhappy. The magistrate’s reply to this is that ““There is a whole side to the story you don’t know, that she could not have told you because she did not know it herself”” (166-167). By suggesting that he knows more about her inner life than she does herself, the magistrate underlines the importance of seeing –and being seen, a notion which pervades the novel, and which is important in the relationship between the magistrate and the barbarian girl, as well as demonstrating the colonialist mentality of invasion.

The Eye of the Beholder

In Zulu, the language spoken by the largest ethnic group in South Africa, people greet each other by saying “Sabona”, “Hi –I see you”. Inherent in the greeting is a recognition, and an encouragement of a mutual exchange of views and values. To see and be seen is a basic human need. Wolfgang Müller-Funk tells us that there is a “space of vision between two people coming into temporary contact. This visual field is reciprocal, reflexive and interactive” (83). As I pointed out earlier in this chapter quoting Müller-Funk, to cast ones eyes down signals a reluctance to be seen, and as such relates to shame. Thus one can prevent the visual field from being interactive. Joll’s eyes, concealed as they are behind the shades “with the mask over his eyes” (148), are protected from scrutiny, preventing anyone from looking into the “windows of his soul”. Similar to how Colonel Joll’s eyes are looking through something, as a means of protecting themselves, both from the *glare* of the sun, but also from being recognized by others, so the magistrate can hide behind his window when he looks down upon the “barbarian” prisoners filling the barracks yard.

Coetzee persists in using imagery connected to sight. A further illustration is the girl’s damaged eye sight after her torture, when she is left with only peripheral vision. In this sense, the girl, operating as the magistrate’s chosen audience, does not really see him, since what is right in front of her is as a mere blur to her: “When she does not look at me I am a grey form moving about unpredictably on the periphery of her vision. When she looks at me I am a blur, a voice, a smell, a center of energy” (31). The notion of blurred vision, or obstructed sight suggests a way of filtering what you see. Different borders come between the seeing “I”/eye and the object of sight. Seeing through his shades Joll sees darkness, and finds safety in knowing others cannot see him. The barbarian girl, with her damaged eyes, is liberated from having to look upon the evil that maimed her. The magistrate’s vision is blurred in a more symbolic way. The office window keeps him safe from responsibility, as he does not look

directly upon the prisoners in the barracks yard. Further, his investigation into the room of torture, where he tries to shed light on the room and its victims, is something he does under cover of darkness, taking “back alleys” and being careful not to be seen by any interlopers. His desire not to be seen suggest an unwillingness to be held accountable for his lack of interfering with the interrogations.

Another way the magistrate’s vision is blurred, is in his inability to *see* or remember the barbarian girl. Whenever he is not with her, he cannot remember her face; his image of her is a blank. “From her empty eyes there always seemed to be a haze spreading, a blankness that overtook all of her” (94). Only in a dream does he come close to seeing her: “For an instant I have a vision of her face, the face of a child, glowing, healthy, smiling on me without alarm” (149). To see her as a child is to see her as an innocent. However, in his refusal, or inability to imagine her face, the magistrate also refuses to recognize her, or recognize himself in her. As such, what he on the one hand tries to do, but on the other seems unable to, is to recognize her as human. Justifying his views with the torture of her body and her father’s in front of her, the magistrate tells us:

Thereafter she was no longer fully human, sister to all of us. Certain sympathies died, certain movements of the heart became no longer possible to her. I too, if I live long enough in this cell...will be touched with the contagion and turned into a creature that believes in nothing. (88-89).

In this passage the magistrate contributes to writing the girl Other by underlining her difference. Earlier I noted Jolly’s argument of seeing a body guilty if it bears the signs of guilt. By referring to the girl as not “fully human” and as a “creature”, the magistrate reads and writes her as guilty due to the marks torture has left on her. Pursuing the myth that the Other is less than human, and animal-like, the magistrate gets away with his own exploitation of her. In a similar way, when the magistrate is himself a prisoner, Mandel makes the cook’s grandson participate in the torture of him: “‘Tell him he must do better next time,’ Mandel says to the boy. The boy smiles and looks away” (127). If the boy had looked at him, he would come face to face with his own humanity, and in looking away he protects himself from responsibility. This looking away or closing one’s eyes to something puts us back into South Africa and the fences and division of space that keep suffering away from public view.

To return to the discussion of eyes and seeing, the eyes of Mandel, the magistrate’s own torturer, are perhaps the most enigmatic of all in their clarity. The imagery connected to his “lovely blue eyes” suggests that they are hiding something: “When he looks at me, as he will in a moment, he will look from *behind* that handsome immobile face and *through* those

clear eyes as an actor looks from behind a *mask*” (84, emphasis added), and; “I look into his clear blue eyes, as clear as if there were crystal lenses slipped over his eyeballs” (129). The clear blue eyes of Mandel appear to be concealing as much of an internal life as do Joll’s shades. Functioning as a mask, the border represented by his eyes, his face, is one which remains inaccessible to the magistrate. The eyes in this way mark a border or a connection between internal and external, what one can see, and what is obliterated from sight, what one must *imagine*. Throughout the novel, the magistrate expresses a desire to *understand* both Joll and Mandel. But it can seem as if he in a sense can come to terms with Colonel Joll’s wearing shades, at least if he applies it to his own values. The shades come to stimulate the magistrate’s imagination and leaves room for interpretation, as such representing an image of Coetzee’s dark chamber. Mandel, on the other hand, unflinchingly meets his gaze and does not feel the same need to hide from others; shamelessly he parades his own violence and cruelty in front of anyone, refusing to justify his actions and to have identity other than as filling the role of the bully: “‘When I was younger’ – he flexes his fingers – ‘I used to be able to poke this finger’ – he holds up the index finger – ‘through a pumpkin shell.’ He puts the tip of his finger against my forehead and presses” (129). This suggests that Mandel in a very physical way can invade other people. His eyes, on the other hand, have a more psychological property. Alongside Joll’s shades, Mandel’s eyes, in their inscrutability, can give the illusion of keeping someone under constant surveillance, while preventing a reciprocal gaze, similar to Foucault’s Panopticon.

According to Michel Foucault, the Panopticon “is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen” (1977, 202). It originally referred to a construct with cells surrounding a tower. From the tower, one had complete view of the cells and the people (for example prisoners) in it. The inmates, on the other hand, could not see into the tower, and could never be sure they were not being watched³¹. The same detachment from seeing and being seen can be found in Colonel Joll’s shades. Because his eyes are prevented from squinting in the sun, he can see “everything”, and the “black discs” prevent his eyes from being seen. The Panopticon is important because it says something about who has the authority to watch, and it represents the institutionalization of authority and power. The idea of the Panopticon necessitates an invading and an isolating instance. The inmates are isolated from one another and can see the tower, but not the people in it. The

³¹ Reality shows like *Big Brother* borrow some ideas from the Panopticon. The participants in the show are constantly being monitored, and they do not know what will be shown on TV.

Panopticon invades in its constant presence, both in physical and psychological terms. The minds of the inmates are invaded or convinced by the idea that they are in fact under constant surveillance. Once the magistrate is arrested, he is persuaded by a similar notion.

At night when everything is still the cockroaches come out to explore. I hear, or perhaps imagine, the horny clicking of their wings, the scurry of their feet across the paved floor.../ ...I often jerk awake during the night, twitching, brushing myself off, feeling the phantom probings of their antennae at my lips, my eyes. From such beginnings grow obsessions: I am warned. (87).

The magistrate's fear of the cockroaches represents his fear of the interrogators and of being invaded. The imagery connected to the interrogation is that of cutting open, shedding light on, deciphering, and dissecting: "every day he folds the flesh aside and exposes my soul to the light" (129). Convinced that they are waiting for him to break, he feels that he has some kind of importance as such. However, after managing to obtain a key and running away one night, the magistrate spends the following day hiding from the guards he believes are looking for him, convinced that it "is only a matter of time before I am discovered" (101). No one finds him, and the same evening he returns to his warden, dejected with the realization that there is nowhere to run, only to find that his warden has told no one of his escape. This is the beginning of the realization that not all eyes are looking at him:

I used to think to myself, "They are sitting in another room discussing me. They are saying to each other, "How long before he grovels? In an hour we will go back and see." "

But it is not like that. They have no elaborate system of pain and deprivation to which they subject me. For two days I go without food and water. / It is not malice that makes them forget. My torturers have their own lives to lead. *I am not the centre of their universe.* (126, emphasis added).

From this we can see that the magistrate realizes that there is no Panopticon keeping him under constant surveillance, even though he at first believes there is one. The illusion of it, however, is enough to keep him perpetually on his toes. In one sense he wants to be seen, to be remembered, and be a worry for his wardens. On the other hand, once he realizes his insignificance to them, he wants to be forgotten.

Remembering and forgetting is an important binary opposition in the novel, which also connects to seeing. For instance, when Colonel Joll returns from his failed campaign to find that the army has abandoned the town, he attempts to conceal himself from the magistrate, but his eyes are bare, no longer protected by the shades, and the magistrate sees that "[m]emories of his mother's soft breast, of the tug in his hand of the first kite he ever

flew, as well as those intimate cruelties for which I abhor him, shelter in that beehive” (160). Without the shades, then, the magistrate is able to recognize his humanity.

Further, the magistrate’s desire to make an impression, to leave a mark on someone, relates to being remembered. At the beginning of the novel, when the first “barbarian” captives are brought to the town, the magistrate makes an ambiguous remark:

I hope that the history of their captivity enters their legends, passed down from grandfather to grandson. But I hope too that memories of the town, with its easy life and its exotic foods, are not strong enough to lure them back. I do not want a race of beggars on my hands. (20).

In the same way that he wants the “barbarians” to remember town life, so too does he want the barbarian girl to remember him, although at their parting the girl suggests that she remembers a different truth than he does. Realizing that he is competing with the memory of Joll, the magistrate admits regret that he could not “engrave myself on her as deeply” (147). To remember, then, one must leave a mark. On the one hand, he argues about men his age that “we leave no mark of our own on the girls who pass through our hands”, but on the other, he concludes that the barbarian girl “is marked for life as the property of a stranger” (147-148). The magistrate’s own failure to remember the girl, on the other hand, is at one point done with intent: “I am forgetting her, and forgetting her, I know, deliberately” (95). This is all connected with Hayden White’s theory about writing (or rewriting) history, discussed in my chapter 2. In choosing what to remember, we to some degree decide the shape of our future, and in rejecting or suppressing certain memories, we make a stand as to what we want to identify with.

Durrant’s article, “Bearing Witness to Apartheid: J. M. Coetzee’s Inconsolable Works of Mourning” deals with issues of remembering and forgetting and their significance in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Exploring the magistrate’s ambiguous relationship to the girl’s body and his need to return to the sites of torture, Durrant argues that “it remains obscure as to whether the Magistrate’s mind returns in order to remember or to forget, to hear the voices more clearly or to shut them out completely” (1999, 454). A clue is found in the magistrate’s obsession with remembering the girl pre mutilation, which suggests an unwillingness to see her as she is now. He expresses his dismay for the move from seeing yourself damaged, and to accepting that damage:

While I have not ceased to see her as a body maimed, scarred, harmed, she has perhaps by now grown into and become that new deficient body, feeling no more deformed than a cat feels deformed for having claws instead of fingers./ ...or is it the case (I am not stupid, let me say these things) that it is the marks on her which drew me to her but which, to my disappointment, I find, do not go deep enough? (61/ 70).

The magistrate must believe that one can go back, that one can return to a state of innocence. However, when he is imprisoned, he realizes that whatever future he had in the town is now gone. Despite this, once the soldiers have returned to the Capital, and Mandel has abandoned his chambers, the magistrate returns to his old office and the station he once occupied: "I have taken the lead. No one has challenged me./ ...I have in effect resumed the legal administration that was interrupted a year ago by the arrival of the Civil Guard" (159). A unitary, unspoken decision must have been reached amongst the townspeople on agreeing to "forget" the magistrate's treatment in front of their eyes. In this way they have closed their eyes to what happened to him: "To her, I realize, I disappeared and then reappeared, and in between was not part of the world" (140). According to Homi Bhabha, "Being obliged to forget becomes the basis for remembering the nation, peopling it anew, imagining the possibility of other contending and liberating forms of cultural identification" (161). Thus the forgetting of the crimes against him, becomes a condition for being able to move on, to look ahead, and to continue life. Whereas the reader sees the irony of the pretence between the magistrate and the townspeople, it is a necessary deception to ensure the future of the town and the people in it. For the reader, then, the result is what Durrant concludes: "Coetzee's novels resist the process of verbalization and relentlessly force us to confront the brute, indigestible materiality of the suffering engendered by apartheid" (460). Thus, even if it is necessary for the future of the nation to forget the past and look ahead, or at least to *rewrite* history, Coetzee's novels remind us that certain things cannot be worked through, and will always be written on our bodies.

We have seen how remembering and forgetting are important to the magistrate, and that the townspeople agree to forget and move beyond the deeds done by both the magistrate and the soldiers. This is all connected to the idea of what deeds can bear close scrutiny. For instance, at the beginning, torture is done behind closed doors and shut curtains, similar to the magistrate's exploration of the girl. However, whereas the townspeople close their eyes to the deeds done by Empire towards the "barbarians", they are not as forgiving of the magistrate taking up with a barbarian girl who has "been patronized by the common soldiers and figured in numerous obscene stories" (91), and then risking the lives of his men to return her to her people. Whilst the magistrate claims that his "private life is none of their business" (124), the townspeople deliver him into Mandel's hands for his "betrayal". Following this, something interesting happens. Whereas previously, torture happened behind closed doors, Joll's return with his captives marks a change where torture is turned into a public spectacle and is applauded by the townspeople. Participating in the torture against the captives as well as the

magistrate, the people partake in writing the “barbarians” Other, and in invading their bodily borders, they accept a share in the guilt of Empire. By inducing the people of the town to become accessories to the violence of Empire, the Other becomes the enemy because of the knowledge of their unitary guilt. As such, innocence and notions of guilt is deconstructed. The children of the town, usually considered figures of innocent, all become involved in the violence and oppression that is Empire, and the cook’s question of “what is going to become of the children?”, followed by the magistrate’s assurance that “they won’t harm the children” (167), take on an ironic undertone in the fact that the children seem already to have been harmed. As such, the child presences running through the novel echo Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* with its rather ambiguous quality. The notion of who is innocent or who is guilty, who is barbarian and who is civilized, is deconstructed, as the magistrate describes Mandel as “one of the new barbarians usurping my desk and pawing my papers” (85), and accuses Colonel Joll of being the enemy. Enemy then becomes a relative term, depending on the eye of the beholder. The magistrate’s point of view is the one we follow throughout the novel, but despite the power he then has, the magistrate is obsessed with appearances: how he sees others, how he sees himself, and above all, how others see him.

Metamorphosis

What I have looked at so far in this chapter are notions of identity imposed by Empire, both on its subjects and on the “barbarian” Other. I have also noted how this changes, depending on which side of the “city walls” you are on. For the people of the town, for example, those who are allowed to take part in the unitary identity of Empire is always shifting, depending on who are “allies” against the mutual enemy, the “barbarians”. Identifying a “barbarian”, however, is made problematic in the novel, and Coetzee and the magistrate both point out the barbarity of the civilized, and deconstructs the binary opposition of barbarian/civilized. Under Mandel’s control, the soldiers situated in the town can do as they please. The townspeople’s fear of the barbarians induces them to accept the behaviour of the soldiers, who help themselves to food, women and drink. No proof of a barbarian invasion is evident, yet chapter 5 begins: “The barbarians come out at night./ All night, it is said, the barbarians prowl about bent on murder and rapine” (134). It is ambiguous who these barbarians are, and for the reader, the barbarians referred to here, could as easily be the barbarianism that is inside all human beings. A girl is raped, and when she refuses to tell her tale, her friends claim it was a barbarian: “They recognized him as a barbarian by his ugliness” (*ibid.*). Whether or not her friends actually saw anything, we do not know, but this too might as easily stem from the

myth of the Other, as an actual spotting, where the imagination fills in the blanks. However, if they did see him, the fact that his “ugliness” exposed him as a barbarian suggests that, unlike in South Africa, where barbarianism was determined due to colour of skin, the distinctions are not as easy to make out in this “Empire of light”. Thus the borders between the barbarians and the civilized are even further blurred.

Another thing to question, is how someone might be seen as part of the community, and then later be excluded from that same community. I have already pointed out the soldiers as an example. Another is the fisherfolk who are foreigners, “speaking a language no one understands”, but because the people of the town at first see them as having a common enemy, they sympathize with them:

‘Was it the barbarians who chased you out?’ they asked, making fierce faces, stretching imaginary bows. No one asked about the imperial soldiery or the brushfires they set./ There was sympathy for these savages as first, and people brought them food and old clothing, until they began to put up their thatched shelters against the wall on the side of the square near the walnut trees, and their children grew bold enough to sneak into kitchens and steal, and one night a pack of their dogs broke into the sheepfold and tore out the throats of a dozen ewes. Feelings then turned against them./ Then one by one their little thatched huts started to reappear, this time outside the town under the north wall. (136).

The soldiers then, having invaded the living area of the fisherfolk, trigger a motion where the fisherfolk in turn are forced to invade the town. It is evident from this that the townspeople at first see the fisherfolk as *savages*, but not *barbarians*. Whereas the townspeople consider them victims of the “barbarian” attack, the magistrate suggests that it is Empire that has driven them from their homes. Once they start getting too comfortable, however, the townspeople no longer see them as allies or victims of a common enemy, and they are pushed outside the city walls. The soldiers, on the other hand, get away with their crimes and invasions because they are protecting the border, keeping the people “safe” from the “barbarians”.

To be included in the identity of Empire, is, as we noted above, to be framed within a discourse. This is emphasized in the novel in that the barbarian girl and the magistrate remain nameless throughout the novel. By not naming the girl, as Magda does in *In the Heart of the Country*, the magistrate refrains from imposing his power over her, but it can of course be argued that in naming her “the barbarian girl”, he actually asserts her as Other³². However, if the girl has had a role imposed on her by Empire, the magistrate shares her fate. Thus after Colonel Joll brings the taint to the town, the magistrate feels estranged from his role of the

³² This refrain from naming characters beyond their roles, “the barbarian girl”; “the magistrate”, is a device often employed in allegory.

“law”. In this sense, he has become a “foreigner” to himself. The vision he has of himself does not correspond with what is expected of him from Empire. He refuses to condone Joll’s actions, and refuses to close his eyes, go hunting, and pretend that torture has never taken place. I discuss above how he attempts to cleanse himself through washing the girl, and this also becomes a means of distancing himself from the role he feels Empire has imposed on him. He tells the barbarian girl that: “Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms” (43). Earlier in the chapter I spent some time discussing how the magistrate’s identity assimilates to the barbarian girl and to the Other. In a world based on binary oppositions, to escape the identity of the so-called civilized, what other option is there but to become the Other? Same as Magda’s search for independence from Afrikaaner stereotypes and conventions, the magistrate seeks to find new means of identification. But regardless of our identity, people need recognition from others in manifesting one. The magistrate, perhaps due to his role as a public figure, relies heavily upon the impression other people have of him. This renders him very insecure in his search for a new identity. With the girl, he does not know what he is, a saviour, a healer, a father, a lover, “now kiss her feet, now browbeat her, now anoint her with exotic oils, now ignore her, now sleep in her arms all night, now moodily sleep apart” (60-61), but after his own torture, he believes that from “the very first she knew me for a false seducer” (148). At any rate, in attempting to assert his distance from Colonel Joll when he is washing the girl, the magistrate does not want to recognize his own power over her. Seeing his own reflection in Joll’s shades, however, makes the magistrate realize that the “distance between myself and her torturers... is negligible” (29).

The magistrate’s identity changes throughout the novel. At the beginning, the changes are made to assert his distance to Empire and Colonel Joll. However, as the novel progresses, this becomes less clear; Empire writes him as Other, and he himself aids in this. Thus when he returns to town after handing the girl over to her own people, Empire writes him as an ally of the “barbarians”. Colonel Joll accuses him of wanting to be the judge, the “One Just Man”, but then goes on to name him and impose an identity on him based on how others see him: “to people in this town you are not the One Just Man, you are simply a clown, a madman. You are dirty, you stink, they can smell you a mile away. You look like an old beggar-man, a refuse-scavenger” (124). After this, Mandel, with help from the mob, makes the magistrate become the clown and madman Joll suggested. The magistrate refrains from blaming the townspeople: “of what use is it to blame the crowd? A scapegoat is named, a festival is declared, the laws are suspended: who would not flock to see the entertainment?” (131). We here see a shift in the way the magistrate sees himself. He accepts being *named* the scapegoat, an innocent who is

helpless against history and must please the crowd. This could also be seen as a manifestation of isolation as found in psychoanalysis: a thought or wish is isolated from its rightful context as a defence mechanism. Seeing himself as merely having a role, rather than connecting it to his current situation, the magistrate is able to keep his disgrace in check. A pattern in the magistrate's desire for identity, is to be seen as innocent, as an ignorant babe, which again reminds us of his disclaimer of liability. Determining that it is his role to be the scapegoat, the magistrate must remain passive and distanced to the situation. Falling into certain roles, then, becomes a way for the magistrate to excuse himself, excuse his own condition, and ultimately to protect himself. No longer locked up, the magistrate lives "like a starved beast at the back door, kept alive perhaps only as evidence of the animal that skulks within every barbarian-lover" (136). At this point, the magistrate expresses his opinion of the fisherfolk who have come to town: "...I see only ignorance, cunning, slovenliness. Yet what do they see in me, if they ever see me? A beast that stares from behind a gate" (137). Thus the name the magistrate wanted to make for himself, of being the One Just Man, of being the one who opposed the torture of the Other, is reduced to nothingness, as he is seen as an animal instead of gaining respect for speaking up against the Empire.

The magistrate's acceptance of his situation is jolted when Mandel rewrites history and imposes a new identity on him. Using the Empire's power over context, Mandel informs him that he is no prisoner: "How can you be a prisoner when we have no record of you? Do you think we don't keep records? We have no record of you. So you must be a free man" (*ibid.*). There is a comfort and a justification in being wrongly arrested and wrongly accused, and that is to be able to clear one's name in front of the world, to have it broadcasted that you were not guilty after all. In claiming that the magistrate is free, Mandel robs him of the possibility of clearing his name, and takes away the feeling of being justified. Further, since he is now a free man, the magistrate must provide his own food, and in this follows in the girl's footsteps by "prostituting" himself through "singing for his keep". In this way, the magistrate becomes a sort of beggar crossed with a bard, who tells a story in exchange for food. Admitting to the reader that what he serves is "half-truths", one gets the feeling that the magistrate has finally understood the intimacy of torture, and why the girl was reluctant to speak. To overcome his experiences, the magistrate must in a sense return to his old identity. That which anchors him to his past self and his prime, is to be fat: "I want to be fat again, fatter than ever before. I want a belly that gurgles with contentment when I fold my palms over it, I want to feel my chin sink into the cushion of my throat and my breasts wobble as I walk" (142). To be fat again is synonymous with no longer being in pain, and with returning to his former self. The return to

his former position of magistrate, and the simultaneous reassertion of his sex, suggests that the wellbeing of his body goes hand in hand with his notion of identity. When his body was in pain, he was preoccupied with the basic human needs of avoiding further pain and of being fed: “I was so hungry that I did not give a thought to women, only to food./ When I dreamed of a woman I dreamed of someone who would come in the night and take the pain away” (140). Once the threat of violence against his body ceases to exist, his needs, and with it, his notion of identity, changes and returns to their former pattern.

The magistrate attempts to construct a structured linearity to his narrative, writing his story or history as moving from order to chaos to order restored. We saw how he realized that he was not the centre of the universe of his torturers, and he seems to have reached the same conclusion regarding Empire, its history, and the town itself. The realization of insignificance becomes apparent when he contemplates writing a history of the town, and compares what he could write to the wooden slips:

I think: ‘When one day people come scratching around in the ruins, they will be more interested in the relics from the desert than in anything I may leave behind. And rightly so.’ (Thus I spend an evening coating the slips one by one in linseed oil and wrapping them in an oilcloth. When the wind lets up, I promise myself, I will go out and bury them where I found them.) (169).

In recognizing his own insignificance, he also seems to accept that he can only ever represent himself, and that he cannot tell the whole story of Empire, only the story of himself –as seen by him.

In the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that meaning in the novel is shifted through multiple contexts to produce foreignness, and that this in turn deconstructs traditional binary oppositions. We have seen how identity is constantly shifting between how the magistrate sees himself, how others see him, and how he believes others see him. Sight then becomes a key element to identification. Movement in space can also determine your identity. For the magistrate, his movement beyond the borders of the Empire, and into the land of the “barbarians” writes him as Other, and thus upon his return to town, he is placed in the space of the Other: the torture room. We have also seen how the notion of who belongs and who do not, changes in town life as well.

I argue that the magistrate does not tell *the* story of Empire, similar to how Coetzee does not tell *the* story of South Africa. But he is *one* voice, telling *one* story from *one* point of view. Attempting to free himself of a certain discourse, the magistrate seems to be doing something similar to Magda in writing himself *out of* the identity of the colonizer. However, in

so doing, he writes himself *into* the identity of the Other. In an article by Susan Stanford Friedman, she emphasizes Walter Benjamin's view on the "storyteller's relationship to space" (2005, 195); there are two types of storytelling: that of home and elsewhere. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, I would like to suggest that there is a transgression of storytelling, one that oversteps the boundaries between these two types. The town is the magistrate's "home", but after Empire's "invasion", it is defamiliarized and made uncanny. In the magistrate's eyes, the conception of the place is *unmade*; from moving freely through a familiar space, the magistrate is incarcerated and isolated from the community. Through estranging the home and making it threatening and uncanny to the magistrate, Coetzee deconstructs the notion of the safe home, and at the same time demonstrates that borders are dynamic and always changing. Thus in the encounter with the Other, be it in the shape of Colonel Joll or the barbarian girl, who does the magistrate see but himself? "The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves" (160), the magistrate mouths to Joll through the carriage window. This suggests unity and a breaking down of boundaries between self/Other. We do not know if the magistrate is referring to 'us' in individual terms, or if he, in a more Blakean sense, refers to how "Cruelty has a Human Heart/Terror the Human Form Divine"³³. The message has similarities to Jesus' Golden Rule: "do to others what you would have them do to you"³⁴. What the magistrate means, then, is that before we commit a crime against our fellow man, we should consider how we would respond to the same treatment. Coetzee is known to have little mercy for his protagonists, and in the "lesson" the magistrate has for Joll, the reader does not fail to see the irony. To inflict ourselves with our own evil is to recognize our next of kin as human, and not Other. But for the magistrate to reach this conclusion, he must first be defamiliarized from all that is familiar to him.

³³ William Blake: "A Divine Image" from *Songs of Experience*.

³⁴ Matthew 7:12.

Conclusion

When I began this thesis I originally intended to include Coetzee's latest novel *Diary of a Bad Year* in my analysis to see how it comments on the themes of isolation and invasion as found in *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. As I began my work I quickly discovered that this would be unfeasible; the two older novels simply required more attention. My reason for wanting to include the novel to begin with, was to show how Coetzee returns to the same themes and problems in his writing. That function has instead been filled by using Coetzee's critical texts, *Doubling the Point* and *White Writing*, and also through minor references to his later fictional works. Certain implications are introduced when reading Coetzee's works within a framework of isolation and invasion. There is a focus on South African history, especially colonialism and apartheid, on both the personal and collective level. Writing is also seen as both personal and collective: writing your personal history, writing the story of the nation, and so on. Issues I have returned to throughout this thesis concern identity, truth, borders, writing history, seeing and being seen, oppression and forces of oppression, power, authority, deconstruction of binary oppositions, to mention just a few. I have emphasized how Coetzee's novels often represent an unwillingness to be confined to conventions, both in terms of identity and in their structure. In both the novels I am looking at, the setting is familiar to the narrators, it is their home. In the article "The World and the Home", Homi Bhabha states that "the intimate recesses of the domestic space becomes sites for history's most intricate invasions" (1992, 141). Bhabha's notion of the 'unhomely' is strongly connected to the *verfremdungseffekt* I talk about in chapter 3. The home as a setting for confrontation between the individual and an oppressive or traumatic history seems in many ways to be emblematic of Coetzee's novels.

Susan VanZanten Gallagher argues that Coetzee's "narrative strategies give silenced voices life, tell an alternative story of South Africa" and "allow[s] a variety of voices to speak" (1991, 46) Whereas I agree that Coetzee does this, and refrains from writing merely one version of the South African story, his focus is on one story or voice at a time. Although many similarities are found between his novels, they are often radically different both in structure and contents. In my view, these stories, with their similarities and differences, seem to partake in the making of a whole. However, this wholeness has certain holes in it. With Michael K as a questionable exception, there are extremely few Black or Coloured voices in Coetzee's novels. In other words, Coetzee is reluctant to give voice to the Black or Coloured Other, as thematized in *Foe*. Despite the perpetual Black/Coloured silence in Coetzee, I want

to argue that much is lost if one looks at his novels as completely separate from each other and his critical works. The narrators of *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* tell what they believe to be their individual stories, but in doing this, they also participate in the writing of the history of South Africa. Since they are telling stories, we can question if they are looking for an audience or if they want to be the audience themselves. Further, as I argued in my introduction, there seems to be a dialogue between and within the novels, where Coetzee sets the stage for debate. As such, the voices represented in each novel make up part of the diversity found in the nation of South Africa.

I have argued that the story or history narrated by both Magda and the magistrate is a form of *rewriting* of the history that has represented them. In chapter 2, I spend quite some time discussing the writing of history according to Hayden White. I have also noted how Coetzee focuses on different traumas of history, and as Samuel Durrant argues, Coetzee's novels make up the remembrance of that which has been forgotten or repressed. History is written by the "winners", the wielders of power. As noted in chapter 1, the apartheid regime in South Africa controlled context and imposed silence on its enemies through banning and incarceration. Through writing a *new* story, Coetzee represents the oppressed. According to White: "narrative would be a process of decodation and recodation in which an original perception is clarified by being cast in a figurative mode different from that in which it has come encoded by convention, authority and custom" (2001, 1726). These are precisely the issues of power and culture that pervade Coetzee's novels. They constitute an articulation of a silenced and painful history, and Magda and the magistrate both become what Bhabha refers to as "repetitions", or re-enactments of a historical situation (1992, 144). Magda is a vengeful repetition of the oppressed and silenced colonial daughters, whereas in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee repeats a more recent situation of the silencing and torture of the oppressed in South Africa.

To rewrite history, one has to distance oneself, isolate oneself from the conventions. The narrator of *Diary of a Bad Year* makes a comment which seems to represent Coetzee's view as well: "As a young man, I never for a moment allowed myself to doubt that only from a self disengaged from the mass and critical of the mass could true art emerge. Whatever art has come from my hand has in one way or another expressed and even gloried in this disengagement" (2007, 170). The distance suggested here is the author's distance from the mass, in terms of mass culture and experience as well as the mass of people, the setting, and the time, not to mention the norm of history writing quoted above. The townspeople in *Waiting for the Barbarians* represent the mass, whereas the magistrate represents the

disengagement from the mass. By keeping a distance, one retains a notion of control and authorial power. The mass threaten to impose certain meanings, certain readings onto the text. By departing from these bounds, Coetzee and his protagonists are free to write their own story and identity.

Through the articulation of their own story in opposition to the convention, Coetzee's narrators practice agency and are able to affirm a new identity. Elleke Boehmer's article "Transfiguring: Colonial Body into Postcolonial Narrative" begins with quoting Nicole Brossard: "...to get me out of the belly of my patriarchal mother.... [distance] my eye from her enough so as to see her in a different way" (1993, 268)³⁵. This resembles what I have already pointed out about rewriting history. To defamiliarize oneself in the face of the known is an important part of what goes on in Coetzee. Similar to Saunders' *verfremdungseffekt*, distancing oneself from the "mother" enables one to see the known in another light. In Coetzee's novels, what the protagonists see in a new light is more often than not themselves, their society and their culture. What they often find is that their notion of identity is some kind of image projected onto them by the surroundings.

As identity relates to both the inside and the outside, mind and body make up a person's notion of identity. Coetzee's novels focus strongly on the body as written or inscribed upon, i.e. the history of South Africa as it is written on the bodies of its people. In order to liberate oneself from the identity imposed by ideology, Boehmer argues that the "figured begins to figure by figuring the Other –itself" (269). Through articulation and enunciation, the 'figured' gains power to represent itself. Magda not only writes her own story, she also makes a figure to represent her for the 'flying machines'. The magistrate chooses a different path: when he tells the townspeople the story of his torture and brutalization, he serves 'half-truths', painting a somewhat different picture than the "true" story and therefore effectively transfigures himself.

Boehmer's essay keeps returning to the notion of art as a means of giving voice to the voiceless. However, she goes on to say that there are "those among the once-colonized for whom the silences of history have not ended" (272). In Magda's story, she is the only voice. She admits to having dialogues with herself, thus the voices of her father, Hendrik, Klein-Anna, -everyone in the novel, is filtered through her own. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the barbarian girl does not articulate her own story. Her body represents itself: "Representing its own silence, the colonized body speaks; uttering its wounds, it negates its muted condition"

³⁵ Mothers are strangely absent from Coetzee's work, with the exception of his autobiographical novels *Boyhood* and *Youth*. Perhaps this is part of Coetzee's own distancing?

(Boehmer, 272). In this way, the marks on the girl's body tell the story of oppression and her unwillingness to speak for her wounds, becomes an unwillingness to put the unspeakable into words, and in this sense to render it harmless.

Narrative can represent a way of naming the unnameable. In Coetzee's novels, the invading acts of rape and torture, unspeakable in their own right, become means of articulating oppression and persecution, and in this sense promotes the possibility of speaking of the unspeakable. Through breaking the boundaries of articulation; what one can articulate; who is allowed to articulate, the articulator (in Boehmer's terms) *transfigures* him or herself, and is able to break out of an imposed identity.

An argument I have made throughout is that Coetzee or his narrators explore new turf to find the "truth". The truth is ambiguous, but since narrated history is not 'value-neutral' (White, 1715), the truth that the narrators are after is an alternative story to the story told by the forces of oppression. In chapter 1, I quote Coetzee's view that South Africa has 'too much truth for art to hold', 'truth that overwhelms and swamps every act of imagination'³⁶. Thus the setting of both *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians* presents a departure from the South African situation of the time they were written³⁷. The search for truth includes a rejection of the "known". Magda rejects the language of authority and the conventions of the *plaasroman*. The magistrate asserts his distance from Joll and the identity imposed on him by Empire. John rejects his mother and his Afrikaans heritage in *Boyhood*. The list goes on. Part of growing up is rejecting the values of our parents, our culture, and so forth. The child cuts the umbilical cord in order to be free, in order to reassess the values that have been imposed, and in order to find its own truth. This distancing or disengagement becomes a kind of self-imposed isolation from the past.

Throughout this thesis I return to issues of truth, autobiography and history. All these terms are problematic, especially when we see them in relation to Coetzee's novels. Many of them deal with the protagonist's unwillingness to see the truth. The magistrate wants to escape the knowledge of torture and violence done by Empire. He also closes his eyes to his own physical and emotional dealings with the barbarian girl. David Lurie, in *Disgrace*, does not want to face the reality of his sexual relationship to Melanie Black vis á vis the oppression and exploitation of the female body in South Africa. Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* is unwilling to see the cause for the "attraction" Hendrik has for her. As we can see, many of

³⁶ Chapter 1, p. 10.

³⁷ It is interesting to note that Coetzee's perhaps most realist novel, *Disgrace*, caused the most controversy within *South Africa*.

these cases relate to the exploitation and inscription upon the female body, the colonial symbol of the conquered (invaded) lands. What I would like to call “sexual mismatches” run through Coetzee’s novels, only in Magda’s case do we ever get to see the female perspective. Yet what we find in Magda’s case, is the kind of isolation found in psychoanalysis: “a defence mechanism whereby a particular wish or thought loses emotional significance by being isolated from its normal context”³⁸. When she is made victim of Hendrik’s violence and is raped, Magda avoids seeing herself as a victim of sexual abuse, and rather casts herself as “the second wife” or his mistress. In this way she rewrites the story and decides for herself her identity rather than allowing Hendrik to have that power over her.

Coetzee’s sexual mismatches are predominantly between older men and younger women. They are emblematic of the “freak displacement” Bhabha talks about in “The World and the Home” (145). As we saw in chapter 3, the magistrate himself was aware of, and commented on, the unnaturalness of his sexual relationship to young girls. In this sense it comes to represent a symptom of the diseased society, it is an ‘invisible worm’ threatening to destroy beauty from the inside. It is a symptom of both invasion and isolation at once.

As we saw in chapter 1, isolation can mean “the separation of a person or thing from its normal environment or context, either for purposes of experiment and study or as a result of its being, for some reason, set apart”³⁹. Both context and experiment are terms I have used quite often here. We have seen how context can be used to determine meaning and understanding, whereas experiment, or thought experiment, is employed to find the truth, i.e. the meaning of certain narrative events and sequences. There are a multitude of meanings, and this is all connected to Coetzee’s ambiguity in terms of language and power relations. Seeing his novels through invasion and isolation presents one of many ways of gaining access to them.

In chapter 3, one of the things I talk about is Coetzee’s metaphor of the locked room. As a starting point, it is the metaphor for the author’s imagination; it is a way of entering experiences not your own. In Bhabha’s terms ““beginnings” require an “originary non-place,” something “unspoken” which then produces a chronology of events. Beginnings can, in this sense, be the narrative limits of the knowable, the margins of the meaningful” (146). The forces of oppression have the power to lock rooms and decide who has the right to access. Through using isolation and invasion they also determine whose eyes are allowed to see. In my introductory chapter, I argue that something is gained from isolation and invasion.

³⁸ See my chapter 1, p. 24 on the definition of “isolation”.

³⁹ See footnote above.

What is gained on behalf of Magda and the magistrate, when facing oppression and bans, is the authorial power of entering locked rooms. Authorial power determines identity, reliability, liability. It allows us to be locked out of rooms and spaces, and then to break into them. As such, invasion and isolation participate in the inscription of boundary lines. Boundary lines that can be transgressed, erased, moved, shifted.

The locked room, or Bhabha's "non-place" is a connection between the contents and the structure of a narrative. The events and sequences of the narrative, which is kick-started by the "unspoken", constitutes what J. Hillis Miller calls "narrative line" as I have discussed earlier. I have already pointed out that the structure of the two novels is very different. In *In the Heart of the Country* there are numerous "repetitions", which is "what disturbs, suspends, or destroys the line's linearity" (Hillis Miller, 1996, 290). Magda calls attention to herself as an unreliable narrator through her many repetitions, as well as presenting us with a startling narrative that forces us to haunt the same scenes again and again. As I pointed out in chapter 3, the magistrate haunts the rooms of torture, yet the narrative line of the novel is not folded back on itself as is the case of *In the Heart of the Country*. Whereas Magda is aware of herself as a writer, and consciously prevents us from leaving "the scene", the magistrate constantly strives for the narrative line to come full circle with a satisfying ending. However, the memory of the barbarian girl, or should I rather say the memory of forgetting the barbarian girl, is a haunting and repeating factor in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. All of Coetzee's novels end along the same line. It is not the rounded and satisfying end the magistrate wishes for. To follow Hillis Miller's metaphor of the labyrinth or Coetzee's metaphor of the locked room, the novels end once the reader has been led into the labyrinth of meaning or to the inside of the locked room. The reader is then abandoned with a myriad of threads leading in many directions or the key to the door, but nowhere to go once he is on the outside. Critics seem not to agree what to make of Coetzee's open-endedness. In my opinion, by ending his novels the way he does, Coetzee refuses to impose a certain meaning on his stories, and underlines the ambiguity he is so careful to preserve throughout. Similar to how the barbarian girl resists representing the signs written on her body, so does Coetzee resist the representation of his novels.

There *is* something to be gained from isolation and invasion, as I argue in my thesis statement. It has to do with power, control and authority. Perhaps it works so well because it works both on the inside and the outside, on the mind and on the body. The novels demonstrate this in terms of contents, but also in their formal structure. When we read, we are in the narrator's power. Despite Magda being an unreliable narrator, we play along and are at

her mercy throughout. Thus it not only tells us something about oppression in South African society and the silent female voices, it also tells us something about the process of writing. Magda refuses to be silent merely on the account that she is considered unreliable. The novel reminds us that history writing itself is not reliable; it does not tell the “whole story”. So although Coetzee’s novels might end on a note open for interpretation, and even though his novels cover not all the voices of South Africa, his stories deserve to be read. They *need* to be read. Gallagher points out that Coetzee “denies that there is a *particular* function that all writers must fulfil” (16). As a novelist, literary critic, and scholar, Coetzee fills the function of what Bhabha refers to as the “homeless modern novelist” (146) who ceaselessly reinvokes a past that has been swept under the carpet and the shame that a nation’s guilt transfers to its subjects. Despite his own reservations, he does not hesitate to enter locked rooms. As Magda puts it: “events have a power to move unmatched by one’s darkest imaginings” (section 91, 49).

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