

**Aspects of Time and Narrative
in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee**

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ABSTRACT

Building on the approaches of critics such as David Attwell, and starting from the premise that the concepts of time and narrative are inextricably linked, this thesis aims to show how J.M. Coetzee's fictional narratives are concerned with the effects of historical time on both the characters of the novels and on the novels themselves; that is, more generally speaking, on literature. The study analyzes the novels paying attention to their juxtaposition of literature and history and the tension between these two discourses. Coetzee tries to establish the legitimacy of a fictional, artistic time and space opposed to the violence of historical time and space. In so doing, he reveals the ironic dependence of literature on history as well as the metaphysical and ethical need for the continuing presence of literature in history. The novels are examined in sequence, allowing for illumination of trends and developments in Coetzee's fiction. The first chapter shows how Dusklands is concerned with breaking down, mainly through parody, the oppressive structures that Coetzee finds in historical time. The second and third, on In the Heart of the Country and Waiting for the Barbarians respectively, discuss how the novels oppose history thematically and formatically. The chapters on Life and Times of Michael K and Foe show characters escaping the restrictive terms of history, and how the novels establish a "fictional realm". The Age of Iron chapter examines more closely the authority of this realm, and notes that the novel issues a plea for the continuation of fictional time and its potential for liberation. The previous five novels all express, ironically enough, reservations about the possible dependence of art or literature on history. The Master of Petersburg, so the chapter argues, takes the trend to its logical conclusion and offers a somewhat ironic look at the ethics of fiction writing.

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1. INTRODUCTION: Time and Narrative

[T]he picture of myself marching to the fray - I, with my craving for privacy, my distaste for crowds, for slogans, my almost physical revulsion against obeying orders, I who by dint of utterly uncharacteristic, single-minded cunning had got through four years of high school without doing military drill - the picture was simply comic.

Why that revulsion? I can only say that violence and death, are to me, intuitively, the same thing. Violence, as soon as I sense its presence within me, becomes introverted as violence against myself: I cannot project it outward. I am unable to, or refuse to, conceive of a liberating violence. ... [I]f all of us imagined violence as violence against ourselves, perhaps we would have peace. (Whether peace is what we most deeply want is another story.) ... I understand the Crucifixion as a refusal and an introversion of retributive violence, a refusal so deliberate, so conscious, and so powerful that it overwhelms any reinterpretation ... that we can give to it. J.M. Coetzee. Doubling the Point.

A poem is an object fashioned out of the language, rhythms, beliefs, and obsessions of a poet and a society. It is the product of a definite history and a definite society, but its historical mode of existence is contradictory. The poem is a device which produces anti-history, even though this may not be the poet's intention. The poetic process inverts and converts the passage of time; the poem does not stop time - it contradicts and transfigures it. Octavio Paz. Children of the Mire.

The history of humanity and the history of the novel are two very different things. The former is not man's to determine, it takes over like an alien force he cannot control, whereas the history of the novel (or of painting, of music) is born of man's freedom, of his wholly personal creations, of his own choices. The meaning of an art's history is opposed to the meaning of history itself. Because of its personal nature, the history of an art is a revenge by man against the impersonality of the history of humanity. Milan Kundera. Testaments Betrayed.

The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves. J.M. Coetzee. Waiting for the Barbarians.

I first discovered the novelist J.M. Coetzee in an unusual way. In an undergraduate psychology class we were asked to undertake a project which was to find a "problematic" character from a novel and design a "cure" for our patient, using a particular therapeutic approach. I had heard of a novel called Life and Times of Michael K and thought it sounded ideal. I was interested in Behavioural Psychology and thought that an uneducated man who would not eat would be a fit subject. The project floundered as soon as I realised that what Michael considered as a reward was precisely not to eat, or at least, not to eat "camp" food. (I realised later that I had taken an approach to Michael which was similar to the medical officer's.)

What fascinated me about that novel was the enigma that is Michael. I did not know what to do with him and yet I knew he had an important meaning, for want of a better term. I was perhaps fascinated by his weakness, his embrace of weakness and complete and powerful rejection of all that deals in power. To a large extent this is still what attracts me to Coetzee's novels.

Later, I realised that studying this enigma through the theme of time might prove illuminating. All the novels thematise time in one way or another, and given the tendency of art to exist in a different time frame than the world - after all, when one reads a novel, for instance, one is immediately outside the world, inside another realm - this might be one of the sites where this enigmatic contest is played out.

Often Coetzee depicts people suffering under the weight of historical time, and trying to escape that weight. If there are two passages that are central to Coetzee's entire oeuvre they

could well be the following two. The first, from Waiting for the Barbarians, depicts both the violence of historical time and the complicity with this time of the narrator:

What has made it impossible for us to live in time like fish in water, like birds in air, like children? It is the fault of Empire! Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe. Empire dooms itself to live in history and plot against history. One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era. By day it pursues its enemies.... By night it feeds on images of disaster... A mad vision yet a virulent one: I ... am no less infected with it than the faithful Colonel Joll as he tracks the enemies of Empire through the boundless desert (1980:133).

The second, from Life and Times of Michael K, depicts a person escaping historical time:

He had kept no tally of the days nor recorded the changes of the moon. He was not a prisoner or a castaway, his life by the dam was not a sentence that he had to serve out.... [H]e was learning to love idleness, idleness no longer as stretches of freedom reclaimed by stealth here and there from involuntary labour, surreptitious thefts to be enjoyed sitting on his heels before a flower-bed with the fork dangling between his fingers, but as a yielding up of himself to time, to a time flowing slowly like oil from horizon to horizon over the face of the world, washing over his body, circulating in his armpits and his groin, stirring his eyelids.... He could lie all afternoon with his eyes open, staring at the corrugations in the roof-iron and the tracings of rust; his mind would not wander, ... all that was moving was time, bearing him onward in its flow. Once or twice the other time in which the war had its existence reminded itself to him as the jet fighters whistled high overhead. But for the rest he was living beyond the reach of calendar and clock in a blessedly neglected corner, half awake, half asleep (1983:115-6).

Much of the enigmatic quality of Coetzee's writing and its force,

as I came to see it, is a result of the "opposition" between historical and a-historical time. I shall return to this later in the introduction.

J.M. Coetzee has received much critical attention in the twenty-two years since the publication of his first novel, Dusklands. He is widely regarded as one of the finest novelists South Africa has to offer, along with Nadine Gordimer and Andre Brink, and has won numerous South African and international awards and citations¹ for his fiction.

Most of the criticism to date has been appreciative in one way or another, as Jonathan Crewe was in his review of Dusklands in 1974, published in Contrast. He hailed the novel as the first "modern", in the sense of "modernist", novel in South Africa (91), and praised its "revelations about man's nature" (92).

It would be impossible to do a complete survey of the criticism on his work, since there has been so much. Thus, this introduction will concentrate on more recent studies, and those which are particularly relevant to this thesis.

The criticism, certainly in the 1970s and 1980s, tended to revolve around the simple question of whether Coetzee was doing his duty as a South African novelist by paying due attention to historical circumstances around him. I believe the argument is not particularly useful in 1997. However, for the purposes of setting out my own position, I shall briefly explain the debate.

¹ These include the CNA, the Geoffrey Faber Memorial, the James Tait Black Memorial, the Jerusalem, and the Booker prizes, the Prix Etranger Femina, and the Sunday Express Book of the Year Award.

In the 1970s and 1980s especially, some South African critics were suspicious of his obvious post-structuralist and post-modernist leanings, and uneasy relation to the historical forces of the time. For instance, Peter Knox-Shaw, writing in 1982, calls Dusklands "existentialism of the armchair" (117), and concludes his article on the novel by saying that

It is regrettable that a writer of such considerable and varied talents should play down the political and economic aspects of history in favour of a psychopathology of Western life (118).

Similarly, Michael Vaughan in his essay "Literature and politics: Currents in South African Writing in the 1970s" (1982) berates Coetzee for not paying attention to the material interests of colonialism.

Michael Chapman, another South African critic, writes that

The danger of the post-structural approach, of course, is an endless deferral of moral consequence which, in the agonized society, can merely provoke the impatience of those for whom reality is less an elusive signifier, more a crack on the head with a police truncheon (1996:389).

These critics have been swayed by an activist, moralistic, moralising view of the duty of a writer in an "agonised society". Instead of asking why he does what he does, they analyze the fiction in terms of what it should be doing - that is, in terms of its role as an (in)effective historical agent. Perhaps all critics are guilty of this to a certain extent, and, in what Chapman calls an agonized society, it is quite easy to do this. Yet, it is a mode of criticism which pre-judges literature and,

quite simply, reduces it to the status of a mere object of history².

Another reductive approach taken by some South African critics, although not as common, was the liberal-humanist approach. Still believing that Coetzee is fundamentally a political writer, Lionel Abrahams, writing in 1982 in his essay "Soft Man in Hard Times", sees Waiting for Barbarians as a work that impresses with its "urgency of commitment" (83). Coetzee is described as "a man with a vision" (83), and this vision is expressed in this "fable about perennial moral and political issues", with a "South African provenance to the thinking" (88). Abrahams describes that provenance in the following manner: Coetzee enables the reader to see the "civilized moderates", the "sole trustees of human value", behind the "hard black men" and "hard white men" (88) who come into direct opposition over apartheid. Abrahams calls the Magistrate a soft man, by which he means a liberal (86). So, in his reading, the novel promotes liberal-humanism and liberal values. But it is also possible to read the novel in precisely the opposite manner - as a critique of those values, a critique which points to their complicity with the dominant political hierarchy; after all the magistrate does recognize himself as another side of Imperial rule. In fact, when one considers the full corpus of novels, it would appear to make far more sense to read them as carefully qualified critiques of

² These critics tended to be of a Marxist persuasion, though obviously did not lean towards Herbert Marcuse's view (expressed in The Aesthetic Dimension: Toward a Critique of Marxist Aesthetics) that "art is largely autonomous *vis à vis* the given social relations" (1978:ix) and that "the political potential of art lies only in its aesthetic dimension" (xii).

the world-view that is liberal-humanism³ - I have in mind Life and Times of Michael K especially.

As a way of demonstrating the poverty of these politically-based debates, it will suffice to refer the reader back to the quotation from Waiting for the Barbarians. It demonstrates the ambiguity of history in Coetzee's fiction and the difficulty of extracting a monolithic approach to it based on some political ideology. Although Coetzee seems at times almost overly concerned with history, he is, quite simply, not a "historical writer" in the sense that these critics would like him to be.

For a long time it was left to American and European critics, along with a few South Africans, to recognize that both historical-materialist and liberal-humanist criticisms of the novels were somewhat reductive. A typical approach is summarised by Richard Penner in his Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J.M. Coetzee, when he says the following:

If Coetzee does not provide political solutions or a direct call to action to resolve South Africa's enormous problems, it is because he is striking at a more fundamental problem - the psychological, philosophical, and linguistic bases of the colonial dilemma (1989:xiv).

This approach was initiated a decade ago by Stephen Watson, in his essay "Colonialism and the Novels of J.M. Coetzee" (1986), and is also located in more recent articles and studies by critics such as Teresa Dovey, Susan Gallagher, David Attwell, Rita Barnard, Michael Moses, and Benita Parry, each of which I

³ It might be worth bearing in mind also, a comment by Lionel Trilling to the effect that no major twentieth-century novelist has endorsed liberal-humanist values.

shall examine. Grouping these critics together is in no way meant to imply that their arguments are similar, although obviously in some cases they are. What they do have in common, though, is an attempt to go beyond the terms of the political debate. Naturally enough, some are more successful than others.

* Watson's essay recognizes the importance of history to the novels (both as theme and structuring factor), but also contains evidence of an attempt to formulate the terms in which Coetzee's fiction operates in a more useful way than the materialist or humanist critics.[^] The concluding paragraph indicates the shift away from people like Knox-Shaw, Vaughan and Chapman, and as such it would be useful to quote it in full. Watson claims that

the unique focus that emerges in his novels is ... definitely grounded in a certain historical position. What is more, Coetzee himself is not unaware of this. In one or other respect, his novels self-consciously and ironically call attention to themselves as the work of a certain type of intellectual and certain type of colonizer. If this does seem to entail an ambivalence in his focus, one which is perhaps unavoidable, then it also allows him a perspective which is often ignored: namely, that South Africa is part and parcel of a global historical process and that a certain mentality or mental structure which goes hand in hand with it is still rampant, here and elsewhere.* He has provided more insight into the colonizing mind, as well as the dissenting colonizing mind, than any of his contemporaries.* Even if this were not enough, there remains that passionate hunger in all four of Coetzee's novels*to escape the warped relationships that colonialism fosters. Nobody has given a more forceful expression to this hunger; and thereby delivered a more powerful protest against all that the historical phenomenon entails (1986:392).

* Watson recognizes that Coetzee is interested in, or is motivated by, history as both discourse and event.[^] He also recognizes in Coetzee an essential ambivalence which allows him a "perspective which is often ignored", and a passionate hunger to escape the

terms of the historical process and product of colonialism, often coupled with an awareness of the dangers of an "a-historical" life. As Watson writes,

the ["colonizer who refuses"] is both inside and outside time. Unlike the majority of the colonized who are entirely involved in the world of their struggles, the world of becoming, and have no possible choice in this matter, this type of person is half in the world of being, only half in the world of becoming. He cannot fail to feel the wrench of history pulling him in one direction and, simultaneously, the opposing pull of a world of contemplation where time is cyclical and knows no interruptions. What is more, it would seem to be part of the essence of his position that he often cannot decide in favour of one or other mode of being. If he chooses contemplation, history will not cease to remind him of his irresponsibility and guilt. If he decides to act, to enter history, the world of being that he has necessarily left behind will continue to be present to him in the form of an inner hollowness (386).

Other critics, myself included, agree that is a central issue in the novels - especially the earlier ones. In my study, though, I see the figure of the colonizer who refuses as a type of artist figure. The later novels seem to indicate that colonialism as such becomes less important to Coetzee and what is often played out in his novels is a contest between art and history.

To return, though, to earlier critics; Teresa Dovey published the first book-length study of the novels, The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories. This ground-breaking study sees the novels as "criticism-as-fiction or fiction-as-criticism" (1988a:9) in that the fiction inhabits models and theories (sub-genres) in a deconstructive way. She attempts to change the focus of criticism from that which sees the novels as offering a critique of the political circumstances in South Africa to one which offers a critique of modes of writing.

She further qualifies her approach by claiming that the novels are "(Lacanian) psychoanalytic criticism as fiction" (11) in that Coetzee's allegorical writing

deliberately incorporates the paradigm of the Lacanian subject in a way which draws attention to its own genesis in the unconscious (11),

as well as by claiming that Coetzee incorporates Lacanian theory in a way which is profoundly innovative. This recognition makes the study as important for students of Lacan as for students of Coetzee.

After Dovey's study, it was more difficult to read the novels as hermetic reactions to a South African context. However, as David Attwell points out in his study, she errs on another extreme. To a large extent she ignores the historical tension in the fiction, as well as, I would say, its ambivalent relation to post-structuralism. In Attwell's words again, she makes Coetzee into a supplement to Lacan (1993:2).

Susan Gallagher's A Story of South Africa: J.M. Coetzee's Fiction in Context, claims to examine how the novels respond to a "variety of social, cultural, and rhetorical contexts from which the novels emerge and in which they participate" (1991:x). However, these contexts remain largely those of South African history, and, generally, her study was critically out of date when published in 1991.

Attwell's J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing is the latest book-length study of the novels, and is important to my own critical work. He situates Coetzee's fiction in "the nexus of history and text" by which he means "they

explore the tensions between these polarities" (2-3). In a way, all novels are situated in this nexus, but according to Attwell, Coetzee foregrounds the relation between them. The novels are thus forms of "situational metafiction, with a particular relation to the cultural and political discourses of South Africa in the 1970s and 1980s" (3). He goes on to say that

Coetzee's figuring of the tension between text and history is itself a historical act, one that must be read back into the discourses of South Africa where one can discern its illuminating power (3).

The novels are thus "worldly". Coetzee, though, draws attention to the questions of agency, power and authority, which he examines rigorously, according to Attwell. The latter goes on to say that one of the most pressing problems Coetzee faces is that of cultural authority, given his familiar relationship with canonic European and American literatures. Coetzee's response is to "interrogate the specific form of marginality he represents" (4), revealing or acknowledging his own limited authority.

Whereas a writer like Nadine Gordimer might believe that "narrative discourse inhabits the writer", Attwell claims that Coetzee "inhabits narrative discourse" (13 Attwell's emphasis). However, Attwell points out

to argue that the writer inhabits narrative discourse, ... is not to appeal to some ethereal realm above or beyond the social process, for Coetzee's position implies that narrative itself is itself a historical product, existing in tension with other discourses of the moment that are also the products of history and the bearers of culture (13).

From such a position Attwell asks what forms of self-definition are available within the culture to the writer, "whose

relationship to society rests on the way in which he or she transmits the discourses of fiction" (13). Attwell correctly claims that Coetzee is not simply a writer who occupies the text side of the textuality/historicity debate (as Gordimer is not narrowly realist or historicist), but moves in both. The historical narrative that is established by Coetzee's oeuvre is that of colonialism, says Attwell, and it is this historical discourse that Coetzee's fiction is largely concerned with.

Attwell's questions and formulations are indeed pertinent, and more subtle and less moralising than certain earlier critics. I see my position as being similar, and, in many ways, this thesis is an extension, elaboration and development of Attwell's study, as his was an extension and development of other studies (such as Watson's).

Let me briefly elaborate one or two points of difference, though these will hopefully become clearer later in the introduction and in the body of this study. Attwell's tension between history and text becomes, in my thesis, a more violent opposition (between history and writing, or art, generally), and this opposition is an act that postulates a different form of authority, a different form of agency (albeit a marginal form) - a fictional, artistic form. I do not use the word "violent" unadvisedly. I refer the reader to the epigraphs, and especially to my chapters on Waiting for the Barbarians and The Master of Petersburg. The violent contest is not played out in the world. Art is engaged in an internal struggle to survive the onslaught of history, and Coetzee plays out the struggle in his novels in an attempt to find a place from which to speak, legitimately,

about the role of art, and about history, as an artist struggling to be untainted by the violence of history.

In my attempts to define the time and space of art, Attwell and others might well accuse me of appealing to some ethereal realm outside history. In many ways I do appeal to another realm, as I believe Coetzee does. Narrative might be a historical product, as might be the attempt to establish another realm of existence, but this realm in Coetzee is perhaps more metaphysical than material, utopian rather than social, fictional rather than historical.

Moreover, I would argue that the basic narrative underlying the novels is not only or even predominantly colonialism. While that narrative is undoubtedly important to the earlier novels, it would be a difficult exercise to read the context of colonialism into The Master of Petersburg (published after Attwell's study) - perhaps as difficult as it would be to read colonialism into Patrick White's The Solid Mandala, or Kazuo Ishiguro's The Remains of the Day, for instance. That discourse would seem to have such a tenuous link, if at all, to the novel, that it would seem short-sighted to read it into the operations of the text. A basic orientation that underlies the texts is rather a repulsion towards (and a fascination with) all forms of authoritarian power.

Two collections of essays on Coetzee have appeared recently. The South Atlantic Quarterly devoted a special issue to him in 1994, and in 1996 Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee appeared. The latter contains several older, influential essays on Coetzee, (such as the Knox-Shaw and the Watson articles) as well as

previously unpublished papers. One of these demonstrates another angle on Coetzee that requires discussion, that which interprets Coetzee within a postcolonial paradigm.

Benita Parry, a post-colonial critic, in her essay "Speech and Silence in the Fictions of J.M. Coetzee", recognizes that the novels attempt to take both history as discourse and as event into account. In other words, she starts from similar premises to Attwell. However, Parry's argument shows her to be stuck in the "political-or-not-political" framework, and harks back to the arguments of Vaughan, Chapman, and so on. She claims that

despite the fictions' disruption of colonialist modes, the social authority on which their rhetoric relies and which they exert is grounded in the cognitive systems of the West (39).

The West, in short, remains the "culture of reference" (39). Her argument, as I read it, takes the following procedure: she defines Coetzee as an anti-colonial writer, then proceeds to define what the approach of this type of writing should be, and then points out where Coetzee falls short - an interpretive paradigm which is as dysfunctional as trying to explain why a game of soccer is nonsensical because it is not played according to the rules of rugby. In short, she, like many other post-colonial critics, appears to want Coetzee to be a "supplement" to post-colonialism (and perhaps her own critical agenda).

Parry forgets that Coetzee is a novelist, not a politician, and that a novelist does not have to be a politician. I, on the other hand, am concerned with the meanings of Coetzee's novelistic art, with the way it, like all art, characteristically attempts to rival the very bases of historical discourses.

Michael Valdez Moses and Rita Barnard appear to share this concern.

Moses, in his essay, "Solitary Walkers: Rousseau and Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K (1994), notes that in Coetzee, the

very oppressiveness [of the political world] may provoke a quest for an alternative realm of radical freedom and autonomous solitude (153).

He finds in this novel evidence of this quest and locates this fiction in an

intermediate state halfway between the non-linguistic world of the unmediated reverie and the authoritative world of politics and history (153).

In other words, his is an attempt to define a place for the novels outside that authoritative and authoritarian world of politics and history.

Barnard attempts something similar in her "Dream Topographies: J.M. Coetzee and the South African Pastoral" (1994). She points to Coetzee's concern with space and landscape and suggests this might be a way of challenging the "explanatory privilege of historicism" (34), much in the manner of pastoral. In her words, Coetzee is concerned with "how people inhabit, how they imagine, and how they represent the physical terrain that surrounds them" (34). She evokes the concept "dream topography", which refers to a "social dreamwork", a spatial concept that is not simply a "sense of place", but a "sense of discursive and cultural maps" (46). Hers is an attempt, as I read it, to show that Coetzee attempts to restore authority to the romantic notion

of the imagination as a way of challenging historicity.

These two critics recognize something important that others often seem to have missed or downplayed. Coetzee is not an uncomplicated poststructural, postmodern, postcolonial novelist. There are tensions and contradictions in his work that run counter to these conceptions. For instance, he could also be seen as a modern romantic in his longings for a time of pastoral bliss, or romantic alienation from the world. These longings and predispositions are ironised in his fiction, but not entirely, as the thesis will make clear. Moreover, his ethical concerns, conspicuous throughout, mean that his work often has strong relations to the (great) realist tradition.

What complicates matters still further, is that the novels are a type of (anti-history), as is all art. As numerous commentators⁴ from Nietzsche to Kundera have noted, art produces anti-history. Octavio Paz also notes this in one of the epigraphs to this study. His comments are more to do with poetry, but can be applied to art generally. As will be discussed in greater detail below, art seems to exist in circular, spatialized time (see philosophers such as David Harvey and Gaston Bachelard), as opposed to history which partakes of developmental, chronological time, which often manifests itself as that jagged time of rise and fall - a time which violently fragments itself (according to Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, for example).

Part of the enigmatic quality of Coetzee's writings, as I

⁴ Rather than present the arguments of the following philosophers in the introduction, I shall do so in the chapters themselves where the specifics of their arguments are enlarged upon in the context of my own.

have already suggested, is a result of characters (such as Magda, the Magistrate, the Medical Officer, Michael K, Susan, and Elizabeth Curren) who seem to desire a different mode of being, a different manner of living in time. They recognize the violence and injustices of history and desire something else. Often, however, this other time, or type of existence, is not open to them because of their participation in and subjection to historical time.

What should be remembered, obviously, is that these characters are only characters in a novel. They exist in narrative. Their vacillations and struggles are often mirrored by the novels themselves. The novels also try to escape historical time, and at times are compromised by it. However, what makes the novels generally more successful than their characters is their reliance on the medium of art - in this case narrative. And narrative, out of all the forms of discourse, is the one that is most concerned with time.

The focus of this study is necessarily broad given the nature of the aspects of the novels it will examine: time and narrative. The novels can be said to thematise and explore time and narrative, aspects that do not seem to have attracted much sustained critical attention, particularly as to how these aspects relate to his contribution to the art of the novel.

Time would seem to be an issue of particular concern with Coetzee; it is one to which he returns over and over again in his work. He indicates as much in an interview in Doubling the Point:

[A]frikaner Christian nationalism came to power and set about stopping or even turning back the clock. Its programs involved a radically discontinuous

intervention into time, in that it tried to stop dead, or turn around a range of developments normal (in the sense of being the norm) in colonial societies. It also aimed at instituting a sluggish no-time in which an already anachronistic order of patriarchal clans and tribal despotisms would be frozen in place. This is the political order in which I grew up. And the culture in which I was educated - a culture looking, when it looked anywhere, nostalgically back to Little England - did nothing to quicken time. So I am not surprised you detect in me a horror of chronicity South African style.

But that horror is also a horror of death ... Historicizing oneself is an exercise in locating one's significance, but it is also a lesson, at the most immediate level, in insignificance. It is not just time as history that threatens to engulf one: it is time itself, time as death (1992b:209).

Indeed all his novels bring into focus, in one way or another, what might be called the cultural, historical and existential dimensions to the experience of time, and how these times determine experience. Most of his characters reflect directly on time, and for them and others, many of their dilemmas can be seen to have important temporal components. Moreover, to go back to an earlier point, much of the enigma and power of Coetzee's protagonists, and the novels as a whole, has to do with the way they inhabit time. The novels also bring into focus the ability of fiction to reconfigure these times, and, thus, bring into focus how the novels situate themselves in opposition to a culturally and historically abject time.

Perhaps all novels are a type of anti-history; however, Coetzee's novels seem unusual in the degree to which they specifically foreground this anti-historical status. This, it should be added, is perhaps the critical difference between my own and Attwell's positions. Where Attwell sees the novels as foregrounding the examination of the tension between history and

text, I see them as foregrounding a more violent opposition between history and fiction, or, more generally, history and art, and, indeed, embodying this through their characters, settings, and narrative structures.

No doubt Coetzee's novels can be read as particular reactions to a historical context, and often a specifically South African one at that, but it is a reaction which seeks to transcend or escape the terms that history and historical circumstances tend to enforce (thus the thesis will contain very little in the way of historical contextualising). It is this refusal to submit to the "iron laws" of history, which will, according to Coetzee, allow his novels to establish their own fictional rules.

Coetzee himself has emphasised the degree to which the novel as a genre is under threat from the discourses of politics and history, and has underlined the importance of the autonomy of fiction in a talk given at the 1987 Weekly Mail Book Week. In it he discusses what he sees as the preferred role of the novel in relation to history, in particular the discourse(s) of politics. It is a novel that occupies an "autonomous place", a place of rivalry to history. Going on to explain this, he says that it is

a novel that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history (as a child's schoolwork is checked by a schoolmistress). In particular I mean a novel that evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process (and here is the point at which true rivalry, even enmity, perhaps enters the picture) perhaps going so far as to show up the mythic status of history - in other words demythologizing history. Can I be more specific? Yes: for example, a novel that is prepared to work itself out outside the terms of class

conflict, race conflict, gender conflict or any other of the oppositions out of which history and the historical disciplines erect themselves (Upstream 1988 vol.6[1]:3.).

The obvious question is whether there can be such a thing as an autonomous place in relation to history; certain critics, such as the historical-materialists would say not. In many ways the purpose of this thesis is to explore the validity of Coetzee's proposition as to the autonomy of this place, and, in doing so, to provide a more concentrated examination of the nature of this place and its central importance in Coetzee's work. Undeniably previous critics such as Moses, Barnard and Attwell, draw attention to it, but, if anything, underestimate its force and centrality in Coetzee's work.

Whether he is successful or not, Coetzee appears to value the novel for operating through and enabling a different mode of thought essentially opposed to a political/historical mode, as the above quotation indicates. Milan Kundera has also recently come to the defence of the novelistic art. In his long essay Testaments Betrayed he argues that a novel obtains its validity through its relation to the tradition, the history, of the novel. This history of the novel is in opposition to the history of humanity, in fact it is a form of revenge on the history of humanity (1996:15). The history of the novel is born of human freedom, says Kundera, whereas the history of humanity constrains and determines humanity (16), and if a novel is not representative of that freedom, then it is representative of the constraints of history. Kundera would include in the latter category novels like George Orwell's 1984 and social realist

texts, and would thus obviously include in this category many South African novels which have had programmatic or otherwise political motivations.

Kundera wishes for a space and time of understanding rather than condemnation and finds the place of this time in the novel. He writes that the novel is

a realm where moral judgement is suspended ... Suspending moral judgement is not the immorality of the novel; it is its morality. The morality that stands against the ineradicable human habit of judging instantly, ceaselessly, and everyone; of judging before, and in the absence of, understanding (7).

As this thesis will show, Coetzee has a similar conception of novelistic art.

Novelistic art is conducted through the medium of narrative. Narrative itself provides a way of comparing fiction and history. In his three-volume study, Time and Narrative (1984-88), Paul Ricoeur claims that historical and fictional narratives provide different accounts respectively of what it means to live in time. They are both, however, allegories of temporality. In the essay "Narrative Time", which sets out the basic principles of the above study, Ricoeur claims that temporality is that

structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity [is that] language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent (1980:169).

Both history and fiction are engaged in the practice of narration, and what they have in common is that both refer to something beyond themselves, beyond their narratives, and that is the structure of human time.

In this thesis I argue that Coetzee's fictional narratives re-order the experience of historical time. In other words, he creates in his fictional narratives an experience of time (which the thesis will analyze and define) that historical narratives attempt to exclude, and which various historicizing and politicizing critics have also excluded, or at least denied.

This study shows how, through paying particular attention to time and narrative, Coetzee attempts to carve out a particular time and place for himself in South African time, and how he makes use of various narrativistic, fictional practices which will allow the narrator and narrated (and by extension, perhaps, the reader) a degree of freedom within the indispensable, but often constrictive structures of narrativisation.

The thesis also raises the question of why Coetzee should wish to escape the hold of the historical discourses. Is Coetzee simply defending the status of art? Is he a Romantic artist caught in the late twentieth-century? If he is defending the status of art, then what, if any, human capacity is he concerned to protect, what effect does he want his art to have on the world? These questions will be answered more completely in the thesis itself. For now it must suffice to say that in many ways this thesis views his novels as defences of art, but the process is not "simple". Coetzee is deeply ambivalent about the time and space of fiction. Any conclusions he seems to reach are always heavily ironised. However, it is in this very irony that he obtains a position of heightened ethical awareness, a position that exists only in fiction. If life, in some small way, does imitate art, as Oscar Wilde would have it, then Coetzee's

position is not an escape from life at all; it is in fact the very condition of life.

The thesis will examine the novels in sequence. This will allow for an illumination of trends and developments in Coetzee's work. The first novel is mostly concerned with breaking down, within its narrative, the oppressive structures that Coetzee finds in historical time. The second and third examine the relation of the times of art and history, and try to establish themselves in artistic time. The next two show characters living outside of historical time, and establish the validity of the fictional, artistic realm. The next novel does this as well, and issues a plea for the continuation of this time and its potential for liberation. The latest novel takes an ironic look at the time and space of fiction, but in this irony finds a position of heightened ethical awareness.

At the outset of his career, Coetzee begins tentatively with Dusklands, published in 1974. Although innovative in South African literature at the time, as already suggested above, it is naturally only a beginning for Coetzee, and the novel follows an approach to time and narrative that Coetzee had to abandon if he was to create a time and place for himself in the determined sense of South African time: the novel works as a straight ironisation and deconstruction of certain Western metaphysical assumptions. The novel is an attempt to dislodge history from its pedestal. It succeeds in showing the fictional status of the discourse(s) of history, but it does not register the contest between history and art in all its ambivalence which is so

important to the later novels.

In the Heart of the Country is saturated with temporality. It takes time as a theme, and the structure of the novel is concerned with its own temporality. Magda's experience of a fragmentary sense of time is related to her fragmented sense of her own identity. I argue that Coetzee equates the colonial experience of time with a modernist experience of time. Art, though, seems to thrive in the disunified sense of time, and, ironically, seems to depend on it for its existence.

Waiting for the Barbarians, published in 1980, depicts a man trying to come to terms with the time of violence that is history. The novel, I claim, finds ways of asserting its authority over history. However, as is usual with Coetzee, there is another issue at stake. I argue that the novel, like the previous one, expresses misgivings about the possible, ironic, dependence of art on violent historical time.

In Life and Times of Michael K, not only does Coetzee show up the limitations of certain historical practices and temporal orientations, but he shows his character Michael escaping the physical and narratorial constraints set up around his time by history. I suggest that the novel does this as well. It is a novel which has established for itself a place outside the laws and constraints of history and issues in its own conclusions - it is subject to the laws of fiction. However, in one section of the novel, I argue that the time of history takes over control of the story. Even though Michael is successful in escaping the time of history, the author does not yet feel that he is completely able to do the same.

In the chapter on Foe I show how Susan's desire to make the island publicly known - in the form of a novel - leads to contradictions (portrayed in the narrative we read), which she cannot get around in narrative. The major contradiction or dilemma she faces is the question of what to do with Friday and the (apparent) loss of his tongue. It is noted how Susan (with Foe) vacillates between the ideological positions of either making or letting Friday speak. More importantly, the novel, as I argue, conducts the argument on a different level by creating an indeterminate time and space whose meaning is related to the indeterminacy of the private rather than to the determined, represented public. The suspended, structured present (that Susan creates and experiences) is made indeterminate, and this opens the way to the discovery of new times and spaces. Coetzee appears to be more confident, or at least has fewer reservations, about the authority of the time and space of fiction.

In my reading, Age of Iron, is primarily concerned with analyzing the particular state of the then present South Africa. Elizabeth Curren offers a warning, as I read it, about the time of the future, which she sees as being a simple repetition of the injustices of the past, that is, a straight substitution of one form of dominance for another. Her narrative, though, is a way of escaping this time, and is also a plea for the continuation of ^{the} liberating potential and potentialities of fiction.

The Master of Petersburg changes track slightly from the earlier novels, and offers the reader a picture of a (master) writer at work. I see this novel as being a study of the relation between a writer and his context (history being part of the

context), a relation I characterise as a contest. But what makes the novel of especial interest, in my view, is that it is a contest characterized by betrayal. The writer emerges as a type of Judas-figure, and the message of the text seems to be that to create is inevitably to destroy, to betray those around you. This might seem to be a step back from the achievements of the previous three novels. However, as I argue, this ironic, compromised, position that Coetzee takes is the only one that can restore some of the authority of art to the world. Appropriately enough, this novel can thus be seen as bringing my thematic concerns to a close.

Thus, the novels evince a movement from attacking the power structures of history, to establishing a legitimate place for themselves "outside" history, to an examination of the ethics of this position. It seems to me that this progression is both indicative, and a result, of a revulsion that the novels express, and that Coetzee has expressed (see the epigraphs to this thesis for example), towards forms of power, especially forms of authoritarian power. This revulsion and subsequent move away from the structures of power in the world is also indicative of a trend in Coetzee that, only recently, critics such as David Attwell, and especially Rita Barnard and Michael Moses have begun noticing; that is, his longing for (a place completely separate from the world (history) for his novels) - perhaps a Romantic notion, as Barnard and Moses would appear to be saying. But perhaps also a religious notion: a quest for a paradise of sorts, a quest conducted through a faith that there can be, will be something other than what we know, and perhaps also a faith that

is specific to the art of the novel.

2. DUSKLANDS: Colonialism and History

Colonialism and colonial historiography are undoubtedly the discourses under interrogation in Dusklands¹. American involvement in Vietnam and the colonisation of the Cape in the eighteenth-century serve as the context. For some critics the definite historical context makes Dusklands "directly answerable" to history². However, this argument is faulty since the novel makes it quite clear that it would like to, and attempts to, change history (in the second part of the novel the "translator" alters the "original" historical documents). It is not an historical novel (as in Sir Walter Scott, or in various social realist writers), and, using postmodernist strategies of parodic re-writing, it presents history's claim to truth in an ironic light.

This critique of history is extended into an examination of the effects that colonialism has on time generally. P a u l Ricoeur's basic hypothesis in Time and Narrative is that

time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative obtains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence (1984:52).

¹ Throughout this study I shall be using Edward Said's basic definitions of Imperialism and Colonialism as a starting point. In Culture and Imperialism he characterizes Imperialism as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory" and as "simply the process or policy of establishing or maintaining an empire". Colonialism is the implanting of settlements on distant territory" and is "almost always a consequence of imperialism" (1993:9).

² See my introduction for comments on Peter Knox-Shaw's article "Dusklands: A Metaphysics of Violence" (1982).

Narratives are allegories of temporality - they have temporality itself as their ultimate referent. That is, historical (and fictional) narratives tell us something about our experience of time, and have the ability to alter how we perceive time.

Ricoeur, in Time and Narrative, identifies the notion of "emplotment" which is common to both historical and fictional narrative. Emplotment configures events into a narrative, and it construes significant wholes out of scattered events. He draws a comparison between metaphor and plot. They are both characterized by semantic innovation where the resulting language produces something (some meaning) beyond itself. Both synthesise heterogenous "events" and produce something beyond the literal meaning of the sentences. Metaphors issue a "new semantic pertinence" from "the ruins of the semantic pertinence as it appears in a literal reading of the sentence" (1984:x). The plot is more than just the arrangement of events, it is the plan, the thought of the narrative. By selecting and arranging events in a particular way one can suggest relationships between events, where there perhaps were none to begin with. There is a design in plot beyond simple arrangement.

The O.E.D. defines the noun "plot" in three ways: it is the plan of main events in a novel (or poem or play), a conspiracy or secret plan, and a piece of ground. The first two are especially significant for Dusklands. Firstly, it is a plan of events - its conclusion is a natural result of its beginning and middle (within the individual premises of the novel, of course). Secondly, the words "secret" and "conspiracy" suggest deviance or betrayal: a plot is not always for the benefit of the people

it effects. In historical narratives this is true as well - histories are never ethically neutral³.

Dawn, Jacobus, S.J. and J.M. Coetzee are aware of the above. Dawn attempts to re-order the narrative structures of Vietnamese myths, Jacobus is concerned with the identity that a colonial narrative gives him, and J.M., by introducing parodic elements into the texts of his two ancestors (Jacobus and S.J. Coetzee), reveals the artificiality of apparently truthful narrative histories.

By parodying the narratives of history that lay claim to truth, Coetzee offers a critique of their claim to authority. The particular historical narrative that he focuses on is that of colonialism. What Coetzee discovers is that not only does colonialism fail in its attempt to represent (capture) the other, but it fails in its attempt to provide the coloniser with a coherent discourse with which to approach the world. In other words, the coloniser is as colonised by the discourse as are the colonial others.

Colonialism, in Coetzee's understanding, is a failed dialectic of self and other. At the outset of his career we can see that Coetzee has learnt the lessons of Hegel's master-slave dialectic, and both sections of the novel appear to rely on this. What Coetzee adds to it, though, is an awareness of how colonialism effects the experience of time in the colonizer and colonized, a theme which is present in the later novels as well.

³ A plot is also a space. Ricoeur considers emplotment as the act of reconfiguring temporality. The word "plot" adds a spatial dimension to this configuration. Later novels will develop in more depth the idea that narrative is also engaged in refiguring spatiality.

The title of the novel, like at least three of his other novels, contains a temporal reference. As in Age of Iron, the title registers decline. Since this novel deals overtly with the colonial project, the title refers to a decline in colonialism. This decline is located in latter-day, twentieth-century colonialism, as well as, ironically, in the time of colonialism's heroic expansion. Incidentally, Coetzee appears to place the present ("The Vietnam Project") before the past ("The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee"), in order to parody certain pretensions to heroism in the historically earlier phase. The divided, inward-looking, unstable, Western, contemporary self serves as an ironic comment on Jacobus Coetzee's possible status as one of the "heroes" who first "brought back news of what we had inherited" (Coetzee 1974:108). The beginning of the decline was registered even while colonialism was in the ascendancy.

The title also appears to refer to Nietzsche's The Twilight of the Idols (also translated as The Twilight of the Gods). No doubt this is an intertext to Dusklands. In the section "Expeditions of an Untimely Man", Nietzsche writes of the concept of freedom, and the following passage can be seen to be an ironic referent of the novel:

The value of a thing sometimes lies not in what one attains with it, but in what one pays for it - what it costs us. ... It is war which produces [the] effects [of freedom] ... And war is a training in freedom. For what is freedom? That one has the will to self responsibility. That one preserves the distance which divides us. That one has become more indifferent to hardship, toil, privation, even to life. That one is ready to sacrifice men to one's cause, oneself not excepted. Freedom means that the manly instincts that delight in war and victory have gained mastery over the other instincts ... The free man is a warrior. - How is freedom measured, in individuals as in nations?

By the resistance which has to be overcome, by the effort it costs to stay aloft. One would have to seek the highest type of free man where the greatest resistance is constantly being overcome ... First principle: one must need strength, otherwise one will never have it. ... the sense in which I understand freedom [is] as something one has and does not have, something one wants, something one conquers ... (1969:38 Nietzsche's emphasis).

Both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee would probably subscribe to the above. Towards the beginning of the novel Dawn writes: "Only the strong can hold course through history's doldrums" (Coetzee 1974:9). After Jacobus has executed his servants he writes: "Through their deaths I ... again asserted my reality" (106) - a reality, a freedom of sorts, achieved at the cost of others. Coetzee shows that the effects of colonialism make the sort of belief expressed in Nietzsche's passage laughable, and also tragic.

The first section of Dusklands, "The Vietnam Project", shows how Eugene Dawn's avant-garde work in the field of "mythography" leads him into conflict with his superior. The project presents Dawn's contribution to the propaganda war, and sets out ways of altering the identity-giving myths of the Vietnamese. Dawn finally kidnaps and wounds his son, Martin, and is arrested and sent to an institution of sorts.

In his study, The Savage Mind, the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss states that the principal value of myth

is to preserve until the present time the remains of methods of observation and reflection which were (and no doubt still are) precisely adapted to discoveries of a certain type: those which nature authorised from the starting point of a speculative organization and exploitation of the sensible world in sensible terms

(1962:16).

Myths seem to provide a way for a community to interact with the world. The past is worked into a narrative which becomes the life story of the community.

A myth is a narrative, but a different "type" to historical narratives. As Mircea Eliade says in Myth and Reality,

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings". In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of Supernatural Beings, a reality came into existence (1963:5).

He goes on to say that

by "living" the myths one emerges from profane chronological time and enters a time that is of a different quality, a "sacred" Time at once primordial and indefinitely recoverable (18).

Dawn plans to alter a myth. A myth lends identity to a community, an experience of time and is an authority - a sacred authority. Dawn would like to alter the community's experience of time to that profane chronological time of (American) history, so altering the identity of a community and their structure of authority.

He often describes himself as an explorer or coloniser: at one stage he says, "Had I lived two hundred years ago I would have had a continent to explore, to map, to open to colonization" (31-32) - an intratextual reference to Jacobus Coetzee, no doubt. He sees himself as a creator, rather than a follower of rules:

Mythography, my present specialism, is an open field like philosophy or criticism because it has not yet found a methodology to lose itself forever in the

mazes of. When McGraw-Hill brings out the first textbook of mythography, I will move on. I have an exploring temperament (31).

He appears to be the latter-day equivalent of Jacobus Coetzee, his position (Dawn's) in history (at the relative end of colonialism) doubtless contributing to his more existential, angst-ridden nature.

In spite (or perhaps because) of his exploring temperament, Dawn has a rational, rule-based approach to myth. He views myths as machines functioning in society and at one stage is told to be more clear about "how myths operate in human society, how signs are exchanged, and so forth" (Coetzee 1974:4). He believes in the ability of mythical narratives to function as programmable machines in society.

Dawn attempts to isolate and resolve a myth into its constituent parts (much as one would take a machine apart), and alter the myth in order to replace the meanings produced by the old one. He attempts to influence the "psychic and psychosocial constitution" of the VietCong and to "guide [the society] from within its cultural framework" (20).

Dawn argues that American propaganda is failing since it projects a Western myth or rationale - the Cartesian doubting self - onto the Vietnamese. It "attempt[s] to embody the ghost inside the villager, but there has never been any ghost there" (20). His proposals in the project he writes amount to creating ideal conditions for the imposition of Western myths of individualization and individualism - the "ghost within". In other words he attempts to change the narrative history of the Vietnamese by altering its structure. Both the attempt and his

failure have implications for the critique of colonialism as does the particular myth he chooses.

Dawn's myth takes the following form:

"the sons of the land (ie. the brotherhood of earth-tillers) desire to take the land (ie. the Vietnamese Boden) for themselves, overthrowing the sky-god who is identified with the old order of power (foreign empire, the U.S.). The earth-mother hides her sons in her bosom, safe from the thunderbolts of the father; at night, while he sleeps, they emerge to unman him and initiate a new fraternal order" (25).

Vietnamese society stresses the subordination of "individual interest to the interest of family or band or hamlet" (20). Dawn claims that

We cannot expect to guide the thinking of rural Vietnam until we recognize that rural Vietnam is non-literate, that its family structure is patrilineal, its social order hierarchical, and its political order authoritarian (20).

The father is "authority, infallibility, ubiquity. He does not persuade, he commands. That which he foretells happens" (21). The weak structural point of the myth is that it portrays "the father as vulnerable" (25). Dawn wants the Americans to assume the role of the father-voice, that which "breaks the bonds of the enemy band" (24), and change the myth so that the father is portrayed as invulnerable. Operations like CT faced each member "with the prospect of an attack on him as an individual with a name and a history" (23). Technology should be used to lay waste to the country, to "show the enemy that he stands naked in a dying landscape" (29).

So, he alters the constituents of this identity-giving narrative and installs a Western meaning in order to control the

thought and behaviour of the Vietnamese Other. According to Dawn's premises, "the myths of a tribe are the fictions it coins to maintain its powers" (24). The alteration to a Western myth robs the myth of this status, and causes it to lose its standing as an identifying narrative of a community. Myths cannot be cross-pollinated; one society's myth would have no meaning for another's. Dawn tries to create a new set of rules for the Vietnamese which follow American rules, whereas if he was to alter the narrative identity he would need to rewrite the existing rules from within the existing context. The narratives of the savage resist those of the civilized. Dawn still has to rely on brute force to impose his myth. If his project were to work it would involve not changing the identity of the Vietnamese, but on enforcing surrender through laying waste to the landscape. The colonial power can attempt to impose their own myths, but these are always an imposition and can never completely represent the other.

Dawn's is a mechanistic approach to behavioral control, in that he leaves no room for the ability of the self to construct its own narratives. The novel thus shows the limitations of a techno-scientific approach to understanding human behaviour, and implicates the colonial power in this approach. It also shows the dangers of the approach for the (Vietnamese) other. But this approach works against the colonial power, as human behaviour struggles to outlive its manipulation. This latter point is illuminated by examining the effect Dawn's project has on him.

Dawn is enmeshed in a system of father-son relations (as might already be apparent), involving Coetzee, Martin, the

doctors, and the project itself. In particular, his superior, Coetzee, comes across as a father-figure. As Dawn says:

I was going to do better for him. I was going to do my best, to show him all I was capable of.... If he had taken notice of me as I really wanted to be noticed, if he had offered any sign of acknowledging his election, I would have given myself utterly to him.... I want to be good. He has his place, I have mine. I want him to look on me kindly. I hope one day to be like him.... In Coetzee I think I could even immerge myself, becoming, in the course of time, his faithful copy, with perhaps here and there a touch of my old individuality (31).

Dawn's work brings him into conflict with Coetzee who rejects him. His version of it is that "at the moment when one ceases to be the pupil ... one must expect one's teachers to feel betrayed and to strike back in envy" (5). He has regrets about this betrayal and claims that he "would not have embarked on the Vietnam Project if [he] had known it was going to bring [him] into conflict with a superior" (1). The father-figure attempts to control and manipulate the son instructing him to alter his report. Dawn rebels and hands in his avant-garde work⁴.

Similar patterns emerge in his relationship with his son Martin, who, during their stay in the Loco Motel "throws tantrums" (38). Dawn's response is to lock him in the bathroom. In his relationship with the doctors they are portrayed as genial and father-like, but his attitude towards them is patronising and he will not reveal his secret - the story of his condition:

I watch their eyes and think: you want to know what

⁴ The Master of Petersburg is also concerned with betrayals between fathers and sons. Whereas the earlier novel takes (predominantly) the perspective of the son, the later novel takes that of the father, and it is the father who betrays the son.

makes me tick, and when you discover it, you will rip it out and discard me. My secret is what makes me desirable to you, my secret is what makes me strong. But will you ever win it? When I think of the heart that holds my secret I think of something closed and wet and black, like, say, the ball in the toilet cistern. Sealed in my chest of treasures, lapped in dark blood, it tramps its blind round and will not die (48).

Dawn views his project as his child. It is called the "New Life" project, and talking about his work, says it is the "shy, secret life" that emerges from his egg. The offspring seems to have a life of its own, however, as is made apparent in sentences like "I have to pull myself together", "I am in a bad way", and "what I say is in pieces. I am sorry" (29).

It also begins to influence the behaviour of the writer. The project, which, after all, is a colonial enterprise, seems to feed back and control the coloniser. Dawn becomes the object as well as the agent of his actions. This is where a focus of Coetzee's lies in Dusklands: not only does he criticize colonialism for its impositions on the other, but he points out that it has a deleterious effect on the coloniser himself. In this novel the Hegelian need for the other to constitute the subject creates a lack in the Americans, a loss of their own identity.

Of a photograph of a prisoner Dawn writes:

The glint in the eye, which in a moment luckily never to arrive will through the camera look into my eyes, is bland and opaque under my fingers, yielding no passage into the interior of this obscure but indubitable man. I keep exploring. Under the persistent pressure of my imagination, acute and morbid in the night, it may yet yield (16-17).

The photograph does not yield its story to the Western

imagination. It seems to be beyond his grasp - within the limits of his perception, but outside the realm of his knowledge. The "nightmare" for the Americans is

that since whatever we reached for slipped like smoke through our fingers, we did not exist: that since whatever we embraced wilted, we were all that existed (17).

A circle which can only lead to failure of the colonial project, but a particularly destructive failure. Dawn writes,

We lined them up in ditches. If they had walked toward us singing through the bullets we would have knelt and worshipped; but the bullets knocked them over and they died as we had feared ... From tears we grew exasperated. Having proved to our sad selves that these were not the dark-eyed gods who walk our dreams, we wished only that they would retire and leave us in peace. They would not. For a while we were prepared to pity them, though we pitied more our tragic reach for transcendence. Then we ran out of pity (17-18).

The passage expresses the tragic consequences of the failed dialectic: because the other resists the coloniser's projections, the coloniser feels vulnerable (his identity is at risk) and responds by physically forcing a discourse onto them. The coloniser's self-pity and dissolution of identity precipitates a violent act of self-assertion, and so causes the violent reaction and death of the other. The irruption of historical time into mythical time brings about this destructive cycle. This is central not only to Dusklands, but to the next three novels as well.

The second section of the novel consists of a translator's preface, the narrative of Jacobus Coetzee, which is an account

of his explorative journeys into the Northern Cape, an afterword by S.J.Coetzee, and a deposition given by Jacobus to the colonial authorities in 1760. In the preface, J.M.Coetzee, the putative translator, informs us that the narrative was edited by his father, S.J. Coetzee, and that all he as translator has done is to "restore two or three brief passages omitted from [his] father's edition and to reduce Nama words to the standard Kronlein orthography" (55). The name "Janszoon", applied to Jacobus, means, as one critic has pointed out, "son of John". In the light of the Vietnam project, this should be enough to alert the reader to this section's continuing treatment of the father-son dialectic.

The second section is set in a different historical period to the first section, in a time when the colonial project was in the ascendancy, and not involved in any evident decline or crisis about its own legitimacy. Coetzee, though, through an undermining of the status of the particular slice of colonial history he is concerned with, shows that the failures of colonialism are concurrent with its so-called successes.

Many critics have attempted to find out which of the three texts actually exists in the historical record⁵. Although this may be interesting in and of itself, the most important thing is that they are posited as examples of real documents and are subsequently undermined. As David Attwell, amongst others, has pointed out, the translator alters the text

by dropping intertextual ironies and by actively

⁵ See, for instance, Peter Knox-Shaw's article "Dusklands: A Metaphysics of Violence" in Contrast 4:1 (1982) 26-38.

rewriting the historical documents themselves; he thus explicitly breaks the conventionally neutral stance of the translator (1993:44).

In the narrative there are intellectual anachronisms, for instance, examples of structuralist thought by Jacobus, surprising eloquence for an illiterate man, and post-modernist (or modernist) writing (see Watson 1986 and Coetzee 1974: 65-66). There is also one particular instance which alerts us to the presence of the subversive translator - the two deaths of Klawer. The second death is perhaps one of the "brief passages" omitted from S.J.'s edition. So J.M. Coetzee re-writes the history using his predecessor's terms. His alteration parodically undermines his father's history.

The succession of generations plays a large role in the writing of histories. As Paul Ricoeur has claimed (in Time and Narrative Vol.3), histories are often written to convey the impression that earlier generations prepare for later ones. They are preparation for future greatness. This is clearly the case in S.J.'s history which portrays Jacobus as one of the "heroes who first ventured into the interior of Southern Africa and brought back news of what we had inherited" (108), and offers, "a work of piety toward an ancestor and one of the founders of our people" (108). J.M. Coetzee exposes the unvoiced assumptions of this tradition.

S.J.'s afterword is respectful towards Jacobus, but with this comes an unconscious betrayal (with the strings being pulled by J.M. Coetzee the author, of course). By painting a picture of an honourable man, the "Afterword" contrasts starkly with the "Narrative". The comparison condemns. With the translator, the

case is similar, although here his "respectful deviance" is calculated. By portraying a complete picture of the man - the presentation of the three documents, and also by restoring episodes - he is engaged in a critique of his ancestor, although, on the surface, he is being dutiful. In this parodic text, the son's deviance is disguised by apparent loyalty to his predecessor.

Histories are, for the most part, constructed on the basis of documents. A history is accepted as true or legitimate insofar as it is supported by documents. However, the novel shows how three documents concerning the same events can say different things. Taken in isolation - ignoring the anachronisms of course - each could be true. Taken together, none of them could make this claim with any confidence.

S.J. perhaps unwittingly acknowledges that a certain amount of fictionalization goes into the writing of histories. He claims that his is a

work which offers the evidence of history to correct certain of the anti-heroic distortions that have been creeping into our conception of the great age of exploration when the white man first made contact with the native peoples of our interior (108).

He acknowledges here history's power to persuade, and that different accounts of the same events can be offered. He criticizes the English historian and travel-writer, Barrow, for being

the victim of many of the enthusiasms and prejudices of Enlightenment Europe. He came to the Cape to see what he wanted to see: noble savages, a lazy, brutal Dutch peasantry, a wasted civilizing mission (111),

revealing that behind every history, including his own, is a preconceived, shaping ideology. The historian cannot know the past, only his own thoughts about the past. Later he says, "I wish I had a hunting adventure to relate ... [they] lend excitement, however spurious, to history" (116). He then proceeds to do just that and embellishes his history with the tale of a hunting adventure, showing that what makes a history is an act of creation, not one of objective reporting of the evidence of documents.

If this is what can be done with them, what then is the actual nature of the document per se? They are stored in archives, which are institutionalized. Documents are formed according to the needs of the particular organization. (Undoubtedly the colonial authorities had some sort of economic interest in Jacobus' expedition otherwise they would not have taken the deposition⁶). We presume that the past leaves traces which are visible in the present. We infer a way of life from a painting on the wall, for instance. But, as is apparent in the case of the traces left by Jacobus (119), these have a life and are preserved only if required. The evidence is created and selected according to a pre-existing ideology, as Coetzee makes evident through his alteration of the "original" documents.

The recourse to the truth-value of documents is what has indicated the dividing line between history and fiction. Fiction might use historical documents, but rarely claims the truth-value

⁶ Incidentally, this appears to contradict Knox-Shaw who believes that Coetzee plays down the economic aspects of history. Here Coetzee shows that economics seem to be at the very base of history.

accorded to narrative history. Even the early practice of claiming that the fiction was a true story - in Samuel Richardson, for instance - was accepted as a convention of fiction. Dusklands in its recourse to documents, blurs this dividing line and is able to question the status of truth which history claims. The novel refigures the historical condition expressed in the documents (via their juxtaposition and "translation") and raises this refiguration to historical consciousness, that is, as historical critique.

The father-son opposition is a theme in the story as well. Early on the journey, Jacobus says of his slaves, "they saw me as their father. They would have died without me" (64). He is the authority figure controlling others. When he first meets the Namaqua he wonders, "was I dealing with adults?" (67). In a speech to them he issues a "schoolmasterly threat" and says "let us resolve henceforth to behave like men" (70). S.J. says of him that "he dreamed a father-dream" (120) of colonialism.

This father-child, master-savage relation is obviously undermined through the novel. A relevant incident in this regard is the following: when Jacobus first comes across the Namaqua he describes them as "small figures advancing towards us across the plain" (64). After being "captured" by the Namaqua when ill, he muses:

The relation of master and savage is a spatial relation. The African highland ^{is flat} the approach of the savage across space continuous. From the fringes ^{of the horizon} he approaches, growing to manhood beneath my eyes until he reaches the verge of that precarious zone in which, invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life (80-81).

Horizons mark limits of knowledge, limits of the function of the eyes, which is to objectify that which is not subject or self, and the limits of control. There is obviously the sense that somewhere there is a space beyond the controlling gaze of the objectifying eye, as well as the sense that this eye is in the perceptual field of another. The child threatens to usurp the position of the father.

Power involves the control of time and space. Jacobus claims at one stage, "savagery or slavery ... we may describe as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer's mastery of space" (80). Power is also the control of time - as in Foucault's timetables, for example. The paradox involved in the "approach of the savage" is that while the other is continually beneath Jacobus' gaze, he moves from the background to the foreground, forcing Jacobus to acknowledge and reckon with him. It is a move which combines elements of submission and rebellion. Jacobus goes on to say:

On the far side he is nothing to me and I probably nothing to him. On the near side mutual fear will drive us to our little comedies of man and man, prospector and guide, benefactor and beneficiary, victim and assassin, teacher and pupil, father and child. He crosses [the space], however, in none of these characters but as representative of that out there which my eye once enfolded and ingested and which now promises to enfold, ingest, and project me through itself as a speck on a field which we may call annihilation or alternatively history. He threatens to have a history in which I shall be a term (81).

There is a danger for the master: his proximity to the savage lays him open to a threat from the savage. The savage threatens to take over (in time, in the future) narrative history with its

control of time and space. Jacobus risks becoming an object of his plotting (as Dawn became an object of his), and indeed to the Namaqua he becomes "nothing but an occasion" (91).

After assaulting a child, Jacobus is banished by the Namaqua, but returns to exact his retribution, which involves resolving the dissolution of self which contact with the savage other has ironically caused. He recovers his guns from the Namaqua, the gun being that which

stands for the hope that there exists that which is other than oneself ... The gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us. It does so by laying at our feet all the evidence we need of a dying and therefore a living world (79).

Like Dawn the only way he can enforce his (Western) standards on the Other is through brute force. He proceeds to execute his slaves, and gives the following interpretation or justification (partly quoted earlier):

Through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality. No more than any other man do I enjoy killing; but 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. All are guilty, without exception. I include the Hottentots. Who knows for what unimaginable crimes of the spirit they died, through me? God's judgement is just, irreprehensible, and incomprehensible. His mercy pays no heed to merit. I am a tool in the hands of history (106).

He is a tool in history, and of history. But he conceives this as being part of some sort of divine plan for his people, the "we" of the quotation. He is the tool used to "thrust into the future" which becomes history (121), as S.J. says. One could

reverse this and say that his history is his thrust into the future, his narrative is his colonising weapon. In other words his discourse of colonialism justifies his wanting to make history and justifies (from the divine position that the above quotation offers) the way it is done (that is, through control of the other's present and future prospects).

Colonialism's narratives appear to be concerned with self-justification in the present, and self-preservation in the future. The novel reveals that colonialism is engaged in an attempt to limit its subject's access to history and the future or at least a history and future that conflicts with its own. The creation of an eternal present in history can be seen as an attempt by the colonizer to fix his own history at the expense of others. This history then becomes a totalizing History, a discourse which attempts to enforce its dominance, and allows no deviation from its formula. It attempts to map out past, present and future for its subjects.

However, the construction of these narratives, while attempting to secure the position of the coloniser, actually contributes to his failure. The effect of determining another's experience of time and history is often to make the other aware of his subjection. In other words, feeling that one does not have the ability to determine one's own narratives, one's own history, is a motivation for the other to attempt to change the state of affairs (this is perhaps why Jacobus' slaves deserted him). Thus, the history of colonialism is, in many ways, also the history of the struggle against it - a contradiction which appears to be at the root of the decline of colonialism.

Coetzee, though, is concerned with more than just colonialism. He is concerned with the authority of the discourse of history (colonialism being a sub-discourse of history) which presents itself as truth. The novel is an attempt to dislodge history from its pedestal, an attempt to show the fictional status of history. This has great implications for the later novels when Coetzee becomes more concerned with the status of fiction itself. Dusklands is a game played with history. However, it is a game played according to rules of fiction. In fact, one could say that by imposing its own rules on history, fiction "overwrites" history. The novel opens up a space and time in which history is not truth. Coetzee will go on, in the later novels, to attempt to give some authority, however compromised, to this fictional space and time.

3. IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY: Time, modernism and art.

As we saw in the previous chapter, Dusklands is a parody or even a satire of the colonial claim to authority. In the Heart of the Country retains the colonial critique, and gives special emphasis to its relation to time. In fact, Coetzee's concern with time comes to the fore in this novel. Of all his novels, it is probably the most temporally saturated. Not only is time one of the major themes of the "story", but the structure of the novel is concerned with its own temporality.

Other critics have noticed this over-riding concern with time. However, they tend to concentrate on how Magda loses control of time. Paul Cantor (1994), for example, notes that Coetzee "asks us to imagine what the convention of ellipsis 'feels' like to a character within a novel" (90). In other words, he asks us to look at the temporal construction of character. David Attwell, on the other hand, notes that Magda loses control of narrative perspective and "the way time is controlled within it" (Attwell 1993:66).

Their observations are obviously pertinent. However, I will approach the novel from a slightly different angle. Not only will I describe how time itself is shown to be beyond Magda's control, but I will outline how she and the novel go some way to recovering control over time.

The novel is organised largely along the principle of repetition. This structuring device is used by Coetzee to reveal the extent to which his character is stuck in stagnant colonial time, and, paradoxically, to provide an alternative to this time.

This operation of the text is linked to another "theme": the

picture Coetzee paints of Magda's situation can in many ways be seen as modernist - In the Heart of the Country is, after all, a modern (structuralist) rewriting of the colonial novel¹. As we will see, it is through a further paradox that Coetzee finds in the disabilities of what could be called the modernist self a way to transcend these disabilities. This hypothesis will be explored later.

Colonial time is often characterized as stagnant. Teresa Dovey, in The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories, claims that In the Heart of the Country is a rewriting of The Story of an African Farm, and, in the latter novel, time is also of great concern. The oppressiveness of colonial time is registered early in the text as Schreiner writes:

At the head of his father's bed hung a great silver hunting watch. It ticked loudly. The boy listened to it and began mechanically to count. Tick - tick - tick! One, two, three, four! He lost count presently, and only listened. Tick - tick - tick - tick!

It never waited; it went on inexorably; and every time it ticked a man died! He raised himself a little on his elbow and listened. He wished it would leave off.

How many times had it ticked since he came to lie down? A thousand times, a million times, perhaps.

He tried to count again, and sat up to listen better.

"Dying, dying, dying!" said the watch; "dying, dying, dying!" (1971:36-37).

Magda's experience of time is also one of oppressive torpor.

This torpor is a characteristic that Coetzee finds in South African time generally. In a passage quoted in the introduction to this study, he expresses a "horror of chronicity South African

¹ A novel about a woman isolated on a Karoo farm is a familiar theme from colonial novels. In the Heart of the Country also makes use of the discourse of pastoralism, although in a far more complicated way than conventional colonial novels.

style", which is also "sluggish no-time" (Coetzee 1992:209). Magda's days on the colonial farm are governed by the movements of the sun and moon and by the clock corrected weekly from "sun and almanac" (3). But towards the end of the novel she says:

Out of the movements of the heavenly bodies ... I could not possibly fill day after day...I would need ... a store of pebbles to build patterns with; and how long can one go on building patterns before one longs for extinction? (120).

The perpetual present (present because of the felt absence of an historical and cultural past and future in the colony) in which she finds herself can be thought of as dead time, or killed time, following Erving Goffman. What happens during this time has no effect on the rest of a person's life. The moments are "inconsequential ... bounded and insulated" (Goffman 1967:162). Goffman gives the example of a person idly flipping through a magazine to kill time before a meeting. Unlike "normal" individuals, however, Magda is not assured of a return to "normal" life - consequential, historical time - after the period of killed time. In a colonial situation, so the novel appears to be saying, there is no such "normal" time.

To fill the time she tells stories; she builds patterns. The novel, or so it could be argued, poses a similar question to Magda's (see the previous quote from the novel); it examines the role of art in a time dominated by history, or rather, a time dominated by historical stasis. Another way of putting it is to say that the novel examines some of the ways that time might be filled when there is no access to a true story.

The truth of the stories that Magda creates is subject to doubt (if history is to all intents and purposes absent, then it

cannot be used as a verifying principle). The most obvious proof of this is the fact that several "incidents" are repeated in the novel - from the arrival of the "new bride" to the rape scenes, to her father's multiple deaths and resurrections (at the end of the novel he is alive once more). No one story, or version of a story, can claim the authority of a master narrative, precisely because of the absence of history. Some critics, Maes-Jelinek (1987) for instance, have claimed that some of the events in the novel are true, while others are not. This distinction is hardly credible when one bears in mind Magda's confession that she has made it all up. Most of the events could be true, but none are definitely true.

Magda is, to all intents and purposes, writing about herself; the novel is a form of fictional autobiography. She is left repeatedly with a paradox in this writing: as already pointed out, the truth value of her stories is subject to doubt. At the same time though, she confesses:

The woman who in a certain sense is me, will dwindle and expire here in the heart of the country unless she has at least a thin porridge of event to live on. I am not interested in becoming one of those people who look into mirrors and see nothing (23).

She desires a narrative for herself in which time is able to be presented coherently, a narrative which will reconfigure her experience of time. She goes on later to say:

I want my story to have a beginning, a middle, and an end, not the yawning middle without end which threatens.... Out of the blankness that surrounds me I must pluck the incident after incident ^{after incident} whose little explosions keep me going (42-43).

The paradox is that her situation does not allow her a history

with "explosive" events, but also forces her to constantly search for one. However, Magda's words "come from nowhere and go nowhere, they have no past or future" (115). Her "colonial philosophy" is only "words with no history behind them" (115). Because of her inability to reach through narrative into the past and future, any narrative she creates will be subject to doubt. The fact that the stories about herself do not have a "beginning, middle and end" has dire consequences for her efforts to establish a self-identity. If she has no coherent narrative, she has no coherent history; she is caught in a catch-22 situation².

Magda shows a lack of any sense of consciousness before the present of writing. She wonders about the time which precedes her present and projects herself into that unknown area as an observer and tries to set up the reality of the past by constructing narratives and telling stories about it. The hero of Remembrance of Things Past, as a contrast, has his memories, and experiences again what has been experienced before, and this gives substance to his consciousness. Magda, in her culture-less, colonial situation lacks these resources or abilities. Hers is a language without history, which is to say without memory as well.

To lessen this feeling of loss and doubt she fabricates certain details in order to embellish and situate the action in

² Although it is not an aspect of the text on which I have chosen to concentrate, Magda's position as a woman needs to be commented upon. She does not conform to the stereotype of the colonial woman. She does not participate in the "normal", colonial, female experience as wife and mother. Also, she does not have access to the time of the fathers - the time of master narratives - neither can she completely identify with the time of the slaves. She does not have access to any particular "role". Her position outside these major discourses contributes to her sense of a lost self-identity.

a real time and place. Some of the details, for instance, the "ostrich-plume", "swallow-tail coat" and "wide-brimmed sunhat" (1) create an apparently "real" (indeed realist) picture for the reader, who is then told, "more detail I cannot give unless I begin to embroider, for I was not watching" (1). The details become props in the narrator's attempts to make her story actual, to give her story authority, to make it into a story with a beginning, middle and end.

This is undermined, though, by her frequent use of phrases such as "or perhaps" and, on page two of the novel, her (parodic) use of logical deduction, instead of memory, in telling of the past: "she is the new wife therefore the old one is dead. ... I barely recall her ... I must have been very young" (my emphasis); and later, "from one of the furthest oubliettes of memory I extract a faint grey image ... one such as any girl in my position would be likely to make up for herself" (2). Magda also frequently questions the validity of the stories she makes up as in the section where she questions the truth of her story of the death of her mother. She claims that her mother died in childbirth, that the doctor was summoned by a messenger on a bicycle, and that he arrived in his donkey-cart. She then asks "But why did he not come on horseback? But were there bicycles in those days?" (2).

The discontinuity of temporal experience, as I have intimated, translates into a lack of a consistent feeling of self-identity. She cannot keep her stories going. The moral philosopher, Charles Taylor, underlines the predicament of anyone similarly placed when he writes, "in order to have a sense of who we are, we have to have a notion of how we have become and of

where we are going" (Taylor in Giddens 1991:54). Magda, in fact, has the symptoms of common psycho-pathological conditions - the discontinuity of her recollected, imagined past.

With no sense of the flow of past, present and future, her time becomes anachronistic: for instance, she is a nineteenth-century colonial spinster, with an extra-ordinary grasp of structuralist philosophies. The presence of anachronisms again shows that the time of the character consists of a series of unconnected moments. History itself seems to have collapsed. It no longer has recourse to the orderly structure that the axes of past, present and future give it.

The numbered fragments are evidence of a parodic attempt to hold time together: they are a parody of sequentiality. Magda lacks a privileged orientation in time in that she is an object rather than an agent of time. She cannot grasp past, present and future, and so her narrative is numbered to give her that grasp. However, a numerical sequence is not necessarily indicative of the "flow" from past to future - in fact, quite the contrary - and the presence of numbers highlights the artificiality of this project and so disconnects the fragments from each other even further. It is as if the numbers are an attempt to count time - to control it in that way - but there is no "addition" to her life.

The numbers have another effect. They show a contrast between subjective and objective time. Narrative, subjective time, the time of Magda's monologue, is artificially compartmentalized (by the numbers) into rational, ordered, sequential, serial time - the time of history. The personal is overwhelmed, seemingly, by the historical/political. Of course,

as already mentioned, the "numeracy" of the text is undermined - the historical is parodied.

The parody of ordered, historical/political time is at the same time a parody of the conventions of realism, especially that convention which deems time to be ordered chronologically. As I shall explain later, though, one of the complexities of the novel is that Coetzee and Magda express a longing for the certainties of realism, even as these are called into question.

The use of tautology - another example of how the text is structured largely by devices of repetition - in the novel is another indication of Magda's predicament. Much of her writing and speech seem to verge on tautology. Towards the beginning of the novel she says, "I create myself in the words that create me" (8) and later on, "I make it all up in order that it shall make me up" (73), two statements indicative of tautology and its effects.

Tautology would appear to be another defining feature of colonial language. Claude Levi-Strauss, in Structural Anthropology, calls language a time machine which permits repetition of social practices, and also makes possible a differentiation of past, present and future. Tautology, as a language structure which continually goes back on itself, repeats itself, indicates a lack in the user of the ability to progress to a use of language which is not mere repetition of the same. This contributes, then, to a feeling of historical stasis.

Tautology, the linguistic analogue of her historical predicament, seems to be all that is available to her, and towards the end of the novel, in order to escape history, she makes use of it in an attempt to build a language based on pure

repetition. Magda tries to invent a "Spanish of pure meanings" (126) derived from first principles (131). For this idealised language she uses stones which "just are" and have no historical constraints, or future to worry about and "desire nothing" (142). This is a reorientation in her attitude to time in that she now longs for a language which does not force her to have a history. This is not possible though, and she has to paint the stones to make them better signifiers and eventually finds them "too unwieldy for the distinctions [she] needs to make" (129).

In the manner of the sentence "I create myself in the words that create me", the sentence "I am I", which Magda repeats throughout the novel, is a tautologous self-identification: I repeats I endlessly. The Cartesian self ("I think, therefore I am") exists only in a moment. However, Descartes felt able to call on the operation of continuous creation carried out by God to give the self a linear temporal existence. Here in the desert, there is no God ("We are the castaways of God" [p. 135]), therefore no linear temporality, and the self is trapped in circular time. Attempts at subjectivity - "I am ..." - turns the subject, I, into the object, I, endlessly - the object which is at the same time the subject³.

Cyclical time is most often associated with mythical time. In the previous chapter on Dusklands I argued that Eugene Dawn attempts to replace the cyclical time of myth with the time of American history. In In the Heart of the Country Magda and

³ "I am I" bears obvious relations to the "I am who I am" found in the Old Testament. That sentence expresses both eternity and linear temporality. God is seen as being both in time and controlling time. He is eternal and also part of this world - an idea expressed again in the trinity. I refer the reader to Paul Ricoeur (1988) p.265, and to Genevieve Lloyd (1993) p.15-16 for further discussion of the temporality of "I am who I am".

Coetzee express a desire for the time of myth since it seems to be a way of transcending the disruptive time of history.

The myth of eternal return, as described by Friedrich Nietzsche, claims that the one true law of history is the eternal return of the same, the fact that there is nothing new, now or ever. Coetzee appears to have had this in mind when characterizing Magda's temporal predicament.

However, this myth is not a completely tragic view of human existence. The cyclical view of history is a projection into history of certain elements that are directly given, human, unchanging, timeless. It provides another way of envisaging a timeless dimension outside and beyond that historical march of time. As Nietzsche proclaims,

man's greatness and hope for transcending himself and the historical situation in which he lives may be seen to lie precisely in his coming to terms with the inevitable cycle of birth and death, or the inexorable law of the eternal return of the same (in Meyerhoff 1960:105).

This may provide a freedom of sorts in that it might lead to a detachment from the affairs of the present, from the tyranny of the facticity of the historical present, and provide a sense of unity between past, present and future, and a sense of freedom from the march of history.

The novel expresses a compromised version of eternal return, though, even a parody of it. Magda is no superman and, finally, cannot transcend her historical situation, although she can perhaps imagine transcending it - in the hymns she could have written, the lives she could have led. If Magda is subjected to the static time of the circle, at the same time she can imagine having access to a dimension outside the circle, even if this

dimension is far less grand than that proposed by Nietzsche. However, the task of transcending history is one that is attempted by the novel as well, as the rest of the chapter will argue.

If colonialism attempts to enforce a no-time, the fact that it is no time means that it is beyond the control of history. Many would say that time as we know it would end when the universe reaches a state of perfect equilibrium without changes in energy states within the total system. Much like the second law of thermodynamics, time tends towards entropy, a state of complete randomness, or lack of control (time would become anachronistic). Colonialism's sluggish no-time, or so Coetzee appears to be saying, accelerates opposition to it. By implementing a state where there is a conceived lack of history, of change, colonialism opens the way to opposition, whether it is in the form of historical revolution or anti-historical art.

However, colonialism is not all that Coetzee is after. The above can be taken as Coetzee's implied comment not only on politically corrupt regimes, but on the state of Western, modern life as well. The more that time is controlled, the more it tends towards extreme chaos, where categories such as time and space cease to have any (even intuitive) meaning. The more we attempt to control time (through technology), the more we come to live in an extended, in fact, boundless present, and, because it is boundless, it is infinite and unordered. The more we attempt to control, the closer we are to chaos.

The reference to Western modernity is more relevant than it might seem at first. The sociologist Anthony Giddens has written that, in this time of what he characterizes as "late" modernity,

Doubt, a pervasive feature of modern critical reason, permeates into everyday life as well as philosophical consciousness, and forms a general existential dimension of the contemporary social world. Modernity institutionalizes the principle of radical doubt and insists that all knowledge takes the form of hypotheses: claims which may very well be true, but which are in principle always open to revision and may have at some point to be abandoned (1991:3).

Self-knowledge and self-identity, then, are open to doubt as never before in late modernity, as they are in Magda's case. At another stage she presents several hypotheses as to the identity of her self:

It is the hermit crab, I remember from a book, that as it grows migrates from one empty shell to another. The grim moralist with the fiery sword is only a stopping-place; a little less temporary than the haggard wife knitting on the stoep, a little more temporary than the wild woman of the veld who talks to her friends the insects and walks in the midday sun, but temporary all the same. Whose shell I presently skulk in does not matter, it is the shell of a dead creature (43).

Modernity has also been characterized by cultural theorist David Harvey as reflecting a "distinctive experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting, and fortuitous and arbitrary" (1989:11). In fact, the only secure thing about modernity is "its insecurity, its penchant, even, for totalizing chaos" (11). He goes on to say that modernity "entails a ruthless break with any or all preceding historical conditions ... and is characterized by a never-ending process of internal ruptures and fragmentation within itself" (12). This description of a particular historical time is synonymous with the way time in In the Heart of the Country has been described in this chapter. The novel's "internal ruptures", anachronisms and repetitive structure are the formal aesthetic consequences of a particular

experience of time⁴.

Hans Meyerhoff, writing thirty years before Harvey, would no doubt agree with him but would place the emphasis slightly differently. What he finds characteristic of the modern world is the situation where history has made itself the only medium in which human life is allowed to unfold (1960:95) - history becomes History. He goes on to say that if History is the only medium, then time becomes that which confronts humans with relentless change and transitoriness. History becomes a patchwork, a montage of pieces without connection, joined only in retrospect by theoretical models and (presumably) individual fantasies. Magda, likewise, finds herself in a situation where history seems to be the only medium in which life can unfold, but where history is absent (or, is only present as a felt absence). The absence weighs heavily, though, and the results are the same. Magda is confronted by transitoriness and lives a life of disconnection.

If, as I have suggested, extensive, obsessional, self-reflexivity is the product of an abject or lost sense of the temporal, narrative, historical self, then what Coetzee appears to be doing in this novel is equating the existential experience of modernity with the existential experience of colonialism. In fact, Coetzee appears to be suggesting that colonialism is precisely what pre-figures modernity. Magda thus becomes a

⁴ It is worth briefly commenting on the treatment of time in Samuel Beckett's modernist play, Waiting for Godot, which seems to have been a source of inspiration for Coetzee. In that play time has become mere succession and repetition. The sense of stasis felt by the characters (and the audience) translates into a lack of memory, since there is no longer access to linear time where past precedes present and future. The loss of teleological security impairs memory, and so impairs self-identity. This modernist experience is to be found in In the Heart of the Country as well.

"proto-modernist" figure. That in itself is an interesting suggestion, making as it does the apparently marginal into the central, but it is not where the novel is most innovative.

Where the importance of this novel lies is in its use of the modernist disabilities to transcend those disabilities. Magda's role as a (modernist) artist is a case in point. From one point of view, she is an ideal figure of a certain type of artist. She lives "in fiction" as opposed to "in history" - she is all fiction, in fact - and she lives in killed time, a time when one might read (or write) a novel, instead of flipping idly through a magazine. Magda, of course, writes stories in this time, or, at least, fragments of stories. This puts her in the camp of modern(ist) artists who create in a time when narrative has given way to image, or, in another way of looking at it, when fiction has given away to meta-fiction.

Amidst the modernist chaos, so critics like Harvey and Meyerhoff tell us, there was still a belief in certain eternal and immutable elements (for Nietzsche it was the law of eternal return), and this is where the role of art is important.

Harvey claims that to create some "work of art" is to link time and eternity in such a way that we escape the tyranny of time. The aesthetic will, if I can put it that way, is an urge to make time stand still, an urge to create a work strong enough to make time stand still, and, as Harvey says, "much of the aesthetic thrust of modernism ... is to strive for this sense of the eternal in the midst of flux" (206).

The eternal is a different "zone" of time, a time which allows for the co-presence of temporal elements. It is a time which is linked to circular time in that it is set apart from

linear, historical time (and is obviously different from perpetuity). It is a time which embraces anachronism and fragmentation - it is "spatialized" time.

All art appears to occupy this realm. Art is anachronistic in that it exists, simultaneously, in at least two time frames. Firstly, it exists in the "real" world and is a product of history and the real world. Secondly, art exists within itself. As a representation of a world it is only a representation and not that world. It exists apart from the world as art.

This time and space of art can thus be described in similar terms to the time and space (or time-space) that Magda occupies. It is a position which is outside historical time, that is opposed to it, but is also, seemingly, made available by history - it is as if the ideal conditions for art are those conditions where art is marginalised.

Magda's words towards the end of the novel show that she is aware of this other realm. She writes, "How idyllic the old days seem; and how alluring, in a different way, a future in a garden behind barbed wire!" (116). The old days are presumably the days before the beginning of the novel, before she became a (kind of) artist. The future she dreams of is suggestive: "garden" suggests a (pastoral) paradise and the barbed wire emphasises the permanence of the state and its isolation. In other words it is an image of permanent detachment from the world. This is present in the Magistrate of Waiting for the Barbarians and this is also the place Michael aims for in Life and Times of Michael K: a sphere outside historical, worldly time. No doubt this movement can be located in Coetzee as well.

In the above quotation, however, she displays an

ambivalence. She seems torn between the "real world" (the world of beginnings, middles and ends) which is also the past world, and the "fictional world". Her words at the end of the novel emphasise this ambivalence:

I have uttered my life in my own voice throughout (what a consolation that is), I have chosen at every moment my own destiny, which is to die here in the petrified garden, behind locked gates, near my father's bones, in a space echoing with hymns I could have written but did not because (I thought) it was too easy (139).

Beneath the positive assertion are irony and parody, and a tone of regret. Her longing for a (realist) tradition is nostalgic.

This ambivalence is quite possibly Coetzee's at this point (it will have disappeared by Foe). Being among South Africa's first "experimental" authors, he is nonetheless ambivalent about the place of experimental writing. In this novel he seems to express a nostalgic longing for the realist tradition, but also appears to realise that the time and space of modernist art holds unrealized possibilities, and that the time of this art is multi-dimensional. History, or its static no-time, can cause an unstable temporal experience and a tenuousness of the unity of the knowing subject. Ironically, though, art, or fictional narrative, thrives in this no-time. The suggestion, then, is perhaps a particularly tragic one. Art depends on disunity, on history. Just as there will be no history in a utopia, so there will be no art.

4. WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS: The Secret Body

The temporal and spatial setting of Coetzee's third novel, Waiting for the Barbarians, is more realistic than that of the previous novel in that there is more description of the physical environment, an ordered sense of place and a regular time system - the events play themselves out in a cycle of one year.

However, all is not as realistic as it seems. The time in which the novel is set is indefinite. In fact, with the co-presence of certain physical and philosophical elements, the time seems again to be anachronistic - a conflation of different historical periods. The spatial setting of the novel, likewise, is a conflation of geographical regions.

This co-presence of realism and what I shall for the moment call an imagined space and time is mirrored by another juxtaposition: that of history and art. The previous chapter argued that Magda was situated in a modernist and colonial (historical) time that was fragmented and anachronistic - a time described as the time of art. It aimed to show that Coetzee, as an author, was beginning to recognize the possibilities of this time - that art as an anti-historical mode of expression thrived in this fragmented time.

The corresponding move towards realism and manipulation of its fictive rules is perhaps indicative that Coetzee as a writer felt a greater confidence in the ability of fiction to issue in its own rules. In Waiting for the Barbarians, Coetzee depicts an irruption of modern, technological time into a pastoral space - the imperialists attempt to re-colonize a forgotten space. The

modern time of history meets with resistance, and various groups carve out spaces of opposition. This chapter will concentrate on the opposition of the magistrate and of the novel itself against incorporation into violent historical time. However, as I shall argue, the novel expresses certain reservations about the possible ironic dependence of art, whether in Fascist or "ordinary" Western states, on political violence. In the chapter on the previous novel I mentioned that art could be seen to be dependent on historical time. In Coetzee's third novel this becomes an issue of greater importance.

In Waiting for the Barbarians, the violent time of history, in the form of Colonel Joll and the Third Bureau, interrupts the idyllic life of the narrator and the town of which he is the magistrate. The magistrate's resistance leads him into conflict with the imperialists. In his dealings with the barbarians, especially the barbarian girl, he struggles to come to terms with what he sees as his complicity with the imperialists. This complicity is recognized by almost all critics of the novel. In my reading, I see the magistrate as partly a type of artist figure, and his complicity is analyzed with a view to elaborating on the act of writing itself - an issue which has preoccupied Coetzee in all seven of his novels to date.

The first words of the novel, "I have never seen anything like it", refer to Colonel Joll's sunglasses. These words mark Joll as an intrusion, as something anachronistic to the time of the settlement. When Joll removes the glasses we find that he has the skin of a younger man. Joll has a body that defies the usual ageing process in time.

He and the magistrate talk about hunting. The approaches of the two are different. Joll tells of "the last great drive he rode in, when thousands of deer, pigs, bears were slain, so many that a mountain of carcasses had to be left to rot" (1). With his reference to one of the "great drives" Joll shows that he is concerned with being part of history, and with the process of accumulation in order to demonstrate domination over nature. The magistrate, by contrast, is interested in the "great flocks of geese and ducks that descend on the lake every year in their migrations and about native ways of trapping them" (1). If Joll is aligned with the time of history which defies cyclical time, then here the magistrate is aligned with the time of cycles, with the time of myth. The opposition between the two is thus set up early in the novel. I will return to the question of the magistrate's particular time when I examine his opposition to Empire.

The (capitalist) process of accumulation is something that guides Joll in his "work" as well. The magistrate questions him about how Joll knows when a man is telling the truth. Joll answers, "a certain tone enters the voice of a man who is telling the truth" (5). When questioned further he replies,

"I am speaking only of a special situation now, I am speaking of a situation where I am probing for the truth, in which I have to exert pressure to find it. First I get lies, you see - this is what happens - first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth. That is how you get the truth"(5).

Joll's linear, rational approach is expressive of a belief that truth is a kernel which exists surrounded by lies. His job as

torturer is to strip away those lies. This confidence about the existence of truth is common also to certain narrative practices, which, perhaps didactically, try to communicate a particular moral lesson or truth.

The sunglasses, the approach to hunting and the "philosophy" of torture, link Joll to technology and to modernity. Michel Foucault and others see state power in the modern era as being faceless, rational and technocratic, and this is often linked to the practice of violence. The picture Coetzee paints of the socially repressive Empire might seem to be that of an "abnormal", fascist state. However, when one considers accounts of the origins of the modern state given by philosophers such as Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, it is clear that the Empire is merely an extreme form of the modern state. In The Production of Space (1974), Lefebvre writes,

every state is born of violence, and ... state power endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space. This violence originated in nature, as much with respect to the sources mobilized as with respect to the stakes - namely, wealth and land. At the same time it aggressed all of nature, imposing laws upon it and carving it up administratively according to criteria quite alien to the initial characteristics of either the land or its inhabitants. At the same time too, violence enthroned a specific rationality, that of accumulation, that of the bureaucracy and the army - a unitary, logistical, operational and quantifying rationality, which would make economic growth possible and draw strength from that growth for its own expansion ... A founding violence, and continuous creation by violent means ... - such are the hallmarks of the state (280).

This rational violence has an effect on time. As Lefebvre says, "the state crushes time by reducing differences", it imposes itself on the people as the stable centre of truth and

as the end and meaning of history, and it neutralizes whatever opposes it by "castration or crushing" (23). Thus Joll and his associates assert imperial truth on their subjects, brand others as "enemy" (Coetzee 1980:105), and claim that "there will be no history" of the magistrate's resistance since he is too "trivial" when compared to the affairs of the empire (114). Time becomes "a jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe" (133), a time that brings with it "images of disaster: the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation" (133). Technology, rationality, modernity in practice propels us into disjointed, unpredictable, violent futures.

The Empire's historical time receives opposition. As Lefebvre says "State imposed normality makes permanent transgression inevitable", and, "the seething forces" of opposition "are always capable of rattling the lid of the cauldron of the state and its space" (23). Violent, historical time leads to a permanent time of waiting for violence, which is perhaps an appropriate way to describe the time of the end of the novel.

For Foucault the body is the basic and essential element of society since it is on the body that the forces of socialization are carried out. The body either submits to authority or carves out alternate spaces of resistance or freedom. Faced with occasionally extremely physical forces of socialization and repression, the magistrate, the barbarians, and the novel itself all carve out these alternate spaces or times.

The barbarians react to imperial expeditions against them

by using the landscape they know so well. A soldier has the following to say after the final, disastrous expedition:

We froze in the mountains! We starved in the desert! Why did no one tell us it would be like that? We were not beaten - they led us out into the desert and then they vanished! ... [The Barbarians] lured us on and on, we could never catch them. They picked off the stragglers, they cut our horses loose in the night, they would not stand up to us! (147).

Like the freedom fighters in Life and Times of Michael K they resist by combatting military strength with guile.

Previous expeditions were not as favourable for the barbarians. A number were captured and tortured, including the barbarian girl with whom the magistrate makes acquaintance.

The magistrate invites the girl who torture has left partly blind and lame into his quarters. He washes her, but at no stage does he consummate his relationship with her (until, of course, he takes her back to the barbarians). She appears to be something that the magistrate uses in order to understand his own fascination with torture and the imperialists.

The magistrate searches on her body for some sort of truth about torture, and the only conclusion he reaches is that the space he occupies is similar to the space the torturers occupied. At one stage he writes,

But with this woman it is as if there is no interior, only a surface across which I hunt back and forth seeking entry. Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel a dry pity for them: how natural a mistake to believe that you can burn or tear or hack your way into the secret body of the other! The girl lies in my bed, but there is no good reason why it should be a bed. I behave in some ways like a lover - I undress her, I bathe her, I stroke her, I sleep beside her - but I might equally well tie her to a

chair and beat her, it would be no less intimate (43).

His goal, like Joll's, is to reach that secret body, the site, apparently of truth. But the girl's physical body lacks a clear pathway - the only markings are red herrings, dead ends - to the space of her resistance: her secret body.

When the magistrate "hunts" her secret he often experiences spaces of blank time. At one stage he writes,

[I] am overcome with sleep as if poleaxed, fall into oblivion sprawled upon her body, and wake an hour or two later dizzy, confused, thirsty. These dreamless spells are like death to me, or enchantment, blank, outside time (31).

He goes on later to say,

On the edge of oblivion it comes back to me that my fingers, running over her buttocks, have felt a phantom criss-cross of ridges under the skin. "Nothing is worse than what we can imagine," I mumble. She gives no sign that she has even heard me. I slump on the couch, drawing her down beside me, yawning. "Tell me," I want to say, "don't make a mystery of it, pain is only pain"; but words elude me. My arm folds around her, my lips are at the hollow of her ear, I struggle to speak; then blackness falls.

The more the magistrate searches, the more he moves towards silence, oblivion. The only gestures he can make are failed, impotent ones. He reaches a point where there is complete silence. This is the only truth he takes from the girl, but, as I shall explain later, it is not an insignificant truth.

Once he has reached this point, he makes the decision to return the girl to her people. On the journey, their relationship is consummated. From a position of weakness - since he is in barbarian territory - he asks her to return with him, but she

refuses. When the magistrate arrives at the town he is arrested by the army, and expresses "a faraway tinge of exultation at the prospect that the false friendship between myself and the Bureau may be coming to an end" (77).

When the magistrate himself is tortured he is left with the task of carving out some space of resistance. At one stage he writes:

The flow of events in the outside world, the moral dimension of my plight, if that is what it is, a plight, even the prospect of defending myself in court, have lost all interest under the pressure of appetite and physical functions and the boredom of living one hour after another (87).

Torture and imprisonment appear to reduce the victim's desire to continue with his protest, although it doesn't extinguish it altogether:

I realize how tiny I have allowed them to make my world, how I daily become more like a beast or a simple machine, a child's spinning-wheel, for example, with eight little figures presenting themselves on the rim: father, lover, horseman, thief... Then I respond with movements of vertiginous terror in which I rush around the cell jerking my arms about, pulling my beard, stamping my feet, doing anything...to remind myself of a world beyond that is various and rich (84-85).

If the authorities direct their assault against the magistrate's body, then the magistrate's task is to remind himself of the world beyond, and imagine another space and alternatives to the torture. The magistrate claims the following:

[The torturers] were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well (115).

The Empire's rational violence is directed at the body and at the mind (in the creation of terror) through the body. However, they still encounter resistance. The magistrate begins to find a site from which he is able to resist, which is not consumed by historical violence.

Throughout the novel, the magistrate muses about the existence of a pastoral time - the time before the Empire's time - and, in many ways, desires to live in this time. It seems to represent an escape from imperial time, and yet this escape does not seem to be available to him. Towards the end of the novel he writes,

"No one who paid a visit to the oasis ... failed to be struck by the charm of life here. We lived in the time of the seasons, of the harvests, of the migrations of the waterbirds. We lived with nothing between us and the stars. We would have made any concession, had we only known what, to go on living here. This was paradise on earth" (154).

However, he recognizes this "plea" as "devious, "equivocal" and "reprehensible" (154). He also recognizes dreams of "ahistorical" paradises" as "dreams of ends: dreams not of how to live but of how to die" (133).

The magistrate is caught in a double bind. Like Magda, he is part of and legitimated by the system he finds abhorrent, and knows at the same time that the alternatives to this system are, to his view, equally bleak. Although he would like to, he knows he cannot live outside history (154) in the time of the seasons, but has to live in "the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe" (133) - of history. He is part of the Empire which "dooms itself to live in history and plot

against history" (133). Although he is associated with cyclical time, he is too much part of the Empire to have access to it.

His morality, though, will not allow him to support a history he feels is unjust. This leaves him in a state of limbo at the end of the novel, since, as an historical subject, he can only live in history. He cannot or will not write a history of the settlement since a history coming from him in his morally complicit situation could hardly avoid being part of that history which Empire imposes on its subjects (154).

The secret body, which I associate with cyclical time, is unavailable to him in his role as an historical subject who tries to find out the truth about imperial "socialization". As a subject undergoing this socialization he has more access to it. Finally, though, the magistrate is not an historical subject, but a fictional subject: he is a character in a novel. Consideration of the Magistrate as a fictional subject and an artist figure will help to clarify the nature of this "site".

Although he realises that history has negated the possibility of physically returning to some pastoral, idyllic time, in other ways he does have access to a related time. One of his redeeming features is a belief in a cyclical pattern to history. As an amateur archaeologist he believes that there have been others before him and there will be others after him. He believes in cycles of births and deaths. This is in contrast to Joll who appears to believe that the Empire is the pinnacle of history.

This cyclical time is the time of myth - myths are also a reminder of the eternal return of the same, since they reveal,

as Mircea Eliade claims, "the exemplary models for all significant human activities" (1963:8). It can also be seen as the time of art.

Cyclical time, the time of myth, is one representation of the eternal in time. As I claimed in the previous chapter, to create something is to link time and eternity in such a way that we escape the tyranny of time. The aesthetic will is an urge to make time stand still.

Eternity is a spatial, rather than a temporal concept. A wish for eternity is a wish to abolish developmental, chronological time - in time, the artist wishes to abolish time¹. In the words of David Harvey, "aesthetic judgement prioritizes space over time" (1989:207).

Gaston Bachelard's space of the imagination sheds further light on artistic space. He claims, in The Poetics of Space, that space that has been acted on by the imagination becomes "poetic space" which contains compressed time (1964:8). Time is memorialized as memories of experienced places and spaces and these affect our images of our present and future surroundings.

This poetic space has a certain relation to historical time. As Harvey says,

If it is true that time is always memorialized not as flow, but as memories of experienced places and spaces, then history must ... give way to poetry, time to space, as the fundamental material of social expression. The spatial image ... then asserts an important power over history (1989:218)².

¹ This brings to mind a line from T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets: "Only through time time is conquered".

² Bachelard's study, and Harvey's "use" of it, allow poetry to be interpreted as art in general.

That is, the space, or compressed time of art, asserts its power over the time of history.

It remains to be shown that this novel occupies this space. Its spatial and temporal setting, use of allegory and tense are relevant here.

Coetzee's imagined landscape is an attempt to imagine new meanings for space. It is a conflation of different geographical regions (desert, snow, marshes and so on) - a collection of memories of places. By not using a recognizable landscape, such as the Karoo, Coetzee fragments historical specificity - history gives way to poetry. Likewise, the historical era is not certain. Different historical periods overlap, which reduces the ability of historical meanings to contaminate the artistic space.

Given the novel's obvious structural and thematic use of allegory, much has been written on this subject. The critic Lois Parkinson Zamora, in an essay entitled "Allegories of Power in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee" (1986), praises Coetzee for an oblique, and therefore less easily censured, critique of the political situation in South Africa. Nadine Gordimer, on the other hand, in her review of Life and Times of Michael K ("The Idea of Gardening" [1984a]) is anything to go by, might criticize the novel for its lack of historical specificity. I would contend the use of allegory is an attempt to find a position from which to speak about history. It is a position characterized by a humility that recognizes the difficulty in speaking of violence and history.

At one stage in the novel, Joll asks the magistrate to interpret the wooden slips that the latter has collected. The

magistrate replies:

They form an allegory. They can be read in many orders. Further, each single slip can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan of war, or they can be turned on their sides and read as a history of the last years of the Empire - the old Empire, I mean (112).

Reading them as an allegory is an acknowledgement that their truth is not available to the Magistrate, that their meaning exists elsewhere. It is also a challenge to Joll in that the magistrate taunts him with what he has learnt from the girl - that the true body is also a secret body - and in that it is a philosophy which is in contrast to Joll's belief that truth is a kernel surrounded by lies.

By adopting the form of an allegory, the novel posits another space apart from the story. The inconclusivity of the allegory means that the other space cannot historically determine the space of the story. The use of allegory, therefore, is a way of transcending the violent effects of history while representing them.

The novel is written in the historic present tense. In his narrative the magistrate situates himself in the past of events. This is similar to Magda, although the obvious difference is that the magistrate knows he was present at the events. Writing in the historic present is a way, like the use of allegory, of refusing to have the final word, of refusing to tie a specific meaning to events.

The time in which the magistrate narrates the story is a time outside the events of the narrative. It is a time which is

not part of the events, but a time when one can tell of them (albeit inconclusively).

We can presume that the story is narrated while the town is waiting for the barbarians. The people, including the narrator, are waiting for their stories to be told. It is, as David Attwell says, a "moment of suspension" (in Coetzee 1992b:8).

This time warrants further discussion. Maurice Blanchot had the following to say about the act of writing:

Sometimes a man holding a pen finds that his hand refuses to let it go even though he very much wants to let it go - that his hand, instead of slackening, tightens its grip. The other hand intervenes with some success: but then the hand we shall call the diseased hand may be seen to perform a slow, almost imperceptible gesture towards the object it has been made to release. What is striking is the slowness of this gesture. The hand moves in a time that is barely human, that is not the time of viable actions nor the time of hope but rather the shadow of time, which is the shadow of a hand unrealistically groping for an object which has become its shadow (1982:100).

Blanchot is describing the "imperious need" of writers to grasp the instrument of their profession. He may as well have been describing the time of writing itself: not the time of viable actions or hope, but the shadow of time. In other words, a time which is unable to be "grasped" by history. Just as one cannot capture one's shadow, so this time is forever detached from (although present in) the "real" world. This novel seems to be narrated from that time.

If the writer is doomed to exist in a shadowy time and to grasp at shadows³ then the irruption of history into time has to take a large part of the blame. George Steiner, in After Babel

³ Blanchot is possibly building on a Saussurean thesis here.

(1975), writes about how, given the "sober recognition [of] ... the finalities of lunacy and barbarism which occurred during 1914-18 and the Nazi holocaust",

a good deal of what is representative in modern literature, from Kafka to Pinter, seems to work deliberately at the edge of quietness. It puts forward tentative or failed speech-moves expressive of the intimation that the larger, more worth-while statements cannot, ought not to be made (185).

This is a quality which Coetzee appears to have inherited from the likes of Kafka, Beckett and even Hemingway. In this novel no large, impressive statements can be made out of the horrors of history. To do so would be to trivialize them, to participate in the complicity that the magistrate fears in his dealings with the barbarian girl. The alternative is to let art exist in silence, oblivion, stopped time - mythical time - which are all apart from the modern time of history.

Like the magistrate, art cannot "live in history", but also cannot live in complete silence, complete pastoral bliss - longings to do so are "dreams of ends" (Coetzee 1980:133). The arrival of either the barbarians or the imperial authorities (the time of history) will signal the end of the story. At the same time it is the presence of the latter (the imperialists) which has given the impetus to narrate, the motivation for the work of art. In the words of Blanchot again: "publicly and privately, literature connives with what threatens it" (1982:41). Literature walks a thin line between the threatening time of history, and the silent time of myth, but, paradoxically, this is the source of its power. The strongest position for art is perhaps that where it is under threat from politics. The time of art is a time

that promises annihilation of art.

Even while this novel seems to "transcend" history, Coetzee seems unable to invest fully in the realm of art, unable to let history give way completely to poetry. Perhaps because of a further complication: if the time of history creates the ideal conditions for art, then the converse is also true. What, if not myth, was the base for such "philosophies" such as Nazism and Apartheid? What, other than silence, prolonged their day? If aestheticism fails then barbarism triumphs. Thus we can see Coetzee's quandary at this point: fiction is at its best when under threat, and, if it fails to hold firm, then the violence of history dominates.

If art and politics prosper in the same time, then it is perhaps only art's renunciation of authority that saves it from complicity with politics. The subject who writes - the magistrate and Coetzee himself - is lost in a world waiting for truth. The novel refuses the possibility of a conclusive ending, it rather embraces the feeling of being lost, since if one is lost in space, one cannot dominate that space. Coetzee's difficulty in negotiating between history and fiction could contribute, ironically, to a reversal of the political view which sees space as a collection of objects and subjects that are able to be appropriated, that is, to a reversal of the governing principles of the forces of history and of the modern state.

Art's saving grace is being able to say with the magistrate that

This [the work of art] is not the scene I dreamed of.
Like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid,
like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on

along a road that may lead nowhere (156).

5. LIFE AND TIMES OF MICHAEL K: A Novel's Allegory

A character who seems to embrace the idea of loss that I discussed in the previous chapter is Michael K. As I will argue he represents a seemingly less compromised artist figure than the magistrate for Coetzee. If Waiting for the Barbarians begins to gesture towards a time and space that art may occupy, then Life and Times of Michael K defines this more clearly and elaborates on it.

The aspect of Coetzee's fourth novel on which I will concentrate is its foregrounding of the inter-relation of time and space and questioning of what it means to occupy space¹. As I read it, this questioning is part of an attempt of Michael, and of the novel itself, to find a legitimate time and space outside the restrictive demands of history.

In the postmodern, capitalist era, space and time have often occupied dialectically opposed positions. While some would claim that the social significance of space outweighs the relevance of time, others say that space is representation, an attempt at closure, and is thus opposed to the political dynamism of time. Writing about the theory of space in the social sciences prior to the 1970s, Christopher Tilley points out that space was seen then as (scientifically) abstract and dehumanized. This view of space refuses to attribute historicity and temporality to space. It refuses to believe (or chooses to ignore) that a space

¹ It will be remembered that Said's definitions of colonialism and imperialism which I used as a basis (complicating them by introducing the notion of time) stressed that both were involved, simply, in the struggle for space.

can be intimately bound up with the identities of people. It sees space as a container for events, decentered from agency and meaning (1994:9). This is a similar conception to that to which Coetzee refers in White Writing when he faults certain groups of people for loving land (or the "emptiness" of the land) above people.

I prefer to follow theorists such as Doreen Massey (1994)² and Tilley (1994) who do away with this dialectic in favour of the term and concept "space-time". Space is constructed out of social relations, which are dynamic. It is a medium involved in, and inseparable from, action, and one which is socially produced (Tilley 1994:11). It is thus not static and lacking in meaning, effect and implications; that is, it is recognized that history and landscape are bound up with one another. Space-time is a configuration of social relations. From a phenomenological viewpoint, Tilley writes, "the experience of space is always shot through with temporalities" (1994:11). This conception of the connection of time and space is one which, as we will see, can be discerned in Life and Times of Michael K as well. The novel attempts to restore dynamism to a space that has been made static and monolithic by the dehumanizing effects of history.

Narratology provides good examples of how time and space are inextricably related. Narratives contain plots, in one form or another (even so-called plotless novels have a plot outside of the usual "configuration of events" - their configuration leads to the plot of having no plot). If plot is seen as the

² See especially the essay "Politics and Space/Time" for a summation and description of her viewpoint.

configuration of events in a novel (or history), and we follow Ricoeur by saying that all plots and narratives are allegories of temporality³, then narrative is inconceivable without time. But at the same time it is inconceivable without space. A plot (also a marked off piece of ground) can be seen as the spatial representation of various events. The arrangement in space of events is correlated to the configuration of time by the novel.

When it comes to the reader, the time it takes to read a text - what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan in Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics (1983) calls "text-time" - assumes a spatial dimension in that a text has a temporality that is derived from its reading. The novel, as a space, derives one aspect of its temporality from this spatiality. Thus narrative, even though it reduces the space-time dynamic to its individual components, is still unable to represent them as completely separate entities. Thus we could say that in addition to being allegories of temporality, narratives are allegories of spatiality as well. This situation will be of importance when we come to consider the effect that Coetzee's representation of time and space in Life and Times of Michael K has on our conception of temporal and spatial orientation.

The act of understanding a place is primarily, fundamentally, a narrative one. According to social theorist Michel de Certeau in The Practice of Everyday Life (1984), every story involves not only some kind of temporal movement, but is also a spatial practice in that

³ See his essay "Narrative Time" (1980), or his three-volume study Time and Narrative (1984-1988).

Places help to recall stories that are associated with them, and places only exist by virtue of their emplotment in a narrative (Tilley paraphrasing De Certeau 1994:33).

As De Certeau himself claims,

Stories ... traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories. (1984:115).

Movement through space constructs spatial stories, forms of narrative understanding, which involve the memory in acting in the present. As Tilley writes,

The human experience of encountering a new place or knowing how to act or go on in a familiar place is intimately bound up with previous experiences (1994:23).

Places people occupy take on, through time, particular sets of meanings and connotations. The meaning of a landscape is a direct relationship of the occupant's experience of time and history.

I have outlined several theoretical concerns thus far. They are relevant to understanding Life and Times of Michael K in two ways: in providing a way to analyze what the narrative does, and also what is represented in that narrative. It can be read as a novel which foregrounds issues to do with the social construction of space and time, and, therefore, Michael's "resistance" can be addressed in these terms. The novel identifies disturbances in the experience of time and space, and shows one person's reactions to these. The resistance of this novel itself is conducted on similar terms to Michael's, I suggest. It is a novel trying to find a time and place for itself in the all-consuming

discourse of modern history, just as Michael tries to live outside the time and place of history. Michael is thus read as an allegory of the novel itself.

South Africa is very obviously the referent in the novel - the action taking place as it does between Prince Albert and Cape Town. A large part of its events unfold in the seemingly empty, but culturally significant Karoo (in In the Heart of the Country, for instance, it was located as the site of the Afrikaner pastoral farm-novel). The time is less certain. It is set in the imagined future - imagined, since the South Africa of the novel is involved in a civil war. Whereas in Waiting for the Barbarians, Coetzee fragmented historical specificity by introducing indeterminate time and space, in Life and Times of Michael K, he attempts to "dislocate" particular meanings attached by history to a landscape, by imagining a future of the then current history.

This imagined future consists of (at least) two different times: the dystopia of South Africa at war with itself, and the utopian "un-historical" time of Michael. These two times are at war with one another in the space of the novel. Coetzee writes of the space of the present (South Africa) and introduces an allegorical time (the imagined future of civil war) divided in two, and plays out in the present of the novel the conflict between these two times. By introducing this conflict into the novel, bearing in mind that all (especially) South African novels were, and perhaps still are, spaces of contention, which revolved around their relation to history, he is introducing conflict and uncertainty into a space (South Africa, and the "South African

novel"), and, therefore, he is introducing the possibility of dynamism and change into the present, or the possibility of another time. The novel concentrates first and foremost on establishing a different time for Michael and for itself. If we accept that this has been plausibly established, then it becomes an alternative to historical time, an alternative human time.

In this novel there seem to be two opposing spaces (roughly corresponding to the two times), which I shall call idyllic or mythic space and disciplinary, historical space. The South Africa of the novel is divided, generally, into these two types of space. As I shall argue, the historic, in attempting to discipline society, attempts to eliminate idyllic space, just as Michael's time is subject to historical intervention.

The control of people in and through space in modern Western "disciplinary" societies (Foucault 1977b) is generally seen to be widespread. As Foucault emphatically states in Discipline and Punish, "in the first instance, discipline proceeds from the distribution of individuals in space" (1977b:141). Disciplinary spaces, Foucault also claims, must cut off, divide, and at the same time, be useful (141-3).

As in the previous novel, we can again see that the disturbances in time and space that Coetzee points out are characteristic of Western modern states generally. Fascist states are not necessarily aberrations, merely extreme instances.

In an essay titled "Of Other Spaces", Foucault draws a distinction between utopias and what he terms heterotopias:

Utopias are sites with no real place. They are sites that have a general relation of direct or inverted analogy with the real space of Society. They present

society itself in a perfected form, or else society turned upside down, but in any case these utopias are fundamentally unreal spaces (1986:24).

Heterotopias, on the other hand, are places that exist and "that are formed in the very founding of society" (24). They are "outside of all places" but a place in themselves (24). "Primitive" societies often have so-called "crisis heterotopias" which are privileged, sacred or forbidden places (24). In Western societies "deviation heterotopias", for instance psychiatric hospitals and prisons, are common. They are reserved for those whose behaviour is different to the norm (25). In my conception, heterotopias⁴ are created so that the space outside them can approximate a utopia⁵. The two camps Michael stays in are quite clearly in the latter category (deviation heterotopias). They have specific functions and how they achieve these (or not) is by adopting a specific relation to time and space.

Heterotopias are often linked to "slices in time" and "begin to function at full capacity when men arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (Foucault 1986:26). This break with time is as a result of the function of the camps. In the case of Jakkalsdrif, it is quite clearly a work camp (Coetzee 1983:91). As Robert claims, those who are in favour of the camp are the Railways and the farmers. Labour, and the menial wages, mean that a person's time is taken up with the task of providing food for the community. The present and immediate

⁴ In Foucault's view, colonies are "extreme" heterotopias (1986:26).

⁵ It could be argued that the homelands were created along similar principles.

future are mapped out and if the inmates of the camp transgress there is the threat of Brandvlei, the hard labour camp, hanging over them.

The camp is a space that divides time. There is the past before the camp, the present and future of the camp, and the (apocalyptic) future of Brandvlei outside the camp. The present and future of the camp, since it lacks genuine dynamism and participation in historical time, is an eternal present. Here the space of the camp is conceived of as being static. The static space of the camp moves through time unchanging. The time of the camps is in fact similar to the time of the colonial farm on which Magda finds herself, and also to the way Coetzee has characterized South African time.

Jakkalsdrif is surrounded by fences and as Robert somewhat ironically claims, has guards, "to stop the thieves coming in the night to steal your money" (78), but also, obviously, to stop the inmates from getting out. The creation of boundaries is an attempt to secure the identity of a place and can be seen as "attempts to stabilize the meaning of particular envelopes of space-time" (Massey 1994:5). The attempt is also one to define the camp as separate from its surroundings, to give it a separate history and "timeless" identity of its own. In an insightful moment Michael

no longer found it strange to think of the camp as a place where people were deposited to be forgotten. It no longer seemed an accident that the camp lay out of sight of the town on a road that led nowhere else (94).

However, the camp does have its uses (as a source of cheap

labour) and so is tolerated by the townspeople, who provide medical care and charity, perhaps because disease and dead bodies "could be offensive" (94).

In spite of the attempts to define the camp as separate from the town, the two are unavoidably linked. The reasons for establishing the camp - labour and sabotage prevention - mean that the identities of the camp and town are dependent on each other. These linkages mean that the boundaries which attempt to define the space and time of the camp are porous, as Michael and the saboteurs prove. This is a continuation of the Hegelian dialectic we noticed in the previous three novels.

Kenilworth is a slightly different matter. It is a rehabilitation camp and is run by a "liberal" in Major van Rensburg. This section of the novel is narrated by the medical officer of the camp (and is really more about the officer's reaction to what he believes Michael represents than about Michael himself), about whom I shall have more to say presently.

At one stage we are told of signs over the main gate and over the entrance to the infirmary. They read "ENCLOSURE A" and "MEMBERS AND OFFICIALS ONLY" (134). The medical officer asks,

Why have they not taken them down? Do they believe the track will be re-opened one of these days? Are there still people training racehorses somewhere, convinced that after all the fuss the world will settle down to being as it was? (134)

These signs ironically define the space within. They refer back to an idyllic past but refer also to the state and position of those presently within its walls. They are indeed enclosed - even the medical officer feels constrained by camp life, as we shall

see later - and they are "members" of the defining codes of camp life. The space is one that is supposed to help control the future and turn enemies into friends, but the signs are reminders that the past reached a point where it was beyond the control of those in power, necessitating the conversion of a racecourse into a camp⁶. The time spent on the farm and surrounding areas is offered as a contrast to that spent in the camps.

The appropriation of a space for oneself also achieves a mastery over time. One has a base from which to "prepare future expansions, and thus to give oneself a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances" (De Certeau 1984:36). Occupying a place also allows one to observe other places and forces, and, therefore, control them. Also, "to be able to see (far into the distance) is also to be able to predict, to run ahead of time by reading a space" (De Certeau 1984:36). The more space one controls, the easier it is to predict and so to control the future. (The foreign policies of various colonial and imperial powers throughout the ages will bear this out.)

Michael, by contrast, has no base where he could "stockpile [his] ... winnings, build up [his] ... own position, and plan raids. What [he] ... wins [he] cannot keep" (De Certeau 1984:37).

⁶ The names of the two camps are also relevant in this regard. Names can construct landscapes and mark places as relevant to particular previous or future experiences. Kenilworth refers to a colonial past and has much the same effect as the signs, drawing attention to the failing colonial present. Jakkalsdrif could refer to a possible future. "Drif" translated means anger or heat (as well as ford and drift). This could point to the inmates' dissatisfaction and the future venting of their anger - one example of which was the torching of the metalworks and cultural history museum in Prince Albert.

When he occupies the farm he does so temporarily. If we accept that the meaning of a landscape is a function of the occupant's history, then Michael has no claim to the landscape based on the dominant history. He cannot be certain of his mother's memories, therefore his occupation of that place is without history, without a claim to possession based on past contribution to the social structure of the land⁷. Of course there are other political (historical) reasons why Michael would not be able to lay claim to the land and at one stage comes close to articulating these reasons when he says,

He could understand that people should have retreated here and fenced themselves in with miles and miles of silence; he could understand that they should have wanted to bequeath the privilege of so much silence to their children and grandchildren in perpetuity (though by what right he was not sure); he wondered whether there were not forgotten corners and angles and corridors between the fences, land that belonged to no one yet. Perhaps if one flew high enough, he thought, one would be able to see (47).

He comes close to thinking "political" thoughts but is "too busy, too stupid, too absorbed to listen to the wheels of history" (159). His is not a "political" protest. In that the words "protest" and "resistance" imply a will, Michael's actions, or lack thereof, do not fall into that category - Michael does what he is told. His concern is with living in the "forgotten corners"

⁷ Compare this to Ryder, in Kazuo Ishiguro's The Unconsoled (1995), who is unsure of his memories and cannot rely on them for an accurate sense of place and current purpose. The city in which he moves is constructed like an Escher print with logic no guarantee for correctness, making a mockery of memory of the city. The tentativeness of his grasp of history is what leads to his dislocation in the present and his powerlessness with respect to controlling the future.

and with being left alone (181)⁸.

With no base, Michael must make use of the cracks not surveyed by the occupiers of the spaces - the gaps between the fences. Establishing a place for oneself allows for a grasp of time. Living in the gaps in time when surveillance drops off involves an intelligent use of time, or perhaps a different conception of and approach to time. Thus Michael adopts various strategies while on the farm in order to be able to do this. Before looking at his "use" of time on the farm, though, it will be instructive to examine how Michael's relation to time changes through the novel.

In the beginning of the novel we are told about Michael's employment - jobs with set hours of work. He also has a strict routine - work during the week and on Saturday mornings, and rest and a visit to his mother on Sundays. His life seems to be determined by duty. We are told

He did not shirk any aspect of what he saw as his duty. The problem that had exercised him years ago behind the bicycle shed at Huis Norenius, namely why he had been brought into the world, had received its answer: he had been brought into the world to look after his mother (7).

Even at this stage, however, he shows signs of falling into the reveries that preoccupy him later on. We are told that

Sometimes on Saturdays he failed to hear the boom of the noon gun and went on working by himself all

⁸ Magda is less content with the "natural" landscape than Michael. Whereas Magda attempts to manipulate stones into a language, Michael attempts to disguise his movements and disturbances of the land as much as possible. Magda, obviously, desires to be part of history (in some ways), whereas Michael does not.

through the afternoon (4).

Later on he seems guided in his use of time by some (greater) force outside himself. After his mother's death in Stellenbosch "it appeared" to Michael, "that he had to stay in Stellenbosch for a certain length of time. There was no way of shortening the time" (34).

The first stay on the farm, "he lived by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time" (60), but still felt occasionally "a sense of pain that was obscurely connected with the future" (59). When he leaves the farm, not wanting to be turned into Visagie's servant, he hides in the mountains, and again keeps no "record of the passage of the days" (68) and seems to live by the rising and setting of the sun. However, here too he feels some anxiety about the future - that his "story might end with his bones growing white in this faroff place" (69). He still feels the disturbances of historical time in mythical time.

He escapes from Jakkalsdrif, after being "devoured by time in the camp" (98), and makes his way to the farm. Here Michael lives independently of the clock and of the time of history, at a pace that is different to that of the state and its peoples embroiled in a civil war. Here he yields himself up to time (115) which is "poured out upon him in ... an unending stream" (102). He lives "beyond the reach of calender and clock in a blessedly neglected corner" (116) as before, but here he loses track of time completely (118) since he is weak and delirious from lack of food. He seems to be able to embrace completely the time of myth, and ignore the time of history.

The farm seems to be a space beyond historical space and

time for Michael. However, it is still a space that belongs to someone else - or at least does not belong to Michael to the exclusion of others. In the beginning of his stay he thinks, "[a] man who wants to live ... must live in a hole and hide by day. A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living" (99). Later on he feels that the "greenness of the new grass would betray him" (101), hears motors in the distance (102), is almost seen by people in a donkey cart (102), and fears discovery by a helicopter (112).

He must make use of the "forgotten corners" of space and time in order to survive. Thus he waters his garden at night, empties the dam, builds his shelter to blend in with the landscape (100), and uses materials that the insects can eat when he is finished with them (104). He uses the scraps of civilization in order to make his life easier (103-4). Michael is weak and has to live off the scraps (temporal and material) left by the powerful, but his resistance is to use those that the powerful do not realise are there. In creating another time and space for himself, the foundations of power are undermined, even if it is only with a few pumpkin seeds and a makeshift burrow.

His capture means being sent to a rehabilitation camp in Cape Town. Here we see him as entirely absorbed in the present, absorbed in the limits or scraps of official time. If the authorities try to keep him in the present of historical stasis (that Magda, for instance, suffers from) by placing him in camps, then Michael's cultivation of presentness (a time that has no historical sense at all) is the opposite of what they would expect. They would expect him to eat, to build up his strength

for tomorrow, before putting him to work. He embraces presentness so much that he refuses to eat even if it means his death in the near future.

The refusal to eat the food of history (camp food) obviously has a deleterious effect on his body, the body being that which cannot help but be "in history". It is the vantage point from which the world is apprehended (Tilley 1994:13), the space from which time is apprehended, and it is the site of all primary contributions to history. According to De Certeau the actions of eating, sleeping and quenching of one's thirst are the first conditions of participation in historical time (1988:97). It is this site which is the site of Michael's resistance. As the medical officer says, Michael acquiesced in his will (to official demands), but his body balked (163). By refusing to eat he can be seen as refusing history.

The "political import" of the body is hinted at several times in the novel. Hospitals are described as places where "bodies asserted their rights" (71). One of the reasons offered as to why the townspeople give medical care, shelter, and meals for the children to the Jakkalsdrif inmates is that "dead bodies could be as offensive as living bodies" (94). As we have already seen in Waiting for the Barbarians, the body is a space which the authorities attempt to control, put behind barbed wire, and force to do certain exercises. Through this the authorities expect to be able to control the will. As the medical officer says,

We are given an old racetrack and a quantity of barbed wire and told to effect a change in men's souls. Not being experts on the soul but assuming...it has some connection with the body, we set our captives to work doing pushups and marching back and forth (134).

Michael thinks and talks about being able to fly. At one stage we are told,

he felt a deep joy in his physical being. His step was so light that he barely touched the earth. It seemed possible to fly; it seemed possible to be both body and spirit (102).

In Kenilworth Michael talks to the officer of Huis Norenius and says,

I used to think about flying. I always wanted to fly. I used to stretch out my arms and think I was flying over the fences and between the houses. I flew low over people's heads, but they couldn't see me (133).

Michael seems to be trying for a separation of soul and body, for existence in an invisible sphere (as soul), an existence that is outside history, and dependent on different laws and codes.

It is perhaps this point that, in the end, the medical officer cannot completely understand, coming as he does from within the camps⁹. He chooses various forms of address in section two, one of which is a letter addressed to "Michaels". Michael's aim, if one can call it that, is not to help the rest of society, but to escape society. A letter is one of the organizing tenets of a society, providing narrative communication across space between two people, companies, and so on. However innocently conceived, by sending a letter the officer misreads the space occupied by Michael - that which is outside the space of society. Michael is after all listed at one stage as NFA - no

⁹ It is this that makes the medical officer the ideological equivalent to the Magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians, and Magda in In the Heart of the Country. They are all complicit in a system they see as unjust.

fixed abode (70).

The irony is evident in much of the medical officer's narration. The fact that he is still using the name "Michaels" decided on by the police chief of Prince Albert is another indicator that the medical officer is speaking from within a discourse, as a participant in history, trying to understand what is exterior to that discourse (Michael).

Another example is that in the letter he calls Michael a "human soul above and beneath classification, a soul blessedly untouched by doctrine, untouched by history" (151). A few lines later, however, he calls on Michael to yield and tell his story (152), tell his history so that the "we" the officer talks about can appreciate the lesson that Michael has to offer; in other words he has to classify Michael before attempting to emulate him. The request or command to yield aligns him with the soldier who forces Michael's face into the earth and orders him to tell his story (122) about his activities on the farm. The soldier is one of the supporters of history, and wants him to yield so that Michael will not pose a threat to that discourse. The medical officer, however, wants him to yield so that his anti-historical message will be understood - the officer himself would like to escape history.

He portrays himself as a victim of historical time and in wondering about the nurse, Felicity, sets out his own conceptions of time. His is a despair at being consumed by all-powerful History. He thinks of himself as "living in suspension, alive but not alive, while history hesitated over what course it would take" and later says,

I doubt that Felicity pictures to herself currents of time swirling and eddying all about us, ... murkily at first, yet tending ever towards a moment of transfiguration in which pattern is born from chaos and history manifests itself in all its triumphant meaning. Unless I mistake her, Felicity does not think of herself as a castaway marooned in a pocket of time, the time of waiting, camp time, war time. To her, time is as full as it has ever been; ... whereas to me, ... time has grown empty (158).

Soon after admitting that his time has grown empty he imagines setting off for the Karoo with Noel, before abandoning the idea in favour of following Michael when he heads back to the Karoo. He says he is convinced "there are areas that lie between the camps and belong to no camp" (162), which is obviously a similar idea to Michael's (47). The difference is that Michael uses the gaps in time and space in order to live, while the officer still feels that he has to arm himself against the ravages of time and take along a change of clothes, money, matches and so on. All Michael needs are his seeds. The medical officer's is thus a historical act, or at least an anti-historical act that is defined by history.

He imagines that, while he is following or chasing Michael, the latter will pick up speed and try to outrun him. This is a sub-conscious admission of the unsuitability of his narrative to Michael. The more he attempts to explain and categorize Michael, the faster Michael runs away: the officer wonders,

Would I be imagining it, or would it be true that at this point you would begin to throw your most urgent energies into running, so that it would be clear to the meanest observer that you were running to escape the man shouting at your back, the man in blue who must seem to be persecutor, madman, bloodhound, policeman? (167).

At one stage the medical officer says "to" Michael:

"Your stay in the camp was merely an allegory, if you know that word. It was an allegory - speaking at the highest level - of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it. Did you notice how, whenever I tried to pin you down, you slipped away?"(166).

He runs away to escape the narratorial fences erected by the medical officer. The narrative destroys itself as it speaks. It is fixed in a particular space - it is a particular space - with a particular relation to time and cannot encapsulate that which is outside it. If Michael constitutes the type of allegory that the medical officer claims, then his (Michael's) "meaning" exists outside the system where Michael's form/body is situated. The meaning of this sort of allegory cannot be named from the system where the structure of the allegory is present, since it appears to refuse the process of naming. By naming Michael's meaning, the medical officer contradicts his own "diagnosis", and reduces Michael's meaning to a term in the system (the discourse of History)¹⁰.

On his escape Michael makes his way to Sea Point. This represents a cycle in a spatial and temporal terms (Michael and

¹⁰ This begs the obvious question of the status of all those who offer interpretations of Michael (readers and critics). In a way we are in the same class as the medical officer. We request Michael to yield and tell his story. The critic produces narrative as an answer to the novel - the novel, and Michael, being that which goes beyond narrative. There is perhaps no answer which will be completely satisfactory for a critic, but there perhaps is an answer that will be satisfactory to a novelist. If my argument for this novel is accepted then it is clear that the novel will always exist outside critical discourse. It will always offer more to write about, it will never be completely written about. A novel is never appropriated into a canon (into history), only images of the novel.

his mother leave in late July and he returns in what appears to be September), reinforcing the idea that Michael participates in cyclical, mythical time rather than history's jagged time of rise and fall. Here, in Sea Point, he resists becoming an "object of charity" (181) and telling the story of a life lived in cages (181), proclaiming, "I was mute and stupid in the beginning, I will be mute and stupid at the end" (182). He is on the verge of death, hinted at when we are told that

He had the feeling that something inside him had let go or was letting go. What it was letting go of he did not yet know, but he also had a feeling that what he had previously thought of in himself as tough and rope-like was becoming soggy and fibrous, and the two feelings seemed to be connected (177).

The novel ends with Michael imagining meeting the man who occupies his mother's old room and returning to the Karoo with him. The "message" of this passage is ambiguous. It is a projection into the future - Michael's first elaborate thought about the future; but at the same time it is a thought about the past. His wanting to correct the past - he thinks to himself, "The mistake I made ... was not to have had plenty of seeds" (182) - in the present (or future) could mean his entering the discourse of history, and desiring community (he imagines returning with the old man), instead of remaining in the gaps of present time, those places not surveyed by history. On the other hand, it is an attempt to create a space - imagined perhaps - completely beyond the reach of history since the occasions of overlap (the times when Michael feared discovery) between the two spatial-temporal systems (the visible pumpkins, for example) would be eliminated. He and the old man would live at their own

pace outside clock time, drinking water from a teaspoon. The novel gives more credence to the latter point: that it is an imagined attempt to make the escape more conclusive; after all, the man is another who is less visible to history, if only because he is old, and he is a man, so there will be no generation of a community.

The terms I have used to describe Michael's resistance and the terms Coetzee has used to describe the "place" he wishes the novel (all novels) to occupy are deliberately quite similar. In the essay "The Novel Today" (1988) he describes how he would like the novel (in general) to be regarded as a "rival" to history, instead of a "supplement"¹¹. What he means by this is a novel

that operates in terms of its own procedures and issues in its own conclusions, not one that operates in terms of the procedures of history and eventuates in conclusions that are checkable by history (3).

In other words, a novel that occupies a separate time and space (a separate camp) to history, a novel that is not just an "imaginative investigation of real historical forces and real historical circumstances" (2). Michael could thus be read as an allegory of this sort of novel - a novel that refuses to be pinned down by history.

However, to escape the narratives, and the time and space of history, is to occupy a non-human realm, which cannot help but be associated with death. This complicates our reading of the novel. Is it being suggested by the novel that the only suitable escape from history is death? (suicide?). Reading Michael as the

¹¹ See my introduction for a more complete summary.

novel, is it being suggested that the only novel that can escape history is precisely not a novel, precisely nothing?

Simply put, being outside human, historical time and space means death only to humans. Michael's body (if he had one) could not evade death forever. Considering that Michael has no body (that is, he is not "real": he is, after all, a character in a novel), and considering that, as we claimed earlier, the body is the primary site and condition of historicity, then we realise that Michael has no relation to history. Michael is not human, which is why we can call him an allegory (of the novel). He is something outside history. If he had a body Michael would die, but he doesn't. Michael lives outside history, in the novel. I also made the point that Michael was trying for a separation of body and soul, and succeeding. His dead body (if he had one) would remain in history, while his soul, his allegory (the novel), will remain in the time it has established for itself.

By making use of Michael as an allegory, Coetzee appears to be defending the needs of the imagination. He is perhaps suggesting that all of us are outside history in some way, as much as we are in it. Michael does not die - he is the site of imagination, the site of art. By using a marginalised figure as an allegory of art, Coetzee also suggests that art is necessarily marginal. If the choice is between life and death, art needs to live closer to death.

If the novel, through its examination of time and space attempts to create its own time and space, and succeeds as I claim it does, then this is a position outside of the official discourse of history, and it is thus a position which offers the

novelist a measure of freedom, albeit necessarily compromised. It leaves the novel free to make its own rules and issue in its own procedures. It is perhaps the time and space of writing itself, that which brings the "feel of freedom", that which allows one to follow one's own thoughts (Coetzee 1992:246). But it also "lives" in a space threatened with death, or more prosaically, with incorporation in history and colonisation by the power of other discourses.

There is one section of this novel - that narrated by the medical officer - where this time and space of freedom has not been achieved. Indeed, there are moments in Coetzee's novels where he would seem to be in as much despair at history (or at the position art has to occupy in relation to history) as some of his characters. In this novel, the question of why Coetzee wished to contrast the medical officer and Michael is pertinent (stylistically as well as ideologically). Surely Michael would still be an allegory of sorts without the officer's naming him as such? Coetzee's approach to Michael seems to change to the historical in this section. That is, the officer's somewhat hysterical search for meaning represents a concession to history on the part of Coetzee, a near surrender of the enigma that is Michael, since it is history that insists on trying to write its opponents into its discourse. The officer is part of history (even if he does not much like it), and history, through one of its subjects, takes over Michael's story for forty pages of the novel. The time outside history is enfolded by it, if only for a short duration. This is an indication of the ability of history to colonise that which challenges it. The spaces outside history

are difficult to occupy and are under continued threat.

This historical despair has another possible implication. If we accept that Coetzee is trying to create another human time, and if we note how Michael achieves his existence in another space and time (his separation of body and soul), then the religious nature of this thought becomes evident: the body remains in the world, while the soul passes into another realm. While in this world (this discourse) we cannot know the other. Coetzee, given this situation, and given the despair at history, seems to be advocating a return to an idea of faith, an idea which will take us out of language, out of narrative, and out of history. In fact, he seems to be saying that this novel, and perhaps all novels, are an expression of this (religious) faith, and the site of art is perhaps as indefinable and illogical as faith.

6. Foe: Privacy and Narrative

Three years after the publication of Life and Times of Michael K, in 1986, appeared Foe, a novel where Coetzee's preoccupation with time and space is less obvious, but no less relevant. As in the previous novel and Waiting for the Barbarians, the body is again a site of contest - the body as temporal and spatial entity. We characterized Michael as a body avoiding (temporal and spatial) classification, and Friday is a body that seems to be completely beyond representation, at least by Susan and Foe. Like Michael, the dilemma that Friday represents seems in turn to represent Coetzee's attempt to invest his fictional realm with (a kind of) authority.

Foe remains what appears to be Coetzee's most written-about novel. This is partly to do with its closeness to, or overt buying into, the discourses of postmodernism and postcolonialism. The text encapsulates ideas on the power and authority of narrative in its intertextual, self-conscious examination of its own construction and authority, which fit in well with dominant, Western, postmodern streams of thought. Added to this, in many ways the novel can be read as a re-writing of Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, with the dominant centre of meaning (the colonizing white male) replaced by an emphasis on marginality in the figures of Susan Barton and Friday. The re-writing of an important colonial text and the bringing to the fore of the dispossessed others make Foe an extremely inviting novel for post-colonial critics.

However, coming at the novel from either of these two angles seems to me to be critically dangerous. Firstly, it is a novel

which seems to want to step out of encircling discourses, and, secondly, it is one of those novels that, if approached from either of these perspectives, seems to say it all for you. The critic might struggle to say something that is not mere paraphrase. If I seem to fall into the same trap from time to time, it is always with the intention of building a base from which to examine what the text does, that is, its attempt to create a discourse of its own, one that cannot be encircled by either postcolonialism or postmodernism.

Kathrin Wagner, in her essay "Dichter and Dichtung: Susan Barton and the "Truth" of Autobiography", approaches the text from a post-modern angle and writes that in Foe,

Coetzee goes on to interrogate the fundamental nature of "Truth" itself, and to question the extent to which it is constituted by language rather than being constitutive of language. Lacan ... has clearly defined the issues at stake here: "... there is no metalanguage", he writes, "no language can say the truth about truth, since the truth founds itself on the fact that it speaks and has no other means of doing so", that is, "... it is the world of words which create the world of things". Reality, or the Real (the conventional locus of the truth), is represented by Lacan as merely "the primordial chaos upon which language operates ...; [in this view] the Real is given its structure by the human power to name" (1989:2-3).

It is these ideas that Coetzee embodies, according to Wagner. While her essay is no doubt valid within the discourse in which it operates, it seems to simply repeat the ideas that are expressed by the characters in Foe - criticism as a repeat journey, rather than a voyage of discovery.

Sheila Roberts, in "Post-colonialism, or the House of Friday - J.M. Coetzee's Foe", falls into the trap of reductiveness,

treating the novel as

an imaginative rendering of the very condition of the colonial personality and of colonialism as they limp towards post-colonialism, in all its independence disappointments, its sluggishness to effect sound social change, and the problematics of finding an authentic, uncolonized mode of discourse - one that can remove the sensation that the ex-coloniser still has his tongue down the throat of the colonized (1991:87-88).

My approach is closer to Derek Attridge's, who begins his essay "Oppressive Silence: J.M. Coetzee's Foe and the Politics of Canonisation" (1996), by asking,

How does it come about that a fictional work, or an oeuvre, is heard within a literary and cultural tradition? What does it mean for a novel to claim canonic status, or for critics to make such a claim on its behalf? What kinds of voicing or silencing are involved in this process, and how do they relate to the wider operations of voicing and silencing that characterise - and in some degree constitute - our cultural and political practices? (168)

These are the questions raised by Foe, according to Attridge. His approach uses what the text says as a way of examining what it does (or what is done to it). It attempts to find a broader "meaning" for the text than one that is simply verbal game-playing or post-colonial-statement-making. I claim that the novel becomes more than a narcissistic, ironic, admiration of itself, or even a political statement, when one considers the distinction and opposition in the novel between the realms of public and private time and space. As I will show, Coetzee's examination of these "realms" is tied in with his continuing investigation of the relationship between history and art.

Briefly, the novel's impetus comes from Susan's desire to have a story written about her stay as a castaway on Crusoe's island. She chooses Foe, a novelist, to write her story for her, hoping that he can clear up the narrative uncertainties and ambiguities and turn the story into a novel that will sell. Her desire is, at least initially, for a world, a text, a space, constructed on empty space, without loose ends, with beginning, middle, end and moral worked out and visible. (As we have seen, Magda wishes for much the same thing from her narratives). This proposed realist text can thus be seen as a type of narrative utopia - a self-contained, unchanging space positioned in the future. This text is situated at the end of history, the end of change, but is itself the History, the all-consuming Truth (of a particular series of events), in that it is without alternative plots, without loose ends.

Susan's desire for this text gives rise to a number of complications, and these issues are what the novel is concerned with. She wants a recognized author, Foe, and not herself, to write the novel. Later we realize that she does not want him to write the novel ^{and} thereby solve the ambiguities and present readers with morals. We thus have a turning away from the utopian ideal of an all-consuming history¹.

Susan's temporal orientation at the end of the novel (or at least at the end of part 3) is suspended, and is arrived at through the combination of her desire for the utopian text, and her interrogation of what is at stake in narrative. The desire

¹ According to Hanjo Beressem in "Foe: The Corruption of Words" (Matatu 1988 v5(2) 222-235) Hegel quotes Robinson Crusoe as the perfect example of the utopia of the master-slave economy.

for realism, coupled with knowledge of its drawbacks, produces a state of suspension.

Her story involves and is about others - Foe, perhaps, but also Cruso, a dead man, and most importantly, Friday, a mute black man. The most important question the text poses is: where does Susan's tussle with her enemy (Foe) for control of authorship and, subsequently, message, leave Friday?

It can already be seen that in many ways Susan is the female equivalent of Magda, the magistrate and the medical officer - their dilemmas appear similar. Her's is perhaps a more complicated position, though. As an eighteenth-century woman whose "moral stature" is in doubt, she has absolutely no authority with which to play. The only "object" (Friday) she controls, she controls because of an accident.

The novel is divided into four parts. The first part is written by Susan to aid Foe in his writings and is set in the past tense, from a present of waiting for her story to be written. In part two we are in Clock Lane (47) in the present tense. The section is, to all intents and purposes, in an epistolary style, and the letters are addressed to Foe.

Part three is also in the past tense. Her writings are no longer addressed to Foe, but are still about her interaction with him. It is about a contest over another narrative which she has given away to Foe, but still wishes to control. The present of writing is less certain here. It is set after the events, but since no end, no moral, is reached, we do not know who won, as it were. This future is indeterminate - we are led to ask at the end of page 152 where Susan is now. What has her writing

achieved, if anything? What is the meaning or significance of this present? Susan initially believes that the past will prove her salvation as well as Friday's. The novel that Foe will publish will restructure the unknown meanings of the past and provide wealth and fame for its characters. Her desire for her story to be written is at the same time a desire for the end of her story. But the achieved end is inconclusive.

This is where the novel ends for her, effectively, since the narrator of part four is unknown. The time is also uncertain. Parts three and four begin with the same sentence except for a change in tense (the former is in the past and the latter is in the present tense) and then take different directions. This would possibly suggest that part four is written at a coinciding, a coincidence, of times from different worlds (the worlds of the two narrators). Two different time systems overlap but then continue on their own. The present tense of part four begins as the time of (retrospective) writing of part three and develops according to different laws. At the end of Foe the reader is also left hanging as the last few pages read more like the beginnings of another novel than the end of this one.

To begin to answer the question of what causes Susan to be suspended in and by time, I would like to go back to Ian Watt and his study The Rise of the Novel (1957), with specific reference to his comments on Defoe and Richardson's use or portrayal of time and space and the concurrent rise of "privacy" and the novel form. Watt's book has been influential in the study of eighteenth-century writers and the emergence of realism. His comments on what characterizes realist narratives can be read

"against the grain" in order to uncover certain ethical implications (with which Foe is concerned) of the practice of narration. Taking one aspect of realism - the detailing of time and space - I would like to examine what it means to narrate.

Watt sees the emergence of realism as marking a break with earlier genres of fiction. Novelists adopted a "window on the world" perspective (of course Foe's window is first imagined with a ripple and then the real window proves the representation false). This perspective necessitated a regulated sense of time and place in narrative and Defoe was one of the first to introduce this into his fictions (Watt 1957:23-24).

Robinson Crusoe shows an attention to detail and a vivid description of objects not seen before. Defoe's Crusoe isolates a space of his own, produces a "system of objects by a dominant subject" (DeCerteau 1984:136) and transforms a natural world. Crusoe writes a diary, giving himself

a space in which he can master time and things, and to thus constitute for himself, along with the blank page, an initial island in which he can produce what he wants (De Certeau 136).

Defoe thus shows his characters with an intimate relation to the time and space around them. Richardson, in his epistolary novels, shows a more "minutely discriminated time-scale" and a much less "selective attitude to what should be told to the reader" (Watt 1957:175) than previous writers. This minute detailing of time (and space) sets the realist novel apart from other fictions. Through this detailing we are led into the "private experience" of the characters in the novel - "we get inside their minds as well as inside their houses" (175).

The rise of the novel, says Watt, is tied to a rise in the importance of privacy, which is linked in turn to the rise of the modern city. London, in Defoe and Richardson's time, was a burgeoning metropolis. With an increasing number of people living in close proximity to one another there was an increase in private spaces (in homes and so on). Women were confined to these private spaces and to the domestic sphere, whereas the city and areas outside the home were spaces for men².

Narrative (especially realist narrative) appears to depend on the private/public dialectic for existence. Narrative probes, and promises to reveal, the private. The writer garners the details of a person's life and presents them to the public. Epistolary novels dramatise this best. Letters are seen as the most personal form of written communication and their display is a promise of revelation of the secrets of their writers. Letter-writing enabled women to stay protected in the houses and still carry on private and personal relationships. This, of course, makes women an inviting subject for male narrative (but also both a fit and an unfit subject since it lay in the male interest to keep the private private). The narrative would reveal to the public the secrets of the private. Narrative makes the private public. But if it does this then the private is no longer what it is, or was.

The condition of privacy characterizes the reading of novels

² Susan flouts this control in her quest for her daughter, in landing on the island, in London, and in taking Friday to Bristol. But she is left placeless through these actions. She does not have a place of her own. She does not belong. She lives in other people's places.

as well³ (Brooks 1993:28). One reads a novel in private - it is an individual experience. The novel is distributed and one can take it away and the reading experience is between the reader and the text. The public makes the private possible. Its opposite makes privacy possible (29). The reader is a lone castaway promised an unveiling of truth, a deliverance to meaning, an end which will bring the reader back to the public world of recognizable messages. In the case of Foe, however, the reader is left stranded in the world that is Part 4 - the section where Coetzee portrays the ethical importance of leaving the private intact.

Indeed, it is the ethics of the operation of the private/public dialectic in narrative representation that interest Coetzee in his representation of Susan and her various dilemmas. Susan's arrival on the island means that it will be presented narratorially. Without her, Cruso, the island, and Friday might as well not have existed. Cruso, as we are told, "kept no journal ... because he lacked the inclination" (Coetzee 1986;16) for it, and did not measure the passage of time at all (16). When she urges Cruso to write down his memories before they are forgotten he simply says, "Nothing I have forgotten is worth the remembering" (17).

Her arrival, and her desire to narrate brings unease to Cruso. He does not seem overjoyed by her presence. Susan's wishes that Cruso provide some sort of history of himself for her either

³ Peter Brooks, in his study of 1993, Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative, sees the private "consumption" of books as being made possible by the public production and distribution (29).

go unheeded or she is presented with an array of stories which are "so various, and so hard to reconcile with one another" (11). In the isolated space of his own he writes nothing, and so cannot master time and history. She struggles to make sense of a man who wants his "story to begin [and end] with his arrival on the island (34). Ironically enough, Susan will later wish for exactly the same thing from Foe.

Cruso's actions on the island are also a source of confusion for her. He produces very little and transforms the natural world only by shifting stones. His terraces provide his only legacy; they are all he will leave behind (18). Susan wishes he had spent his time doing other things that would be of more entertainment value when written down: she feels that "Cruso rescued will be a deep disappointment to the world" (34). What she doesn't realise is that Cruso's actions made every bit of sense within the confines of the island. The time of the island was determined by Cruso and Friday. Before she came there was no need amongst the island's inhabitants for narrative. Her desire to narrate the island brings to it categories of evaluation outside and beyond the island. One could say that in making the world of Cruso and Friday public she makes that world irrational, rather than, as she believes, ^{that} the world was irrational prior to her arrival.

Susan's representation of the terraces portrays them as a sort of preparation for the future. But it is a work which is a way of filling the historically empty time of the present. It is almost a religious effort to achieve some salvation for oneself

in some time after the present⁴.

Susan's dilemma in London could be articulated in a similar manner. The unresolved past enforces a condition of stasis in Susan's present. Only once the past is narrated as past can she continue with the future. Waiting for her story (that which will set her "free of Cruso and Friday" [66]) to be written, she becomes a castaway in the city, living from day to day on the resources she finds around her - a life that grows less and less distinct from the life she led on the island (71). There is no attempt to produce a "system of objects by a dominant subject" (DeCerteau 136). Instead she initially pins her hopes on salvation by a realist, utopian (with all the hidden meanings worked out) presentation of her story to the public. Her work is all for this purpose (of course she later realises that this work could be a form of sacrifice - of herself and perhaps of Friday and Cruso).

On her return to London she seeks out the author, Foe, and pleads with him to write her story, restoring to her "the substance [she] has lost" (51). She wants Foe to regulate her time and space for her. At first she longs to become word from flesh, giving away her life to become a unit of meaning that people can read, quote and recognize⁵. The promise of fame and fortune proves attractive. She sells her story to Foe as she

⁴ Incidentally, I do not view the building of terraces with as much disdain as Susan and most critics. The work opposes history's torpor, and imagines another world. It is quite possible to think of the act of writing in similar terms.

⁵ Friday is also a quotation - a common unit of exchange - in a more obvious way than Susan, because of his presence in Robinson Crusoe. In a similar manner, it would seem that the "other" Susan is a being, a body created entirely by narrative.

would sell her body, giving away privacy for financial gain. At the same time she holds on to the story insisting on fidelity to the "truth". In the exchange she attempts to keep part of herself, part of her story, away from Foe.

This latter point is revealed in two particular modes of discourse that Coetzee makes use of in parts two and three: the letter and the confession. Part two begins as a series of dated communications which she calls letters and later she adopts the more formal manner of beginning them with "Dear Mr. Foe" (94).

Susan's letters take on what Linda Kauffman in Discourse of Desire (1986) labels the "typical epistolary style" (see especially the prologue). They analyze the behaviour of the beloved (in this case the desired figure of Foe), talk to him, who is (unexplainedly) absent, and commentate on the act of writing⁶.

Writing letters was a way for a woman to control the production of writing and to control her representation. It was also a way to escape the social restrictions which kept women in the domestic space. But at the same time their circulation was very limited - usually only one other person.

Letters were private, but Susan breaks this rule. At first she begins entrusting the letters to others (62), then she begins throwing them out the window, proclaiming, "Let who will read

⁶ Samuel Richardson was obviously one of the first novelists to make use of the epistolary form. Pamela enacts attempts to protect the privacy and innocence of the heroine. (Shamela displays what Fielding saw as Pamela's hypocrisy). The reader is at the same time violating Pamela since her letters are private. Of course, the letters are not really Pamela's since she doesn't exist: the novelist invites us to participate privately in the unveiling of a narratorially constructed and created privacy.

them" (64). By doing this she is challenging the rules of the value of texts - they usually have to be bought to be read - and of the circulation of texts - only those who had bought them could read them. Her challenge becomes one to patriarchy. The woman is not allowed to be "read" by anyone except he entitled to by contract - her husband. Thus woman's desire escapes its boundaries and exposes the private life of the woman and of the men in her life. Susan here shows her disregard, or perhaps her despair, at the rules and conventions of narrative.

The epistolary, autobiographical, and confessional modes are in many ways closely related. In this novel Foe is characterized as a confessant by Susan. Early on she says she was told that he was Foe, "the author who had heard many confessions and [was] reputed a very secret man" (48). Later on she repeats this characterization of Foe as a "clergyman of sorts" and says, "here I am pouring out my darkest secrets to you!" (120).

Scherazade had to keep spinning stories to keep death at bay. If she stopped telling stories, she would have been put to death. This scenario is paralleled by the parable of the woman thief that Foe tells Susan (as well as Susan's own position, as I shall presently argue). The parable is as follows: the woman asked to make another confession just before she was about to be put to death, claiming that the previous one was false. She confessed countless sins for hours on end and when stopped by the minister says,

If I do not speak the truth, reverend father ... then am I not abusing the sacrament, and is not that a sin worse even than those I have confessed, calling for further confession and repentance? And if my repentance is not truly felt (and is it truly felt? -

I look into my heart and cannot say, so dark is it there), then is my confession not false, and is that not sin redoubled? (124).

She confesses and throws it into doubt, as Foe tells Susan, thereby postponing the moment in which she will be put to death.

The idea of confession is generally problematic. It involves the revelation of the most private and secret, and is a narrative of an event or experience. If confession is a narrativization, it is also a fictionalization and a historical representation, and, therefore, incomplete. If the confession is incomplete, can it be the truth? In fact, would the whole "truth" not be a re-enactment of the sin, which would make it no different to sin? Narrative representation of something cannot completely capture that thing, and so its "substance" is altered.

Susan has a slightly different role to either Scherazade or the thief. For Susan, the end of the story means death, but so does the publication of Foe's novel. A final confession and the result - absolution - both mean death. Susan does not keep spinning stories, but rather holes in stories, making it impossible to write her story. She insists that the truth of her story is a silence, and, speaking to Foe says, "the shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday's tongue" (117). Her insistence on fidelity to something she won't or can't reveal has the effect of postponing the end of the story, of extending her fictional life, and the story she ends up with is about no more, or perhaps no less, than a woman cowering from the wind (94).

There is a further way in which Susan's role complicates issues. She is at once confessor and confessant. She tells her

story and analyzes it herself, finding gaps or silences. She is a biographer of herself (and of others) unable to propose the definitive version of her story (in a similar manner to Magda). Coetzee writes in "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoyevsky" that a confession like this

has no more authority than an account given by any other biographer: it may proceed from knowledge, but it does not proceed from self-knowledge (1992b:273).

She feels a separation between herself and her self in narrative. She perhaps begins to feel more like the other Susan Barton, who appears to be an agent who alerts her to this problem. The "daughter", to Susan, seems to be a self created by and existing completely in narrative (in a similar manner to Magda, perhaps), a fate that Susan would like to avoid. She says alternately, "I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire" (131), and,

In the beginning I thought I would tell you the story of the island and, being done with that, return to my former life. But now all my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. I thought I was myself ... But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you? (133)

Amidst these relatively commonplace postmodern ideas, we detect the cause of Susan's dislocation, and it is this cause that Coetzee is more concerned with. Reading between the lines we can perhaps read another truth. The problems centre around Friday and the revelation of his secret: She says, in a line already quoted, "the shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday's tongue". Her confession involves her privacy and that

of Friday.

Friday is indeed the hole in the narrative - that which is unable to be explained (in many ways like Michael K), and he is that which means the realist, utopian, historical narrative cannot be written. The narrative of Susan and Foe that is presented in Foe is intent on uncovering the secret of Friday's body in order to expose the truth whose signs are written on the flesh. Susan struggles to narrate the black space that is Friday, to put his (mutilated) body into language and meaning. Initially, Friday's body means wealth and fame to Susan, as part of the story of the island about to be written by Foe. He then holds the key to intellectual satisfaction: as the unexplained hole in the narrative. It is the lack in Friday which causes a lack in Susan.

Her struggle to articulate the problem that is Friday takes on changing forms. Early on she says,

To tell my story and be silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with the pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost! (67)

Later on she says,

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

In a conversation with Foe they trade ideas on how to approach the problem of Friday's tongue. Foe begins by saying,

In every story there is a silence ..., some word unspoken ... Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story (141).

Susan replies with, "It is for us to open Friday's mouth and hear what it holds" (142); then Foe: "we must make Friday's silence speak" (142). Susan asks, "But who will do it?" (142). There is a distinction between making and letting the silence speak in the above quotations, and these are the terms in which they approach the ethical dilemma. But the novel, it seems, conducts the argument on a different level. This level can be explored via an interrogation of what is written on Friday's body and how Susan, in particular, reacts to this.

The writing on Friday's body is obviously an imposition. The cutting out of his tongue is an imposition of law or custom on the body. The law, written on the body, transforms it from a private space into a public - a social text is written onto a private space. It is a short step from one's body being a public space to the body being public property. This is the case with Friday, as it is the less extreme case with all of us; the writing marks him as a slave. (In a way, Susan realises that having Foe write her story is like having her tongue cut out. She, her narrative self, will be transformed from private to public space by the writing of the novel.)

It also goes some way to determining his temporality. It is a writing that determines Friday's future and covers up its history (the process of inscription - the removal of the tongue - conceals the process of inscription⁷), leaving Friday an island in time, living in the present. As in Waiting for the Barbarians,

⁷ Compare this to the ideas on confession (confession, the moment it is, is false) and that about Crusoe's world seeming irrational only when it is put into narrative - narrative could be said to make it irrational.

the body is seen as a temporal entity: the writing on Friday's body determines his temporality and is, therefore, an invasion of his right to private time. There is no private time if a mark on the body determines how that body shall be used.

Susan realises the control Friday is subject to - how he has "no defence against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others" (121), and how "as long as he is dumb we can tell ourselves his desires are dark to us, and continue to use him as we wish" (148).

The "writing" that is responsible is the removal of the tongue. However, there is another possible mutilation about which Susan muses - the removal of Friday's penis. After learning about Friday's tongue (which, by the way, we cannot ever be entirely sure has been removed⁸), Susan thinks, "It was no comfort that his mutilation was secret, closed behind his lips (as some other mutilations are hidden by clothing)" (24), and later: "from that night on I had continually to fear that evidence of a yet more hideous mutilation might be thrust upon my sight" (119). In London, Friday finds robes that belong to Foe and spends hours in a monotonous dance twirling around in circles. His nakedness, we are told, shows forth (118). Susan has the following to say about what she sees (or does not see):

In the dance nothing was still and yet everything was

⁸ It is somewhat surprising that more critics have not commented on this. Crusoe tells Susan that Friday's tongue has been cut out, but Crusoe's stories are not always to be believed, as we can see in the novel, and, Susan never actually sees the evidence of mutilation. I have chosen not to follow it up here, but this uncertainty begs the obvious question of how our reading of the novel would change if there was the possibility (as there is) that Friday's silence is not enforced, but chosen by Friday.

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

I saw and believed I had seen, though afterwards I remembered Thomas, who also saw, but could not be brought to believe till he had put his hand in the wound (119-120).

While Susan and Foe are surmising about making or letting Friday speak, the novel takes a different route - neither. The tongue and the penis have the obvious connotations in the Western culture of patriarchal knowledge and power. If we were told that Susan saw Friday's penis we would be viewing Friday's symbol of male authority. This would then be ironic, since he quite clearly does not have any authority (yet). So, we would still inscribe him as weak in the phallogocentric system. If we were told that he did not have one, then that would unman him completely in the same system. That patriarchal discourse would draw the reader into itself and exclude, objectify, other Friday, no matter what the result. Either way Friday is inscribed into a phallogocentric discourse and classed as one of those who have no penis.

The ancient Greek Sceptics pursued arguments along these lines as well⁹. By inventing paradoxes such as the statement "What I am now saying is a lie" (they are true when they are false and false when they are true), they claimed that it was impossible to make "significant" statements. In Foe Coetzee refuses to make a "significant" (realist) statement about Friday's tongue and penis since to do so would be to put words

⁹ The philosopher Pyrrho believed that doubt was central in the human make-up (I doubt, therefore I am, perhaps). Susan's characterization of herself as "Doubt itself" will be remembered.

in his mouth, to once more mark him as other. The entire narrative, representational system is itself subject to similar problems, as I have been arguing. For instance, with reference to confession, the confession becomes false immediately as it is spoken as the truth.

Peter Brooks, in Body Work, writes,

signing or marking the body signifies its passage into writing, its becoming a literary body, and generally also a narrative body" (3).

In Western culture, narrative is taken to be synonymous with the transference of some meaning or message. Friday's "body of narrative", his story (the robes, after all, as Susan surmises, might be those of the master of a guild of authors) offers no coherent message to Western representational systems, just as Vietnamese myths could not be altered by Western ones in Dusklands. Similarly, Friday's engagement with the Western alphabet is inconclusive. He writes page upon page of the letter "o", which is, at the same time, something and nothing. Also, when Friday dances and plays his music he appears to be in a trance that Susan cannot disturb (98). Much like Michael, these trances seem to take him out of his immediate (historical) surroundings - out of history, and to a place unable to be touched by historical narrative. If one, as an observer or critic, cannot say anything significant (that is, in terms that we know) about the black hole that is Friday, what then can one say?

Coetzee's response, or, rather, the novel's response, is to take the narrative away from Susan (at this stage she is, as I

have pointed out, trapped in an eternal present which offers no resolution to itself) and give it to someone else or something else. She is silenced in order that Friday might be approached from a different perspective.

The narrator of this fourth section is unclear. Words like "indeed" in "It is indeed like lambswool" (154) and phrases like "as she said" in "I begin to hear the faintest faraway roar: as she said, the roar of waves in a seashell" (154), suggest that it is someone checking on the authenticity, the truth, of Susan's narrative - Coetzee as author perhaps, or the reader (the narrative is in the first person, after all, aligning the reader¹⁰ with the speaker).

The time is also uncertain. It could be set in contemporary times (there is that suggestion). It could also be eternity - the water is described as "still and dead, the same water as yesterday, as last year, as three hundred years ago" (157). The creation of eternal time has, in this thesis, been linked to the time of art, and in this section that which the historical "art" of Susan and Foe has attempted to address (Friday) is given its own authority. This is perhaps the world that Friday occupies when he wears an author's robes and escapes into a time of reverie.

As I claimed earlier, the overlapping first sentences suggest overlapping worlds with two different time schemes. This one, whoever the narrator is, belongs to Friday: as we are told,

¹⁰ The reader is drawn into this novel quite powerfully by Susan's mode of address: she often speaks to the you that is Foe, but also, obviously, the reader. The narrative is thus also a contest between narrator and reader. The reader, as the title proclaims, is the foe.

"This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday" (157). At the same time this section could be taken to be an "out-of-body" experience - a place where the voice, the soul, whatever it is, escapes the (temporal and spatial) restrictions enforced by virtue of the body's substantiality. This could, therefore, be read as an artistic representation of that space which Michael attempts to occupy: the time and space of art.

In this fourth section we hear, read, see something, but do not know what it is, who says or represents it, what it is, really. All that is certain is that there are bodies, seemingly dead, and it is Friday's home. Friday's body is thus the border between the unknown and knowledge, between the private and the public. As a border it is invisible, perhaps indefinable, but it is also an object, a symbol, a site of conflict, of public struggles.

The stream that comes from Friday's mouth at the very end of the narrative cannot be interpreted as words indecipherable to the Western, historically oriented mind-set. That would be to decide what the ultimate goal of the Friday's of the world should be. The stream is without interruption and should remain so. What comes out of Friday's mouth, if anything, should be left alone and his privacy respected. The novel enacts the protection of privacy, which includes the protection of difference, and of otherness. We have a body with the tongue removed (perhaps), but to put speech into the mouth is a greater invasion of privacy. To speak for someone is to objectify, categorize, marginalize that person. Friday must be allowed to live in a place where

bodies are allowed to be their own signs. This is a place outside of narrative boundaries, since in the Western representational system, bodies appear never to be their own signs. In other words this would be a place beyond representative, narratorial history, and, therefore, beyond time.

It is to the private that narrative strains, but can only go public. The private, by definition, is beyond and before narrative. Ironically (or perhaps not), it takes a novelist to illuminate the point. Why I say "perhaps not" is that privacy is one of the conditions of Coetzee's imagination. The novel argues for a world of meaningful public judgement (a world where Friday's "body" is not "always already" publicly judged), which will depend upon there being authority accorded to the realm of the private, and authority being accorded a position which speaks from outside the dominant discourse. The other side of the coin is that, obviously, if narrative can only represent publicly, then that position can never exist in narrative - the medium of the novelist's art. It can perhaps only exist in imagination.

But, paradoxically again, the private world is the first condition of the world that enables the novel to exist, the novel being a realm apart from the political, where possibilities of life and history are explored, the realm where moral judgement (among much else) is suspended (Kundera 1996:7). The novel, and perhaps art in general, exist caught between the public and private, between the historical/political and idyllic/eternal worlds. This particular "vision" places Coetzee in a decidedly ambivalent relation to the discourses of postmodernism and postcolonialism.

As in Life and Times of Michael K, we see Coetzee trying to establish a fictional position outside of the discourse of history, that is, the totalizing discourse I first mentioned in relation to Dusklands, that discourse which allows no judgement in time, and of time, other than its own. This position, in Coetzee's formulation, is a private realm with private times and spaces, and restores the authority of judgement to the private, that is, to the individual, but is "always already" influenced by the public, by the historical.

7. AGE OF IRON: The Time of the Future

Elizabeth Curren (hereafter E.C.) is a character in the same mould as others in Coetzee's fiction. As is the case with the magistrate, the medical officer or Susan Barton, she finds herself in a particular (historical) situation, and in examining that situation finds evidence of her role in its creation and perpetuation.

Age of Iron, which, after all, is a type of epistolary elegy, is a despairing text: one of its more obvious and important themes being the ancient one of the brevity of life faced with the inevitable spectre of death. The narrator, E.C., writes a letter, to be delivered (perhaps) after her death to her daughter. The letter expresses a mother's love, but also a mother's rage against death in all its forms. One of the forms of death is history, or the "mystique of death", which she sees as dominating part of history, specifically the "Age of Iron" which characterizes the South Africa in which she is immersed. She wishes to escape both this time of death, the history of her country, and transcend her biological situation. The letter, which is also the novel we read, is her way of doing this. However, the narrative's relation to the future, to the time after death, is left uncertain. She asks someone whom she suspects is unreliable to post the letter. We do not yet know if it will arrive. As I understand it, this latter act is the key to the text. It is the only way to live on in the future that the narrator finds ethically acceptable.

Thus, once again, time can again be seen as a particular

concern of the text; like Life and Times of Michael K, in many ways Age of Iron could be read, as I will show, as a reaction to a particular conception of time: in the case of the latter, one which Coetzee clearly saw as prevalent in the late 1980s in South Africa. This chapter will be concerned with E.C.'s view of time, and the novel's relation to this time, and gives further insight into Coetzee's complex preoccupation with time itself.

David Attwell suggests that Age of Iron "extends and enriches Coetzee's whole novelistic corpus" (Attwell 1993:118) by posing the question of what it means "to write without authority" (Attwell's emphasis 120) - a "harder" question than Foe's "questioning of narrative authority" (120). Hand in hand with this comes a further question:

what kind of discourse emerges from a narrative subject who has not made peace, exactly, with the historical Other, but for whom there is another kind of limit [death] against which to speak? (Attwell's emphasis 121).

If E.C. has any authority it comes precisely from her lack of authority, her irrelevance (121), says Attwell. She herself asks, "what right have I to opinions...?" (Coetzee 1990:148). This authority of irrelevance¹ enables E.C. to express misgivings about how judgement is exercised, and thus constitutes an attempt to imagine judgement being restored to the public sphere (Attwell 1993:123), to imagine the time when

all human acts ... will be returned to the ambit of moral judgement. In such a society it will once again be meaningful for the gaze of the author, the gaze of authority and authoritative judgement, to be turned upon scenes of torture (Attwell quoting Coetzee

¹ This is a term I borrow from Attwell, although I use it in a slightly different context.

1993:123).

This imagined moment, says Attwell, is

projected negatively in Age of Iron in the dramatization of the failure of reciprocal judgement before scenes of cruelty (Attwell's emphasis 123).

The former quotation, however, is confusing. Reading it, the question of what sort of judgement, what sort of authority, will still allow there to be scenes of torture, arises. If this novel projects itself into another time - the time of fiction - as I believe it does, then that time is a time when all human acts have been returned to the ambit of trust. This time is projected negatively in the novel, in the writer's "wager on trust". She entrusts her narrative to someone she doesn't trust, and this, as I read it, is her supreme act of moral courage.

To illuminate and explain the above propositions, the approach I will take in this chapter will be to question what, exactly, she imagines, and how she imagines it. The narrative's treatment of and relation to time will illuminate this.

The setting of the novel has connotations which might serve as a contrast or comparison to the type of space that the novel occupies. (I will be defining this space later.) It is set in Cape Town, in the Cape of Good Hope. The name "Cape of Good Hope" is a temporal description of that part of the African continent. The space is named as a way-station to a future. Like purgatory, it held the promise of a glorious future, which, because it was to be in some other place (the East), was always postponed.

E.C. is diagnosed as having cancer, and immediately after this

begins writing the "letter" to her daughter. The letter is a story of her last few weeks or months, and it ends when she realises she "will have to depend on help [from Vercueil] for the most intimate things" (179). She embraces, or is forced to embrace, another world - death (which is allegorized in the novel). There is little space for her to create her own world; there is, for instance, no space like Part 4 of Foe for her, nor is she a master story-teller like Dostoyevsky of The Master of Petersburg. She finds herself in an age when historical alternatives are disappearing (or have disappeared already), and, if she is to have a history, there is only one in which to participate: that which is defined by the Age of Iron, a historical period which registers decline (and, of course, hardness) in its title. She has a vision in this time and of this time which fascinates her. She faces death (the blank wall) and is, in fact, trapped by it. Like Captain Ahab, in some ways, she sees herself looking back. However, her elegiac act of writing, while lamenting the past and present, is also an anticipation of a future of sorts.

This vision of hers has affinities with another vision, or myth, which has occupied many South African writers - the Adamastor myth. It was initiated in the work of the Portuguese poet Luis de Camoens in his epic poem The Lusiads. It is a white man's myth, a symbol of confrontation, and what is registered is the "ambivalence of white South Africans about the European-African antinomies in their heritage and commitments" (Chapman 1996:77). Adamastor, the "threatening spirit of a continent" (Van Wyk Smith 1988:19), placed a curse on Vasco da

Gama and all his European successors - that one day the continent would be their nemesis. In Camoens' poem, the meeting with Adamastor marks a rite of passage for Da Gama: successful handling of the giant embedded and embodied in the landscape earns Da Gama access to a new world (12); however, it is always a world with a curse attached, a world whose future is limited. Roy Campbell's poem, "Rounding the Cape", describes that part of the continent as a sleeping black figure seemingly on the verge of awakening.

The Adamastor myth is one which has been used many times by South African writers, and at one stage E.C. refers to it (as a retired Classics lecturer she might not have heard of the myth, but Coetzee, we can be sure, has - indeed, he mentions it in White Writing) when she says of Bheki and the "other dead" that they would sink to just below the surface of the earth

but then ... would sink no further. They would stay there, bobbing just under the surface. If you so much as scuffed with your shoe you would uncover them: the faces, the dead eyes, open, full of sand (114)².

Writing to her daughter she says when she walks upon this land that is South Africa she has

a gathering feeling of walking upon black faces. They are dead but their spirit has not left them. They lie there heavy and obdurate, waiting for my feet to pass, waiting for me to go, waiting to be raised up again. Millions of figures of pig-iron floating under the skin of the earth. The age of iron waiting to return (115).

² This quotation from Age of Iron, as well as the following one, also makes implicit reference to Nadine Gordimer's novel The Conservationist, which may be read as another variation on the Adamastor myth.

When E.C.'s historical imagination looks on South Africa she sees a land which has not been loved enough (23), and she also sees the past waiting to become present again. It is the past as a promise - or curse - transposed onto the future. She sees a presently empty landscape waiting to be filled with the corpses that lie buried beneath it, a community wronged in the past, come to claim what is theirs. She sees time as inverted, the past as the memory of the future, a future of remembrance.

The image of time offered by the novel is thus a circular one. In Age of Iron, the past is an age to come. Octavia Paz, in his study Children of the Mire: Modern Poetry from Romanticism to the Avant-Garde, writes the following of "primitive" societies: "the future offers a double image: the end of time and its rebirth" (1972:11). This is mythical time. The end of the cycle is the restoration of the original past. But in Age of Iron, however, the cycle is somewhat different. The past will be re-examined in an age to come and the original past will not be restored, but inverted - the future will belong to the wronged ghosts of the past, the figures of pig-iron, as E.C. tells us, who will populate the landscape. This process is still a cycle, but an inverted one. It is a process which wants to change its legacy, its rootedness in the past, by restoring the past (bringing the figures of pig-iron back to life) - a contradictory movement. It is the time of the death of real change, brought about by the dominance of a view of time which seeks to look to the future by always looking backwards.

As a critic, Coetzee has discussed the portrayal of the South African landscape in his book White Writing, which was

published just two years before Age of Iron. He has the following to say about the image of the garden in narrative:

The topos of the garden, the enclosed world entire to itself, is more extensive than the Judeo-Christian myth of Eden. In its isolation from the great world, walled in by oceans and an unexplored northern wilderness, the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope was indeed a kind of garden. But the future promised by the Cape seemed to be less of the perfection of man in a recovered original innocence than of the degeneration of man into brute (1988:3).

Coetzee goes on to say that because of the situation of the "unsettled settlers with so uncertain a future" (4), the retrospective gaze of pastoral art tended to dominate over the Utopian prospective gaze. South African pastoral art, he says,

looks back, usually in a spirit of nostalgia, to the calm and stability of the farm, a still point mediate between the wilderness of lawless nature and the wilderness of the new cities; it holds up the time of the forefathers as an exemplary age when the garden of myth became actualized in history (4).

Like In the Heart of the Country, Waiting for the Barbarians and Life and Times of Michael K, Age of Iron is also concerned with pastoral time. When E.C. names her origin as the stopping place at the top of Prince Alfred's Pass, the place where her mother, as a little girl "lay in the dark not knowing what was rolling over her, the wagon-wheels or the stars" (110), she names a time seemingly of pastoral bliss - the family's visits to the Piesangs River. For ages she thought it must be "the most beautiful place on earth" (16), but when she visits Plettenberg Bay for the first time years after her mother's death she discovers that it is "not paradise at all" (16). As Coetzee also implies in the above two extracts, the pastoral utopia is here

located not in the past as such but in the imagination of the past. Since it is pure projection, the utopia is destroyed once its image meets with reality. So, if the past is imaginary, then the future as a reliving of the past is imaginary as well. The novel thus raises an ethical dilemma: if one cannot be certain of the truth of the past, can one restore it, or invert it, or even correct it in the present? It is an ethical dilemma that contains an apocalyptic vision. If the past is imaginary, then will the future not be destroyed once it becomes present or real? Can ghosts, chimeras, populate a future which is not a future of death?

If there is a danger of apocalypse, then what does this do to the time of the present? Writing about the killing of her domestic's son, John, E.C. characterizes the time she lives in as

a hovering time, but not eternity. A time being, a suspension, before the return of the time in which the door bursts open and we face, first he, then I, the great white glare (160).

Earlier she calls it a "time out of time, heaved up out of the earth, misbegotten, monstrous" (46). It is a time of suspension, waiting for the great white glare - the liberating apocalypse or apocalyptic liberation. A time of suspension is a time that Coetzee speaks out against in an interview in Doubling the Point, when he says that Afrikaner Christian Nationalism "set about stopping or even turning back the clock" (1992b:209). This novel claims that suspended time is also caused by certain approaches to resisting Afrikaner Christian Nationalism.

If the apocalyptic renewal is seen as all-important by South

Africans, and as definitely and definitively liberating, then what value does this place on the present? In a discussion with Bheki over the reasons why he won't go to school, E.C. says to Florence that her son, Bheki, is "ruining his future ... [by] killing time till Apartheid comes to an end" (62). Implicit in their disagreement is a different reading of time, a different idea of what to do in the time which is controlled by Apartheid.

E.C. calls comradeship a "mystique of death, of killing and dying, masquerading as ... a bond" (137) between the youth. This ideology calls for a sacrifice of life itself and of the present in the name of future liberation. As an ideology it prospers since the end seems nigh³. There is a promise of the end of the present world with the prospect of making another start for everyone who participates. Time becomes charged with expectation as the present is forgotten in favour of the future.

This is revolutionary time. Revolution breaks violently with the old and establishes a new order. It promises perfection in the future. Paz believes that modernity is characterised by revolutionary time. He cautions:

our [modern] future, though the repository of perfection, is neither the resting place nor end; on the contrary, it is a continuous beginning, a permanent movement forward. Our future is a paradise/inferno: paradise because it is the land of desire, inferno because it is the home of dissatisfaction. From one point of view our perfection is always relative; from another it is unattainable and untouchable. The future, the promised land of

³ Perhaps one could say an old testament faith (as in the book of Redemption), as opposed to Coetzee's less fundamental faith (see my chapter on Life and Times of Michael K and later in this chapter).

history, is an inaccessible realm (1974:30-31)⁴.

E.C. herself wishes to be rid of the present, but she feels that Bheki's way of removing himself from the present, his revolutionary actions, is indicative of a belief which claims that the only way one can remove oneself from the present is through the mystique of death, a desire to pass over into the future, or literally, to die into it.

By opting out of the oppressor's History, Bheki and his comrades set a goal for the future, and, indeed, try to create the future. E.C., as the sceptic, suggests that the value of the goal might be devalued by the methods used to obtain it - an ends and means argument. If the young generation sacrifices itself to achieve utopia (the paradisaal future), who will be left to populate that state, but the ghosts she talks about (115), things rooted in and structured by the past (the infernal future)? Love of the future will replace love of people for each other. Note the similarity of this argument to one in Life and Times of Michael K. Michael has the opportunity of joining the revolutionaries. Instead he thinks to himself,

there must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children (109).

E.C. asks, "Can parents be recreated once the idea of parents has been destroyed within us? ... What love will they [the youth] be

⁴ As in Waiting for the Barbarians and Life and Times of Michael K, especially, we can again see that Coetzee's concern is with modern, Western time generally. The time he criticizes is merely an extreme form of modern time.

capable of?" (46). The "mystique of death" may translate into a general lack of respect for life, a carelessness of their own and everyone else's life (45) on the parts of the ghosts who will populate the nation. A mystique is alienated from the people, concealing its own devices. If it is carried into the future, it remains a mystique, or *Mystique* (of history), since it too determines, rather than is determined by, its subjects.

The future she fears is a future of the mystique of death, a time where this mystique has infected history, and has eliminated alternatives for its subjects. In the South Africa of which E.C. writes "nothing is private anymore" (157), it is a land without mystery (76)⁵. Towards the end of the narrative E.C. says to Vercueil,

I would promise to watch over you, except that I have no firm idea of what is possible after death. Perhaps there will be no watching over allowed, or very little. All these places have their rules, and, whatever one may wish, it may not be possible to get around them. There may not even be secrets allowed, secret watching. There may be no way of keeping a space in the heart private for you or anyone else. All may be erased. All. It is a terrible thought (172).

Throughout the novel it is made clear that her situation and that of South Africa are interlinked (for instance on p.59 she says of herself and of "this country" that it is "time for fire, time for an end, time for what grows out of ash to grow" and p.26). Her time is coming to an end (like South Africa's) and she imagines her "rebirth" in her daughter as she imagines the rebirth of the country (the figures of iron rising from the

⁵ As in *Foe*, Coetzee expresses a desire for recognition of the (metaphysical) need for the private world.

dead). Just as she fears the place where she will be going, she fears that the South Africa of the future may be a place where secrets are not allowed. It may be a place of "flat hard light, without shadows, without depth" (76), as it is in the present. If there are no secrets, it follows that no probing after them is allowed, or at least, searching becomes an activity outside the comprehension of the all-pervading dominant discourse.

Jacques Derrida claims that secrets are the possibilities that ensure the possibility of literature⁶. We cannot know more than a text tells us, and so its secrets are inviolable. The inviolability is the possibility of non-truth in the place of possible truth. To put E.C.'s vision into other terms, the South Africa of the future may be a society where fiction (and imagination, generally) is not possible. Such is the implication of the narrative.

E.C.'s portrayal of the time she fears is, nevertheless, only one aspect of the novel. Another, more important aspect is her own relation to this time, and her ways of circumventing it. Like Coetzee, and like most of his protagonists, she is opposed to the time, the history, in which she finds herself and is implicated. In fact, her opposition, like many of his characters, and like Coetzee himself, can be read as being conducted in relation to time.

She perceives her relation to the historical moment she criticizes in a particular way. At one stage she thinks,

⁶ See especially his book Given Time:1. Counterfeit Money (1992).

Man, I thought: the only creature with a part of his existence in the unknown, in the future, like a shadow cast before him. Trying continually to catch up with that moving shadow, to inhabit the image of his hope. But I, I cannot afford to be man. Must be something smaller, blinder, closer to the ground (155).

Here she explains that she desires to set herself apart from this dominant, future-directed time. Her narrative, as we will see, is her attempt to do this. The narrative, in short, creates a different relation to time than that of which she is critical.

The difference hinges on the question of trust. Derek Attridge has also recognized the importance of trust in the text. As he says, the "entire project of the letter depends on [trust]" (1994:63). He goes on to say that

Trust in the other and in the future is at the ethical heart of a situation such as that which prevailed in South Africa in 1986, or that which prevails today. ... Through its staging of an encounter ... the novel offers a precise understanding of trust, and of its relation to the vital questions of the other and the future ... It is an understanding that can be conveyed only in such a novel, or such a letter, or such a life (66).

His argument is one which I endorse, but, I would like to redefine the "trust" that E.C. and the novel have.

Attridge writes that

Mrs. Curren must trust someone to get the letter to her daughter after her death ... [She] has to rely on another person to perform a task that, by its very nature, she cannot verify. Hence there is something absolute about the trust that is called for (62).

E.C., however, says the following of the "task":

It is a wager on trust. So little to ask, to take a package to the post office and pass it over the counter. So little that it is almost nothing. Between

taking the package and not taking it the difference is as light as a feather. If there is the slightest breath of trust, obligation, piety left behind when I am gone, he will surely take it

And if not?

If not, there is no trust and we deserve no better, all of us, than to fall into a hole and vanish.

Because I cannot trust Vercueil I must trust him (119).

The last sentence of the passage is crucial. She does not trust Vercueil. But, she does trust him, or "must", at least. This contradiction is also evident in the first sentence of the above quotation. If trust is a "firm belief in [the] reliability, honesty, veracity, justice [and] strength... of [a] person or thing" (O.E.D.), then, quite clearly this is not an option available to E.C. She cannot, but she must trust. This act of trusting without trust is a gamble on trust. The acts of trust and gambling are both relations to the future. Having trust in the present means that one is certain a particular future will take place. Gambling expresses, rather, an uncertainty in a particular future, distrust, even. She has to gamble because the only companion she has in the present is the derelict Vercueil.

Why, then, does she go about posting her letter this way? An answer lies in the time of the future she fears, as well as in the practice of narrative itself, or perhaps more precisely, the practise of fictional narrative.

The future she fears is one where all possibilities are eliminated, a time and place of, as I pointed out, "flat hard light without shadows, without depth" (76). By gambling with her narrative she is restoring possibility and the darkness of uncertainty. She is leaving the future to its own devices.

E.C.'s fear of death makes her wish to be close to her daughter who is in self-imposed exile. She writes

These words, as you read them, if you read them, enter you and draw breath again. They are, if you like, my way of living on. Once upon a time you lived in me as once upon a time I lived in my mother; as she still lives in me, as I grow towards her, may I live in you (120).

E.C.'s supreme act of courage, as I intimated earlier, is to not call the daughter back and to gamble on Vercueil posting the package.

This act is a demonstration of faith. It is also a fictional act. She leaves the narrative to its own (or another's) devices, and does not try to enforce it on anyone else. She accepts that she cannot control it after her death, accepts that the narrative has a life and future of its own, and so does not enforce the narrative, her presence, on her daughter.

This may well bring to mind Roland Barthes' essay "The Death of the Author". What Coetzee achieves is not a simple repetition of the argument of this essay, but an illumination of the ethics of relinquishing control over narrative, fictional or historical, control which, in this novel, is more easily released by the writer of fiction than history.

E.C. viewing the dead body of Bheki, Florence's son, has the following to write:

It is through my eyes that you see; the voice that speaks in your head is mine ... It is my thoughts that you think, my despair that you feel ... To me your sympathies flow; your heart beats with mine.

Now, my child, flesh of my flesh, my best self, I ask you to draw back. I tell you this story not so that you will feel for me but so that you will learn

how things are. ... So I ask you: attend to the writing not to me. If lies and pleas and excuses weave among the words, listen for them. Do not pass them over, do not forgive them easily. Read all, even this adjuration, with a cold eye.

...

Do not read in sympathy with me. Let your heart not beat with mine (95-96).

She is asking her daughter to maintain her critical distance and judgement, to be aware of the anagrammatical possibilities of language (and of time), that narratives have depth, have other possibilities within them, to be aware of the organizing design behind narratives, and to be aware that narratives have secrets. Whereas a narrative or discourse like the oppressor's history, or the mystique of death, may attempt to eliminate possibility and uncertainty, fictional narratives rely on these. She asks her (and us) to probe those secrets, aware that these secrets are often inviolable: "Thaba Nchu ... Nine letters, anagram for what? ... Mrs Curren: nine letters, anagram for what?" (157-158). By asking her daughter to pay attention to fiction in this way, she is also asking her to pay attention to the way in which the world limits us if it eliminates fiction. A world of flat, hard light with no shadows is unreal, only an image. It is the darkness and the unknown depths that hide other stories, worlds other than the one we know.

Thus we could say that what E.C. has achieved (as has Coetzee through E.C.) is the establishment of a fictional place of speaking, a place with an irrelevant authority, and this place is opposed to the dominant voice of history (the mystique of death). It has an irrelevant authority precisely because it is anti-history, because the letter is perhaps no more than a love

letter from a dying mother to her daughter expressing disgust at the values she finds around her. However, this irrelevance is what enables her to be fictional in the first place, is what enables her to make her reader(s) look again at the structures of authority, and gives her a form of authority based on trust of the other, which is perhaps the most important form of authority of all.

So, in many ways, this novel can be seen as a plea on the part of Coetzee for the continuation of the liberating potential and potentialities of fiction, which is the only means through which time might be something other than an age of iron. E.C. inserts the possibility of uncertainty into the future and if her daughter receives the narrative, then the future will be able to recognize her narrative, which is emblematic of a fictional act and then the future will contain fiction. Thus it will also contain E.C. and Coetzee as narrator and author respectively, and ourselves the readers as fully human agents.

This plea has another side to it. By cultivating uncertainty, E.C. could thus be said to be cultivating Keats' negative capability. She is embracing uncertainty and mystery (fiction) instead of reaching after flat, hard facts and reason. If this is a Romantic position it is also an artistic position. And, it is also at root a religious position, a position which attempts to restore faith in the future, faith that there will be trust. For only if there is trust can there be places of darkness, places of uncertainty, places of fiction. Like the Cape of Good Hope the novel is a place of purgation. The former, though, has been described as cursed, the latter, once again

carving out that alternate space and time which fiction enables, offers hope for life after the "curse". At the same time, though, the novel admits, to its credit, that fiction, in wanting something other than an age of iron, cannot, will not, offer a utopia, a place completely without the uncertainty of darkness and the threats that come with it.

8. THE MASTER OF PETERSBURG: The Time of the Fall

While Coetzee's novels refuse any easy allegorical readings, all of them, except perhaps the latest, The Master of Petersburg, can easily be read as referring in some way to a South African cultural and political context. His latest novel at the time of this writing is the only one which appears to have very little to do with the discourse of colonialism, so important to his earlier novels. What is also unusual is that neither history nor time is an overt theme or obsession of the text. These three facts suggest that this novel is an important departure from the concerns of his others. No doubt it is that, but it is also a culmination of his efforts in those other novels. It is, as this chapter will argue, a study of the time of fiction, specifically, the time of creativity. The novel can thus be read as a type of fictional autobiography, with Coetzee taking an ironic look at the ethics of his own vocation. The novel establishes the authority (of irrelevance) of this time, but it also lays out the consequences of this fictional position. Coetzee's "vision" in the novel is not life-affirming, but is all the more powerful for that.

It is a difficult text, in that it provides little "action" for the reader, and, moreover, appears to call for historical, biographical knowledge of Dostoyevsky. Even with this knowledge the reader spends the novel searching for a plot, much like the fictional Dostoyevsky who appears to be searching for some meaning, some truth about his step-son Pavel's death. The narrative denies both this satisfaction.

Coetzee has said in an interview with David Attwell on the essay "Confession and Double Thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau, Dostoyevsky" (1985), that

Against the endlessness of scepticism Dostoyevsky poses the closure not of confession but of absolution and therefore of the intervention of grace in the world (1992b:249).

It is this notion of grace that I believe Coetzee finds important. He cannot, though, have recourse to it in the same way that Dostoyevsky can. Neither the reader nor the fictional Dostoyevsky is given any divine insight. There appears to be no access to grace in this fictional world, especially considering the portrait of the artist that Coetzee paints. If there is any grace in art, neither the artist nor his readers seem to have access to it.

Dostoyevsky was writing at a time when realism held a position of unchallenged dominance, and at a time when the disruptive forces of history had not fragmented the (narrative) experience of time to anything like the degree commonly recognised in the twentieth century. An artist's access to meaningful, authoritative narrative was, in the broadest sense, undoubtedly easier. According to Octavio Paz, however, in the late modern era "man's fate is not union with God, but with history. Work replaces penitence, progress grace, and politics religion" (1974:29). Coetzee, as this thesis has shown, writes in a time when history has fragmented time and asserted its dominance over other constructions of time that concepts such as art and religion might embody.

As noted already in my introduction, Coetzee himself has

forcefully expressed the need for art, or at least his desire for his own art, to escape the shackles of history and to write its own rules. History as such might not be an overt theme, but The Master of Petersburg does stage within its pages a contest between history and art, personified in the figures of Nechaev and Dostoyevsky. The result of the contest is anything but a celebration of the regenerative power of art in the world. This does not mean, though, that Coetzee represents a "victory" for history over art, rather he represents a need for a redefinition of the role of art in the world.

The writer Dostoyevsky arrives in Petersburg after hearing of the death of Pavel. He stays in Pavel's lodgings with the landlady, Anna, and her daughter, Matryona. Anna appears to represent a way to Pavel, as does Matryona, who occupies the forbidden, but desired space of childhood.

Initially the novel seems to be about the father coming to terms with his son's death. Holding Pavel's white suit, Dostoyevsky tries to "evoke a spirit that can surely not yet have left these surroundings" (12). However, nothing is forthcoming. At one stage he hears a dog howling in the night. He thinks that it is a voice calling "Isaev" (79). He then surmises,

If he expects his son to speak in the voice of the unexpected, he will never hear him. As long as he expects what he does not expect, what he does not expect will not come. Therefore - paradox within paradox, darkness swaddled in darkness - he must answer to what he does not expect (80).

Nevertheless, he does not set the dog loose (it is tied up near his lodgings). He thinks "Why should I bear all the world's

burdens?" (81). Likewise, he shies away from delivering the police spy Ivanov "wholly and absolutely from his cold watchpost" (93). These two opportunities for grace, for charity, and for hearing the voice of his son, offer nothing.

He remains in Petersburg in his son's lodgings, has an affair with the landlady, Anna, and seems attracted and also repulsed in a complicated way by her young daughter, Matryona. He waits, ostensibly for his son's "private papers" held by the police to be returned to him. These papers turn out to connect Pavel with the revolutionary youth Nechaev. Eventually he meets Nechaev, and a large part of the text is devoted to verbal contests between the writer and the revolutionary. Dostoyevsky receives contradictory information (which is not resolved) suggesting that his son might not have committed suicide, but been murdered by either the security police or the Nechaevites. The text ends with Dostoyevsky overcoming his "writer's block" of sorts, and (re)writing a story in his son's diary.

This is the climax (as such) of the novel - the portrait of the artist at work. In fact, towards the beginning of the novel we are told, "he is aware, even as it unfolds that this is a passage he will not forget and may even one day rework into his writing" (24). So, this novel can be read as a study of the time before writing, that time when the author wrestles with ideas for a novel and puts himself in the required spiritual or psychological state for its genesis. As will become apparent, this time suspends the march of history, and is an ecstatic time which obliterates past and future.

We know that soon after the time in which the novel is set,

the real Dostoyevsky began to write his novel The Devils (also known as The Possessed). The Master of Petersburg can be read specifically as an investigation of the inspiration of The Devils. Several historical episodes to do with the latter novel are repeated in the former. The real Dostoyevsky was living in Dresden in 1869 because of debts in St. Petersburg. Pavel and Nechaev are both "real", historical individuals. Coetzee also makes use of Dostoyevsky's history as a gambler and as an epileptic. Added to this, Coetzee writes about events in his novel that are based on events of the earlier novel. The story of how Pavel came to buy his white suit is a near repetition of the story of Maria Lebyatkin to be found in The Devils. The historical figure Nechaev appears in both texts (as Peter Verkhovensky in The Devils). In The Devils a Russian terrorist is murdered by one of his own number. There is a suggestion in The Master of Petersburg that this is what has happened to Pavel as well.

However, there are other elements of The Master of Petersburg which do not rely on the historical record. As Derek Attridge points out in his article "Expecting the Unexpected: Coetzee's Master of Petersburg and some recent works by Derrida", Dostoyevsky did not, in all likelihood, visit St. Petersburg in 1869, and the real Pavel outlived the real Dostoyevsky. Thus the novel establishes itself as a space in which the truth of history is not to be taken for granted, and as a space where fiction has the final say. Another way of putting it is to say that the novel is an instance of the betrayal of history by fiction, and a betrayal of the reader by Coetzee. Certain "facts" are true,

others are red herrings. Betrayal is, without a doubt, one of the themes of this novel.

Another is the dispute between generations. This has been a theme in several of Coetzee's novels, most notably Dusklands. In the beginning of his career Coetzee took the side of the son. As a Master novelist (a father novelist) he now takes the opposite side. This movement is perhaps paralleled by the real Dostoyevsky who was at one stage a revolutionary youth, and eventually wrote The Devils, a politically conservative text. If we read the generational dispute as that Oedipal (and perhaps Bloomian) notion of the son needing to establish a place for himself distinct from the father, then we can also read The Master of Petersburg as a contest within Coetzee between himself as authorial father and himself as authorial son. Each narrative that Coetzee as author produces has an uneasy relation to the ones before, and has to establish a place for itself.

An important Russian novel taking the generational dispute as a theme is Turgenev's Fathers and Sons, no doubt an intertext of The Master of Petersburg. Dostoyevsky, the father, is unable to understand the children, Pavel, Nechaev, and Matryona, and feels alternately attracted to and threatened by them. When he first meets Nechaev, who is disguised as a young woman, their feet touch under the table. Dostoyevsky thinks, "two players across a small table making their deliberate moves. Is it the deliberateness that excites him?" (100). As the conversation develops he feels "now there is something inert about its pressure, inert and lumpish and even threatening" (100). Dostoyevsky also draws up sides in the contest: he and Anna, who

"make love as if under sentence of death" (225), are on one side, and Pavel, Matryona, his wife, and Nechaev are on the other.

The text hints at Dostoyevsky's sexual attraction for Anna's young daughter, Matryona. Dostoyevsky and Matryona talk about Nechaev and we are told,

Her lips part, the corners of her mouth quiver. She is going to cry, he thinks. But it is not like that at all. When she raises her eyes he is enveloped in a glance that is at once shameless and derisive. She draws away from his hand, tossing her hair. "No!" he says. The smile she wears is taunting, provocative. Then the spell passes and she is a child as before, confused, ashamed (213).

Anna herself says to Dostoyevsky that he is using her as a route to her child (231).

A few paragraphs after the passage on page 213, appears the phrase "The death of innocence". It appears as if Dostoyevsky has just witnessed this in the child. Bearing in mind, though, Dostoyevsky's attraction for the girl, it is rather that Dostoyevsky's reading (or writing) of the girl is the cause of the loss of innocence. She is violated and corrupted by age, or, specifically, by the "master" writer.

This betrayal of the innocence of youth is present in his memories of Pavel as well. Leaving the graveyard where Pavel is buried, Dostoyevsky thinks,

I will come back: the same promise he made when he took the boy to school for his first term. You will not be abandoned. And abandoned him (5 Coetzee's emphasis).

This pattern of betrayals culminates in an event towards the end of the novel. Dostoyevsky takes Pavel's idea for a story and

re-writes it in Pavel's diary. The story is a corruption of the relationship between Pavel and Matryona. I shall return to this episode.

Dostoyevsky, in the course of the novel, remembers a story about a fellow-convict in Siberia who had raped and murdered his daughter. Dostoyevsky thinks,

Not rape but rapine - is that it? Fathers devouring children, raising them well in order to eat them like delicacies afterwards. Delikatessen (125 Coetzee's emphasis).

This occurs in the chapter where Dostoyevsky and Nechaev visit the tower where Pavel supposedly fell to his death. Immediately after the above thought, Dostoyevsky asks himself,

Does that explain Nechaev's vengefulness: that his eyes have been opened to the fathers naked, the band of fathers, their appetites bared? (125).

This is a similar supposition to that of the councillor Maykov who suggests that "perhaps it [the Nechaev phenomenon] is the old matter of fathers and sons after all" (45).

Nechaev is the revolutionary, "a man of the future, of the next century, with a monstrous head and monstrous appetites but nothing else" (196), or so claims Dostoyevsky. The time of revolution is different to the time of writing, as will become apparent. In revolutionary time, the populace revolts and stakes everything on a future which abolishes the past. This moment is characterized, says Gary Saul Morson in his study Narrative and Freedom: The Shadows of Time, by a thrill that the course of history might be changed in a moment. The revolutionary's movement is one of confidence and bravado - an attempt to change

history in a single moment. This is similar to gambling - a phenomenon the historical Dostoyevsky (and apparently the fictional one) knew only too well - where the present is gambled for a Utopian future. Revolution is a gamble with history and the break with history (of course the irony is that revolution is always an historical act since it sets itself in direct opposition to official history) is marked by a gesture of violence which then takes on a sacrificial nature: Matryona classifies Nechaev as a martyr.

Not accepting that "everything is permitted for the sake of the future" (200), while nevertheless permitting himself almost anything else, Dostoyevsky continually plays with, or is taunted with the idea of betraying Nechaev to the authorities. When he writes a pamphlet saying that he believes Nechaev killed Pavel, Dostoyevsky seems to believe that he has tricked Nechaev, but it becomes clear that he has fallen into a trap. We realise with Dostoyevsky that Nechaev could have been saying one thing - that Pavel was murdered by the Russian police - while meaning another - that he, Nechaev, killed Pavel. This appears to be exactly what Nechaev wanted - to be accused of the murder:

A trap, a devilish trap. He [Dostoyevsky] is not after all, as he had thought, a figure from the wings inconveniently intruding into a quarrel between his stepson and Sergei Nechaev the anarchist. Pavel's death was merely the bait to lure him from Dresden to Petersburg. He has been the quarry all the time. He has been lured out of hiding, and now Nechaev has pounced and has him by the throat (203).

The tables have been turned and the writer has been tricked by the revolutionary.

Soon after this betrayal by the forces of history,

Dostoyevsky begins to write. This proves to be his final betrayal of those close to him, one which "tastes like gall" (250). He takes Pavel's story (about the freedom-fighter lovers) as well as his history and alters them. He writes in the space reserved for his son's narratives - Pavel's diary. The past, Pavel, is betrayed as well as the future, in the form of Matryona. Dostoyevsky leaves the story out so Matryona might read it, as the character in the story "leaves the bed unmade so that the child, exploring, can familiarize herself with the smells of love" (244).

The second, negative, epiphany described by the Bible is the sudden awareness felt by Judas after his betrayal, of his true, treacherous, corrupted self. Disgusted by his own corruption, and in despair, he commits suicide. Dostoyevsky believes himself a Judas figure. He thinks after writing the story, "the device he has made arches and springs shut like a trap, a trap to catch God" (249). He knows that he has betrayed others, and this, to him, tastes like gall. Of course, he has also betrayed himself, in a way. He is also caught in the trap.

The suicide and the above quotation are images of violence. The novel is in fact imbued with sublimated or deferred violence: the list of people to be assassinated, the future revolution, the suggested, imagined violation of Matryona, Pavel's murder/accident/suicide, which is outside the text, the underplaying of Ivanov's murder, and Dostoyevsky's imagined assaults on Nechaev. This could be read as a continuation of a theme from the earlier novels, especially Waiting for the Barbarians. In that novel I claimed that art and history seemed

to both partake of violence. I also claimed that this presented a quandary: art's failure means the triumph of barbaric, violent history. In The Master of Petersburg both the time of history, and the time of art are characterized by betrayal - betrayals like that of Judas which could easily lead to violence. Indeed, given that to betray is to violate in some way, there is a sense in this novel that the artist needs the creative force of violence. Since this appears to be where the critical force of the novel lies, it would be useful to take a closer look at this Judas/artist figure.

When Dostoyevsky sits down to write he is in front of a mirror and his thoughts develop through a number of stages. The progression depicts the emergence of the writing self:

In the mirror on the dressing-table he catches a quick glimpse of himself hunched over the table. In the grey light, without his glasses, he could mistake himself for a stranger; the dark beard could be a veil or a curtain of bees.

He moves the chair so as not to face the mirror. But the sense of someone in the room besides himself persists: if not of a full person then of a stick-figure, a scarecrow draped in an old suit, with a stuffed sugar-sack for a head and a kerchief across the mouth (236).

The "double" in the mirror could represent unrealised possibilities (even if only in the form of a demonic other self, or anti-self) which could only be realised in the world of fiction. The self in the mirror might have raped the child, killed Nechaev, divorced his wife, married Anna, written off his debts, and so on. The other doubles in the text represent much the same thing. The two Annas represent different lives. The image of Dostoyevsky in Pavel's suit is an image of an attempt

to realise the other, perhaps fictional, life. The double in the mirror goes on to attain demonic life:

The head of the figure across the table is slightly too large, larger than a human head ought to be. In fact, in all its proportions there is something subtly wrong with the figure, something excessive.

He wonders whether he is not touched with a fever himself. A pity he cannot call in Matryona from next door to feel his brow (238).

Soon after this, Dostoyevsky begins to realise the force of the apparition:

This is the spirit in which he sits at Pavel's table, his eyes fixed on the phantasm opposite him whose attention is no less implacable than his own, whom it has been given to him to bring into being.

Not Nechaev - he knows that now. Greater than Nechaev. Not Pavel either. Perhaps Pavel as he might have been one day, grown wholly beyond boyhood to become the kind of cold-faced, handsome man whom no love can touch, even the adoration of a girl-child who will do anything for him.

It is a version that disturbs him. It is not the truth, or not yet the truth. But from this vision of Pavel grown beyond childhood and beyond love - grown not in a human manner but in the manner of an insect that changes shape entirely at each stage of its evolution - he feels a chill coming. Confronting it is like descending into the waters of the Nile and coming face to face with something huge and cold and grey that may once have been born of woman but with the passing of ages has retreated into stone, that does not belong in his world, that will baffle and overwhelm all his powers of conception (240 Coetzee's emphasis).

The latter quotation appears almost immediately prior to his beginning to write. This is the moment of the suspension of time, the (epileptic) moment just before writing, "the moment before he loosens his grip [on sanity, on reality] and begins to fall" (241) from one, everyday self to another, creative self. It is interesting to note that the time of writing seems to have a lot

in common with time as experienced in an epileptic fit.

Dostoyevsky thinks at one stage:

The epileptic knows it all: the approach to the edge, the glance downwards, the lurch of the soul, the thinking that thinks itself crazily over and over like a bell pealing in the head: Time shall have an end, there shall be no death (118 Coetzee's emphasis).

These "fits" are perhaps more extreme examples of the magistrate's "dreamless spells". Thus, the time of writing in this novel has much in common with the spatialized, eternal time of fiction in his other novels.

When Dostoyevsky looks at himself in the mirror, his imaginings go through a clear progression from a sense of himself to himself as a stranger to himself as a monster. The self is gradually splitting and differentiating itself from itself. The doubled self both acts and watches, or reads, himself act. The relation between his two selves is not a loving father-child relationship. He feels repulsed by the figure sitting opposite him. The development of this figure seems to be the emergence of the writing self. Maurice Blanchot has written:

Fiction creates a distance in he who is writing, a gap (itself fictional) without which he could not express himself. The distance increases as the writer becomes more involved with his story (1982:38).

The fictional world - the wonderland, if you like - is represented in the mirror¹ with the fiction writer, but it seems to contain a fallen world. The novel can be seen as depicting the act of writing as a fall from the (real) world. We are told that

¹ This is clearly a variation on the realist notion of fiction as a mirror held up to the world.

"time is suspended, everything is suspended before the fall" (249), and the fall is writing, or it is represented by the written, which is "an assault upon the innocence of a child ... an act for which he can expect no forgiveness" (249), and a betrayal of the people around him, perhaps the deepest betrayal of all (250)².

As in the mythical original Fall there is a progression in self-knowledge, here expressed in writing. Indeed, it might be the case that the fall is necessary for the gaining of wisdom, for the ability to write. He asks, speaking of his monstrous vision, "this presence, so grey and without feature - is this what he must father, give blood to, flesh, life?" (240). It seems the answer is "yes".

If a fall is necessary in order to write, there probably could not be any redemption in art. The self is certainly not reconciled with itself through art; in fact, quite the contrary. Dostoyevsky does not feel purged of his troubles. The taste of betrayal is in his mouth - the last words of the text are "It tastes like gall". He embodies Thomas Mann's idea of the artist as a lost soul doomed to everlasting torment, as well as the Faustian action, the wager, of forfeiting community and redemption for the god-like act of creation. Not for him the first epiphany where the magi recognized the Lord of the Universe and the hope of the world, and where the self attained a new, dignified, grace-ful identity.

² In Age of Iron, the daughter holds the promise of eternal life for the mother. In The Master of Petersburg, the son holds a similar promise for the father. However, it is reached only through betraying the son; it being eternal damnation rather than eternal life perhaps.

Conventional wisdom would have it that the fall is forgiven when a novel or artwork brings the writer and reader back to the world with a new understanding of the world. This is refused in The Master of Petersburg. We, the readers, are not brought to a graceful end, neither is the writer. We are left stranded in a world where the only message seems to be that to create is to destroy, to betray those around you, to fall, irrevocably, from the world.

The obvious question posits itself: why would Coetzee paint a picture of the artist which makes him into a devil figure, a person who seems to embrace death and damnation? In Coetzee's second novel, In the Heart of the Country, the artist is already portrayed as an abject outsider. The Master of Petersburg goes a considerable step further. If the artist is a fallen figure then this must call into doubt the status of the fictional world he creates. It seems that life in fiction is created only through corruption and violence (death) in history.

This is by no means a new dilemma. The guilt of the artist and value of art in the world has preoccupied the artist throughout the twentieth century. In a passage quoted in the chapter on Waiting for the Barbarians, George Steiner writes about how artists have felt that, given the horrors of the twentieth century, the larger, more impressive statements cannot and should not be made. To do so would be to trivialize the violence of history (1975:185). Yet this guilt does not release art from the burden of trying to imagine that which could survive, oppose and even prevent the horrors of history: artists have indeed "made statements". But they are insignificant and

irrelevant in that they do not (cannot) oppose history directly. This is not to be critical of artists. It is precisely because art is outside of history and because it attempts a different mode of being in time to history that it does oppose history. So, the artist might be a fallen figure, and might rely on the fallen world for inspiration, but art, because it is art, is never completely in that world; part of it is always outside. It is the only way we can be outside a worldly discourse, the only way we can register our non-identification with a particular way of approaching the world (or, perhaps, with the violence of history) without being part of that approach. There is only one thing we can compare life with, and that is art, and, perhaps it really is the case that "we live most intensely while we are falling" (Coetzee 1994:121).

In Doubling the Point Coetzee has written that (I have used the passage as an epigraph to this study, but it is worth quoting it again):

Violence and death, are to me, intuitively, the same thing. Violence, as soon as I sense its presence within me, becomes introverted as violence against myself: I cannot project it outward. I am unable to, or refuse to, conceive of a liberating violence... [I]f all of us imagined violence as violence against ourselves, perhaps we would have peace. (Whether peace is what we most deeply want is another story.) ... I understand the Crucifixion as a refusal and an introversion of retributive violence, a refusal so deliberate, so conscious, and so powerful that it overwhelms any reinterpretation ... that we can give to it (1992b:337).

The Master of Petersburg suggests that the creative process is, unavoidably, a betrayal of those around you. But it is also a refusal of retributive violence, and its introversion. The price

to pay might be high, but perhaps it is the only way to achieve a measure of peace.

9. CONCLUSION

It has been this thesis's contention that much of the force of Coetzee's novels lies in their thematising of time. As a novelist, Coetzee is unique in his ability to delineate, in particular, the impact of historical time and circumstances on people. Through the acute focus of his novels on the deleterious effects of constructions of historical time, he is able to articulate, fictionally, the travails of people labouring under the burden of their particular historical moments in a way that is not surpassed in contemporary fiction.

The "foe" of many of the characters is history, or rather, certain modes of understanding the world which twentieth century history has created, and it is arguably the same for Coetzee. In my introduction I claimed that part of the interest of Coetzee is the ambiguity of the place of history in his fiction. While he is clearly concerned (even obsessed) with history, it is not in the manner of either a historical realist such as Nadine Gordimer, or a ludic postmodernist such as Julian Barnes, for instance. When it comes to history he does not take either the purely realist, or postmodernist view. If he shows the constructed nature of historical narratives (as in Dusklands), he also shows that this matters little to those who cannot afford to think about such "academic" matters (such as in Age of Iron). Where his value lies is in his recognition of the oppressive and liberating structures in various conceptions of time.

As Coetzee reveals, history, especially in the twentieth century, can attempt to enforce different times on subjects; for

instance: a time of cultural and historical stasis; a utopian time that is oriented to the future and which disregards the potential of the present; or a time which violently disrupts people's experiences of the present. Moreover, history itself can impose its own discourse as a dogma to which all others must conform. However, what he also reveals is that there are conceptions as well as experiences of time which oppose the impositions and oppressions of historical time. Most significant of these is what I choose to call the time of fiction, which is a spatialized, eternal, a-historical time, and which I align with the (often pastoral) time of myth (but which is not wholly subsumed by this). Many of Coetzee's characters, even when failing to occupy this time, give credence to its reality and its necessity.

Through the articulation of their narratives, the novels also attempt to occupy this time, in an attempt to overcome what they see as a tendency of history to appropriate times, discourses and narratives which rival it. The novels make use of techniques, those arts of narrative, that try to write a different time. Their use of allegory, anachronisms, parody, spatial and temporal settings, and so on are used to reconfigure particular conceptions of time. In so doing they are not merely escapist, but are concerned to protect themselves, and indeed imaginative enterprises generally, from the potential reductive impact of the discourses and narratives of history.

In all this, Coetzee is concerned, or so I believe, to protect a human faculty or predisposition which the novel represents: that ability to imagine alternatives to the status

quo. For many writers and thinkers, literature has represented a model of freedom. For Coetzee himself writing is that which brings a feel of freedom (1992b:246). In the introduction to this study I quoted Milan Kundera who claims that the history of the novel, which is "born of the freedom of man" (1996:18), has always rivalled the history of humanity, which is the history of constraints placed on humans. And, in the words of a very different kind of social critic, Herbert Marcuse, who, when he speaks of art, means literature (see the preface to his The Aesthetic Dimension):

The inner logic of the work of art terminates in the emergence of another reason, another sensibility, which defy the rationality and sensibility incorporated in the dominant social institutions (1977:7).

For Marcuse, the invocation of the image of liberation is grounded in the dimensions where art "transcends its social determination" (6).

For Coetzee, and this is where his ethical thinking is at its most incisive, art, literature, or at least the type he is after, is always a-historically historical. It is, in this sense, generally oppositional. A crucial aspect that Coetzee brings to the understanding of the relation between literature (or art generally) and history is that it is placed in a precarious position in the world. It is part of, and separate from the world at the same time. It both partakes of the effects of history and, paradoxically, opposes them. It recognizes its own complicity with history, and seeks to transcend that complicity. This means that any position, any stand taken by the novels is always

occupied with irony, and always occupied tentatively. Fiction, for Coetzee, and for this critic as well, recognizes its own "evil", and (to transpose Coetzee's terms in Waiting for the Barbarians and an interview in Doubling the Point) inflicts the crime that is latent in it on itself, and is a refusal and introversion of retributive violence.

This is where the value of literature for Coetzee appears to lie: it can restore a multi-dimensionality to time that history so often attempts to exclude and posits a time and place of heightened ethical awareness. Literature is thus more than just a frivolous expression of imagination. It is the result of a human faculty which can oppose the existential, cultural and political violences of history. Coetzee's stubborn and emphatic defence of the art of the novel should be seen in this light. Milan Kundera has recently expressed his view of the writer which seems to accord quite well with Coetzee. Kundera writes,

being a novelist ... was an outlook, a wisdom, a position; a position that would rule out identification with any politics, any religion, any ideology, any moral doctrine, any group; a considered, stubborn, furious non-identification, conceived not as evasion or passivity but as resistance, defiance, rebellion (1996:158. Kundera's emphasis).

As Coetzee would be the first to recognize, though, literature has a limited authority in the world. Its ability to directly oppose the violence of history is limited. All fiction can do is to provide imaginative models of escape from oppression. All it can do is to provide gestures towards the gaps between the fences. The time and space of literature is fragile, but still essential, as a model of freedom, to our being in the

world. In the words of Michael K:

And if the old man climbed out of the cart and stretched himself (things were gathering pace now) and looked at where the pump had been that the soldiers had blown up so that nothing should be left standing, and complained, saying, "What are we going to do about water?", he, Michael K, would produce a teaspoon from his pocket, a teaspoon and a long roll of string. He would clear the rubble from the mouth of the shaft, he would bend the handle of the teaspoon in a loop and tie the string to it, he would lower it down the shaft deep into the earth, and when he brought it up there would be water in the bowl of the spoon; and in that way, he would say, one can live (Coetzee 1983:183-4).

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