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Atwell, David

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AUTHOR: David Atwell

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THE "LABYRINTH OF MY HISTORY": THE STRUGGLE WITH FILIATION IN J. M. COETZEE'S *DUSKLANDS*

DAVID ATTWELL
University of the Western Cape

Filiation is the name given by Edward Said to that realm of nature or "life" that defines what is historically given to us by birth, circumstance or upbringing. *Affiliation* represents the process whereby filiative ties are broken and new ones formed, within cultural systems that constitute alternative sources of authority or coherence ("Secular Criticism" 16-20). The fiction of J. M. Coetzee can be described in terms of the way it embodies this shift: from the early work, in which colonialism is the stony ground on which consciousness and identity are formed, to the later, in which the inter-textual networks of literature are explored for their promise of partial, qualified forms of freedom.

It would be a mistake, however, to read *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Foe* as a-historical departures from the more socially critical *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country*. Affiliation is itself a historical process; it is the place where biography and culture meet. In Coetzee, it is also, among other things, a way of upholding a particular kind of critical consciousness, one that is always alert to both the disingenuous exercise of power, and the disingenuous representation of power.[1] In this essay, I am concerned with a small portion of the movement from filiation to affiliation within the corpus of Coetzee's novels: its beginnings in *Dusklands*.

"My name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that. Here goes." So begins Coetzee's struggle with the biographical past and with his experience of America in the late sixties. The opening sentences of *Dusklands* present a subject that can only bear the consequences of its own social identity, that must undergo its history, even though the leap into this realm of necessity, and its consequences, cannot be exactly calculated.

Coetzee's struggle with colonialism at this stage leads into existentialism, both the Sartrean categories of being-in-itself and being-for-itself, and the formal, Beckettian paradoxes[2] of expression and negation. What is curious about the existentialist tendencies of the early fiction, however, is that they are incorporated eclectically, along with the influence of linguistic movements such as structuralism and generative grammar[3], so that existentialism itself never stands as a hallmark of the early work but finds its place sometimes in tension with these other elements. This is especially true of *In the Heart of the Country*, where the historicity and the fictionality of self continually impact against one another, but it is also true of *Dusklands*, in which problems of selfhood and identity are marked by the capriciousness of discourse itself.

At this point, far from being in conflict with one another, the ontological and historical questions in the fiction are posed simultaneously, as a diagnostic and critical exercise. It is partly the concern of the first two novels to show that the ontological indeterminacy of the colonial ego is the result of its historical situation. As Sartre puts it in *Being and Nothingness*:

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"And the one who I am—and who on principle escapes me—I am he *in the midst of the world* in so far as he escapes me" (263). Sartre qualifies this particular sense of being-in-the-world by adding that it is governed by colonial, generational, professional, class and other relations, just as it is governed by relations with particular individuals (279).[4] It is perfectly logical that problems of filiation will express themselves in ontological language; it might also be said that the historicisation of identity could represent the first stage of the movement away from the givens of filiation.

A measure of authorial struggle in *Dusklands* is evident in the very construction of the historical ground in terms of the broad narrative of colonialism. One of the first ruses of all colonial self-representations, after all, is to find ways of harmonising and naturalising the relationship of the colonist to the new landscape and its inhabitants (*White Writing* 8); seen in this light, Coetzee's candid deployment of the narrative of colonialism is itself an attempt to break through the crust of contemporary ideology. The two parts of *Dusklands* disturb respectively American self-confidence concerning the global defence of democracy (a policy consolidated during the Truman adminstration and given considerable effect under Kennedy: Eugene Dawn writes his Vietnam Report for the Kennedy Institute in the Harry S. Truman library); and the only slightly more fantastical white South African presumption about representing an historical link with Western, civilised values on a barbaric continent, a notion fed by the mythology of the frontier. An important feature of this critique is Coetzee's refusal to offer some easy vantage point from which one might gaze upon the historicised subject with flattering self-possession. Like Eugene Dawn, the narrating subject resides *in* its history. Since no other time-frame is given—as with Fredric Jameson's model of the political unconscious—history is known to us only in its effects, in the language in which the subject speaks itself. In this way, the critique strikes home, and as a moral imperative, it addresses itself to the naturalised structures that maintain their hold over the contemporary consciousness.[5]

Critics of *Dusklands* with historical sensivities have registered misgivings about the juxtaposition of the narrative of Eugene Dawn, in the context of the Vietnam war, with that of Jacobus Coetzee, in the context of eighteenth century Dutch colonialism at the Cape.[6] We should be cautious, however, about taking such misgivings to their obvious polemical conclusion, that is, to the point of inferring that Coetzee wishes first of all to mount a philosophically idealist or universalist diagnosis of western imperialism. For in both narratives, solipsism and narcissism, the pitfalls of philosophical idealism, are seen explicitly in terms of the colonist's failure to engage in reciprocal relationships. Moreover, when Jacobus Coetzee expounds on the metaphysics of the gun, declaring that "guns save us from the fear that all life is within us" (84), to circumvent the ethics that partly constructs such a formulation, is surely evasive. Teresa Dovey's idea, on the other hand, that the juxtapositioning of the narratives is designed to problematise the concept of history through the principle of repetition (*Lacanian Allegories* 67) has some validity if it refers to positivist conceptions of history, but it makes light of the actual pressures that the narrative responds to. What connects the narratives is the sense of estrangement and possibly, complicity, that Coetzee begins to feel as a white South African with an Afrikaner pedigree studying in Texas during the escalation of the Vietnam war. Coetzee has said that complicity was "not the problem" at the time: "complicity was far too complex a notion for the time being—the problem was with knowing what was being done. It was not obvious where one went to escape knowledge" ("How I learned about America" 9). The complicity, however, is partly what the novel, four or five years later, undertakes to explore.[7] Coetzee connects his current life-history and his ancestry, finding ways, in other

words, of making sense of the contiguity of American and Dutch imperialism in determining his *own* historical situation.

What circumstances demanded was an effort of will and intelligence to render explicit the historical connections that were evident everywhere, but had yet to be defined. If the silted layers of non-recognition were to be dredged out, the effort would have to be essentially anti-positivist (and by implication, anti-humanist). In this, Coetzee was lucky to have increasingly found his moment in the intellectual revolt against positivism and humanism in the West, specifically in continental structuralism and generative grammar. In coming to *Dusklands*, however, the resources—such as the historical documents which are parodied in both narratives—could not have immediately fallen into place.

THE REVOLT AGAINST RATIONALITY

The most telling feature of *Dusklands* is its revolt against rationality. This revolt has been seen by Michael Vaughan as a rebellion against liberal positivism, primarily, as a rejection, that is, of liberal aesthetics—aesthetics in Vaughan's analysis having epistemological and political implications ("Literature and Politics" 126). Broadly, though I do not share all of Vaughan's premises, I share this conclusion, and it is perhaps worth noting that liberal positivism is possibly the historically dominant form of rationality that Coetzee is confronting, in his own immediate circumstances within the academy. However, Coetzee goes back to the sources of this positivism, employing two main lines of attack: firstly, historicisation, and secondly, the laying bare of the now historicised subject-positions of his narrators.

Historicisation takes the form of returning positivism to the moment of Western scientific rationality, essentially to Descartes. Hugh Kenner's description of Beckett's subversive parody of Cartesian rationality will help us to define this aspect of Coetzee's project more closely:

> . . . the Beckett trilogy [*Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable*] takes stock of the Enlightenment, and reduces to essential terms the three centuries during which those ambitious processes of which Descartes is the symbol and progenitor (or was he too, like The Unnamable, spoken through by a Committee of the *Zeitgeist*?) accomplished the dehumanization of man. The Cartesian Centaur [the cyclist, as representative of a perfect harmony of mind and body-as-machine] was a seventeenth century dream, the fatal dream of being, knowing, and moving like a god. In the twentieth century he and his machine are gone, and only a desperate élan remains: "I don't know, I'll never know, in the silence you don't know, you must go on, I can't go on, I'll go on."
> (*Samuel Beckett* 132)

Unlike Beckett, however, and despite his influence, Coetzee's path does not lead from the skeptic's historicised reconstruction of the *cogito* to an empty space where form must try to register pure doubt, or where all attempts to capture meaning seem clownish or bitterly vacuous; in Coetzee, the process is taken in another direction, which sees those founding philosophical moments in world-historical terms. These include both the observation that the period of scientific ascendency coincides with colonial expansionism, and the conviction, or moral intuition, that in the twentieth century the process is coming to an end with decolonization: the beginning of the process is therefore seen from the perspective of its end.

Hence "Dawn" as the supposedly autonomous "I" of what is also the bourgeois capitalist moment, the moment of Crusoe (although "Eugene" also means noble or well-born and is as American as Eugene McCarthy) finds himself in the "dusklands" of history, attempting to re-establish a crumbling edifice by means of the "New Life Project."[8] "The Vietnam report," says Dawn, "has been composed facing east into the rising sun and in a mood of poignant regret (*poindre*, to pierce) that I am rooted in the evening lands" (7). In the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, the violence associated with the assertion of scientific rationality in the colonies is explored in various forms, both epistemic and physical. Although the allegorical markers cannot be as explicit as they are in the first narrative, the eighteenth century frontiersman nevertheless registers all the pressures of twentieth century African nationalism and anti-colonialism. Coetzee's framework anticipates very closely Jameson's more recent account of the beginnings of the sixties—as a period of diverse and fundamental shifts or "breaks" of consciousness—in the "third world" movements for decolonization ("Periodising the 60s" 180-186).

The two philosophers who have been mentioned most often in criticism as providing Coetzee with some of his terms in *Dusklands* are Hegel, and Spengler. As Teresa Dovey shows, the most pertinent section of the *Phenomenology of Mind* is the master/slave dialectic. It is necessary here to say that the master/slave dialectic ought to be seen in the light of Hegel's critique of essential Enlightenment concepts, a critique which shows that the consciousness of freedom—the highest goal of human thought—is impossible outside of society; subsequent references to Hegel in psychoanalytic thinking have tended to obscure the original force of the dialectic. (This is not the case in Sartre's phenomenological-existentialist discussion of the Look in *Being and Nothingness*, later taken up by Frantz Fanon; see Jameson, "Periodising the 60s" 188.) At another, perhaps deeper level, Coetzee has clearly absorbed the basic Hegelian proposition that it is possible for human thought to make collective progress, though with the original qualification that in the absence of social reciprocity the possibility of progress is vitiated; in Coetzee's novel, we are reminded again and again that consciousness of freedom is impossible in the epistemic conditions of colonialism, and the drive for transcendance repeatedly founders.

In the case of Spengler, mentioned by Don Maclennan (175-176) and later Dovey (67), the connection has been thought to be largely titular, the idea of "dusklands" being derived from *The Decline of the West* and possibly, though it seems unlikely, Nietzche's *The Twilight of the Gods* —one would also add the Wagnerian *götterdämmerung*. There is certainly more at least to Spengler's influence than this. *The Decline of the West* begins with a set of distinctions that run deep in the early fiction, and are still discoverable in *Life and Times of Michael K*. In Spengler, in the analysis of history and culture, *chronological* is distinguished from *mathematical* number, and "pragmatic" history from "the *morphological relationship* that inwardly binds together the expression-forms of of *all* branches of a Culture" (6). Even in his use of a linguistic analogy, Spengler is a proto-structuralist who would have been congenial to Coetzee's efforts to grasp systemic rules. Thematically, Spengler is significant in his distinction between the *world-as-nature* and the *world-as-history*, a distinction that has behind it the classic Heideggerian distinction between being and becoming (to which Spengler connects nature/culture), and which leads to his description of the movement within world history from *culture* to *civilization*, or from organic to inorganic relations. In the life-cycle of the West, this shift occurs in the late summer of western history with the advent of Descartes, Pascal, Newton and Leibniz; from that point on, it has been downhill all the way into nineteenth century skepticism, materialism, intellectualism and abstraction.[9] Geo-politically, the shift from

organic to inorganic relations is marked by the predominance of the world-city over the province, and it is fulfilled finally in imperialism: "Imperialism is Civilization unadulterated," says Spengler (36). The figure who embodies imperialism, "the first man of a new age," is Cecil Rhodes: "The expansive tendency is a doom, something daemonic and immense, which grips, forces into service, and uses up the late mankind of the world-city stage, willy-nilly, aware or unaware" (37). It may be that the distinctions between being and becoming, and organic and inorganic relations, have even by the late nineteenth century become a convenient set of tropes enabling Spengler to define this movement towards sterility in imperialism, and that Coetzee is simply discovering a contemporary application for them as well. However we define Coetzee's use of them and his relation to Spengler, one recalls, in this sense of bloodless and technical colonial power, Dawn's strategies against the Vietcong, Jacobus Coetzee's against the Nama, and even Magda's sense of exclusion in *In the Heart of the Country* from the imagined fireside stories of Klein-Anna and by contrast, her own blasts of arid philosophy. There are lingering traces of it, too, in the magistrate's subjection to Joll in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and in a purified form, in Michael K's gardening and his desire to keep out of all the camps. But Dawn expresses it most clearly, as both a biographical fact and a political compulsion:

> When I was a boy making my quiet way through the years of grade school I kept a crystal garden in my room: lances and fronds, ochre and ultramarine, erected themselves frailly from the bottom of a preserve-jar, stalagmites obeying their dead crystal life-force. Crystal seeds will grow for me. The other kind do not sprout, even in California. (32)

> But has the master-myth of history not outdated the fiction of the symbiosis of earth and heaven? . . . In the Indo-China Theater we play out the drama of the end of the tellurian age and the marriage of the sky-god with his parthenogene daughter-queen. If the play has been poor, it is because we have stumbled about the stage asleep, not knowing the meaning of our acts. Now I bring their meaning to light in that blinding moment of ascending meta-historical consciousness in which we begin to shape our own myths. (28)

In addition to historicisation, the other method employed in the attack on rationality is the laying bare of the narrator's subject-position. This is achieved initially through parody, with effects that take in some of the scientific discourses that have evolved in the wake of the Enlightenment; these discourses, in one way or another concerned with enlarging empirical knowledge, are the principal means whereby the narrators attempt, on behalf of their cultures, to manage their world and achieve self-affirmation and mastery. The narrative tools evolving in post-Beckenian metafiction were to hand in this aspect of Coetzee's work; the example of Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* is particularly relevant, with its combination of text and commentary in a single work. In *Dusklands*, this method is extended to a proliferation of texts and counter-texts, which enables Coetzee to hold up various discourses for objectification.[10]

"Mythography" is the first of the discourses held up in this way; it is also the most difficult to account for, for if the term is not a neologism, it is a specialism being given new emphases. The obscurity is deliberate: "Mythography," says Dawn, " . . . is an open field like philosophy or criticism because it has not yet found a methodology to lose itself in the mazes of. When McGraw-Hill brings out the first textbook of mythography, I will move on" (33). The passage

goes on to develop a direct analogy between mythography and exploration, with the implication that what Dawn undertakes as a contemporary intellectual and revisionist enterprise, is a later and only more abstract version of what Jacobus Coetzee undertakes in the interior. As the inscription or re-inscription of myth—perhaps *on* myth—mythography takes the notion that cultures gravitate around myths, and that individuals think the myths that cultures offer them, and raises it to a higher power, thus making it productive and analytical and therefore useful, in the projection of meta-critical, meta-analytical strengths. That mythography is able to reflect on itself does not make it less politically embroiled; far from it, for its reflective character is a means whereby, through self-consciousness, and through reflection on the conditions underlying myths, more complete control is established. The notion of a mythography objectifies and politicises, in fact, the idea of paradigm shift which was becoming increasingly current at the time, locating it within the imperialist effort in Vietnam. It also holds out the possibility that the analysis of myth along structural-functionalist lines, for example, can serve the colonizer's ends, as did its predecessors in classical anthropology. For this reason, Franz Boas is mentioned specifically as being part of the mythographer's heritage (21). Coetzee's affinity with structuralism does not therefore exclude him from recognising that it can be used to project the authority of a dominating culture. In "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," other discourses come into focus. Exploratory narrative, colonial adventure writing, landscape and manners-and-customs description, and frontier or pioneer history, all deepen and localise the critique, revealing more precisely the legacy of key colonial discourses in the management of Southern Africa.

In both narratives of *Dusklands*, however, the objectification of *epistemic conditions*, rooted in language, is handled very specifically, that is, not only does it place certain discourses in question in general terms, it also works by means of an explicit parody of a particular text or group of texts, and a critical reconstruction of the situation in which these texts were originally produced.

PARODY: THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

In "The Vietnam Report," the parodied documents appear to be taken from a series of studies on "national security and international order" put together by a corporation called the Hudson Institute which published a volume entitled *Can We Win in Vietnam?: The American Dilemma*. Other texts might have been used as well, but this one is clearly one of, if not the, most important. The book was completed in the aftermath of the Tet offensive in February 1968, when the Vietcong inflicted severe damage on South Vietnamese and American installations, fuelling domestic anxiety in the U. S. about the feasibility of pursuing the war. There are five contributors to the volume, three who are in favour of stepping up operations, and two who *think that the U. S. should cut its losses and get out*. One of the first group is Herman Kahn, whose Introduction provides Coetzee with his epigraph:

> Obviously it is difficult not to sympathise with those European and American *audiences who*, when shown films of fighter-bomber pilots visibly exhilirated by successful napalm bombing runs on Viet-Cong targets, react with horror and disgust. Yet, it is unreasonable to expect the U. S. Government to obtain pilots who are so appalled by the damage they may be doing that they cannot carry out their missions or become excessively depressed or guilt-ridden. (Armbruster 10)

"Unreasonable" is the key word here, illustrating the spirit of cool, technological equanimity that Eugene Dawn aims for in his report, ultimately unsuccessfully; Kahn is successful, discussing at some length, for example, the "instrumental" position of tying the moral issues with the question of whether the war is actually winnable (204). The rhetorical context in "the Vietnam Report" relies on the situation exemplified by the Hudson documents: Dawn is a "backroom boy" himself, who like several of the Hudson strategists, offers a program for improving the effectiveness of the American presence. The intended readership of Dawn's Report is the Department of Defense; clearly, that is where the Hudson Institute (and no doubt other corporations, notably Rand) would like to have some influence. In several matters of substance, moreover, the debates being conducted in the Hudson Institute prepare the way for J. M. Coetzee. There is much discussion in *Can We Win in Vietnam?* of cultural factors as potentially decisive in determining the war's outcome. The more forthright of the critics of U. S. policy, Edmund Stillman, for example, puts the case as follows:

> Vietnam is a land of strange and violent sects—e.g., Cao Dai and Hoa Hao, "religions" that are also armed movements, and such "criminal sects" like the Binh Xuyen, Mafias with religious overtones. All unwittingly, America has stumbled into a strange and convulsed society—and one that makes a mockery of the traditional American world view, still faithful to its eighteenth-century Enlightenment origins and its nineteenth-century belief in the ability of material wealth to calm any disorder of the spirit. (156)

I shall ignore an abomination like "all unwittingly," and highlight the emphasis on cultural difference. In a panel discussion at the end of the volume, it is again the mythic imperviousness of Vietnamese society that prompts much of the insecurity about policy and strategy (347-349).[11] Coetzee unravels this apprehension—revealing the Euro-American "disorder of the spirit" that Stillman claims is under control—in Cartesian, Hegelian and Sartrean terms, thus giving it content and a philosophical and critical explanation. Rounding off the argument for withdrawal, Stillman quotes Santayana in vocabulary directly applicable to Dawn: "A fanatic is one who, having lost sight of his object, redoubles his zeal" (164). Kahn, in opposing critics like Stillman, notes that as the resistance of the Vietcong to programs such as "attrition-pressure-ouch" become tougher, the U. S. turns increasingly to what is called "pacification" or "nation-building" (an attempt to strengthen traditional culture in order to prevent communist infiltration), and argues in favour of seeing the problem in Vietnam as purely technical, and as one of having a "theory of victory" (204-112). As Dawn puts it: "There is only one problem in Vietnam and that is the problem of victory. The problem of victory is technical. We must believe this. Victory is a matter of sufficient force, and we dispose of sufficient force" (29).

Let me pass over more incidental connections[12] and deal with the remaining important ones. There are occasions when the advocates of military solutions come close to the threshold of moral discretion. For example, Kahn: "There may be in this kind of war vital special operations that do not meet these [Geneva Convention] criteria. If so, I would recommend, first, that they be isolated from regular military operations, and secondly, that they be rigorously reviewed and controlled at some reasonably high level" (319-320). Gastil, in an appendix providing a plan for a revised "defense system" for areas controlled by the Vietcong, suggests that the locals should be individually placed in categories ranging from those to be tried for specific crimes (involving "punishment up to execution") to "persons permitted to live normally and take part in politics." Then he adds: "It might well be found just, and certainly

expedient, to place present VC cadres in all categories, with most of the people in the last" (416). The acknowledgement of expedience here amounts to an acceptance of the strategic value of terror. The reason Dawn is disgraced at the Kennedy Institute is that he breaks this threshold repeatedly and explicitly. On one occasion, in parenthesis, he repeats Gastil's implication exactly: "Szell reports that a camp authority which randomly and at random times selects subjects for punishment, while maintaining the *appearance* of selectivity, is consistently successful in breaking down group morale" (25). More generally, his advocacy of a program of assassination and of area bombing transgress the boundary separating tacit from explicit, and he argues, "There is an unsettling lack of realism about terrorism among the higher ranks of the military. Questions of conscience lie outside the purview of this study. We must work on the assumption that the military believe in their own explanations when they assign a solely military value to terror operations" (23). Or again: "Until we reveal to ourselves and revel in the true meaning of our acts we will go on suffering the double penalty of guilt and ineffectualness" (31).

The possibility of a mythographic strategy is also an extension of the following kind of observation, made by Kahn in a chapter entitled "Toward a Program for Victory":

> The problem is not to convert the average Vietnamese to our own image, but to work with the materials at hand. This, of course, may mean attempting to fulfill certain aspirations for modernism that many Vietnamese have, but at the same time adapting our programs and policies to the existential situation—particularly the fact that most of our supporters are "peoples of the past" and not a superpoliticized, modern totalitarian movement such as the NLF [National Liberation Front]. (341)

Dawn's developing science is able to make specific proposals in this direction. An interesting and difficult problem here relates to the fact that there was much debate in the U. S.—reflected in the Hudson papers—about whether the dominant ideology in Vietcong insurgency was communist or nationalist. The cold war thinking of the State Department under Kennedy clearly regarded the insurgency as primarily communist, hence the commitment of troops; many critics of foreign policy, however, regarded the NLF as nationalist. Not all of those favouring the nationalist argument advocated withdrawal, however, as Kahn's position illustrates. Such is Dawn's perspective as well, but it is curious that in Coetzee's reconstruction of Vietnamese myth, via Dawn's report, there is nominal reference to the Marxist-Leninism of the NLF, whose clarity, indeed, formulaic rigidity, is more than exemplified in a volume such as Ho Chi Minh's *Selected Writings*. Instead, the report gives precedence to the myth of the father and the rebellion of the band of brothers. The myth owes much more to *Totem and Taboo* than to any more plausible anthropological description of either Vietcong or South Vietnamese traditions, which when not influenced by Marxist-Leninism, were quite heterogenous (involving, in addition to a number of smaller sects, a range from Catholic—following French colonialism—to Chinese Buddhist). It is to Coetzee's political credit that he does *not*, in a novel such as this, attempt what would in ordinary positivist language be called a faithful representation of Vietnamese myth. The question then becomes, what is *Freud* doing in this description?

Its purpose would appear to be to reinforce the evolutionist imperative behind the notion of a mythography. Freud's account of the primal horde in *Totem and Taboo* was intended as a universally applicable explanation of, among other things, the incest taboo. Kahn's expression, "the people of the past," qualified as it is by quotation, acknowledges a cultural-descriptive

heritage in which Freud is a prominent figure. The myth of the rebellion of the brothers is especially useful because it provides the U. S. with the role of father, and therefore strengthens the philosophical implication of dominance—hence Dawn's proposals concerning the use of the father-voice in the programming of propaganda. When Dawn realises, however, that adopting the position of father might reinforce the myth of rebellion and therefore be self-defeating (26-27), he turns to another myth in Western evolutionist thought, namely, the Hegelian "master-myth of history," or "that blinding moment of ascending meta-historical consciousness in which we begin to shape our own myths" (28). The appeal which immediately follows, for recourse to the goddess *techne*, who "springs from our brains," connects this Hegelian self-consciousness with earlier references to the moment of Western scientific rationality, as well as suggesting that in latter-day imperialism, technology will resolve by force what cannot be resolved by other means, such as withdrawal.

PARODY: THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Dawn's counterpart in the second part of *Dusklands* is the editor and historian, S. J. Coetzee. Their connection lies in their respective commitment to a discourse of scientific objectivity in the service of the historical ascendancy of their own culture. Dawn's mythography is matched by S. J. Coetzee's pioneer history.[13] Significantly, the dates given for the fictitious course of lectures given by S. J. Coetzee at the University of Stellenbosch, from which the Afterword is drawn, precisely mark the period of the rise of the formal political power of Afrikaner nationalism under D. F. Malan, from the break with the Smuts-Hertzog Fusion government in 1934, to final electoral victory in 1948. As editor of Jacobus Coetzee's narrative and its official historian, S. J. Coetzee's role in the reproduction and management of historical data places him at the centre of the second half of *Dusklands*. J. M. Coetzee, as "translator," is S. J. Coetzee's antagonist, for it quickly emerges that J. M. Coetzee subversively re-produces and re-manages the work of S. J. Coetzee, both by dropping intertextual ironies and by actively rewriting the historical documents themselves, thus breaking explicitly the conventionally neutral stance of translator—and going well beyond the familiar acknowledgement that translation is already a kind of reinscription.

It is here that we must locate the relevance of the epigraph to "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," taken from Flaubert: "What is important is the philosophy if history." It comes from a point in *Bouvard et Pécuchet* when, having discovered the relatively arbitrary status of dates, the protagonists question the relevance of facts in general, which in turn provides the momentary certainty of "Ce qu'il y a d'important, c'est la philosophie de l'Histoire!" (190). Very soon, however, even this is discarded for other opinions, in Flaubert's parody. Its place in Coetzee's scheme, however, is simply to emphasize the fickleness of data, and to direct attention to the struggle *over* history, to the writing of history or to historiography, for it is in the latter domain that a "philosophy" or meta-historical conception of what constitutes inner historical law or destiny has force. It is interesting that Coetzee should have returned to *Bouvard et Pécuchet* as an early example of fiction's capacity to subsume scientific discourses under its own projects; his more modest subversion of the archive of the Van Riebeeck Society has, as one of its points of origin, Flaubert's subversion of the scientific documents of the Enlightenment, especially the encyclopaedia.

The source of J. M. Coetzee's parodic version of pioneer history is probably an essay by one N. A. Coetzee, who in 1958 published in the journal *Historia* an essay entitled "Jacobus

Coetzee: Die Boerepionier van Groot-Namakwaland."[14] Where S. J. Coetzee is defensive and less than ingenuous in the hands of J. M. Coetzee, N. A. Coetzee is forthright in his treatment of the ancestral frontiersman: "Jacobus Coetzee was een van die merkwardigste persoonlikhede in ons pioniersgeskiedenis" (588) ["one of the most noteworthy figures in our pioneer history"]. N. A. Coetzee also drops phrases like *die binneland oop te maak* ("to open the interior"), *die voorposte van die beskawing* ("the outposts of civilisation"), *die wye onbekende van 'n eie vaderlandsbodem* ("the wide unknown of one's own native soil"—a splendid oxymoron) quite unself-consciously (593). Most pertinently, N. A. Coetzee argues that Jacobus Coetzee was resourceful in finding ways of exercising his "gesag as blanke . . . in 'n see van barbare" ("his authority as a white person in a sea of barbarians") when he approached the Great Namaquas.[15] This involved keeping out of the Namaqua camp, deferring to the authority of the Governor, and preserving the force of his personality in negotiating for safe passage in the local language (595). This version of the encounter, in relation to the experience of other explorers in the region, notably Brink and Wikar, is atypically confrontational, but it is nevertheless N. A. Coetzee's account (spinning out a few clues in Jacobus Coetzee's original deposition) that endures in the more elaborated version in *Dusklands* itself (69-73). This suggests that J. M. Coetzee's use of sources is directly related to his critical intentions with respect to the preceding generation, S. J. Coetzee being the fictional father.

This begs the question of exactly how free J. M. Coetzee is in his use of the sources. It has generally been assumed since Peter Knox-Shaw's discussion of this question in *Contrast* that the deposition or *Relaas* of Jacobus Coetzee, reproduced as an Appendix, is the one authentic historical document in *Dusklands*, and that the remaining sections are either fictitious or deliberately corrupted ("A Metaphysics of Violence" 27). This is inaccurate, however, in the sense that Coetzee tampers substantially with the deposition as well. Apart from minor but consistent alterations in dates and figures, Coetzee significantly omits from and adds to the document. Omitted (among other details which disturb narrative coherence) are references to the friendly disposition of the Namaquas; the fact that Jacobus Coetzee was allowed to pass; that there was an exchange of gifts—oxen for links from his trek-chain (*Relaas* 285); also, that he returned *with a Great Namaqua* who wished to get to the Cape (289)! Needless to say, N. A. Coetzee omits most of these details as well, since they detract from the confrontational emphasis which strengthens the frontier hypothesis of white nationalism. Perhaps more startlingly, *added* to the deposition are two accounts of desertion. The first involves an "Envoy of the Damroquas [who] had not long ago met a treacherous end at the hands of servants afflicted for lack of pursuits with the Black Melancholy; that these servants had fled to the Namaquas he the narrator had first met and dwelt yet among them; wherefore he should treat warily with the lastmentioned and look always to his Person" (*Dusklands* 132). (Laziness is a common accusation of the ethnographers of the period, discussed in some detail in *White Writing* [12 -35]; here Coetzee turns it into a Renaissance joke.) The second instance of desertion affects Jacobus Coetzee himself: "being on his return journey deserted by his servants but not being disturbed by the aforementioned Namaquas . . ." (133).

Coetzee therefore omits cordial exchanges from the record, and adds desertion. The immediate purpose would seem to be consistency: Jacobus Coetzee's first-person narrative also includes an episode of desertion. The deeper and more salient purpose, however, is that it radically turns the narrative into a game of power, emphasizing the movement of the colonizer-self from assertion, to sharp encounter, followed by weakness and debilitation, attempts at self-preservation (at this point, desertion by servants), followed by recovery and reconstitution of the self, and finally, re-assertion (by meting out punishment). The analysis that follows shortly

will track this movement through its three main phases. (I shall also make connections to Dawn's narrative as I proceed.)

The game of power would explain another, equally spectacular alteration. The Hop expedition, originally, was a fact-finding mission prompted by Coetzee's *Relaas* to investigate the economic propects in the territory and to locate if possible a people (the Herero) who "are tawny in appearance, with long hair on their heads and are clad in linen, and who it must be supposed are a civilised People" (Brink 5). J. M. Coetzee ignores the original purpose (although he uses details from this expedition in constructing Jacobus Coetzee's narrative), making it a punitive raid on the servants who have now taken up with the Namaquas. The problem of desertion runs prominently through the early documents on colonial justice under the administration of the Dutch East India Company, as is exemplified again and again in Moodie's *The Record*, but in re-writing the narrative of the Hop expedition Coetzee seems to have picked up two specific incidents in the actual events of the Coetzee/Hop journeys and conflated them: one involving a murder, and the other involving ordinary theft, accompanied by seemingly gratuitous violence. The murder took place during the return journey of the Hop expedition, when a servant named Ruyter was killed by a certain Coenraad Scheffer (in the novel, "Scheffer" rivals only Jacobus Coetzee in sadism). Ruyter refused an order to fetch water, a struggle developed in which he was stabbed; later the same night, Scheffer shot him while everyone was asleep. The official narrative of the expedition was later amended to conceal the murder from the Chamber of Seventeen in Holland (Brink vii, 115). The second incident concerns an illegal trading expedition (twenty-two years before Coetzee's) by a party of burghers which was discovered by the authorities when, on the return journey, the Hottentot servants, "with or without their masters' permission, returned armed, and robbed the Great Namaquas, killing seven of them" (Brink 94). As in "The Vietnam Report," J. M. Coetzee is uncovering or rendering explicit what is relegated in the original documents to the borders of legality. "But I have nothing to be ashamed of," says Dawn, "I have merely told the truth" (38). In "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee," the consequences of "telling the truth" are fundamental to the structure of the narrative itself.

Knox-Shaw's complaint that the "fictional narrative is distinguished throughout by a virtual effacement of economic motive" (28), a position that has held currency (it is repeated by Dovey and Kohler), seems misplaced, in the light of what the revision of sources *does* achieve. But the observation is incorrect, even on its own terms. The very opening paragraph of "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" deals with the social consequences of the shift in white settlement from burgher to trekboer in the political economy of the eighteenth century, consequences which involved a developing competitiveness between the Boers and both Khoi and San over land and cattle. The story of Adam Wijnand, the son of a servant who left home and established himself with "ten thousand head of cattle, as much land as he can patrol, a stableful of women" (61), locates Jacobus Coetzee's bitterness immediately and precisely within this social and material context. In fact, if, as Kohler argues ("Freeburghers" 24-25), the background to the story of Adam Wijnand is the history of Adam Kok, then we must deduce that it was precisely to contextualise Jacobus Coetzee in this way that J. M. Coetzee was once again so deliberately cavalier with the historical record, for Coetzee would be omitting Kok's political career in order to emphasise the contest over resources. Coetzee dispenses with the data in order to arrive at deeper version of the truth. In addition to the contextualisation, Jacobus Coetzee himself mentions the object of his journey, to find ivory, when negotiating with the Great Namaquas (75)—Knox-Shaw claims this is removed from the narrative. It is also inaccurate to say that J. M. Coetzee "virtually effaces" the economic basis for the entire

colonial project, for, among other available examples, in S. J. Coetzee's Afterword we are told of Jacobus Coetzee, on the banks of the Great River, dreaming "a father dream of rafts laden with produce sailing down to the sea and the waiting schooners" (128). If one were to take this question very seriously, one might go as far as to say that Coetzee's knowledge of colonial economics is in fact more subtle than Knox-Shaw's, in the sense that the narrative, with a sophistication unmatched in Knox-Shaw's strictures, implicitly plots Jacobus Coetzee's economic options in terms of attempts to revive earlier practices in the colonial enterprise (a raid on natural resources, followed by trade) in the face of the threat of impoverishment that the shift from mercantile capitalism to settler pastoralism entails, in the world of Jacobus Coetzee.

THE QUEST FOR POWER: ASSERTION, PRESERVATION, RECOVERY

The truth, however, is that Coetzee's interests lie elsewhere, even though the economic dimension is fully acknowledged. If Coetzee's emphases are different, then the point is to ask why, rather than turn evaluative. "The one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. . . . The Hottentot is locked into the present. *He does not care where he comes from or where he is going*" (61-62).[16] *This* categorical emphasis on racial and cultural difference is then enforced in subsequent descriptions of commando raids against the Bushmen (62-66).[17] The final paragraph in these descriptions deals with the rape of Bushmen women, which Jacobus Coetzee represents as offering an ideal of freedom, "the freedom of the abandoned": unlike the colonists' daughters who connect the white male with "a system of property relationships," a "wild Bushman girl is tied to nothing": "You have become Power itself now and she is nothing, a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away" (65). This is what I shall call Jacobus Coetzee's early fiction of self-assertion, a fiction involving the Hegelian attempt to extract self-consciousness, or self-validation, from the recognition given by the other. Immediately hereafter, the narrative proper begins (under the heading "Journey beyond the Great River"), with J. M. Coetzee putting together from Brink's journal a cursory account of the journey northward, in order to get to the encounter with the Great Namaquas as quickly as possible. In this encounter and what follows, the fiction of self-assertion with which the preamble ends, is destroyed—and has to be restored, in the final episode of the narrative, by Jacobus Coetzee at all costs.

In the initial moments of the encounter, Jacobus Coetzee sizes up the Namaqua leader and is condescendingly pleased with his self-assurance and humanity, but J. M. Coetzee lingers here, departing, in fact, from the narrative discourse used in the construction of the journey, in order to delve more fully into the resonance of the moment by means, once again, of an explicit parody:

> Tranquilly I traced in my heart the forking paths of the endless inner adventure: the order to follow, the inner debate (resist? submit?), underlings rolling their eyeballs, words of moderation, calm, swift march, the hidden defile, the encampment, the graybeard chieftain, the curious throng, words of greeting, firm tones, Peace! Tobacco!, . . . the order to follow, the inner debate, the casual spear in the vitals (Viscount d'Almeida), the fleeing underlings, pole through the fundament, ritual dismemberment in the savage encampment, . . . the order to follow, the inner debate, the cowardly blow, amnesia, the dark hut, bound hands, uneasy sleep, dawn, the sacrificial gathering, 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—these forking paths across that true wilderness without polity called the land of the Great Namaqua where everything, I was to find, was possible. (70-71)

Strands are woven together here from a range of sources in colonial adventure writing, from documentary, such as the reference to the death of d'Almeida, (recounted in several early histories) or to methods of impaling imputed to Shaka , to fiction, such as the wizard and the contest of magic, and what follows, in *King Solomon's Mines*. Framing the whole, is the Conradian emphasis on the journey inward, "the inner adventure," and on the disappearance of known social conventions, with the suggestion that the genre of colonial adventure writing involves the projection of a subject into a narrative sequence whose purpose is to establish, deepen, or possibly reconstitute, the subject's coherence and authority (though the "forking paths" of the genre also mischievously suggest the equivocal nature of this enterprise).[18]

In several ways, the preamble to Eugene Dawn's Report contains similar attempts at self-assertion, though in Dawn's case the equivocation is more dramatic. The account of the relationship with Marilyn (like Marilyn Monroe, the name of conjugal bliss in the ironic allegory of names in the first part of *Dusklands*) is a catalogue of failures to achieve connection, sexual and otherwise; the photographs which Dawn carries around in his briefcase, and fetishises, involve attempts to get beyond the surface of the picture to direct reciprocity: "Under the persistent pressure of my imagination . . . it may yet yield" (17). The glint in the eye of the prisoner in this particular photograph is immediately generalised to all the Vietcong, while Dawn also speaks on behalf of his culture as a whole: "We brought them our pitiable selves, trembling on the edge of inexistence, and asked only that they acknowledge us" (18). American violence, imaged in the gun, in fire, in the knife, and finally in rape, is then projected as a hysterical and futile attempt at self-validation in relation to the Vietcong (18).[19] Just as the structure of Jacobus Coetzee's narrative undermines his self-assertive fiction, so Dawn's attempts to contain and control his ontological insecurities in the rationalism of the Report go awry: "I am in a bad way as I write these words. . . . But I see things and have a duty toward history that cannot wait" (31).

Jacobus Coetzee is undermined early in the encounter with the Great Namaquas. In direct contrast to N. A. Coetzee's representation of his rhetorical range in the local language, we find, despite his best efforts, Jacobus Coetzee acknowledging ruefully: "The irony and moralism of forensic oratory, uneasily translated into Nama, were quite alien to the Hottentot sensibility" (75). The Namaquas are oblivious to his attempts to establish control. Things come to a head when in the camp, he returns to his wagon to find the servants helpless while the locals pilfer his goods; he lays about him with his whip, the people retreat, a woman comes forward to taunt him, he fires into the ground at her feet, and scrambles out of the camp with his men and oxen; later that night, fever sets in, and his servants return him to the camp to seek help, thus subjecting Coetzee to a mild form of captivity. In captivity, Jacobus Coetzee develops in his delirium a series of "meditations" which amount to what I shall call fictions of self-preservation. While the fiction of self-assertion is conveyed partly in descriptions of genocide and rape, and partly in a parodic version of the narrative of colonial adventure, the fictions of self-preservation retreat into the propositional discourse of ontology and metaphysics. Indeed, their type is the by now familiar Hegelian dialectic, but whereas before, this dialectic was rendered in terms of situational conflict, here it is developed specifically, in metaphor, and in a language resembling speculative philosophy. In addition to Hegel, however, these "meditations" also carry the

imprint of both Descartes and Sartre, suggesting an attempt to place the whole of Western metaphysics into the fragmented colonial space: Like Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee has become Herakles roasting in the poisoned shirt of heroic individualism (34).

The process of inner retreat is carefully presented, with Coetzee, in the care of his servants, attempting to define himself in isolated potency: "A great peace descended upon me: the even rocking of the wagon, the calm sun on the tent. I carried my secret buried within me. I could not be touched. . . . I deepened myself in a boyhood memory of a hawk ascending the sky in a funnel of hot air" (80). Coetzee now hears two voices, "one near, one far. 'Wash my feet, bind my breast,' said the near voice, 'will you promise not to sing?' Far away, from the remote South, the second voice sang. The first voice responded interminably" (80). The voices correspond to what S. J. Coetzee later will call "zones of destiny" (116), the near voice representing the appeal of the interior, now modified as an impulse to relinquish assertion and seek reconciliation; the far voice, the voice of the remote South, represents the voice of settlement, civilisation, polity. Caught between these zones, both of which have in the past, and will again, contain and explain him, Coetzee now must find new ways of achieving self-consciousness as an integral being, plagued though he is by apprehensions of abandonment and death. In this situation, J. M. Coetzee grants him the language of metaphysical speculation, encoded in the life of "the tamer of the wild." All the meditations are inconclusive, and they are ironised in the rhetorical context by being spoken to "Jan Klawer, Hottentot," with his "savage birthright" (87).

The first of these meditations concerns the explorer's relationship with the landscape of the interior. Projecting himself outward from his bed to "repossess [his] world," Coetzee contemplates the "lures of interiors for rape," and realises that "under the explorer's hammerblow this innocent interior transforms itself in a flash into a replete, confident worldly image of [a] red or grey exterior." Not only do the promises of the interior begin to appear as "fictions," but Coetzee has misgivings about his own "interior" being equally elusive: "My gut would dazzle if I pierced myself. These thoughts disquieted me" (83).

The next meditation, on the subject of dreams, is similarly disconcerting. It attempts, without conviction, to recover the *cogito*, in "a universe of which I the Dreamer was sole inhabitant," but it ends by questioning this proposition as possibly a "little fable I had always kept in reserve to solace myself with on lonely evenings, much as the traveller in the desert keeps back his last few drops of water, choosing to die rather than die without choice" (83).

The following sequence is on the subject of "boundaries," of how the explorer, in seemingly limitless space and solitude, separates himself from his world. The primary defence against solipsism is the gun: "The gun is our mediator with the world and therefore our saviour. The tidings of the gun: such-and-such is outside, have no fear. The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us" (84). The argument is clearly hollow and self-defeating, however, as Dovey (92-93) has argued, because if otherness is eliminated by violence, there can be no recognition of the subject. But it is not only the logic of the argument that is at fault, it is also its ethics. The pervasive sense of calculation in Jacobus Coetzee's speculations must undermine their propositional status. The ethical force of these pages involves something like the following: death, or rather, *dead things*, Coetzee's "dispersed pyramid to life," are the explorer's salvation; moreover, colonial settlement itself is death, or a means of dispensing it: "The essence of orchard tree and farm sheep is number. Our commerce with the wild is a tireless enterprise of turning it into orchard and farm. . . . He who does not understand number does not understand death" (85). J. M. Coetzee is offering here a direct reversal of a particular trope in colonial discourse, where the value usually placed on such work as enumeration (more

classically, naming and classification, but the underlying principle is the same) is typically Adamic; in Jacobus Coetzee, however, instead of being creative, the transformations are sterile and destructive. One is reminded of the passage taken from Ovid in the epigraph to *White Writing*: "Pressing his lips to foreign soil, greeting the unfamiliar mountains and plains, Cadmus gave thanks. . . . Descending from above, Pallas told him how to plow and sow the earth with the serpent's teeth, which would grow into a future nation" (*Metamorphoses* 3; Coetzee's translation).

When Jacobus Coetzee speaks in the next meditative sequence of the approach of the master and savage across space, it is true that Hegel is being reformulated in terms close to the original (Dovey 94); however, there are distinctions that must be made. In Coetzee, we do not have master and slave, but master and *savage*. The other, prior to his appearance as slave, is *radically* other, with cultural difference inscribed in that otherness, so that his approach involves the establishment of a threshold near to which the explorer feels a genuine vulnerability, where the "out there . . . promises to enfold, ingest, and project me through itself as a speck on a field which we may call annihilation or alternatively history" (86). It is this threshold that presents itself to the explorer as "an ideal form of the life of penetration" (86). If the savage crosses the "annulus" of space defined by the two presences, entering the master's space, he becomes slave, the Hegelian "inessential consciousness"; however, it is more frequently the explorer's experience that there is no crossing of this limit, and no resolving climax: there is an obligatory exchange of gifts, directions, warnings, demonstrations of firearms, followed by an enigmatic pursuit of the explorer, at first devious, then frank, but never close, producing "the obscure movement of the soul (weariness, relief, incuriosity, terror)" that is felt as "a fated pattern and a condition of life" (86-87). Suspension, irresolution, anxiety: such is the explorer's historical lot. One must also qualify the repeated reference to Hegel, however, for in Sartre's discussion of the Look, the transcription of Hegel is figured precisely in terms of space, of the distances between objects, and of the disruption of the perceptual field of the subject by the entry of the other (*Being and Nothingness* 254-257).

We have come a long way from the crisply efficient prose of S. J. Coetzee. A broken and historicised subjectivity, put together from the tradition of Western metaphysics, has intruded and subverted the record, even before S. J. Coetzee's version of events is presented.[20] The narrowing of the distance between the subject and an ostensibly neutral scientific discourse is effected more directly in "The Vietnam Project," where Dawn breaks off the bureaucratic register, saying, "We are all somebody's sons. Do not think it does not pain me to make this report" (28). In pointed reference to the sense of contradiction, he later adds that he is speaking "to the broken halves of all our selves," telling them "to embrace, loving the worst in us equally with the best" (31). The shadowy supervisor, the "Coetzee" to whom this is addressed as a "postscript," remains a silent and steely reminder of the scientism from which Dawn has lapsed.[21]

The meditations over, Jacobus Coetzee steadily "recovers." There are two prominent features of the narrative around which this recovery revolves: the rebellion of the servants, notably Plaatje, and the carbuncle. This is surely among the most portentous of carbuncles in any literature. The rebellion leads to desertion, the final and decisive challenge to Coetzee's authority. In order to rectify matters at the existential level, Coetzee needs to reconstitute himself in self-consciousness. The carbuncle is really a blessing, for the infliction of *pain* serves this purpose. As he milks his wound, lovingly scrutinising its products, he is really recovering a sense of the body and the self, as object. The theme is taken up in a later moment of narcissistic reverie:

> Around my forearms and neck were rings of demarcation between the rough red-brown skin of myself the invader of the wilderness and slayer of elephants and myself the Hottentot's patient victim. I hugged my white shoulder, I stroked my white buttocks, I longed for a mirror. Perhaps I would find a pool, a small limpid pool with a dark bed, in which I might stand and, framed by the recomposing clouds, see myself as others had seen me, making out at last too the lump my fingers had told me so much about, the scar of violence I had done myself. (103)[22]

This reading is consistent with the drift of the remaining pages of Jacobus Coetzee's narrative, where during the return journey his primary concern, in what may be called fictions of self-recovery, is to achieve absolute self-sufficiency; of course, such a condition is quite fictitious, and Jacobus Coetzee is perhaps at his most specious here. After being banished for biting off the ear of a child who taunted him, he turns necessity into a virtue by treating the loss of his wagon, weapons, accoutrements and servants, as a "casting off [of] attachments" (99). The death of Klawer occurs at this point,[23] after which Coetzee "feels free to initiate [himself] into the desert": "Every possible copula was enacted that could link the world to an elephant hunter armed with a bow and crazed with freedom after seventy days of watching eyes and listening ears" (101). Dovey points out how contradictory Coetzee's efforts to achieve complete ontological independence are in this sequence. His attempt to perform the "ur-act" ends in impotence; his calling to God to witness his aloneness shows his dependence on an imagined consciousness for self-recognition; and his ditty, "Hottentot, Hottentot,/I am not a Hottentot" precisely traps him in a relational position from which he is trying to escape (Dovey 107-108). The sentence following the ditty is interesting, however: "It was neater in Dutch than in Nama, which still lived in the flowering-time of inflexion" (101). Unaware of his non-sequitur, Coetzee values the clean opposition carried in the inflexion in Dutch, the colonial language—an historical nuance residually derived, perhaps, from the Whorfian principle that particular languages have distinctive epistemic consequences.

Jacobus Coetzee's sojourn in the land of the Great Namaquas undercuts his early self-affirming fiction; indeed, frustration, self-division and fragmentation plague him, even in his most apparently euphoric moments. Since his experience is so much in polarities, he invents a hypothesis to contradict the dominant trend, in characteristic bad faith. This is the story of what he calls the "Zeno beetle," which has the gift of seeming infinitely resistant to all attacks:

> What passes through his mind during the last moments? Perhaps he has no mind, perhaps his mind is extraverted as mere behaviour, as they say of the praying mantis *(hotnotsgod)*. Nevertheless, in a formal sense he is a true creature of Zeno. "Now I am only half-way dead. Now I am only three-fourths dead. Now I am only seven-eighths dead. The secret of my life regresses infinitely before your probing finger. You and I could spend eternity splitting fractions. If I keep still long enough you will go away. Now I am only fifteen-sixteenths dead. (102)

As a follower of Parmenides, Zeno held that Being was undivided; that the category "not-is" is unknowable; that both motion and plurality do not exist (distance is never erased, only reduced in ever-diminishing fractions, and whatever is plural, can be numbered). Comforting himself with Zenonian principles—thus forcing what has been a story of fragmentation into a private

myth of wholeness and integrity—Coetzee claims that he had hidden himself away in the "labyrinth" of the self, that the "Hottentot assault" had been "baffled from the beginning, in a body which partook too of the labyrinth, by the continuity of my exterior with the interior surface of my digestive tract." Whereas in his earlier meditations he had found the demystification of interiority disquieting, here he derives comfort from it (since the positions of subject and object have been imaginatively reversed), showing once again how much of a philosophical opportunist he really is. Once again, however, J. M. Coetzee makes use of an ironic reversal of colonial tropes. If the Hottentots had been "true savages," he might have had a more satisfying encounter with them, Coetzee decides. Defining "true savagery" as "a way of life based on disdain for the value of human life and sensual delight in the pain of others" (104), Jacobus Coetzee—as Knox-Shaw accurately shows (31)—exemplifies precisely these attributes himself in the remaining events of the narrative. Entering the periphery of colonial property, he attacks a herd of cattle and wounds the herder; on arrival at his own farm, he falls on a lamb like "God in a whirlwind" and enters his house with the liver (106). Although the full extent of Jacobus Coetzee's sadism is revealed only in the Hop expedition, what has been established in the contrastive irony of these closing paragraphs is that the critique of Jacobus Coetzee's ontological recovery carries a socialised, ethical weight.

The Hop expedition demonstrates this with horrifying clarity. Its purpose is nothing less than to stage, theatrically, the drive towards self-consciousness on the part of the seemingly reconstituted, penetrative, male, assertive self, in the form of a punitive raid on the deserted servants. Apart from its violence (which I shall discuss shortly) the most prominent feature of the passage is that it presents Jacobus Coetzee *observing himself perform* these acts of sadism. The opening paragraph is explicitly conventional, beginning "We descended on their camp at dawn, the hour recommended by the classic writers on warfare, haloed in red sky-streaks that portended a blustery afternoon," and ending, "Fill in the morning smoke rising straight in the air, the first flies making for the corpse, and you have the tableau" (107). For the rest, the passage is marked by stiffened formality, by a repetitive, declamatory "I," and by frequent, self-regarding commentary: "A muscle worked in my jaw," says Coetzee, comforting a dying Plaatje whom he has just shot (113). It is violence theatrically ritualised in self-consciousness.

The corresponding attempt to regain self-conscious potency, after it has broken down, in "The Vietnam Project," is the motel sequence, in which Dawn runs off with his son, Martin. Writing in the "present definite," Dawn in several ways muses over the possibility of finding a language in which the referent is not problematised, the desired referent being himself, that is, projected into a stable world of immanent and verifiable things. Dawn speaks appreciatively of names, especially of songbirds, plants and insects, which seem to have fullness and self-sufficiency. This offers an alternative to the relational principle of meaning, the legacy of contemporary linguistics: "Like so many people of an intellectual cast, I am a specialist in relations rather than names. . . . Perhaps I should have been an entomologist" (37-38). Shortly hereafter, similar questions are raised about novelistic discourse. "I have *Herzog* and *Voss*, two reputable books, at my elbow, and I spend many analytic hours puzzling out the tricks which their authors perform to give their monologues . . . the air of the real world through the looking-glass" (38). The books are well chosen, for together, they place in question the status of the project of the contemporary *bildungsroman* in the colonies, but the immediate point has to do with realism, and the stable, authentic self that is historically linked with the realist tradition. This is the mode that Dawn *would like* to inhabit. It needs to said, of course, that the very archness of his calculations effectively excludes him from doing so, and the attempted self-recovery *is* inevitably a failure. Dawn's "true ideal," he tells us, rather like

Jacobus Coetzee's Zenonian myth, "is of an endless discourse of character, the self reading the self to the self in all infinity." There is more at stake here, however, than a gently ironic reflection on a generic discourse: would a life of action, he asks, have saved him from self-division? The reply to this can only be negative, for action takes consciousness into the world, and it is there that the divisions are generated. Dawn's response is "to call down death upon death upon the men of action":

> Since February of 1965 their war has been living its life at my expense. I know and I know and I know what it is that has eaten away my manhood from inside, devoured the food that should have nourished me. It is a thing, a child not mine, once a baby squat and yellow whelmed in the dead center of my body, sucking my blood, growing by my waste, now, 1973, a hideous mongol boy who stretches his limbs inside my hollow bones, gnaws my liver with his smiling teeth, voids his bilious filth into my systems, and will not go. I want an end to it! I want my deliverance! (40)

The passage prepares for the savage act which follows—recounted now in the "present *in* definite" (my emphasis)—Dawn's stabbing of his son. There is a metonymic chain here which helps to explain this act. Self-division is imaged early on in terms of the rebellion of the body. The capriciousness of flesh, undermining the *cogito* , is a theme with Beckettian overtones (*Molloy* 66-67). Here, Dawn is inhabited by a mongol child, a specifically ambiguous symbol, suggesting not only the rebellious body in the form of a capricious congenital inheritance, but also the other of South-east Asia, growing precisely in relation to the level of commitment of American troops, 1965-1973. The body, in other words, situates the self and self-consciousness in history. (A similar doubleness in the image of a child occurs when Jacobus Coetzee is recovering from fever in his hut: "Patches of skin had peeled from its face, hands, and legs, revealing a pink inner self in poor imitation of European colouring. . . . I told it it was a dream and ordered it not to touch me . . ." [88-89].) The body—the child-parasite—the historical other; it is this chain, I suggest, that Dawn tries to halt and destroy in stabbing the son, Martin; for the chain destroys the coherence of the transcendent self. (What Dawn does not want, furthermore, just as he does not need the men of action, is the regenerative historical continuity of children.) The violence of the act has its direct structural parallel in the violence of the Hop expedition in "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee"—about which there is more to be said at this point.

The violence of the Hop expedition is so startling as to become a burden for most readers. For this reason, Knox-Shaw, for example, on traditional humanist grounds, indicts J. M. Coetzee for merely re-enacting "true savagery" and therefore furthering its claims (33). In response to this argument, Dovey correctly points out that Coetzee is refusing the option of a neutralising discourse, but then she herself goes on to discuss the episode in relation to pornography which, in various guises, tries to return to "a fullness of speech and thereby to a fullness of being" (115): the violence is therefore another moment in the allegory of the narrator's failure to achieve self-realisation. This reading still begs the question of why *violence* is used to achieve these ends, so that Dovey's metacritical reading is simply another form of neutralisation. There is no question that the episode is projected explicitly *as violence*; this is so much the case that not to cite a relevant passage would surely be evasive:

> "Stand up," I said, "I am not playing, I'll shoot you right here." I held the muzzle of my gun against his forehead. "Stand up!" His face was quite empty. As I pressed the trigger he jerked his head and the shot missed. Scheffer was smoking his pipe and smiling. I blushed immoderately. I put my foot on Adonis's chest to hold him and reloaded. "Please, master, please," he said, "my arm is sore." I pushed the muzzle against his lips. "Take it," I said. He would not take it. I stamped. His lips seeped blood, his jaw relaxed. I pushed the muzzle in till he began to gag. I held his head steady between my ankles. Behind me his sphincter gave way and a rich stench filled the air. "Watch your manners, hotnot," I said. I regretted this vulgarity. The shot sounded as minor as a shot fired into the sand. Whatever happened in the pap inside his head left his eyes crossed. Scheffer inspected and laughed. I wished Scheffer away. (111)

The depravity of the scene, deeply exacerbated by Jacobus Coetzee's self-observation, not to mention his sick humor and hypocritical scorn for Scheffer, is surely *transgressive*, not in a theoretical manner which enables one to explain it, but rather, in an *aggressive* mode that is aimed ultimately at extant conventions of reading. The formal explanation (what Jacobus Coetzee impatiently calls "expiation explanation palinode") for these acts is given directly, and it is predictable: "Through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality," and "I have taken it upon myself to be the one to pull the trigger, performing this sacrifice for myself and my countrymen, who exist, and committing upon the dark folk the murders we have all wished. . . . I am a tool in the hands of history" (113-114). A further reason, given by Jacobus Coetzee himself, specifically in explanation of his bitterness, is the "desolate infinity" of his power: undergoing "a failure of imagination before the void," he feels "sick at heart" (108-109). Neither of these explanations, however, is sufficient to account for the aggressivity of the prose.

I argue that the violence of the passage, and others like it, cannot satisfactorily be explained, for the aggressivity remains a *social* fact that readers have and will continue to give witness to. This argument relies on the description at the start of this essay, in which Coetzee was said to be taking on, in a combative sense, the filiative structure represented by colonialism and its discourses. *Dusklands*'s explosive aggressivity, specifically registered in moments like these, is a measure of the extent to which this struggle is not only with the conventions of fiction, but also with the social and moral framework in South Africa in which those conventions take up residence.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE DISPLACED SUBJECT

While aggressivity is one of the consequences of Coetzee's fictive struggle with colonialism, another is the emergence of a displaced subject, a narrator or shadow-narrator who is not one of the primary agents of colonization, but who lives in the historical circumstances created by such figures and who suffers and has to endure the subjectivity which such a position entails. Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* is clearly such a displaced subject, but it is possible to discern its emergence in *Dusklands*. I said earlier that one of the explanations Jacobus Coetzee gives for his acts is predictable: "I am a tool in the hands of history." After making this assertion, however, he has misgivings: "Will I suffer?" "I too am frightened of death." He

dismisses these apprehensions as "a winter story" used to frighten himself and make the blankets more cosy, but closes with the following reflection:

> On the other hand, if the worst comes you will find that I am not irrevocably attached to life. I know my lessons. I too can retreat before a beckoning finger through the infinite corridors of my self. I too can attain and inhabit a point of view from which, like Plaatje, like Adonis, like Tamboer & Tamboer, like the Namaqua, I can be seen to be superfluous. At present I do not care to inhabit such a point of view; but when the day comes you will find that whether I am alive or dead, whether I ever lived or never was born, has never been of real concern to me. I have other things to think about. (114)

A certain ambivalence is pervasive in this conclusion. I believe that it straddles two possible positions: there is a voice that prompts the larger, existential questions, and another that replies. The first of these voices represents that aspect of J. M. Coetzee's authorial narration that would keep alive the options, either for escape—retreating down the corridors of the self—or for the shadings of moral receptivity or complexity. The second voice, however, the voice of the reply, is one in which Jacobus Coetzee tries to shut off those options: "at present I do not care to inhabit such a point of view." It is possible, the paragraph suggests, that under different conditions, Jacobus Coetzee might tell a different story of himself, a story other than the ontological one of assertion, preservation and recovery that we have read ("whether I am alive or dead, whether I ever lived or never was born")—but only, "when the day comes..." For the moment, in other words, assertion pure and simple will do.

What the passage enacts, then, in its ambivalence, is a *recognition followed by a denial of complexity*, in the work of a writer who values it almost to a fault, but who, in this instance, is speaking the voice of a fictional subject who carries his own burdened fascination with, and antagonism for, his inherited culture. Of course, there is extraordinary complexity in *Dusklands*, as in every one of Coetzee's novels, but here, for once, there is an attempt to curtail it by means of a gesture whose essential function is to preserve the moral imperative of the author's attempted self-distantiation from the imprisonment of filial and naturalised connections. Jacobus Coetzee's gesture of closure amounts to a declaration of conscience on the part of J. M. Coetzee, one which says, this is the moral record, let us allow it to stand and speak for itself. It is for this reason, I believe, that J. M. Coetzee never again allows his authorship to inhabit a narrator as oppressive, as father-like, as Jacobus Coetzee. (Later, such figures are the *antagonists* of the narrators: Magda's father, or Colonel Joll.) Such a narrator has to be inhabited for essentially moral reasons, and appropriately at the start of a developing corpus, but in the final event, Jacobus Coetzee must go, for he is wearying and dull. The paradox, however, represented in Jacobus Coetzee's gesture is that in tension with this act there is another, emergent narrative voice, one which asks for openness, and Jacobus Coetzee's gesture is *in opposition* to its promptings.

This is the larger meaning, I believe, of the games of self-preservation elaborated by Jacobus Coetzee on his return journey: "I had been set a task, to find my way home, no mean task, yet one which I, always looking on the brighter side of things, preferred to regard as a game or a contest" (104). The games comprise a *mise en abyme*, a recounting, albeit in a different order, of some of the sequences of the narrative itself: the journey, "primitively equipped," the punitive raid, captivity and expulsion, and a final game, "the most interesting one," a Zenonian approach towards death. "Would I be able to to translate myself soberly

across the told tale, getting back to a dull, farmer's life in the shortest possible time . . . ?" (105). Games of self-preservation, games of diversion or evasion, are a small but important part of what fascinated Coetzee about Beckett; we know this from his doctoral work on *Watt*, but one might also bring to mind Molloy's elaborate computations of how to rotate sixteen "sucking stones," one at a time, from his mouth to the pockets of his trousers and greatcoat (*Molloy* 69-74). "In each game," says Jacobus Coetzee, "the challenge was to undergo the history, and the victory was mine if I survived it" (105). One also recalls the opening sentences of the novel: "My name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that. Here goes." While the drama of self-preservation is deadly serious, since it carries ontological weight, it is also *continuous* with the moral critique of and indeed, resistance to, Jacobus Coetzee.

In therapy, Dawn is willing to allow the doctors to trace their way through what he calls "the labyrinth of my history." The phrase neatly captures the authorial ambivalence I have been discussing. On one hand, history is a maze of entrapments for the subject forced to inhabit it; on the other, it leads the doctors astray, providing protection for the subject's vulnerabilities. "My secret is what makes me desirable to you, my secret is what makes me strong. . . . Sealed in my chest of treasures, lapped in dark blood, it tramps its blind round and will not die" (49-50). As we shall increasingly discover, Dawn's resistance to his therapists' attempts to explain him is representative of larger things in the Coetzee *oeuvre*. If *Dusklands* is mainly diagnostic and critical in emphasis, however, though not absolutely conclusive either—these considerations are carefully placed in Dawn's closing line, "I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am"—it also finds a minor corner in which to position a different, displaced narrative subject, one which will develop and steadily find its own voice, or voices, in the corpus as a whole.

Magda is the first of the displaced subjects in Coetzee. She is, among other things, a "spinster with a locked diary" fighting against becoming "one of the forgotten ones of history" (3). The drama of *Heart of the Country* lies precisely in her attempts to find and speak a life for herself in such conditions, a life in which all the usual forms of exchange or relationship—from ordinary forms of family bonding and sociability to marriage into colonial structures of kinship—seem either inauthentic or simply unavailable. But I shall reserve this aspect of Coetzee's authorial struggle with the filiative structures of colonialism for another occasion.

Notes

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1 I have presented this argument more fully in "The Problem of History in the Fiction of J. M. Coetzee," forthcoming in a collection of critical essays on South African literary culture of the seventies and eighties, edited by Martin Trump (Ravan Press), and in *Poetics Today*.

2 In "Samuel Beckett and the Temptations of Style" (1973) Coetzee brings together a range of studies of Beckett from his Ph. D dissertation--a stylistic analysis of Beckett's English fiction-- and from articles on *Murphy* and *Watt* (later, Coetzee writes on "Lessness" from the *Residua*), in order to examine the movement expression-negation as it recurs (and is progressively refined) in Beckett. The pattern is explored in terms of metaphor, syntax and finally, Beckett's version of reflexive consciousness, which revolts irevocably against its own conventions.

3 My essay on the problem of history in Coetzee's fiction makes an attempt to read some of the influence of these linguistic movements, and to relate them to the various forms of historiographical and literary revisionism in South Africa in the seventies. In Coetzee's brief memoir on his experience

in the graduate program at Texas in the late sixties, he speaks of the effect of universal grammar (mentioning Chomsky and Jerrold Katz) on his early ambitions as a writer, in ways that suggest that it initiated the drift in Coetzee's work away from realism; this trend was of course reinforced by other reading during the seventies, especially French structuralism.

[4] Fredric Jameson, explaining his sense of the logical development of his interests from Sartre to Marxist dialectics, has said, "it has always seemed to me that an intense awareness of one's individual existence serves to provoke and to exacerbate an equally strong and painful sense of what transcends it, in particular of what we call History" (*The Ideologies of Theory , Essays: 1971-1986, Vol. 1: Situations of Theory* xxviii).

[5] The extent to which Coetzee was grappling with the problems of filiation as they pertain specifically to *novelistic discourse* can be guaged by an article which appears between the publication of the first two novels, entitled simply "The First Sentence of Yvonne Burgess's *The Strike* " (1976). Since the institutionalisation of structuralism, some of its arguments have become fairly commonplace, but they were radical at the time. Reading the codes of the Novel from the first line of Burgess's work, Coetzee argues that the book reaffirms a "social and characterological typology" that ultimately assists in the consolidation of a "class bond" (48) between readers and writers, and readers and readers. Coetzee's own choice of first-person narration is in opposition to this effect. This critique is not based primarily on structuralist models at this stage. The sources are surrealism, Beckett--*The Unnamable* --John Barth, Borges, and the Prague School. Coetzee's models for the presentation of consciousness in fiction go back firstly to Ford Madox Ford, the subject of Coetzee's 300-page M. A. thesis written for the University of Cape Town in 1962-1963. Ford called himself and his camp "impressionists," referring to the attempt to present consciousness directly, as it were. Later, once again, Beckett is influential: consider the opening sentences of *Molloy* : "I am in my mother's room. It's I who live there now. I don't know how I got there." Like Dawn in Part V of "The Vietnam Report," Molloy is writing his story as a quasi-diagnostic exercise, attended to by doctors. Molloy's opening lines also parallel Dawn's last: "I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am."

[6] For example, Michael Vaughan describes the two-part structure of *Dusklands* as defining a mode of consciousness which he calls "Northern European Protestant," which, although having a racial-historical origin, is nevertheless "identical" in both contexts ("Literature and Politics" 123); similarly, Peter Knox-Shaw argues that the two-part structure involves the attempt to "universalise from the particular" ("A Metaphysics of Violence" 35).

[7] In the later Penguin edition Coetzee dates the writing of "The Vietnam Report, "1972-73." This is not done in the first Ravan Press edition of 1974. Clearly, by the mid-eighties, Coetzee was concerned that the first part of *Dusklands* should be read in context, at least by metropolitan readers.

[8] There was a "New Life Hamlet" project undertaken in the context of RD (Revolutionary, or Rural Development) strategies in Vietnam (a sub-strategy of what was actually called, with Conradian overtones, "pacification"), a project to recreate the traditional hamlet in order to encourage resistance to the infiltration of the Vietcong in South Vietnam (Armbruster 377-385). In Chomsky's *The Backroom Boys* , a number of similar though rather more jaunty titles for operations are given: Phoenix, Rolling Thunder, Speedy Express, Sunrise. Coetzee is allowing history to provide the terms of its own allegorial explanation. Further parodic connections with actual war-time documents are illustrated later.

[9] It is perhaps important to note that in Spengler the cyclicity of history, which Dovey traces to Vico (67), does not imply the regeneration of any single culture. This negativity to which Coetzee is responsive ought not to be confused with the potentially hegemonic notion of cyclic *repetition* .

[10] In *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, Linda Hutcheon discusses the ambivalence in parody between "conservative repetition and revolutionary difference" (77). The conservative element involves parody's implied respect for tradition, which must qualify the claim, based on popular wisom, that parody and satire are interchangeable terms. Coetzee's use of parody is complex and changing, when considered in the light of Hutcheon's analysis. The parodic radicalism of the early fiction is surely a given. At this stage, Coetzee's critique goes well beyond the bitterness of satire. In later fiction, however, the parodied texts, such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxana*, apart from becoming more literary, are also treated more respectfully. The changing forms of parody in Coetzee provide another useful way of describing the shift from filiation to affiliation in the *oeuvre*. Needless to say, in the early fiction at least (up to an including *Barbarians*), Coetzee does not share in that aspect of postmodernism described by Jameson as the replacement of parody by the less acute mode of pastiche ("Postmodernism, Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" 64). The term pastiche does not seem appropriate for the later fiction either, but for different reasons.

[11] Edward Said notices the explicitly congruent interests of traditional anthropology and the U. S. Department of Defence, in "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors."

[12] Despite the Tet offensive, Kahn argues that the phases toward victory projected in late 1967 by General Westmoreland were not completely off target (198-203); looking back on the earlier part of the war from 1973 (the explicit "present"), Dawn follows in broad outline the phases predicted by Westmoreland (19). Kahn discusses the importance of charisma in unifying people (219-220); Dawn reflects at some length on this factor in the programming of broadcast propaganda (21-22). Raymond Gastil discusses the weaknesses of U. S. propaganda, mentioning specifically the *chieu hoi* program (89-90); Dawn does likewise (21). Kahn bemoans the fact that too few people realise that in Vietnam, "if a man picks up a rifle and fires it at you, he is almost never a farmer who simply decided to shoot at you, but a full-time guerilla pretending for the moment to be a farmer" (xi); Dawn quotes a member of an assassination squad as saying, "'At a hundred yards who can tell one slope from another? You can only blow his head off and hope.'" (24).

[13] Coetzee uses the term "mythographic" in reference to white nationalist history in "Man's Fate in the Novels of Alex La Guma," published in the same year as *Dusklands*.

[14] This essay was subsequently reproduced in N. A. Coetzee's compendious (600-page) volume of Coetzee-genealogy, published in commemoration of 300 years of the Coetzees in South Africa, *Die Stamouers Coetzee en Nageslagte*. I am grateful to Catherine Glenn for showing me this volume, and for alerting me to *Bouvard et Pécuchet*.

[15] A word on nomenclature. When the context of discussion implies a protagonist's (or historical subject's or historian's) perspective, I will use the corresponding terms, i.e. Hottentot, Bushman, Namaqua; when I switch, rarely, from the language of criticism to that of history, I will use more acceptable terminology, i.e. Khoi or San.

[16] In Peter Kohler's interesting essay "Freeburghers, the Nama and the politics of the frontier tradition," which tries to read Coetzee's narrative symptomatically (i.e. following Althusser and Macherey), using the resources of social history and revisionist historiography, Coetzee is criticised for replicating uncritically the frontier hypothesis, with its emphasis on race, which is characteristic of both liberal and white nationalist accounts of conflict in the political economy of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The argument breaks down, however, because Coetzee's reflexivity and parodic intentions are not sufficiently recognised (despite discussion of the "ironic mask"). Coetzee's constructions find more immediate connection with the contemporary critique of colonial discourse (though they also predate this critique), which emphasises, following Fanon, its racially and culturally

Manichean tendencies (see Abdul JanMohamed, *Manichean Aesthetics* and "The Economy of Manichean Allegory" in *Critical Inquiry*. In the article, JanMohamed mentions *Barbarians*, but he also makes the mistake of assuming that Coetzee's use of "the Manichean allegory" is uncritical.

17 Again, in these descriptions of frontier terror, Coetzee is simply giving narrative content to what was, indeed, a policy of genocide. In the records I have not found any descriptions of procedure, as it were, of which Coetzee's version might be a parodic copy, but there are any number of reports of raids on camps, with numbers shot (usually men) or captured (usually women and children). In his journal of 1809, Colonel Collins reports meeting with one commando leader who could account for 3,200 dead, and another for 2,700 (Moodie V. 7). Coetzee's version, it must be said, refuses the palliative of third-person objectification that statistics like these offer, providing us instead with the implicated subject.

18 Dovey notes the emphasis on categorical difference, and the parodic implications of this passage (86-89), but what I call here the fiction of self-assertion, undermined in the movement of the narrative, stands in Dovey for attempts by the *narrating self* to erect itself into autonomy. In my argument, this view has post-Romantic, universalist implications and therefore undervalues both the ethical dimension and the contextual strength of the fiction.

19 Dawn's earlier reflections on the authority of print (14-15), as compared with other forms of the sign, ought not to be allegorised wholly into a statement about signification only, since the context has to do with force and its function as attempted self-validation.

20 I find it difficult to take seriously Dovey's decision to read the novel both backwards and forwards, ingenious as her findings are. We can agree that interpretation is productive, without this licensing a capricious re-modelling of the narrative construction.

21 This "Coetzee," as head of the Mythography section, is a silent apologist for scientific positivism in *Dusklands*. How do we interpret the biographical echo? In the novel, the "author" function has been replaced by the manager and translator of extant documents. It might be that J. M. Coetzee is ironising the apparently free agency implied by such a role, by associating it with the obviously interested "objectivity" of the fictional Coetzee.

22 Dovey misreads this episode as a lancing, whereas in fact it is a milking of corrupted flesh. She does so in order to make of it a motif of penetration, linked with Dawn's stabbing of his son, representing allegorically the "poetic gesture of 'ontological self-sufficiency'" (citing Coetzee's essay on Achterberg), or the "initial phase in . . . an increasingly radical declaration of textual independence" (97). This is, I believe, a strong, inaccurate reading.

23 There has been unnecessary confusion over the fact that Klawer's death seems to occur twice. A simple distinction is required between narrative elements and their treatment or presentation--between *sujet* and *fabula*. On the first occasion, Klawer goes to his death downriver only in the sense that it is at this point that the narrator Jacobus Coetzee writes him off; within a paragraph, we read Coetzee's weary description of Klawer's fever, the result of the accident. When Coetzee leaves him to die shortly afterwards, he lingers sentimentally on the moment of their parting for the purpose of self-aggrandisement. Thus it is only in the narrator's manipulative treatment of events that Klawer "dies twice." A proper repetition of narrative elements--with a range of other postmodernist devices--is developed fully only in *Heart of the Country*.

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