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Freeburghers, the Nama and the politics of the frontier tradition: an analysis of social relations in the second narrative of J.M. Coetzee's Dusklands.

Towards an historiography of South African literature.

That the people remained white, in spite of the exceptional circumstances, is just as remarkable. An awareness of this fact and a pride in our ancestry should contribute to the continued desire of the people of the Republic of South Africa to remain white and Western, notwithstanding any pressure in our own country for integration and assimilation, and notwithstanding the ever-increasing pressure upon the numerically weaker whites in the rest of the world. (H.F. Verwoerd, February 1961 in Malherbe. 1966:V)

... for more than a century and a half now the South African people has, as a result of inter-marriage, been developing into a single nation, so that today there is no longer a clear division between Afrikaans and English speaking families and one cannot any longer speak of two separate population groups. (Dr. D.F. Du T. Malherbe, 1966:V) .

The term 'non-white' is at least partially anachronistic in its application to the eighteenth century: the economic and political conditions in which racial categories could become established did not as yet firmly exist. The eighteenth-century colour line was, to say the least, a blurred one in which the criteria of legal and social status by no means always coincided with those of ethnic origin. Many who later became assimilated into the white side of the South African colour line descended from a biological and cultural mixture in the eighteenth century. (Legassick, 1979:250)

Introduction and the question of historical method

The study of the way history has been written, and its relationship to the development of Southern African literature, has in the main been ignored in literary studies. The reasons for this are both complicated and diverse. Added to this there is a certain empirical naivety present in literary studies at the moment, concerning what seems to be the sudden interest in literary history in Southern Africa today; a naivety which seems to regard this 'new' development as simply one more choice, or intellectual departure, in an otherwise disinterested universe of free and open possibilities. To complicate matters even more there has been a general body of progressive, but fragmented marxist historical literary research forming on the periphery, so to speak (outside english departments and for very good reasons too). Moreover, recent political developments -- Soweto ('76), Uitenhage ('85), Soweto ('86) -- have impinged themselves upon mainstream literary agents, but predictably this has led to the reformulation of the old (assumptions), rather than the bringing in of the new.

The general cue of this paper is taken from the work of a number of revisionist marxist historians, and from the seminal works of Michael Vaughan on J.M. Coetzee, Mtutuzeli Matshoba, Staffrider, and marxist literary theory1:

> I realise the danger in attempting to characterise some of the features of a liberal aesthetics of South African fiction, without taking cognisance of the specific historical ingredients involved in the development of this fiction. The danger is of setting up an ahistorical abstraction: liberal aesthetics as the ahistorical essence of liberal South African fiction.2

Moreover, I take my departure from this warning: the need for particular historical research within the theory of materialism.

For Marx, traditional historical analysis (idealism), reduced changing material conditions (history) to an evolving consciousness, which in turn was expressed as an 'ahistorical essence' (a philosophical truth). This idealism, for Marx, had to be set right by placing it on its head: thus the materialist inversion of the Hegelian dialectic. The implications of a materialist reading of an Hegelian (idealist) text are far-reaching, and indeed violent. Dusklands is in a sense an Hegelian text. The opening of the second narrative begins with a quotation from Flaubert: 'What is important is the philosophy of history.'3 This we would argue is Hegelian in the sense that it implies that ideas are the essence of social development. History is seen, in turn, as the work of an evolving consciousness.4 A materialist reading of an Hegelian text like this is violent in the sense

that it seeks to look not at what the text is saying but at what it cannot say, and at the forces which generate these 'silences'.5 This involves a 'symptomatic' reading of the text:

> The symptomatic reading analyses the textual mechanism which produces the sightings and oversights rather than merely recording it.6

We need to pay particular attention to the forces which produce certain meanings, as well as to the accompanying silences and 'oversights'. We need, then, to ask very different questions of the novel: in short, historical questions and questions of historical method. We can begin by pitching these questions in a theoretical (abstract) way.

Literary studies have generally relied upon two separate (though related) methods of analysis. The first we can identify in practical criticism in which the practice is untheorized, and which relies upon simplistic (not necessarily simple) generalizations. The method is based on common-sense (and acute perception) or on, what Richard Johnson calls, 'chaotic abstraction':

> Chaotic abstraction is the form of thinking found, typically, in the practical common sense of the bourgeois class... They work from the immediate experience of capitalist exchange relations and stay within this viewpoint. Of course, all knowledge starts from 'experience', from the chaotic impressions of everyday life; but in empiricist modes of knowledge (for that is what they are) 'real life' is supposed to yield up knowledge unproblematically. This corresponds to the forms of abstraction, to the sorts of categories employed. Often these categories abstract whole chunks of real life. These lumps are 'chaotic' because they contain great internal complexity and many determinations. None of these is properly distinguished and analysed (let alone understood dialectically). To return to an earlier formulation: 'it is only the immediate phenomenal forms of these relations that is reflected in their brains and not their inner connections'.
>
> One common form of empiricist abstraction is to mistake a complex historical product or result for an adequately analytical starting point... Adequate categories grasp the changing socially determined use of things.7

Literary studies (and fiction) have been dominated by the philosophy of raw experience, spontaneity or 'chunks of real life.' These conceptual categories (and they can be nothing else) are undefined and for their practitioners they speak for themselves. The limitation of this mode of analysis is that it is unable to 'grasp the changing socially determined use of things.' The point, of course, is not that experience is absorbed into

consciousness and made redundant, but rather it needs to be theorized as historic, changing and connected to the 'socially determined use of things': for a start it is neither static nor 'unproblematic' (universal). The Victorian conception (and experience) of sexuality is very different from say Jacobus Coetzee's. Moreover, to mistake a 'complex historical product or result' (such as Jacobus Coetzee and the whole colonial enterprise which he is part and parcel of), for an adequate form of analysis whereby this historical complexity (with all its determinants) can be unraveled, is to mistake description for analysis, the end for the means.

The second dominant method of analysis in literary studies can be termed idealist in that it is closely associated with the sacred prizing of certain intellectual categories (reason for example). It is closely associated with a belief in the primacy of the idea, and its historical stability -- 'pure thought stripped of its historical content.' One could simply identify it as 'Pure Reason' or 'philosophical abstraction' per se:

> In the neo-Hegelians and again in Proudhon and Bastiat, such thinking becomes entirely 'phantasmagoric', 'sacred' or 'mystical'. The thoughts or categories themselves, now divorced from the complex situations they once expressed, perform their ghostly dances on the special stage of 'theory'. They become a series of 'thoughts' that devour one another and are finally swallowed up in 'self-consciousness' ...this is indeed the characteristic delusion of the 'philosopher'(or of the professional intellectual or academic).8

This form of thinking in literary studies can be associated with traditional historical studies of literature: studies which have attempted to identify the pure essence of a literary moment (or tradition). History in these terms is highly abstract: it is no more than a (privileged) self-conscious process whereby knowledge is successfully (or unsuccessfully) accumulated -- a mystical shimmer, a ghostly dance 'on the special stage of 'theory''.

If we are to identify the general literary criticism surrounding Dusklands as belonging to the first, we can say that the novel has been written within the tradition (with all its variations) of the second. We need to look at the way these two methods of analysis interact. What they seem to have in common is a certain anti-historical dimension -- pure ideas on the one hand and raw experience on the other: both aspiring to an ahistorical (self-conscious or fulfilled) moment.

Social relations, exchange and the frontier tradition

It would seem that **Dusklands** has been regarded as an anti-

historical document, an 'anti-documentary polemic'.9 This may be an overstatement, but it is clear that J.M. Coetzee's relationship to history is ambivalent; this ambivalence -- in which the meaning of a single event, like Klawer's death, splits in two: this ambivalence is expressed both in the parody of the national historian Dr S.J. Coetzee, in the **Afterword**, and in the variegated layers of translation (and intervention) in the novel.10 This historical ambiguity, it will be argued, is at the heart of the narrative's Hegelian posture in which there is a fundamental contradiction between the dominion of ideas and the imperviousness of material (historical) reality.

The **Afterword**, for Peter Strauss, is 'the weak-minded evasion of a mealy-mouthed historian': 'a section which mimics to perfection the myth-building stream of South African historiography'.11 However, one could look more closely at this 'myth-building stream': one needs to know where it is coming from (and why); and what (if anything) the narrative is offering in its place? One may feel that a certain nationalist historiography is inimical (particularly if one makes the connection between Dr S.J. Coetzee and other leading nationalist ideologues of the 30's and 40's), but to call it 'mealy-mouthed' -- and this is how we are meant to take it -- implies that we have no reason (or are unable) to move beyond the intense provocation which the text produces.

There is only one published article that I know of which has attempted to look at the historical documents used by the author in **Dusklands** (though not historically as such). It is called, '**Dusklands**: A Metaphysics of Violence' by Peter Knox-Shaw. He draws together a collection of colonial expeditionary literature, and points out how John Coetzee (sic) has ignored significant economic and political motives of the original expeditions. He argues that 'political and economic aspects of history' are reduced to their bare essentials -- 'documentary detail' is worked through with 'philosophical abstraction':12

> The copper mine which Jacobus Coetzee had noted in his deposition and over which Brink on his way back expended his most detailed entry appears in **Dusklands** merely as a date 'carved on the rocks'. The fictional narrative is distinguished throughout by a virtual effacement of economic motive. Nothing is made of the gold dust which Jacobus Coetzee gathered on the banks of the Great River and later displayed at the castle (indeed the omission is noted). Moreover the poverty-stricken burgher of history hunts in **Dusklands** to satisfy a refined bloodlust (kills for 'metaphysical meat', p.85) rather than to procure the ivory for which he had been granted a permit by the Governor.13

Knox-Shaw describes these historical omissions, and the depreciation of the 'force of context' as 'regrettable'.14 The reduction

of western imperialism to the psychopathology of the western mind is, in other words, 'deemed to the domain of the fortuitous'.15 The issue, for me, involves more than some accidental or essential omission: it concerns more than a question of chance and the vagaries of the fortuitous. It has a lot to do with the author's initial (ideological) assumptions regarding the nature of history, particularly narrative as such (for this is where the novel and history overlap, it would seem).

We could take Knox-Shaw's significant departure further by asking why J.M. Coetzee should pitch historical narrative in this particular (ideological) way? What is it in the author's method of writing (fiction/history) which leads to the effacement of certain political and economic details and (by implication) motives? Why is Simon van der Stel's expedition to the 'Kooperbergen' reduced to simply a date 'carved on the rocks'? These questions cannot however be asked 'at the level of ideology alone':

> Ideological ambiguities arise out of structural ambiguities and cannot be explained at the level of ideology alone. Ideology is not self-explanatory. When it is treated as though it were, the result is a moralizing psychologism. Under such an historiographical regime ideological inconsistencies become betrayals, and ideological shifts hypocrisy.16

Criticism of, and the irony within, **Dusklands** generally operates at the level of ideology (at the level of ideas), and so never escapes what Neville Hogan calls this 'moralizing psychologism.' We aim to look beneath this level of ideology by focusing on the political and social (exchange) relationships of the 18 century frontier.

A central idea through which the narrative moves (and through which the novel's sense of history is expressed) is that of the frontier. The frontier has had a significant presence in colonial literature, but seems to have been regarded by critics -- through their very silence -- as self-explanatory because it is natural and, in this sense, homogeneous. However, it would seem that distinct historical meanings of the frontier exist:

> ...in the South African situation there has been a tendency to move between the idea of frontier as isolation from the parent society, and the frontier as meeting-place of black and white cultures, peoples, and societies. The two are not necessarily the same.
>
> White frontiersmen expected all their dependants (save their families) to be non-white: they did not expect all non-whites to be their servants.17

Jacobus Coetzee enters the wilderness with the idea that 'all

non-whites should be [his] servants.' Likewise the wilderness is regarded as both the place of 'isolation' and the 'meeting-place of black and white cultures'. This was not the case in the 18 century, but is rather a contemporary concern projected onto the past:

> In place of the mercenary concerns that predominate in most early colonial travelogues John Coetzee allots the foreground to his explorer's encounter with primitives.18

The narrator in keeping with traditional conceptions of the frontier, has collapsed these distinct historical meanings into an overarching one. This collapsing lends a certain metaphysical force to the presence of the frontier. Subsequently, in terms of the frontier (and in terms of South African history in general), ''Afrikanerdom' becomes an explicitly personified metaphysical force'19 -- its motives are depicted as irrational and messianic:

> The present work ventures to present a more complete and therefore more just view of Jacobus Coetzee. It is a work of piety but also a work of history: a work of piety toward an ancestor and one of the founders of our people, a work which offers the evidence of history to correct certain of the anti-heroic distortions that have been creeping into our conception of the great age of exploration when the White man first made contact with the native peoples of our interior.20

Moreover, Afrikaner nationalism, viewed as a metaphysical force, has (it is believed) led to flagrant distortions in national history:

> ...Coetzee rode like a god through a world only partly named, differentiating and bringing into existence.
>
> I wish I had hunting adventures to relate... Hunting adventures lend excitement, however spurious, to history.21

Dr S.J. Coetzee is, of course, the spurious historian, but more than that his conception of the hunting frontier for example, already has a history (a life!) of its own. This is neither the moral perversity of one historian nor of one historical tradition (which critics have been tempted to conclude). This spuriousness is partially the result of a material shift in which a whole way of life has come under question, and is subsequently in crisis:

> The world-colonisation project has encountered serious reversals in the later twentieth century: this does not mean that intellectuals who recognise this (and who does not?), and are critical of the project, can reject their ascribed racial-historical place, and inhabit a new medium -- a new consciousness, a new history.22

J.M. Coetzee is accurate in focusing this crisis; a crisis brought home to the western intelligentsia, not only by its growing impotence generally, but through the Vietnam War (see the narrative of Eugene Dawn), and, locally, in the manifestation of the crisis of white hegemony (the 'total onslaught'): 'He threatens to have a history in which I shall be a term.'23 However, J.M. Coetzee engages this crisis only as an attitude, as a particular expression of consciousness: his ironic exposure of the fallacies of his 'father', Dr S.J. Coetzee, is an exposure at the level of ideas only. His 'father' represents a particular attitude (Afrikaner national), which the narrator is critical of because of what appears to be its obvious self-deception -- '...Coetzee, a humble man who did not play God, is unlikely to have tortured his animals.'24 The narrator's criticisms of national historiography -- represented by his 'father' -- are, however, shaped by certain assumptions (like that of the frontier) which he shares with his 'father'. Traditionally this has been regarded as a result of a common history (genealogy?): of attitudes simply carried, atavistically, down the line. However the narrator's reliance on, and departure from, national historiography can best be understood by looking at the distinct alliance within traditional (dominant) historiography:

> Both the liberal and the Afrikaner nationalist historiographical traditions,..affirm the dominant impact of the Boer/Afrikaner ethos on South African history, and are at variance only in as much as the nationalists cite Calvinist ideology and claim the course of Afrikaner history to be divinely ordained, whilst the liberal apologists decry the damage wrought by this aberrant character roaming about in a rational capitalist society. In terms of methodology, events, for both traditions, are the expression of the unfolding in history of two determinants, one 'true' and the other 'false'. For the liberal apologists, capitalism is the true determinant, and racialism...the false; for the nationalists, the opposite is the case. These determinants, dually active, are both anticipatory and teleological. The past directly anticipates the present -- the Boer/Afrikaner racist personality is seen as having been fully formed from a very early stage of colonial settlement at the Cape, and as having developed in terms of quantity rather than quality; and capitalism is characterized by the interaction/integration of two (or... more) classes (or 'races'...) which develop only in so much as they grow larger. And the future is latent in the past -- the cause and course of apartheid/separate development is presented as the movement of the will of the Afrikaner volk towards its inherent end of dominance over the other South African 'nations' or 'races'...and capitalism is viewed as heading towards its inherent end of complete and beneficent integration.
>
> History, whether caused by its origin and/or its end, is

> portrayed as taking a straight course from which it can be deflected only by external or alien phenomena; for the nationalists, capitalism, and the British, and for the liberals, racism and the Afrikaner.25

We need to identify the common assumptions within traditional (dominant) historiography so as to be clear about what 'silences' and 'oversights' there are in the narrative; and how they, in turn, differ from the self-conscious criticisms by the author (criticisms which lie on the surface of the novel in the form of the ironic mask).

I.D. MacCrone, in 1937, was one of the first, according to Legassick, to articulate in detail the thesis of the frontier tradition, and by doing so to combine two traditions of South African historiography.26 Racism, for MacCrone, was the result of an attitude developed in response to the physical conditions on the frontier -- this, for Legassick, is the frontier myth. It is mythical in that it cannot explain, for example, why Canadians -- who had a more severe frontier -- did not develop apartheid. This is not to say that racism is absent from Canadian history -- the point is that racism has nothing to do with a psychological response to an environment, as much as it has to do with a specific economic history: 'the expansion of the capitalist world market produced patterns of race relations which were not identical over either space or time.'27

The second narrative of Jacobus Coetzee implies that the past anticipates the present, in a linear and unproblematic way. Jacobus Coetzee is the fully formed racist personality having developed from 'a very early stage of colonial settlement of the Cape'. He stands at the point at which the freeburgher becomes the trekboer (the trekboer is looked back upon as the founder of Afrikaner nationalism). He is one of the original (it is significant that he isn't the original) progenitors of a whole line of Coetzees.28 The Coetzee offspring grow in number as history progresses 'in a more or less continuous and homogeneous temporality'29:

> The generations of the Coetzees illustrate well the gradual dispersal into the hinterland which has constituted the outward story, the fable, of the White man in South Africa, trekking ever northward in anger and disgust at the restrictiveness of government, Dutch or British.30

The problem at the centre of the novel is that history has not been able to move directly and linearly. For example there are many gaps in Coetzees' records; and historical narrative, as such, is unreliable: Klawer dies twice. This emphasis upon history as direct and anticipatory, and which can only be deflected by an alien force (imperial power -- expressed as settler racism in the second narrative and state bureaucracy/corporate

capitalism in the first) implies that the novel is working within a certain problematic: a problematic which assumes that history has an inherent simplicity or naturalness about it:

> ...the old belief that there was a unified civilization which it was the business of the artist to extend had been cast into doubt by history: by industrialization, by technology, by the nature of the modern state.31

This inherent simplicity and naturalness has gradually been lost: 'the tree...lives on trapped in its treeness'.32 Both Jacobus and Dr S.J., Coetzee are 'aberrant character(s)' -- 'divinely ordained' -- roaming around in what should be a natural world (a 'rational [capitalist] society'?). This type of aberration, it would seem, is to be found in the early history of the Cape and later on, on the frontier of 1760/1.

Although the narrator is critical of the dominant historiography he is still concerned with issues defined from within it; issues -- if we stick to the second narrative -- like that of the frontier which revolve around traditional historiography's understanding of the development of racialism/racism. This is evident in the use of all-rounded, clearly conceived racial categories in the novel. These categories are, to quote Michael Vaughan, 'racial-historical' in origin:

> The primary, original (or determining) drama is that of the mode of consciousness in its historical interaction with material reality. The mode of consciousness -- the primary term of the human drama -- is, it appears, ascribed to individual 'subjects' on a racial-historical basis... Ultimately, racial categories determine the broad trajectories of history.33

In the novel race, like that of the frontier, is a defining characteristic of consciousness in history. And although one would not want to underestimate the role of race consciousness in South African history, one cannot reduce different forms of consciousness and behaviour to racial categories per se. Moreover, these categories of race and the frontier, are not simply categories of 1760/1, categories which seem to have a well-developed group consciousness, and through which Jacobus Coetzee presumably operates. On the contrary race consciousness -- as we know it and as it is presented -- seems absent as such in the 18 century: 'If the stereotype of the African as enemy cannot be traced to the eighteenth century, when and why did it in fact come into existence ?'34

Legassick argues that to look for the antecedents of racialism/racism on the frontier of the 17 and 18 century is a misconception of the dominant historiography: an historiography which has

attempted to regard apartheid as the result of the victory of the ascetic trekboer frontier over the urbane benevolence of Cape liberalism; or, alternatively, as a result of the victory of the god-ordained Afrikaner volk over 'the restrictiveness of government, Dutch or British'. In other words, the frontier has been regarded as a static homogeneous boundary in which isolated (Afrikaner) communities have arisen -- it is this 'isolation' and 'stasis' which has lead, according to conventional wisdom, to a parochial conservatism and subsequently, to racism. Racism, in these terms, arose as an attitude to prevent isolated communities from becoming 're-barbarized', from losing their sense of civilization, or, as Jacobus Coetzee would have it, 'In the wild I lose my sense of boundaries.'35:

> Jacobus's fear of losing racial identity in the wilderness remains latent all along in the anxious watch he keeps over his 'tame' Hottentots, since in their 'betrayal' he reads his own capacity for reversion to the wild.36

The importance of the language of the frontier as a defining discourse of present social relations in South Africa can be seen both in the way it remains, unquestioningly, as an explanatory concept in literary criticism, and in the way it is echoed by Dr H.F. Verwoerd in 1961: 'That the people remained white [civilized], in spite of exceptional circumstances, is...remarkable'. Moreover, the language of the frontier has been incorporated into various other historical explanations of imperial social formations:

> The frontier was primarily what separated the Canadian, physically or mentally, from Great Britain, from the United States, and even more important, from other Canadian communities... Small and isolated communities surrounded with a physical or psychological 'frontier'...: communities that provide all that their members have in the way of distinctively human values, and that are compelled to feel a great respect for the law and order that holds them together, yet confronted with a huge, unthinking, menacing, and formidable physical setting -- such communities are bound to develop what we may provisionally call a garrison mentality.37

The South African equivalent to the 'garrison mentality', which has also been viewed as a psychological response to a 'menacing and formidable physical setting', is the laager mentality. It is the laager mentality which has traditionally been used to explain (and to perpetuate the belief in) the Afrikaner as a small isolated community, with a capacity for 'distinctively human values', which, paradoxically, has been 'compelled to feel a great respect for law and order'. In other words, the laager mentality, which has traditionally been regarded as peculiarly

Afrikaans, has been used to explain the cause of apartheid -- even by apologists for Afrikaner nationalism:

> ...the apartheid idea is...preeminently peculiar to the Afrikaner... The Afrikaner, as a result of his (sic) instinct of self preservation has developed a specific emotional attitude toward the numerically superior Bantu... The apartheid idea evolved mainly from this psychological attitude.38

The frontiersmen are regarded as the architects of South African society (it is significant that the ideologues of apartheid are referred to as architects). Jacobus Coetzee is the 'far-wandering vee-boer': traditionally regarded as 'the most active maker of South African history'.39 They are depicted as such by the traditional literary ideologues of the 'volksbeweging', such as F.A. Venter and D.F. Malherbe.40

The second narrative of Jacobus Coetzee is situated on the northern Cape frontier. Knowledge of this area is limited (more attention has been paid to the eastern frontier). This setting allows J.M. Coetzee a little room for the manipulation of his fiction, but it also betrays certain assumptions concerning social behaviour in isolation and concerning the nature of the northern frontier itself.

The northern frontier was not, of course, isolated and unpopulated as both **Dusklands** and the historical documents to which Coetzee refers, suggest.41 There is now a popular aphorism that goes: 'Jan van Riebeeck did not found the Cape Colony in an empty land'.42 Even though the northwest was arid and unfit for habitation (by settlers of course), it was nevertheless populated by the Nama and the San; and although the numbers of Nama (and Khoi generally) had been reduced, they did exist, and as more than another static landmark, another savage obstacle.43

An assumption regarding the frontier in **Dusklands** concerns the way antinomies are clearly defined, particularly racially. Perceptions of behaviour and the methods of conquest, for the colonial writer/historian, are simple, clearly demarcated and often immediate. The limitations of this assumption, are for a start, that Khoi and San are not clearly identified ethnic categories: 'It is clear from anthropological evidence that 'Hottentot' and 'Bushman' are not discrete racial categories'44; nor were they so in 1760/1. The Khoi and San as distinct racial categories is a 19 century conception. Ethnicity, as it is presented in **Dusklands** only seems to enter settler discourse later on. Jacobus Coetzee talks about the Khoi and San in 19 century ethnic terms -- the 18 century did distinguish pastoralists (Khoi) from the hunter-gatherers (San) but this distinction was an economic, and not an ethnic, one. According to circumstances

these economic roles could switch -- pastoralists turned to hunting and gathering when forced to and so on.45 This social fluidity is absent in Dusklands. If we are to look at 1760/1 we need to look at class relations (expressed in the various levels of access to political power, or medical knowledge, for example) and not ethnicity. And although the narrative mistakenly distinguishes Khoi from San on ethnic grounds, it nevertheless indicates an awareness of other factors such as social stratification (class relations); but it is an awareness clouded by its own historical (racial) context:

> Morning and evening he [Klawer] conveyed to me...the bowl of broth which constituted the foundation of the cure by purge that was being practised upon me by the same crone...a gloomy Bushman slave with a knowledge of the Bushman pharmacopoeia whom I sometimes glimpsed peering in at me from the door of the hut and who replied to my questions...with churlish silence.46

It is because the woman is a 'Bushman', over and above her being a slave, that she is 'churlish'. We have this emphasis clearly in a phrase such as, 'He was smiling a Hottentot smile'.47 If it is the physical differences, and colonial reactions to such physical differences, which concern the narrator then why should they be expressed in static ethnic terms, particularly when social relations in the 1760/1 were not static? Settler records are filled with a certain puerile obsession with physical (often imagined) differences between the settlers and the indigenous people. J.M. Coetzee picks up on it:

> If you want profit out of women you must make them breed you herders off the Hottentots (they do not breed off White men). But they have a very long cycle, three or four years, between children. So their increase is slow. It will not be difficult to stamp the Bushman out, in time.48

It was a popular settler myth that the Khoi were 'sexually misformed'49: the myth acted as the rationale for a policy of exclusion (and extermination). The narrative explores this. The point, however, is that this myth could apply equally to the so-called 'Bushman', or to the indigenous people as a whole, given that ethnic rigidity had not developed its 19 century political sophistication, as yet: 'the Dutch did not distinguish between Khoikhoin and San on physical grounds in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries'.50

The ethnic overlay is, however, partially a result of the editing of the original narrative by the racist historian, Dr S.J. Coetzee. And yet, if with the disjuncture in Klawer's death we are, as Knox-Shaw convincingly argues, alerted 'to the ease with which a sole witness may falsify facts prejudicial to his self-

preservation'51, it would seem, then, that our omnipotent translator is not so innocent after all: 'Otherwise the sole changes I have made have been to restore two or three brief passages omitted from my father's edition and to reduce Nama words to the standard Kronlein orthography.'52 J.M. Coetzee seems unable to escape his own ironic historical exercise. The difficulty lies in trying to locate his intervention (particularly as he professionally covers his own tracks). The narrator, however, has overlooked an incriminating clue: the inconsistent use of the frontier myth in the narrative. On the one hand we have the ironic exposure of the many fabrications in traditional historical explanations of the frontier: 'To understand the life of this [Jacobus Coetzee] obscure farmer requires a positive act of the imagination.'53 On the other hand we have the narrator's 'silent' reliance on traditional conceptions of the frontier to explain the very object of his critique: '...the writing itself furthers the claims of true savagery. This is an art that can only re-enact'.54 In other words the narrator's reliance on and departure from the frontier myth means that he unknowingly becomes caught up in his own ridicule. It allows Knox-Shaw, among others, to sharpen his talons: '...this is an existentialism of the armchair which, far from withstanding the desert, fails even to penetrate the text.'55

We need, then, to explore other aspects of the frontier myth, particularly in connection with the way antinomies are clearly and racially defined in the narrative. We can begin by looking at the reference to the warfare of the 'Bushman':

> The Bushman's bow is really very weak. He does not like to lose arrowheads because they are so much trouble to chip, so he shoots with a slack bowstring...56

For a start arrows were not necessarily 'chipped' from stone. A demand for metal had long been satisfied, and it would seem -- although metal was still prized (a ban on its trade was imposed in 1652) -- not all arrowheads would have been made of stone.57 This image, deliberate or not, is a simplification. It points towards certain (racist) assumptions regarding the indigenous civilization, its resistance and the erosion of its political power:

> I too could survive in the wilderness armed with only bow and arrow, did I not fear that so deprived I would perish not of hunger but of the disease of the spirit that drives the caged baboon to evacuate its entrails. (my emphasis)58

The erosion of indigenous political power was not a question of deprivation. Neither was it one-sided, and based upon the 'Gun' (superior technology). The usurpation was gradual and took many forms. Although the technological strength of the settlers was

undoubtedly real, it was not simply a question of this:

> Savages do not have guns... From the fringes of the horizon he approaches, growing to manhood beneath my eyes until he reaches the verge of that precarious zone in which, invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life. Across this annulus I behold him approach bearing the wilderness in his heart. On the far side he is nothing to me and I probably nothing to him. On the near side mutual fear will drive us to our little comedies of man and man...59

This is the language of the frontier zone -- the 'treacherous neutral zone'60: the point at which two frontiers meet, and where the frontier myths converge.61 To reduce the erosion of indigenous political power to a metaphysical and physical image of violence, in which we have an image of savagery on the one hand, and superior technology (the 'Gun') on the other, within the frontier zone, is to sustain the frontier myth. Firstly, the frontier zone was not a place of endemic violence (ironically the original travels of Coetzee were not violent in the way they are in the novel, if at all62); and secondly it was not necessarily a place of excessively comical proportions. This myth of the frontier as a place of comedy (and terror) is played out in its most domesticated forms in the American western and locally in Doman (Dam?) versus the frontiersmen.63 In other words, to reduce the erosion of indigenous political power to a tragi-comic scene like this is to 'divert attention from the complexity of the past', so as to 'mask those aspects of the present which serve to sustain the past'.64 The technological resistance of Khoi, San and Griqua, for example, did not only take the form of warfare, but when it did it was not simply a case of bows and arrows against guns, indians vs. cowboys. There is evidence of guns, horses and the integration into a money economy, which were used by the Khoi, San and Griqua to defend their political autonomy -- 'Savages' did have guns. In other words technology was not ethnically divided as traditional historiography leads us to believe, because social alliances were fluid in the 18 century. Moreover, relegating indigenous resistance to the periphery (as part of the wilderness) is in itself an ideological -- political -- choice (and a choice which the author is not exempt from). This is how Jacobus Coetzee (and Dr S.J. Coetzee) would want it:

> Now that the gun has arrived among them the native tribes are doomed, not only because the gun will kill them in large numbers but because they yearning for it will alienate them from the wilderness. Every territory through which I march with my gun becomes a territory cast loose from the past and bound to the future.65

Khoisan resistance was both sophisticated and far from over in 1760/1.66 This is partially acknowledged by Dr S.J. Coetzee --

'the Namaqua...did not break until 1907'67 -- and yet because of the way he is presented one can never take him seriously:

> At one of their halts (August 18) the expedition left behind: the ashes of the night fire...oxhide rope; tobacco ash; and a musket ball... Rope and bones were eaten by a hyena on August 22... The musket ball was not there on August 18, 1933.68

Although the second narrative (all four documents) introduces many facets, and various complexities, of indigenous resistance it is nevertheless the product of an illiterate frontiersman, a 'Castle hack', an unreliable historian (and self-effacing translator). One of the obvious features of the narrative is the clear and impelling ridicule of certain types of historical fetish and the type of penetration (intellectual or otherwise) which is unable to tell the bark from the tree; as for example in this absurd historical record above. And yet because this ridicule obscures many of the potentially reliable aspects of Dr S.J. Coetzee's historical record -- and because there is clear overlapping of histories between the various actors in the narrative -- we need to question, as we already have, the reliability of our omnipotent translator. However, it is not a question of who is reliable and who is not -- one needs to avoid both the true/false paradigm of traditional historiography69, and the conception of history as comprising various actors. We need to look more closely at the historical elements in the narrative and to see how they relate to the broader social context to which it refers, and within which it was written.

For Dr S.J. Coetzee, Jacobus Coetzee is a true frontiersman: he is regarded as the first 'white' man to cross the Orange River, for example (it serves the irony of the narrative that he probably wasn't).70 Jacobus Coetzee, as a frontiersman, is likewise individualist and anarchic -- 'suspicious of and hostile to the authority of government', and with a 'wasteful attitude to land', life and property: 'I glutted myself on a day of bloodlust and anarchy whose story would fill another book, an assault on colonial property...'71 He is, in turn, portrayed as embodying all the racial attitudes of the frontier -- the indigenous people are regarded as either servants or enemies (or both):

> I am an explorer. My essence is to open what is closed, to bring light to what is dark. If the Hottentots comprise an immense world of delight, it is an impenetrable world, impenetrable to men like me, who must either skirt it, which is to evade our mission, or clear it out of the way. As for my servants, rootless people lost forever to their own culture and dressed now in nothing but the rags of their masters, I know with certainty that their life held nothing but anxiety, resentment, and debauch... They died the day I

cast them out of my head.72

This attitude, Legassick reminds us, was neither present in the 18 century, nor, when present later on, simply on the frontier alone.73

Furthermore, the frontier has been regarded as a place of liberation74; and as a place (for the settlers) void of language, logic and rules: 'I played against an indifferent universe, inventing rules as I went.'75 It is on the frontier that 'Plaatje the newly articulate' comes into his own.76 Likewise it is on the frontier -- the magical zone in which we have the 'transformation of savage into enigmatic follower'77 or settler into 'white Bushman'78 -- that Jacobus Coetzee is forced to undergo the frontier experience. Jacobus Coetzee fails to benefit from the experience not because the frontier does not offer it, but because he is the type of man he is: colonial and deluded. Like the historical process which he represents he is 'an arrogant abstraction'79, divorced from nature:

> As the other senses grow numb or dumb my eyes flex and extend themselves. I becomes a spherical reflecting eye moving through the wilderness and ingesting it. Destroyer of the wilderness, I move through the land cutting a devouring path from horizon to horizon...I am all that I see.80

Moreover, these colonial delusions are brought to light by his experience on the frontier (part of the frontier myth is that the settler way of life could not be accommodated by the frontier). We, too, are made to share in the delusions of the western colonial experience. Klawer's death is recorded twice. This is a deliberate profaning of both the historical narrative (professionalism, science and objectivity) and the sanctity of death (a kind of natural religiosity): both profanities, it would seem, are symptomatic, for the author, of the undefined and egocentric power of the colonial master (which finds its logical conclusion in the faceless Coetzee of the first narrative). With the double death of Klawer we are brought to focus on the way mastery over history (broadly conceived of as nature) and fiction (in part a return to an essential language), overlap:

> If individuals hold potential mastery over the real world, it follows that a fiction which is concerned to promote this mastery may set an example in its own domain. Reality must be mastered, rendered amenable in every facet.81

It is the inherent corruption of power and the impotence of this type of mastery which J.M. Coetzee returns to again and again. Moreover, embedded in the novel is a level of inquiry which includes questions about historical technique, for example, whose answers, like the conundrum of Klawer's death, are there per-

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CAPTAIN ADAM KOK,
Chief of the Griqua Nation.

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manently to tease reader, critic and historian alike. Coetzee's modernism is meant to remain enigmatic and impervious to certain questions. History, like language, is presented as corrupted: fickle and enigmatic. To deliberate upon Klawer's double death, however, is to be caught up within a similar problematic which repeats itself for J.M. Coetzee -- a problematic concerned with the crisis of (bourgeois) realism and history. We need to question the very tenets upon which this problematic is based, in order to work through it:

> It is, I think symptomatic of Coetzee's liberal petty bourgeois class position and self-identification that his fiction reveals an enormous preoccupation with problems of consciousness... Symptomatic, in that Coetzee indicates in this way his critical alienation from the dominant interests in Western society, and at the same time his inability to make a material change of role, of identity, on the basis of this critical awareness: he remains 'a part of the system'. Hence, the prominence given to an agonised duality experienced in terms of consciousness.**82**

Part of Coetzee's 'agonised duality' is expressed in certain assumptions surrounding colonial historiography; assumptions, as we have seen, like that of the frontier. The frontier has a certain naturalness about it which Coetzee finds both attractive and potentially invigorating. It is also seen as a place of isolation and endemic violence where settlers cannot live. In alignment with progressive historical forces our way out of this problematic, of this 'agonised duality', is through foregrounding certain (mythical) assumptions concerning South African colonial history; particularly, in our case, those concerning the role of the frontier (close-set and racist) as a way of obscuring 'possible options open to the society'; options which, according to Legassick, the Griqua (among others) offered.**83** One of these 'possible options' in the novel, as we will see, is the story of Adam Wijnand, who is mentioned in the opening of the narrative, then ignored.

According to traditional thinking the frontier was a place of exclusion (societies developed closed structures in order to exclude foreign influences). However, according to Legassick, the frontier was also a place of inclusion:

> Firstly...attention has been devoted exclusively to the white frontiersmen at the expense of non-whites who became an integral part of the frontier society. Secondly ...it is pure romanticism to suppose that the 'struggle' on the frontier is any more intense than in the 'settled society'. Furthermore the suggestion that relations of the whites with non-whites were purely those of struggle neglects elements of cooperation and acculturation [assimilation]... Finally,

> it would be most surprising if over the wide area of the diaspora, so thinly settled by whites, there should have emerged such a self-conscious and cohesive community as many have suggested.84

For Legassick there are basically three misconceptions in traditional historiography. Firstly, historians have, traditionally, focused exclusively on the 'white frontiersmen'. Settler history is the record of colonial penetration; or as Jacobus Coetzee would have it: 'I continued with my explorations of the Hottentots, trying to find a place for them in my history'.**85 Dusklands** is a 'colonial' narrative: its whole conception revolves around settler concerns -- it cannot be anything else (nor does it pretend to be); J.M. Coetzee: '...our experience remains essentially colonial'.**86** And although one can not confuse the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee (edited by Dr S.J. Coetzee) with the translation by J.M. Coetzee, what they do have in common is their dominant concern with the 'white frontiersmen'. The second misconception concerns the relationship between racial exclusivity and violence: racial rigidity does not mean greater violence, nor does less rigidity mean less violence -- the 18 century was violent (criminal sentences, for example, included drowning, crucifixion ...), but this violence though different was not necessarily greater than today's. This is not to say that the very process of colonial dispossession was not violent -- there is ample evidence of numerous 'cruel and bitter' struggles. The point is that violence itself has an historical meaning, and cannot simply be measured quantitatively:

> To protect themselves against...depradations, farmers had organized themselves into protective commandos whose purpose it was to create a neutral zone or free belt between the farms and the wilds in which the Bushmen roamed. Lacking the resources to police this zone, the instrument they reluctantly adopted to keep it free was terror.87

Furthermore violence, according to Legassick, was not necessarily more intense on the frontier than in 'settled society'. The frontier 'zone'-- the 'free belt between the farms and the wilds' -- was not simply a place of 'terror'. Nor can one assume that the relationship between the settlers and colonized people was naturally an authoritarian and despotic one; nor can we assume that settler responses on the frontier were necessarily exaggerated and over-confident in the 18 century. Setting the novel on the frontier, with an emphasis on the inherent violence and unreality there, again reinforces traditional assumptions regarding the frontier as an explanation of the South African social (racial) formation. [One of the priorities for J.M. Coetzee then, could be a rethinking of his fictions' design: obscure, isolated settings have their ideological drawbacks!] Thirdly, the frontier (which does exist) was neither static nor homogeneously white. In

the northwest Cape, for example, the 'Bastards' owned land. Social relations, to repeat, were fluid -- cooperation and assimilation existed.

Another facet of contemporary racial concerns being projected onto the past can be seen in the different kinds of treatment handed out to the Khoi and San in the narrative:

> For the afterlife they [the Hottentots] have no feeling at all. Even the wild Bushman who believes he will hunt the eland among the stars has more religion. The Hottentot is locked into the present. He does not care where he comes from or where he is going.
>
> The Bushman is a different creature, a wild animal with an animal's soul...88

Both the Khoi and San occupied one of the lower rungs of the Great Chain of Being in the 18 century -- they occupied the nether regions (between man and animal). However, the Khoi -- who were to be assimilated as the Khoisan later on -- have been viewed negatively in colonial history; whereas the San have been treated, relatively speaking, with a certain amount of respect (see Laurens van der Post).89 In traditional literature the San have a certain (moral) positiveness which the Khoi lack. The San have been regarded by historians as having put up a certain stubborn resistance to the settler which the Khoi never achieved90: 'These people [Hottentots] could be ignored.'91 This of course was not the case. The San unlike the Khoisan (who were to be assimilated as the so-called Cape coloured people),

> never formed a significant part of the colonial labour supply. And now that they pose no threat either as an external enemy or an internal proletariat, it is perhaps easier to view their activities in a positive, if not heroic, light. Part of this is surely also a hangover from the crude Social Darwinism of the nineteenth century, which had no room for the victims of history: in general, people who raided and enslaved their neighbours were 'infinitely preferable to those who allowed themselves to be enslaved'.92

The narrative never escapes these rudimentary 19 century perceptions: one 'Social Darwinist', the other to do with the Khoisan as the future Cape coloured labour supply -- 'They [the 'Hottentots] lacked all will, they were born slaves.'93 Plaatje is singled out for special treatment in the narrative -- he is not only 'newly articulate' but his death, which is 'unkindly botched' by Jacobus Coetzee, is also focussed upon. Plaatje is singled out partially because of the kind of resistance he displays (though certain to be curtailed). In light of 19 century historiography he, unlike the Tamboers who 'went without protest, nonentities swept away on the tide of history'94, is not the 'victim of history'. He is

naturally noble because he does not allow himself to be 'enslaved'. Moreover, Jacobus Coetzee's distinction between the 'tame' and 'wild' 'Hottentot' (in which the latter are a better breed), is a distinction based upon the structural position which the Khoisan have generally occupied (as labour) in relationship to settled society. The 'wild' 'Hottentot' is preferable to the 'tame' 'Hottentot' because he or she is more natural (that is, less of a threat as 'either external enemy or internal proletariat'):

> I should doubtless interpolate here something about man in his wild state. Let me only say that the wild Hottentots stood or sat with an assurance my Hottentots lacked, an assurance pleasing to the eye. A Hottentot gains much by contact with civilization but one cannot deny that he also loses something... Put him in Christian clothes and he begins to cringe, his shoulders bend, his eyes shift... He becomes a false creature. I say this of all tame Hottentots, good ones like Klawer and spoiled ones like Dikkop. They have no integrity, they are actors. Whereas a wild Hottentot...one who has lived all his life in a state of nature, has his Hottentot integrity. He sits straight, he stands straight, he looks you in the eye.95

Generally the Khoisan have been presented in a patronising way, almost as children, not to be taken seriously ('ignored'), in South African history -- as there was no room for the 'victims of history' in the 19 century, nor is there space in our history for a rising 'internal proletariat'.

The ideological perception of men in their natural state -- in which consciousness is racially defined -- is underpinned by another significant dimension in **Dusklands**, and that is the presence of a natural and rational capitalist economy in the narrative. This can be seen in the way J.M. Coetzee's fiction, specifically in its particular form of political and economic analysis, mirrors (with important differences) the alternative liberal historiography of the **Oxford History of South Africa** with its emphasis on the logic or naturalness of the market:

> A central theme in this school [liberal historians who produced the **Oxford History of South Africa**] has been the expansion of social relationships of trade (or, in other words, of commodity exchange) as the mode through which 'cooperative' relationships were established between the Cape Colony and indigenous societies, and through which a 'new' South African society came into being. The task of this school, therefore, has been to explain how the harmony generated by trade has become 'distorted' into historic and contemporary forms of racial conflict.96

This historiography -- which has its roots in the writings of de Kiewiet and Macmillan -- has focused on trade and cooperative exchange relationships between colonizers and the colonized. Its assumption is that 'the exchange of commodities generates relationships between men as equals'; the corollary being that inequality develops when these exchange relationships are hindered by racialism, or by the trying physical environment of the frontier, for example.'97

J.M. Coetzee introduces certain economic motives in Dusklands -- something which is easily overlooked (because they seem peripheral to the movement of the fiction):

> Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard and farm. When we cannot fence it and count it we reduce it to numbers by other means...98

The word 'commerce' is used here in its 17 century meaning of 'interaction' to do with trade.99 There is in the novel this deliberate fashioning of the narrative's language. However, we need to look briefly at liberal economic theory in order to identify the general underlying economic language of **Dusklands**. We need to know why economic principles take on natural colourings, and why, on the other hand, it is possible to see them as historically specific.

For our purposes, liberal economic theory has been challenged by revisionist marxists on the basis of Marx's central economic principle: the double meaning embodied by labour in the exchange of commodities.100 Inequality -- crudely the difference between use and surplus value -- arises when labour is paid less than the value it produces. Inequality implies, in turn, underdevelopment (exploitation):

> ...hand in hand with the increasing productivity of labour goes...the cheapening of the labourer, therefore a higher rate of surplus-value, even when the real wages are rising...101

Labourer produces surplus value which is then appropriated (in the name of profit) by the owners of the means of production. For liberal economists, however, the laws of economic production (called development) are linear and quantitative: the more money one generates the better off everybody will be. The laws of the market are natural (in that they are able counter conscious manipulation), and naturally beneficial to all: dissatisfaction results from low wages, poor living standards... In other words, in 'hard times' everybody suffers (such is the argument against punitive sanctions today); but more importantly this leads to 'social discontent and political instability.'102

The narrative works within (though alienated from and therefore critical of) this economic rationality. Jacobus Coetzee articulates it in the form of a mixture of hard-won common sense, and settler arrogance: 'Everywhere differences grow smaller as they come up and we go down... In hard times how can differences be maintained?'.103 J.M. Coetzee is critical of Jacobus Coetzee's elitism; his desire to maintain social 'differences'. However, the central economic (capitalist) rationality is still there: social differences are dictated by the overall movement of the economy and not by the particular mechanisms of the distribution (or appropriation) of wealth within it. Furthermore, inequality can result from conscious manipulation by particular interest groups -- cartels or simply settlers. [To blame the whole colonial enterprise on settler appetitiveness or on something as amorphous as western expansionism, is, likewise, to overlook the historically specific economic forces at work within the society.] Social differences simply 'fall away' when the economy collapses (and paradoxically they also 'fall away' in good times because everybody benefits). It would seem that it is in spite of settler policies that the capitalist economy remains natural: it knows no colour, it favours no specific group.104 Adam Wijnand, a bastard, becomes a 'rich man with ten thousand head of cattle ...'105

Jacobus Coetzee is critical of how Adam Wijnand became wealthy, but it is a criticism which has little to do with articulating the laws of economic development as much as it has to do with exposing his own moral arrogance, and general settler appetitativeness. However, what interests us is the common bond, the unconscious agreement, between narrator, national historian and early settler (and reader?) concerning the way wealth is generated and how it impinges upon social relations.

Liberal economic theory assumes that economic progress benefits all and reduces (particularly in our case, racial) differences. However, we are never told why a specific economic way of life should take on racial overtones:

> It is true that, at one level, the exchange of commodities generates relationships between men as equals. If this is the only level at which exchange is seen, then all conflict must be viewed as a product of relationships created and developed outside the market. But, for Marx, commodity exchange was not a universal mode of social relationship, but a *historical* mode. Its *appearance* progressively disguised and fetished the social relationships of class which it expressed. Its appearance, indeed, could be said to have created the potential for relations of class exploitation and domination to take on 'racial' forms.106

J.M. Coetzee operates within liberal economic theory: because exchange is only viewed as generating relationships between men as

equal, conflict is expressed as taking place outside the market. Even the hunting expedition seems void of economic motives; it appears as a highly abstract mental exercise -- the hunters hunt for 'metaphysical meat'. When economic motives are made explicit they take place either as fable or as an expression of a certain psychological state:

> ...the wizard, the contest of magic, the celestial almanac, darkness at noon, victory, an amusing but tedious reign as tribal demi-god, return to civilization with numerous entourage of cattle...107

It would seem that because the relationship between economic motives and imperial behaviour is largely unexplored (and therefore mystified), social interaction on the frontier is regarded as simply bizarre or purely violent. Social relations, in other words, are an expression of some psychotic mental state. Added to this, racial divisions, for J.M. Coetzee, are simply carried over from the psychological complexities of the master/slave relationship -- a relationship which seems, ironically, to take place outside the market: that is, outside the economic terrain of service!

Moreover, the relationship between master and slave is seen purely as a hierarchical and violent one; and yet the political context in which this coercive relationship takes place, is largely ignored. The reason why the master/slave relationship was violent was because 'political coercion rather than the market [was] used to create an adequate labour force'108: the resistance to slavery (and proletarianisation) had to be broken physically. The rivalry, as we will see, between Klawer and Dikkop, appears to be not so much a result of intra-class struggles (vying for limited political and economic resources within the context of political coercion and market forces) but, in the distorted words of Jacobus Coetzee, of having lost their 'Hottentot integrity' through 'contact with civilization'. The particular historical conditions of social conflict are collapsed into an abstract sweep of race, nature and history. Furthermore, class relations (which the social relations of commodity exchange express), are 'disguised and fetished' in the novel by the the depiction of social relations as racial-historical in essence. In other words, the very forces of 'class exploitation and domination' are obscured by the broad, and inaccurate, racial-historical concerns of the novel.

Economic motives, then, seem to have a silent presence throughout the narrative: silent in the sense that explicit economic motives (censored from the original documents) appear as peripheral to, or abstracted from, the movement of the story; and present in the sense that a tangible economic rationality nevertheless pervades the narrative:

> Most frontiersmen have had experience of Bushman girls. They can be said to spoil one for one's own kind. Dutch girls carry an aura of property with them. They are first of all property themselves: they bring not only so many pounds of white flesh but also so many morgen of land and so many head of cattle and so many servants, and then an army of fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters. You lose your freedom. By connecting yourself to the girl you connect yourself into a system of property relationships.**109**

There is a clear engagement in the narrative with the social implications of exploitation through 'property relationships' as expressed in marriage, for example; but it is an engagement which revolves around the psychology of 'freedom' and the Nietzschian desire for 'power': 'God, I want to be alone.'**110** [Both the possessiveness and restlessness of the frontiersman are another dimension of the frontier myth.] Jacobus Coetzee, in line with traditional conceptions of the frontier as fostering individualism which borders on anarchy, expresses the imperial mania for 'freedom' and privacy: the 'Hottentots...had violated my privacy, all my privacies, from the privacy of my property to the privacy of my body. They had introduced poison into me'.**111** However, little is (and can be) made of the severe restrictions on trade placed upon the freeburghers by the V.O.C. [Dutch East India Company]. In other words it is with the idea of freedom and privacy (or their impossibility) which concerns the author. The relationship between property relations and imperial behaviour (Jacobus Coetzee's obsession with freedom and privacy, for example), is left unexplained, and therefore unexplored. Likewise the role of property relations in shaping the form and content of social relations in the 18 century in general, is either distorted or ignored.

This 'lack of', or rather this specific type of economic intervention (whose laws are seen natural in the way they are able to expose and counteract conscious settler exploitation for example) may explain -- through its reliance on psycho-social analysis -- the presence of popular racial myths in this fiction.

Adam Wijnand [Kok], small pox and the staff of office

Social relations in the second narrative can be better understood if we concentrate upon both the references to, and departures from, the historical documents referred to in the narrative:

> FIVE YEARS ago Adam Wijnand, a Bastard, no shame in that, packed up and trekked to Korana country. He had had his difficulties. People knew where he was from, they knew his mother was a Hottentot who had scrubbed the floor and

> emptied the bucket and done as she was told till the day she died. He went to the Korana, and they took him in and helped him, they are simple folk. Now Adam Wijnand, that woman's son, is a rich man with ten thousand head of cattle, as much land as he can patrol, a stableful of women. Everywhere differences grow smaller as they come up and we go down...112

'Adam Wijnand' is a reference to the first Griqua chief, Adam Kok I, who moved from the Piquetberg to the Khamiesberg ('Korana Country') between 1751 and 1760. He ostensibly was forced to move out of the Bokkeveld because he made false claims about indigenous raids in, or near, the Piquetberg.113 I say ostensibly because this reason -- though better than Jacobus Coetzee's dismissive he just 'packed up and trekked' -- ignores the slow and deliberate process whereby, initially the V.O.C., and later the freeburghers, persuaded/forced non-settlers (initially the Khoisan, and later the Griqua) off their land.

Adam Kok I (Adam Wijnand) was not a 'Bastard' but a manumitted slave who was granted the farm Stinkfontein under the title of Hottentot between 1751 and 1760.114 This is again evidence of a certain racial confusion in the 18 century. The narrator introduces an element of historical complexity by referring to Adam Wijnand as a 'Bastard':

> The meaning of the word 'bastaard' of course indicates illegitimate birth. Within the social system of the Cape Colony, however, it acquired two further meanings. In the first place it came to specifically denote the children of mixed parentage, particularly between white and Khoikhoi, but also between slave and Khoikhoi. Initially such persons acquired a stigma because of their illegitimacy as much as their colour; indeed, children born out of inter-ethnic marriage could be more readily absorbed into the white community. Moreover, the term Bastard apparently denoted an economic category as much as a social status of illegitimacy or colour. Thus Maynier described the Bastaards as 'such Hottentots, particularly [i.e. not only] of the mixed race, who possessed some property, were more civilised'.115

Although Adam Wijnand is introduced as a complex historical figure (he is of mixed parentage, owns property and is more 'civilised'), there is nevertheless a popular view of Adam Kok I, as bastard, grafted onto the narrative. The popular view fits in in with the 'racial-historical' design of traditional South African history, which again reinforces a sense of racial rigidity, in the novel, which (to repeat) was not present in the 18 century. One of the many ironies in South African history is that the 'Bastards' (or Griqua as they were later known) are associated with a clearly defined sense of ethnicity -- reflecting the extent to which ethnicity has been used as both a social

category of analysis, and as a form of political coercion. This grafting on of a popular conception of bastard onto the historical complexity of the narrative can be seen in the way we are introduced to 'Griqua soldiers' later on in the second narrative.116

The term Griqua was only used around 1813, until then the term 'Bastaard' was used.117 A certain national identity -- void of historical complexity -- has been forged onto the narrative by calling the soldiers 'Griqua'. This may be a play on the racist sense of ethnic purity and the militarism and fear associated with it, something which the idea of 'Bastard' soldiers may lack(?). However, it is further evidence of the narrative's departure from the 18 century in projecting a sense of race consciousness onto the past. Moreover, not only are we introduced to the 'Griqua' as a coherent national group, but their very presence as soldiers (presumably of the boer commandos) fails to take into account the necessary ambiguities of their position as soldiers:

> ...the Bastards felt no obligation to defend, either from the San or from external enemies, a colony which increasingly impeded their access to land and imposed upon them restrictive regulations.118

This is not to say that there was no such thing as 'Griqua' soldiers -- 'the whites tended...to send their Bastard or Khoi servants as substitutes [in the commando] for themselves'-- but rather, as elsewhere, the historical nuances are missing in Dusklands. This, however, is not something an individual can be blamed for: 'the historians' stereotypes [of the Khoisan, for example] are no more accurate than those of earlier European observers.119 If we are to apportion any blame (that is, identify the cause of these developments) we must begin with the 'assumption that the Cape Colony itself must be seen as a product of the world expansion of Europe, starting from the fifteenth century, which began to integrate ever larger areas of the world into a single economic system'.120 This is a process J.M. Coetzee identifies in the way Dusklands contains two very different yet related (historical) narratives: 'Had I lived two hundred years ago I would have had a continent to explore, to map, to open to colonization' (Eugene Dawn).121 The relationship between the two narratives is however obscured by both the specific type of economic and political analysis which the narratives contain, and through the assumption that the two narratives are simply spanned by a single sweep of time (even if they are clearly broken off):

> The history of thought and knowledge is not a history of cumulative progress -- data piling up in our 'storehouse'. The history of thought, like the history of men, is a history of revolutions and conquests, a process of conflicting

> imperialisms and sovereignties. It cannot be written from the point of view of continuity and evolution.**122**

The relationship in the novel between the different Coetzee's (though not restricted to them) is presented as one of 'continuity and evolution'.**123** Moreover, the relationship between the two narratives (and between the different protagonists in the novel) is presented as a quantitative one: the one story adds to the other. This is not to deny that there are very real connections between the two narratives, between these two different historical moments: the 'underlying unity is real and profound, but it is not that of a linear continuum'.**124** **Dusklands** makes a clear connection between racial domination and western expansionism, but it is a connection in which the intricacies of this connection are obscured.

If we return to the sense of ethnicity (and the stereotypes associated with it) in the novel, we can see it illustrated in another significant departure, by the narrator, from the original documents. Klaas Barend, the 'Bastard' who accompanied the two original expeditions is replaced by Klawer, an old and obedient 'Hottentot'.**125** These departures are more than simply the result of inaccuracies in the official historiography (by Dr S.J. Coetzee, for example). Switching Klawer for Klaas Barend clarifies again for us the design of the novel: Klaas Barend, the 'Bastard', would introduce a certain grey area (almost literally) into the narrative which would blur, one of the racial-historical poles of the story -- Jacobus Coetzee colonial-hunter, on the one hand, and Klawer, obedient 'Hottentot', on the other hand.

Likewise, Adam Wijnand, the Bastard, disappears from the novel altogether, even though he had moved to the Khamiesberg -- an area which Jacobus Coetzee passes through.**126** [It is significant that he only enters the novel in the form of the third person.] The reason Adam Wijnand disappears from the narrative -- and the reason why the meaning of the term 'Bastard' loses it's historical complexity by the end of the narrative -- is because he, as a 'Bastard', contradicts many of the racial assumptions in the novel concerning the frontier. One of these assumptions is that the frontier (white hegemony) was extended firstly by the white hunting frontier, and secondly, by white settlement. This is partially endorsed by the narrative. Jacobus Coetzee is the leading edge of the frontier: he is both hunter and farmer. However, the frontier was extended, in the main, by the so-called 'non-white farmers' (Adam Kok, for example).**127** This is implied in the narrative by the mention of Adam Wijnand, but it needs to be silenced so as to give the dominant assumptions of the frontier some coherence (even as they are being questioned). The disappearance of Adam Wijnand from the narrative (and the reason that he only appears as an absence), implies that we are caught again within the dominant assumptions of 'white settler historio-

graphy': an historiography which viewed colonial domination as not only inevitable (superior technology, civilization and education), but desirable.128 Colonial domination, of course, is no longer viewed as 'desirable', and yet it's very inevitability remains, in the novel, unanswered.

J.M. Coetzee is critical -- and it is significant that this critique is expressed in the form of irony -- of the whole colonial enterprise and of the white settler myths associated with it. However, by leaving Adam Wijnand out of the narrative, he again fails to penetrate certain rudimentary assumptions which lie within the dominant discourse of colonial historiography, and within our common colonial experiences:

> [The author's] irony is that of someone who can no longer uphold colonialist arrogance but has nowhere else to go. Or, to put it more plainly, [he] takes a deeply searching look into the pasts of his hunting forefathers but cannot be radically critical of them because he will not admit the extent to which he (and all of us) are to this day complicit in the same colonist thought-structure.129

One of the achievements of Dusklands, however, is its radical engagement with traditional historiography (the narrative opens with a reference to Adam Wijnand endowed with all his historical complexity), and yet this engagement is curtailed by a sliding back into what Marx calls, this 'time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language' of the past.130 Adam Wijnand is lost to the narrative as he enters it (or as he is spoken for!); left to lie abandoned, once more, on the dung-heap of history. (Awaiting, like the phoenix, to rise from these imperial ashes).

There are two other historical incidents to which I would like to briefly refer in order to consolidate my analysis of the sense, and use, of history in Dusklands. The first is related to the 'staff of office'; and the second concerns the smallpox epidemic of 1713 through which only one in ten Khoi survived.131

The 'staff of office' incident is very brief:

> Long ago I had given Klawer a medal, which he had bored a hole through and hung around his neck. It gave him authority, he said, like that of the Hottentot kapteins who carried staffs of authority from the Castle.132

The incident refers to Klawer's sense of being out of favour when Jacobus Coetzee takes Barend Dikkop -- 'a soldier in the Hottentot Company' -- out hunting. The 'staff of office' is a complicated historical phenomenon -- more than simply the granting of power by the V.O.C. to the Khoi chiefs: '...the only way in which non-whites could maintain some title to land was by accepting

staffs of office as Khoi chiefs.'133
J.M. Coetzee, however, refers to the 'staff of office' in passing in order to highlight Klawer's 'malady of the soul': his loss of authority. The rivalry between Klawer and Dikkop is reduced to a question of resentment (grounded of course on a difference in the conditions of service), but a question which skirts, for me, a more critical issue: the erosion of Khoi political power by the V.O.C. through the 'staff of office', and the extension of this erosive power to the freeburghers (who derived power locally in the form of the commando, for example).134 Klawer is a particular kind of victim of this erosive power: he represents the dispossessed Khoi (now labour tenant), historically once removed from the former 'kapteins'. We could, therefore, read Klawer hanging a medal around his neck, as a pathetic attempt to salvage some kind of political power (political power which Dikkop threatens to undermine). This, then, is the underlying source of Klawer's 'malady of the soul'. The specific form of economic and political analysis in the narrative -- in which economic and political motives appear to be absent because they are present in a highly abstract (or naturalized) form -- leaves this kind of analysis as it is, simply hanging in the air.

The second incident concerns the 'Hottentot' reaction to Jacobus Coetzee's sickness:

> I asked [Klawer] why my other men had not come to see me. He said they had come, but I had been too sick. I told him he lied. ... I told him to try again. He said they were afraid of my sickness...
>
> What was wrong with me? I asked. Did I have the Hottentot sickness. He was sure I did not. The Hottentot sickness was for Hottentots...135

A smallpox epidemic -- a sickness brought to Africa by colonial seamen136 --reduced the Khoi to a fraction of their initial size in the 18 century. Klawer calls it the 'Hottentot sickness'; a sickness exclusively for 'Hottentots'. Settlers blamed the extermination of the Khoi on some inherent biological weakness of the indigenous people, rather than on their own contaminating enterprise. This type of reasoning was absorbed by the colonized people, and acted as a rationale for further penetration, further extermination: a process which appeared to have the consent of the colonized. For Jacobus Coetzee the reaction -- 'They kept their distance' -- confirms popular settler views of the indigenous people as superstitious, cowardly and 'thievish and not to be trusted'.137 (There are, however, other factors involved in the Khoi 'keeping their distance'; I am just referring to smallpox as a possible one.)

The narrator's intervention allows us to focus on Jacobus Coetzee's popular misperception, but his deliberate thinning out

of historical detail (which abstracts political and economic motives), does not allow the type of critical intervention needed to explain the 'malady of the master's soul'138: 'Like the protagonists of his fiction, Coetzee can exemplify this crises, but not explain it.'139 We are left -- see most articles dealing with **Dusklands** -- pondering in a crudely social and psychological way, the 'sickness' of world history. The authors exclusive focus, in the second narrative, upon the 'malady of the soul' ultimately distorts his very aim (as expressed in his parody): to expose certain fallacies of both traditional historiography and colonial -- master and servant -- thinking.

Another example of this analytical paralysis in **Dusklands** concerns the reasons given for Jacobus Coetzee's initial expedition: to hunt for ivory. The hunt was not, unlike that presented in the narrative, an open-ended, secondary activity in colonial history:

> P.J. van der Merwe has shown that the hunting experience was important in the formation of the cattle boer culture; not only did hunting allow a man to explore new lands, but it gave him the opportunity to buy or steal Khoikhoi cattle and to accumulate the small amount of capital needed to start a cattle post... 140

In the original report of Jacobus Coetzee there is a reference to the 'abundant cattle' north of the Orange.141 However, what has fascinated colonial historians is his less significant report of 'a tribe of black people called Damrotquas living ten days' journey beyond the farthest point which he reached, and that they had long hair and wore clothes made of linen cloth'.142 The second expedition of 1761 -- 'the story upon which Coetzee's slight fame subsists'143 -- was commissioned to find these apparitions.

Historians have led us to believe that it is primarily this 'fable' which Jacobus Coetzee and his contemporaries were interested in. This is an obsession of 19 century historiography. The second expedition (which had gone is search of these strange forms) was a failure not because it did not find the long-haired people to the north, but because no cattle were obtained (raided or traded -- the difference was purely academic); they in fact lost cattle. An expedition was an expensive undertaking, and to overlook this and depict it as an imaginative or 'metaphysical' exercise (which it could be perceived from within, and without, as), is to overlook the underlying forces, the 'inner connections'144, which operate below the phenomenal layer of social reality (and consciousness). Even Knox-Shaw's significant article -- one of the few attempts to look at **Dusklands** historically -- ignores the underlying historical realities in order to highlight a certain state of consciousness, a certain moral order (which, again, seems posited by nature):

> There is no record of racial friction on the journey and, indeed, Coetzee himself seems not to have been without scruples for he refused the services of much-needed Namaqua guides who offered themselves on condition they received help to fight their enemy, the Enicquas.145

The material reasons, for why Jacobus Coetzee was 'scrupulous' (on this particular occasion) are ignored. It probably has something to do with the political balance of forces at the time -- it would seem that a war against the 'Enicquas' would have to settle accounts with 'the more powerful Sotho-Tswana groups'146, something the settlers were not prepared for in the 18 century.

J..M. Coetzee, likewise, has not been able to enter his narrative with a solid grasp of the 'inner connections', the underlying economic and political forces, because of an epistemology which assumes that it is ideas, and not material forces, which ultimately shape social reality.

Epilogue

One of central motifs in Coetzee's writings concerns the question of endemic violence inherent in the master/slave relationship. However, as in traditional historiography, this motif has been inverted so that 'race-historical' categories appear as the determining factors in the relationship:

> A major theme in the twentieth-century historiography of South Africa has been an explanation, whether as affirmation or critique, of the forms of exploitation, domination and dependence which have existed, and the conflicts which have resulted from them. Most frequently these structures of domination and conflict have been analysed in 'racial' terms, and assumed to have developed historically along unambiguously 'racial' lines.147

As we have suggested, it may be more beneficial to conceive of these themes of inequality which surround and determine the master/slave relationship, in terms of inequality endemic to the exchange of commodities: an exchange which in turn, as Coetzee has partially shown, penetrates to the very heart (or psychology) of social relations (including language). To understand the relationship between the freeburghers and the Nama without both a theoretical and historical knowledge of the relation of exchange, is not only to distort a certain historical moment (like that of 1760/1), but to distort our understanding of the present -- particularly in its relationship to the past -- as well.148

My argument has been that the frontier concept, and the way it has been used in literature, says as much about colonial penetration and the settled society (including contemporary concerns),

as it does about the geo-political boundaries in the 18 and 19 centuries; and that the frontier is a specific social and economic construct: a construct which aids to serve and legitimate very real material interests. For the settlers these interests were to extend colonial influence at the expense of indigenous civilization, and to incorporate in some instances the indigenous people into the settler labour market. In other instances -- America for example -- it almost meant the extermination of an indigenous people. This process is documented (often silently) through the concept of the frontier in traditional literature, and we can see its residual presence in contemporary literature such as **Dusklands**. In its residual presence it serves slightly different interests -- as I have implied these interests are complicated, and cannot stand independent of broader social forces at work. Part of these broader social forces at work has been the demystification (by the revolutionary practice and theory of third world and socialist countries) of what once appeared as the naturalness, of the frontier, social relationships of exchange, and the western (capitalist) economy.

J.M Coetzee is aware of the problems surrounding the history of western civilization. He expresses this in his critique of western imperialism and bourgeois humanism (as in **Waiting for the Barbarians**). He cannot, however, escape colonial history (and its western ontology): in all his fiction there is a constant attempt to wring some kind of meaning from a world which is tending to greater chaos, greater non-meaning. His meditation upon violence (which is itself mystificatory) is partially an expression of this dilemma. However, his acute awareness does not offer J.M. Coetzee a way out of this cul-de-sac (awareness never does): 'Awareness is no transcendence'149 Subsequently his fiction is continually circumscribed by the very ineffectualness of western thought and consciousness. One of the attempts to circumscribe this paralysis is to seek sustenance in the primacy of the individual as the 'natural, all-rounded organic (ethnic?) man'. The central metaphysic of his fiction is the natural man stripped to an essential self. The phrase the 'philosophy of history' -- which informs the narrative -- is likewise an expression of the historical moment stripped of detail, to finally bare its essential spirit:

> [Marx] pointed out that the Robinson Crusoe-like figure of 'the Natural Individual', the starting-point of classical liberal theories, was actually a complex historical product, thinkable only after the break-up of bonds of personal dependence and the appearance of 'the society of free competition'. Adequate historical categories would have to untangle this complexity. To take the individual not as 'historical result' but as 'history's point of departure' is to make a chaotic abstraction which lumps all the complexities in together as an undifferentiated premise. The

> specific bourgeois form of individuality is represented as something 'posited by nature', therefore not modifiable.150

The frontiersman (Jacobus Coetzee) is a complicated historical phenomenon who is simplified (made more natural) by Coetzee's naturalization (and suppression) of certain economic and political details of the original narrative. The 'Natural Individual' (unfree and in constant competition for survival)' is the basic social unit of all J.M. Coetzee's fiction, and as such forms the basis of his epistemology; however, an epistemology, which departs from traditionalism because it is grounded in a specific historical juncture of western imperialism in crisis. It is no coincidence that the individual is continually trapped within the same metaphysical concerns -- whether he or she likes it or not -- even when presented historically as in the case of Jacobus Coetzee:

> Coetzee's premise of an ideological dialectic, a mode of consciousness that inspires the Western quest for total mastery of Nature, a social-historical aspect of which is the story of Western imperialism, enables the development of a quite different perspective on South African history. According to the new perspective, the story of racial domination in South Africa is not perverse, but symptomatic. It is symptomatic of the central thrust of Western expansionism.
>
> Coetzee does not adopt a stance of protest, but of analytical exemplification, in the face of this thrust. The whole of Western civilisation is implicated in the drive towards subjugation and mastery. The analytical mode of the prose penetrates consistently to an identical essence at the heart of the phenomenologically diverse forms of Western/colonial culture.151

However, to call **Dusklands** anti-historical is to collapse its very real historical concerns into the dilemma of an idealist metaphysic -- a metaphysic in which the very materialism of documentation rubs against the pristine historical moment or 'identical essence'.

J.M. Coetzee, by focusing on an obscure, illiterate freeburgher in the 18 century, offers us an after image of traditional historiography -- an historiography which has attempted to focus on central historical figures (often rescuing them from history as is the aim of Dr S.J. Coetzee), and whose central thrust has been its emphasis on historical figures, who appear as significant decision makers and who are highly self-conscious as well. Jacobus Coetzee, however, is not, traditionally, the exemplary case; and yet the narrative hardly offers an alternative. (Adam Wijnand remains lost to the narrative). Subsequently, J.M. Coetzee offers a particular angle on South African racial-colonial/capitalist history -- it is significant that 'racial

domination' is not presented as 'perverse, but symptomatic' 'of Western expansionism' -- but this angle is nevertheless, symptomatically, racial. Rooted in an idealist epistemology, Coetzee is bound to repeat himself, although each new story will be engagingly different. The reasons for this engagement in his fiction (its 'relevance') still needs to be mapped out: 'Of what relevance is a novel which appears to perpetuate all the racist beliefs whites hold about blacks in South Africa?'152 One could easily dismiss this question as one could easily dismiss this fiction. We could begin mapping out the 'relevance' of Dusklands by looking at the ironic mask(s), and at the ambiguities associated with it, not as some isolated aesthetic (or ideological) phenomenon, but as an expression of material contradictions in colonial history:

> The working of the 'colonial misunderstanding' means that the words and actions of individuals are both deliberately and accidentally ambiguous, as the colonized don the mask of deference before their conquerors, and conquerors assume the garb of authority before the subjugated. At the psychosocial level, domination is both experienced as ambiguous and elicits ambiguous behaviour. Yet the ambiguity of ideology and behaviour of individuals arises not simply out of personal psychology but also from their structurally dependent position within the colonial political economy and the colonial state, and the contradictory nature of the colonial order itself.153

Moreover, this ironic mask -- both the disguise and the ambiguity -- is 'essential to survival in a colonial situation.' We need to begin our analysis of the irony in Dusklands with a material understanding of colonial history, because this irony is the (ambiguous) expression of a 'structurally dependent position within the colonial political economy...' This is even the case for an understanding or 'liberal' academic. However, we '...have to go beyond 'irony' to understand the psychology of colonialist violence'154:

> [The] concept of ambiguity is crucial to any understanding of domination: even while demanding obedience, and provoking resistance, domination operates not simply through coercion but also through concessions that themselves are shaped by the nature of resistance. These in turn become the basis of consent as well as of further struggle by the dominated.155

A study of the outcome of resistance and domination (class struggle) is essential to an understanding of the ambiguities in colonial (including neo- and post- colonial) literature. These ambiguities are not necessarily obvious; they are often 'silent'. The second narrative in Dusklands, for example, never escapes the racial discourse of the 19 century even when parodying it as it

does in its critique of Dr S.J. Coetzee. This reading -- based upon the theory and realities of class struggle -- has tried to uncover the novels' ambiguous silences: its reliance on traditional historiography as it appears to depart from it; its naturalization (or abstraction) of economic and political motives as it effaces the economic and political detail of the original documents; its empathy with Adam Wijnand's cause (a history from below) as he is silenced from the narrative; the silent shift from the historical complexity of a single concept (like that of bastard) or event (khoisan resistance for example), to their simplification in light of immediate political expediency ('survival'!).

According to Shula Marks, historians have had difficulty detecting historical ambiguities, this mask of 'colonial misunderstanding': 'As in poetry, so in history, ambiguity serves to alert the reader to the relationship between things...historians should be able to write in chords, for our medium distorts our intentions by its linear imperatives.'156 Fictions' very method is lateral and symbolic: its medium is the metaphor. Writers are able to 'write in chords'. Subsequently, fiction has a way of teasing out historical ambiguities, revealing the different masks, the various layers, in social relationships (like the 'colonial misunderstanding', for example). But in order for it to prevent itself from becoming symptomatically part of the problem (of 'colonial misunder- standing') it needs to have a solid (theoretical and material) grasp of political and economic history.

J.M. Coetzee, in order to expose the grand delusions of the whole imperial enterprise -- by basing it on consciousness gone astray in the wilderness, and developing either a sense of racism or statism depending on the era -- is nevertheless drawn into the very tenets of his object of explanation. This explanation if not social darwinist, is a form of psycho-social determinism: 'Characters of other races, the victims of domination, are entirely enigmatic entities within the medium of this fiction':157

> The notions of 'stasis' and 'isolation' have also been applied by liberal historians to the development of racism in South Africa. In this regard they have been used to denote 'Afrikaner' or 'platteland society'. The concepts in such a context often function as terms of condemnation. To complete their meaning, the ellipses which appear in the liberal grammar have to be filled in -- i.e. isolation (from capitalism and Western civilization) and stasis (rather than progress).158

In short, J.M. Coetzee's use of certain conceptual categories such as the 'isolation' on the frontier and the 'stasis' of race, implies that he is able to show how the consciousness of colonial

domination operates, but is never able to explain why (and this must be part of his aim) that a particular form of consciousness developed, in a particular way, at a particular time.

However, having reached this far we need to be clear about the role of history in literary studies. Firstly, history is a social product -- it arises out of specific material conditions (as opposed to being immaculately conceived). Secondly, it requires both conceptual precision and systematic research:

> In as much as the historian's conceptual apparatus is badly constructed, the quality of expression suffers. The power of historiography depends on the precision of its concepts and the rigour of their interrelation. The murky realms of South African historiography demand elucidation.[59]

Our engagement with history, in literary studies, needs to take cognisance of this, and act accordingly: we need rigorous conceptual tools, and we need a thorough historical weaponry (archival labour for a start). This, I would argue, is only possible with a greater theoretical clarity, and a more thorough and systematic grasp of, not only literary, but economic, political and social processes as well.

References

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2. Vaughan, Literature and Politics: ..., op. cit., p.120.
3. J.M. Coetzee, **Dusklands**, Ravan Press 1974, p.55.
4. Vaughan, op.cit., p.137.
5. See P. Macherey, (trans. Geoffrey Wall) Routledge & Kegan Paul 1978.
6. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, **Reading Capital**,

(trans. Ben Brewster) Verso, 1979, pp 317-318. (The quotation is from the **Glossary** added to the English edition).
7. Richard Johnson, Reading for the best Marx: history-writing and historical abstraction, in R. Johnson et al (eds.), **Making Histories: studies in history-writing and politicis**, Hutchinson 1982, p.167.
8. Johnson, op.cit., pp 170-171.
9. Peter Knox-Shaw, Dusklands: A Metaphysics of Violence, in **Contrast** 53, 14(1), September 1982, p.26.
10. It is important to make a clear distinction between the different 'actors' in the narrative: 'the Castle hack', Jacobus Coetzee, Dr S.J. Coetzee and J.M. Coetzee. The different personages represent different forms of intervention in the novel. Often these differences are impossible to delineate -- it is difficult to separate 'the Castle hack' from Jacobus Coetzee, for example. The point is important, however, because critics have tended to collapse the different voices into one: Knox-Shaw even refers to John Coetzee as an object of his critique. This tendencey, however, is partially a result of both the structure of this narrative and the bourgeois novel in general: J.M. Coetzee, the author, seems to suggest that the historical distortions are the result of the intervention of the chauvinist historian, Dr S.J. Coetzee. This, as we will see, is not the case. Moreover, the bourgeois novel -- because of its highly personalised and individualised format -- tends to focus attention on the author-as-private-citizen. This paper does not escape these problems, but tries to point out how they can be circumvented on condition that the structure of the narrative is radically altered. For a start the authorship could be collective; and with a more systematic grasp of the particular histories the differences between the various voices in the novel could be made explicit -- this can be achieved through the technique of narrative overlay, for example. In short, though this paper is critical of **Dusklands** -- particularly the 'thought-structures' which it represents -- it is not an attack on an individual.
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12. Knox-Shaw, op.cit., pp 26-38.
13. ibid., p.28.
14. ibid., p.37.
15. Perry Anderson, **Lineages of the Absolutist State**, Verso 1974, p.8.
16. Shula Marks, **The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: class, nationalism and the state in twentieth-century Natal**, Ravan Press 1986, p.2.
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19. Quoted in Martin Legassick, Review article: The Dynamics of Modernization in South Africa, in Journal of African History, XIII,1 (1972), p.145.
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21. ibid., p.124.
22. Vaughan, op. cit., p.124.
23. Coetzee, op. cit., p.86.
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25. Atmore and Westlake, op. cit., pp 127-128.
26. Legassick, The frontier tradition in South African historiography, in Shula Marks and Anthony Atmore (eds.), Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial South Africa, Longman 1980, pp 52-62.
27. Legassick, The frontier tradition..., p.48.
28. see N.A. Coetzee, **Die Stamouers Coetzee en nageslagte**, published by the author 1979.
29. Anderson, op. cit., p.10.
30. J.M. Coetzee, op. cit., p.116.
31. Peter Strauss, Yeats, unpublished lecture, 1984.
32. Coetzee, op. cit., p.85.
33. Vaughan, op. cit., pp 123-127.
34. Legassick, The frontier tradition..., p.68.
35. Coetzee, op. cit., p.84.
36. Knox-Shaw, op. cit., pp 30-31.
37. Northrop Frye, **The Bush Garden: essays on the Canadian Imagination**, Anansi 1971, pp 220-225.
38. quoted in Atmore, op. cit., p.127.
39. Legassick, op. cit., p.45.
40. I thank Charles Malan for bringing these two authors to my notice. For more on the ideologues of the 'volksbewegig' see Dan O'Meara, **Volks-kapitalisme: class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism 1934-1948**, Ravan Press 1983.
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43. Terminology in South African history is extremely fluid (and confused). I have used 'Khoi', 'Khoikhoin' and 'Khoikhoi' interchangeably. Generally, I have used 'Khoi'but where my sources differ I have followed them. See Elphick, **Khoikhoi: and the founding of White South Africa**, Ravan Press 1985, p. xxi. The 'Nama' are a subgroup of the Khoi. Whereas 'Khoisan' refers to the assimilation of the 'San' within the 'Khoi'. See Shula Marks, Khoisan resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, **Journal of African History**, xii, i (1974).
44. Marks, op. cit., p.57.
45. Shula Marks, 'Bold, Thievish, and not to be Trusted': Racial stereotypes in South Africa in Historical Perspective, in **History**

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47. ibid., p.93.
48. ibid., p.65.
49. ibid.
50. Marks, op. cit., pp 16-17.
51. Knox-Shaw, op. cit., p.30.
52. Coetzee, op. cit.,' p.59.
53. ibid., p.116.
54. Knox-Shaw, op. cit., p.33.
55. ibid., p.36.
56. Coetzee, op. cit., p.64.
57. Elphick, op. cit., pp 62-68.
58. Coetzee, op. cit., p.85.
59. ibid., p.86.
60. ibid., p.116.
61. See Martin Legassick, The Griqua, the Sotho-Tswana, and the Missionaries, 1780-1840: the politics of the frontier zone, unpublished Ph.D., University of California 1969.
62. Jacobus Coetzee's 'unfriendly reception among the Great Namaqua' (Knox-Shaw, op. cit., p.29), is not the work of the frontier as much as the political and economic history of the time.
63. See Elphick, op. cit., pp 62-68; Marks, Khoisan resistance... op. cit., pp 62-66; and Coetzee, op. cit.,pp 62-64.
64. Marks, 'Bold, Thievish...' op. cit., p.21.
65. Coetzee, op. cit., p.85.
66. See Marks, Khoisan resistance... op. cit., for example.
67. Coetzee, op. cit., p.125.
68. ibid., p.126.
69. See quotation of Atmore on pages 6-7.
70. See Legassick, The Griqua... op. cit. 1969, for example.
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72. ibid., p.113.
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74. ibid., p.67.
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