CONCLUSION

Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963) initiated an analysis of the dynamics of decolonization, and brings out three phases in the transformative process by which a colony becomes a nation. In the first, during the course of a colonial denial and suppression of the indigenous past, the native intellectual assimilates the literary tradition of the colonial country in an unqualified manner (by writing sonnets etc). Secondly, the native intellectual looks to the past for indigenous forms and abandoned traditions. Finally, in “the fighting phase,” the nationalistic phase, the poet will “become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action.” (222) In the inevitable move to establish a new national culture, Fanon warns that attempting to return to a pre-colonial past is not enough. A national culture cannot be purely recuperative or static. It will draw on the past, look forward to the future, and participate in the present. As Fanon defines it, the postcolonial is never a specific moment but an ongoing struggle, a continual emergence, a “zone of occult instability” (227).

Such a zone currently exists in South Africa, where, in the 1990s, a postcolonial period has come into being, as signalled by the end of apartheid, the first national democratic election, and the 1994 formation of the Government of National Unity headed by President Nelson Mandela. For a minority of the country's population, those of Afrikaner descent - political, linguistic, and cultural freedom from colonial rule was achieved in the early part of the century through the Anglo-Boer Wars and the consolidation of an Afrikaner national identity, particularly following
the move into power of the National Party in the 1948 elections. However, with the subsequent institution and extension of apartheid, South Africa in many ways remained a colonial country, in that the vast majority of people were denied the rights of citizenship and were exploited economically as sources of cheap labor. For most South Africans, the country did not become postcolonial, politically speaking, until the historic elections of 1994. Postcolonial South Africa in the nineties dramatically demonstrates Fanon's "occult instability." In this uncertain time of national and cultural transition, the relationship of history to the novel has acquired increasing importance.

J. M. Coetzee in “The Novel Today,” (1988), protested against the novel's supposed "colonization" by history. Speaking before the fall of the apartheid regime, Coetzee refers to a powerful tendency, perhaps even dominant tendency, to subsume the novel under history. Such a novel, according to Coetzee, during "times of intense ideological pressure like the present... has only two options: supplementarity or rivalry" (3). A supplementary novel, one that is colonized by the historical present,

...aims to provide the reader with vicarious first-hand experience of living in a certain historical time, embodying contending forces in contending characters and filling our experience with a certain density of observation." (3)

This novel is documentary, reportorial, providing a camera-eye's view. The novel as rival, however, is one 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 ... [it]
evolves its own paradigms and myths, in the process ... perhaps going
so far as to show up the mythic status of history." (3)

In arguing for storytelling over history, his primary point, Coetzee concludes,
is “..that history is not reality; that history is a kind of discourse ... The categories of
history ... are a certain construction put upon reality." (4)

History as reality, "the Real, the datum of the individual and collective
experience of the past" does exist in Coetzee's paradigm. (5) He clearly does
acknowledge the existence of historical reality. Coetzee's polemics engage the politics
of historical discourses; in order to preserve their rhetorical force, they are silent about
the referents of these discourses. The issue for Coetzee is how to engage with
historical reality as a writer, not whether such a reality exists. Coetzee's case against
history refers to the discourse of history, a constructed text of what has happened, a
myth, a metanarrative, which might be resisted, deconstructed, or even destroyed by a
rival discourse of the novel. Much of Coetzee's own fiction operates in this fashion:
rivaling historical discourse, revealing its mythic qualities, undercutting its authority,
such as in Foe's revisionary account of Robinson Crusoe, Duskland's exposure of
South African colonial history, and Age of Iron's deconstruction of both liberation and
liberal rhetoric of the eighties. Coetzee's case against history addresses the text's
linguistic and discursive strategies more than the contingent nature of reality. In his
argument Coetzee uses the term history to refer both to historical reality (events) and
to historical discourse (historiography). Novels that represent historical reality can be
further divided into those that engage the present moment and those that depict past events, suggesting a third meaning for the term. In South African criticism, this is a crucial distinction. Although Coetzee appears to propose a simple binary opposition of rivalry between history and the novel, the subtleties of his diction suggest an elaborate complementarity and interconnectedness between “history” and the novel.

The debate over the novel's employment of documentary social realism as a means of commenting on and affecting historical reality came to a climax in the nineties, with the publication of a paper by Albie Sachs, a white ANC lawyer and autobiographer who had lived in exile for many years. In 1989, Sachs wrote "Preparing Ourselves for Freedom" for an in-house ANC discussion in Lusaka, and the essay was later published in the *Johannesburg Weekly Mail* in February 1990 on the very same day that F. W. de Klerk stood up in Parliament and shocked the world by announcing the beginning of the end of apartheid. The tumultuous response to this brief essay was unprecedented, revealing the volatile interconnections between culture and politics during the decolonization process that Fanon outlined. Representing an important stage in Fanon's evolution of a national consciousness, the renewed interest in historical writing is providing the documentation and narratives that dismantle and counter the myths propagated by official Afrikaner historical discourse, a strategy that Coetzee had begun some twenty years earlier.

In the backwards glance, South Africans are also insisting that the evils of the past are not be suppressed and are decrying the readiness with which some of those
who had been responsible for apartheid are forgetting their own culpability. Speaking at the “New Nation Writers Conference” in 1991, Ndebele in *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture*, asserted,

“...we have to cry out when the past is being deliberately forgotten in order to ensure that what was gained by it can now be enjoyed without compunction. It is crucial at this point that the past be seen as a legitimate point of departure for talking about the challenges of the present and the future. The past, no matter how horrible it has been, can redeem us. It can be the moral foundation on which to build the pillars of the future.”(155)

The riveting storytelling that occurred at the Truth and Reconciliation hearings on human rights abuses throughout 1996 provides one such ritual means of remembering the past; more formal remembrances through storytelling are appearing in novels and short fiction of the nineties.

shebeens, and reports on gangster violence. Andre Brink, who throughout his writing career had moved back and forth between fiction set in the present and historical fiction, took on a much more self-reflexive historicism in *The First Life of Adamaster* (1993), which attempts to rebut, from the "inside," two key stories in African historiography: Camoes's account of Europe's encounter with Africa personified as a black giant-monster, and the common European myth of black African sexual potency.

Andre Brink's *On the Contrary* also published in 1993 returns to the seventeenth century for another reconsideration of South African colonial history.

Unquestionably, a great deal of the novel's notoriety stemmed from the fact that it included one of the first straightforward South African accounts of homosexuality, long a forbidden topic under the strict censorship laws, and was written by an openly gay author. What might have been presented as spectacular in Ndebele's terms, though, is rendered ordinary through the novel's point-of-view: it is narrated by an eleven-year-old Afrikaner boy named Marnus Erasmus. As a coming-of-age novel, *The Smell of Apples* depicts Marnus's growing awareness of his family's self-delusions and corruption, but his initiation also exemplifies all Afrikaners' recent reconsideration of their history and heritage.

In both *July's People* (1981) and *A Sport of Nature* (1987), Gordimer depicts the future destruction of apartheid as occurring through a brutal and chaotic revolution. Similarly, Karel Schoeman's *Promised Land* (1978) describes the misfortunes of a group of rural Afrikaners after a violent revolution. Coetzee's account
of the end of South Africa is more obliquely rendered in Life & Times of Michael K (1983), but he also forecasts that change will occur in South Africa only at the point of a gun, as the novel's epitaph makes clear ("War is the father of all and king of all"). Rather than projecting a world to come, they now depict the anticipations and beliefs of a world that has passed.

As was vividly demonstrated in the above apocalyptic novels, most South Africans believed that political change would occur only after a bloody civil war. Instead, a route of tenuous reconciliation was carefully negotiated, in large part because of Nelson Mandela. In Long Walk to Freedom, Mandela recalls that even when the ANC established Umkhonto we Sizwe (the MK), they deliberately rejected strategies of guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and open revolution in favor of sabotage for purposes of reconciliation:

...because it did not involve loss of life it offered the best hope for reconciliation among the races afterward. We did not want to start a blood feud between white and black. Animosity between Afrikaner and Englishman was still sharp fifty years after the Anglo-Boer War; what would race relations be like between white and black if we provoked a civil war?"(246)

Mandela's longstanding commitment to reconciliation and political pragmatism has resulted in a post-liberation South Africa that can only be termed liberal, in a political sense.

Racism still exists in South Africa, although now it is no longer institutionalized or overt like before. The era of struggle literature is over in South
Africa. Today, the country is contending with the complications of freedom. A racial
divide once enforced by law has become an economic divide that falls mostly along
racial lines. Everyone is profoundly uncertain of his place. Four out of five South
Africans are black, one in four is unemployed and at least one in nine H.I.V. positive.
Violent crime is rampant, rape rates are among the highest on the globe. South Africa
today is a grand experiment in multicultural democracy, where the leadership is black,
money largely white and the line between empowerment and exploitation ever
shifting. The preamble to the 1996 Constitution — perhaps the most significant
document to emerge from the post-apartheid period, if not the country’s entire history
— says, “South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.” The unity
is willed: not quite a facade but not quite a foundation, either.

In the mid-’80s, J. M. Coetzee asserted that the “great South African novel” —
a book that would encompass all strata of society the way “War and Peace” did for
Russia — would be impossible to write in a country so divided. After the end of
apartheid, the South African literary scene remains as fragmented as ever, with writers
exploring their own ethnic experiences.

In South Africa, the transition to democracy had been sufficiently gradual to
allow white South African writers a gestation period in which to ponder over
collective guilt. Yet for South African whites generally, as for white South African
writers, there has been, perhaps expectedly, no consensus about the appropriate ethical
response to the historical guilt of apartheid, just as there has been a deep anxiety to
acknowledge the culture of violence in post-apartheid South Africa as part of the enduring legacy of apartheid.

Acknowledging that the Truth Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was potentially a heroic ethical project, David Attwell and Barbara Harlow in “Introduction: South African Fiction after Apartheid,” have noted that it was nonetheless not without ambiguities:

“Apart from the cost of giving amnesty to torturers and assassins, the militant youth culture of the 1980s ... has left an uncomfortable legacy of seemingly apolitical crime and vigilantism.” (6) They go on to observe that the TRC, in elevating forgiveness in the name of peace above justice in the name of principle, excludes natural justice; and that by "emphasizing individual acts of abuse, it has tended to obscure the systematically abusive social engineering that was apartheid.” Therefore, apartheid's legacy remains evident in extensive poverty, educational deprivation, and a warped criminal justice system which, because it was developed as an instrument of political oppression, seems incapable of dealing with ordinary crime (7)

Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, and Andre Brink, three of South Africa's most distinguished white writers, all with definite anti-apartheid commitment have written major novels set fully in post-apartheid South Africa: Gordimer's The House Gun (1998), Coetzee's Disgrace (1999), and Brink's The Rights of Desire (2000). Each novel is arguably a timeless piece of art attempting to offer a wonderful illumination of life in its totality. Yet each novel in its preoccupation with violence, with varying notions of the expiation of guilt, justice, reparation and of the implications of the transfer of power for both black and white, equally participates in the on-going dialogue on the transformation process in the new South Africa. Read in the context of
contemporary South African history, these three novels complement one another. But even in their varying apprehension of the substance of the daily routine of South African life, they enhance our understanding of the underlying implications of South Africa's peculiar history.

Considering the crime wave which plagues post-apartheid South Africa a consequence of black rule, Gordimer meditates on it primarily as an expected legacy of apartheid. In a 1990 essay, “How Shall We Look at Each Other Then?” She had, in fact, predicted in clear terms the kind of legacy which post-apartheid South Africa would have to confront with regard to human relations, an aftermath of apartheid which--although it could be tackled only by majority rule under a bill of rights--would still not evanesce as a result of legal victories alone over oppression. Gordimer notes:

Just as there are people physically maimed by the struggle between white power and black liberation, there is psychological behavioural damage that all of us in South Africa have been subject to in some degree, whether we know it or not, whether we are whites who have shut eyes and electronically-controlled gates on what was happening to blacks, or whether we are blacks who have been transported and dumped where the government wished, tear-gassed and shot, detained, forced into exile, or have left to join the liberation army which came into being when no other choice remained. Violence has become the South African way of life. (13)

Disgrace, (1999) published five years after Nelson Mandela was elected president of South Africa in the country’s first election open to the whole population, caused fierce controversy for its depiction of black violence against whites and particularly for its presentation of the black rape of a white woman. Written in a hard,
straight language rich in associations, *Disgrace* reveals Coetzee as a profound researcher of human determinants and deals with abuse and rape; it is about guilt bigger than the individual life. The rape, Lucy says in humble self-abasement, is the price she must pay in order to be allowed to stay and continue an undignified life like the dogs for which she cares. In the end, there is only disgrace, and the narrator seems to come to the conclusion that there is no longer a place for white people in South Africa. Lurie is searching for redemption but only meets abasement in his task of putting dogs to death and disposing of them. Finally, David Lurie and Lucy arrive at the point where Michael K began.

Coetzee, in 2002, emigrated to Australia where he holds an honorary position at the University of Adelaide. In the past few years, Coetzee has used the fictitious "Australian" author Elizabeth Costello as a masque for the revival of the genre of philosophical dialogue. Mrs. Costello gives outraged lectures on the mass slaughter of animals, on Auschwitz, and on Holderlin's gods. She is a relentless moralist, a mobile task force of literature who leaves behind traces of intellectual despair. *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) is a clever and irritating book that, at first sight, comes across like a collection of literary essays, which are highly argumentative and never lacking in challenging theses. In one of them, Costello argues that the details of a novel which describes the execution of the group of failed Hitler assassins around Graf von Stauffenberg should not gain any publicity, as it is morally irresponsible to open one's literary imagination to these particular executioners and thereby help to circulate their
evil. Coetzee brings the counter-voices inherent in serious fiction to the foreground of his stories, embodying them in the characters and, frequently, in the form of the narrative itself.

There is a shared explicitness of purpose to the books published after _Youth_ (2002), _Elizabeth Costello_ (2003), _Slow Man_ (2005), _Diary of a Bad Year_ (2007), and _Summertime_ (2009). Coetzee uses Costello as a masque to reflect on the ultimate purposes of life and writing. He wraps the considerable seriousness of the essays around the irony of the narratives. Here, Costello defends her frequently exaggerated opinions and arguments while an anonymous third-person narrator connects Costello's ideas with her circumstances. _Disgrace_, and _Elizabeth Costello_ is nothing else than a continuation of _Disgrace_ by different means, lifting the motives that one had to unearth in _Disgrace_ into the spotlight of an intellectual debate. _Disgrace_ already followed the movement from a professor's writing to the good deeds of a person taking care of abandoned dogs; it also follows the movement of the world of postcultural metropolitan people to those who live in the humble vicinity of mangy animals. _Disgrace_ reveals this pattern with a clear religious conclusion and contains, like _Elizabeth Costello_, a provocative allusion to the Holocaust. Both texts allude to the ambiguity of redemption and a "final solution." In _Disgrace_, the burning of animals is—though not explicitly stated—described in terms reminiscent of the Holocaust's crematoria. At the same time, the killing of animals—as is the case for _Elizabeth Costello_—contains hints of a redemptive nature. Lurie, the professor of literature,
compares Bev Shaw, the founder of an animal clinic, to an Indian priestess, as does John his mother Elizabeth Costello. Both books mention the redemption of the soul on the day of the Last Judgment. It becomes obvious that Coetzee has described protagonists David Lurie and Elizabeth Costello with great sympathy and deep imagery in both Disgrace and Elizabeth Costello; protagonists who turn away from writing and our civilization with metaphysical radicalism. Disgrace already went beyond the realms of the politically critical South African novel. And Elizabeth Costello confirms that, for years now, Coetzee has been developing a cultural critique that was not visible in his earlier works.

In Slow Man Coetzee provides a closer view of the authorial power of manipulation by bringing Elizabeth Costello into Rayment's placid life. Rayment is disconcerted by the knowledge Costello appears to possess about him and dislikes the possibility that much of what he does--falling in love, having sex with a blind woman--has been arranged by her. He tries to resist Costello's attempt to make him grow by throwing him into sexual and emotional intrigue. She wants Rayment to hurry up and do something or become someone. Images of exhaustion and death haunt Slow Man as much as they did Coetzee's two most recent novels.

A tale of age, loss and love, the novel focuses on a divorced old photographer, Paul Rayment, 60, who enjoys riding his bicycle until he is hit by a car, which causes him to lose a leg. He falls into a deep depression, refuses a prosthesis -- even though he could probably adjust to wearing it very well and even ride a bike again -- and instead
becomes a recluse. His sudden disability causes Paul to feel the effects of age more than he normally would. After going through several nurses whose personalities he cannot stand, Paul finally is assigned to Marijana, a Croatian nurse, who faces the difficulty in adjusting to Australia with her husband and three children. Paul is helpful to her and shows the wisdom of age in teaching her about the culture. Marijana is so gentle with him that he finds himself falling in love with her -- but he resists telling her for a long time. When he does, she fearfully disappears for a few days, although she eventually returns. And later, Marijana's husband comes to confront him.

At this moment Elizabeth Costello, a strong-minded author enters who seems determined to shape up Paul's life. For his part, he assumes she is writing a book in which she is using him as a character – but she never admits to it. She moves in with him and refuses to leave despite his most strenuous objections. The two of them have many discussions, demonstrating their quick intelligence. Their confrontations are masterful examples of intellectual dialogue; it is easy to see from this why so many writers from various cultures speak often about the influence of Coetzee's writings on their own work. Paul is embarrassed to have Elizabeth around when Marijana is caring for him. In a strange way, Paul and Elizabeth begin to appreciate each other but under no conditions will admit it. Since they are much closer in age than Paul and Marijana, their union would seem logical – but the animosity between them seems to make that impossible.
The story develops in a very human way, as cultures clash. Marijana grows to appreciate Paul, and he comes to know and love two of her children. He even offers to pay her son's way to attend an elite private school, which makes Marijana's husband angry and jealous. Marijana's son comes to live with Paul for a short time, and he finds that having a teenager in his house is basically undesirable, even though he has genuine affection for the young man. The climax is solid and satisfying. Coetzee, a consummate storyteller, demonstrates his interest in human values and his startling gift for writing clear, inviting prose that easily draws in the reader. His habit of interspersing the thoughts of his characters with their actual conversations is highly effective in moving the story forward.

Given the exultation and edification of reading *Diary of a Bad Year*, is tangentially an account of a highly regarded South African writer’s removal to Australia and his reflections of political thought, moral philosophy, and personal drama that borders on the tawdry drama.

Señor C, retired novelist of no little esteem, has taken residence on the bottom floor of a high-rise apartment building in Sydney. Age encroaching, he faces the prospect of writing a selection of essays—or opinions—at the behest of a German publisher. In the laundry room an exotic young woman catches his eye. Currently between jobs, she reluctantly agrees to transcribe his opinions, but her live-in mate is suspicious from the beginning. Alan is a pragmatist and opportunist, a financier of sorts. It galls him that the Señor plans to leave his millions in savings to an
organization that rehabilitates discarded lab animals. That the Señor’s mild flirtation with Anya is more in pursuit of aesthetics than sex is a subtlety consistently lost upon both of the upstairs tenants, and each eventually comes to terms with Señor C in divergent ways.

Coetzee’s super-honed style bears close watching. At one point early on, he refers to “talk-back” radio, a refinement that seems a bit arch. Later, we learn that the flip coinage is actually not C’s usage but a correction of Anya’s made for the sake of hipness. Anything that seems even slightly out of place will be explained. As too, the narrative structure. The pages are arranged in three-layer fashion: on top are the strong opinions, in the middle is a personal narrative by the Señor, and Anya’s account takes the bottom. Appropriately, we learn in one opinion of Señor C’s high regard for J.S. Bach, as the ensemble nature of the sections comes to resemble musical parts.

The structure also reflects the nature of the characters. The Señor with his observations is lofty and trenchant, yet shying away from the requirements of philosophically rigorous thinking. Anya with her practical preoccupations: appearance and aging, her effect on men, and the place of women in general. Alan with his notions of survival of the fittest, societal appearances, and schemes to get rich. The thoughtful, the bourgeoisie, and the base, so arranged, comprise a whole beyond the reach of any branch. From the earliest novels and the starkly forceful Waiting for the Barbarians on down to Diary, Coetzee has managed to find appropriate scaffolding for allegories with the highest moral purpose. To integrate the ostensible realms of the didactic with
accounts of human bravery and courage inside a whole that can strike fear and
recognition in the human heart is an ambition wherein Coetzee pays tribute in a
revealingly emotional way.

Coetzee filled in some of the outline of his earliest days with Boyhood (1997),
which was labeled by different publishers with the subtitles “A Memoir” and “Scenes
from Provincial Life.” It was, and remains, one of Coetzee’s most straightforward and
accessible books, with the only obvious complication being the third-person point of
view. Boyhood and Youth assault the genre boundaries of autobiography. They do
more than simply render questions about such writing’s inherent ambiguity visible,
relevant, and worthy to ask questions. They make them a necessary part of the reading
experience. This technique is adopted to bring upon distance: the distance in time
between the adult writing the book and the child represented in it, the distance
between experience and recollection, the distance between writer and text. The device
means that both author and reader relate to him as to a biographical—rather than
autobiographical—subject. In Boyhood and, especially, Youth, the John Coetzee
presented to us is an alienated and alienating figure. The narration heightens both the
alienation and the distance by keeping uses of the protagonist’s name to an
extraordinary minimum in both books. John Coetzee in these books is “he,” a pronoun
amidst pronouns, and the narration occasionally allows semantic ambiguity in
preference to naming. In Boyhood he is more alienated than wicked, but as his
awareness of the world grows along with his alienation in Youth, wickedness comes as
a side effect of not being able to bridge the gap between being a person and non-person.

The books are not simply portraits because there are other strategies at work in them in parallel to the portraiture—strategies that highlight ideas of history, specifically the history of European incursion into Africa. In *Boyhood*, John Coetzee’s alienation arises partly from his living in an Afrikaner-dominated town, having white skin and an Afrikaner name, and yet lacking real fluency with the Afrikaans language, much connection to Afrikaner traditions, or any experience with the Afrikaners’ Christianity. In *Youth* he flees South Africa for England so that he can avoid compulsory military service among what he imagines the military to be filled with: loutish, jingoistic Afrikaners. That is not everything, though, for he is no longer shielded from the challenges of identity and politics that threatened from the periphery of his child’s consciousness in *Boyhood*.

Wrapped up though he is in his private worries, he cannot fail to see that the country around him is in turmoil. The pass laws to which Africans and Africans alone are subjected are being tightened even further, and protests are breaking out everywhere. In the Transvaal the police fire shots into a crowd, then, in their mad way, go on firing into the backs of fleeing men, women, and children. From beginning to end the business sickens him: the laws themselves; the bully-boy police; the government, stridently defending the murderers and denouncing the dead; and the press, too frightened to come out and say what anyone with eyes in his head can see.
John leaves South Africa not only from fear of what he would encounter in the military but also from fear of falling into activism—of stumbling toward action which is what military service would require of him as well. His desires are for something more passive, more intellectual and literary, free of the responsibilities of politics and history, unbothered by the guilt of complicity. Even his assumptions about what it means to live as an intellectual and an artist are naive and occasionally pitiful.

Coetzee’s most recent book, *Summertime* (2009) has been described since its British publication in the summer of 2009 as a companion or sequel to *Boyhood* and *Youth*. In its form and subject matter, *Summertime* has more in common with *Elizabeth Costello* and *Diary of a Bad Year* than *Boyhood* and *Youth*, but some of its central concerns are the same, and it is possible to see the John Coetzee who is the topic of *Summertime* as an adult version of the John Coetzee who is the protagonist of *Boyhood* and *Youth*. In many ways, *Summertime* unites the strategies of the recent books with the earlier ones—not only *Boyhood* and *Youth*, but *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country*, *Foe*, *The Master of Petersburg*.

With *Summertime* John Coetzee moves from the position of a subject to that of an object—something to be analyzed, studied, talked about. The book is broken into seven sections: the first and last are third-person, present-tense passages labeled as being from notebooks, with the first section passages having specific dates from 1972 to 1975 and the last section passages being “undated fragments.” The notebook passages are, in tone and form, much like the narratives of *Boyhood* and *Youth*, and a
reader could certainly suppose they are outtakes from an uncompleted third volume. The middle five sections of *Summertime* have the form of interviews: questions from the biographer of a dead writer named John Coetzee to people whom the biographer has determined Coetzee considered important in his life, though many of the people are perplexed by such a designation. Four of the interviewees are women. All of the interviewees knew Coetzee during the period the notebooks cover, when he was living with his father, scrounging for work as a teacher, writing and publishing a first book called *Dusklands*, and seeming rather lost and aloof in the world.

In *Summertime* John Coetzee is dead (Coetzee’s own attempts at exploring and expanding Barthes’s ideas of “authoricity” and “authoricide.”) John Coetzee, then, is more fictionalized than many of the protagonists of novels inspired by writers’ own lives. Towards the end of *Summertime*, a complex sense of the John Coetzee character is built from various subjectivities and stories. The book begins and ends with a fictional self perceiving itself and telling stories about itself. The interviews shift us away from the fictional John Coetzee’s self-perceptions and show different dialogic approaches. First, there is the fictional interviewer who has never met John Coetzee as a person outside of texts, and who himself aspires to write a text about him. He gathers material for his text through interviewing characters who were, according to the texts he has read, important to the fictional Coetzee. These characters then tell stories that are given to us as the interviewer’s raw material, and so
the text we read is not the text he will create, but potential elements of it, the primary
source material. The biography he intends to write hovers in our minds, a fiction
outside the fiction.

The characters, though, are aware of how their stories may be shaped. Some
accept this without much question or complaint, remaining complicit, while others try
to assert themselves against the interviewer. This is clearest in the second of the
interviews, with Margot Jonker, a cousin with whom the young John Coetzee fell in
love. While the first interview took a familiar question-and-answer form, the form of
the second is inverted—Mr. Vincent has recorded and transcribed what Margot told
him and is now reading back to her what he has made of her words, becoming less
interviewer than ventriloquist. He has not transcribed her words entirely faithfully,
however, for he, crossing over into the world of the fictioneer, has heightened some
moments for dramatic effect, creating his monologic ideal, and Margot disapproves.

The purpose of the mirror-looking-at-a-mirror structure of *Summertime* is not
merely to highlight the difficulties and implications of locating truth in storytelling,
nor to complicate our ideas of the relationships between author, text, and world. The
structure also supports the creation of richly imagined characters, characters created
from the shadow of the character they each talk about, that of John Coetzee. This John
Coetzee is as awkward, odd, lonely, occasionally cruel, and apparently untalented as
the John Coetzee of *Boyhood* and *Youth*, though his apparent lack of talent is, here,
shown to be only apparent, since he is someone who has published books that brought him awards and the attention of scholars.

It is here where *Summertime* has as much in common with *Elizabeth Costello* and, especially, *Diary of a Bad Year* as with *Boyhood* and *Youth*. *Diary of a Bad Year* utilized a complex, multi-vocal structure and offered a protagonist with the first name John and the initials JC who has written some books that share the titles of J.M. Coetzee’s own books. JC is older than Coetzee, though, and does not seem to be quite as successful, though a framed scroll in his bedroom could, perhaps, be a Nobel Prize (or not). The novel presents various essays JC has written and encourages the knowing reader to wonder whether the opinions he expresses might be those of J.M. Coetzee, much as readers of *Elizabeth Costello* were likely to wonder whether the opinions Elizabeth espouses are those of the man who wrote her words.

(i)

Nadine Gordimer in her ‘Preface’ to *Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee* explains the appealing processes of Coetzee’s works.

…..the worth of a work of fiction is proven, finally, only when, alone with me, it imposes the rhythm of its thought processes so that I hear its voice, feel its pulse coursing through my life between readings (Huggan XI)

For Gordimer, the story involves a certain loss of agency, a process by which the reader ceases to feel his or her own pulse and begins to feel the pulse of the book he or she is reading: the discourse of the novel overrides “the truth” of reader’s actual
experiences and thus evoke the responses of feeling and of seeing things according to the framework the book posits even when the readers are not occupied by the vocation of reading the book or even between the intervals of readings. Writing is a succession of choices that must somehow end. Yet within a sentence that it is trying to close, Coetzee forces alternatives to open. In a fiction he is bringing to an end, he closes down firmly to multiply choices of meanings rather than to reduce or focus them. He thus offers readers a liberty that is as painful as it is specious. Readers are given the dubious freedom of making their own decisions. This becomes a license for the author extending his authority even further into the reader than being in a state of deprivation.

By sheer magnitude of Coetzee’s critical oeuvre, it has to be taken for granted that Coetzee is a writer particularly suited to the preoccupations of contemporary academic discourse. Graham Huggan and Stephen Watson in their “Introduction” to Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee guess that “Academe would have invented J.M. Coetzee had he not already existed, so sympathetic do his concerns seem to be to critical theory and many of its current preoccupations.” (6) Coetzee represents in himself the accomplishing quality of being both a critic and a writer, as is the case with John Barth, the American novelist. His works answer many of the dominant critical and theoretical questions currently being asked. Indeed, the novels Coetzee writes don’t always feel like stories proper in so far as the narrative world he creates seems to be part imaginative storytelling and part philosophical investigation into the nature of language and discursive practice.
Coetzee’s first novel *Dusklands* was seen as a complete departure from the realist tradition in the South African novel that had characterized this liberal humanist ethic and was labeled as “modernist,” by White and Couzens, in *Literature and Society in South Africa*. Paul Rich in “Tradition and Revolt in South African Fiction,” assesses that

As an art form, it [Coetzee’s writing] is probably destined to remain the vehicle for expressing the cultural and political dilemmas of a privileged class of white artists and intellectuals and at best it is likely to lead to a more general loosening of contemporary South African writing away from a slavish imitation of the English liberal novel-writing tradition. (73)

While early South African critiques of Coetzee’s work were offered against the local political background, the influence of contemporary literary theory generated other responses. Teresa Dovey, whose book *The Novels of J.M. Coetzee: Lacanian Allegories* argues from a post-structuralist theoretical framework for a reading of Coetzee that takes into account the “self-deconstructive activity” of his novels (1988: 46). She sees this in itself as a form of resistance, as “a strategy which deconstructs the position of mastery per se…a mode of writing which denies the critic the position of mastery” (50).

David Atwell in *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* has written on the awareness of the “aesthetics versus politics” debate and describes Coetzee’s novels as constituting

…a form of postmodern metafiction that declines the cult of the merely relativist and artful…Coetzee has absorbed the lessons of moden
linguistics – the textual turn in structuralism and poststructuralism – yet seriously addresses the ethical and political stresses of living in, and with, a particular historical locale, that of contemporary South Africa”

(1)

Much of the international critical attention that focused on Coetzee after he was awarded the Booker-McConnell Prize for *Life & Times of Michael K* sought to explicate the ways in which his novels were stories of South Africa. Susan Van Zanten Gallagher in *A Story of South Africa: J.M.Coetzee’s Fiction in Context* analyzes the novels as postmodern allegories, and while denying their realism by drawing attention to their postmodern narrative strategies, she also seeks to tie them closely to their South African context.

Dick Penner’s critical study, *Countries of the Mind: The Fiction of J.M. Coetzee*, concedes that

…the demand for J.M.Coetzee’s works is related to the world’s interest in the politics, literature, culture and society of South Africa….Coetzee’s fictions maintain their significance apart from a South African context because of their artistry and because they transform urgent societal concerns into more enduring questions regarding colonialism and the relationships of mastery and servitude between cultures and individuals. (xiii)

This appreciation of the novels’ cultural and political specificity, while bearing in mind their “universal” concerns, is typical of the approach of the criticism from outside South Africa. While much of the criticism from within South Africa has concerned itself with issues of commitment and “relevance,” much has been made of the works’ “South African-ness,” with commentators, both from within and from
outside South Africa, striving to allegorize each novel within a specific South African context.

Thus, Robert. M. Post, in “The Noise of Freedom: J.M. Coetzee’s Foe,” writes

In the allegory of Foe, Cruso and the ship’s captain, who promised to take Friday back to Africa but who really wanted to sell him into slavery, represent the Afrikaner government of South Africa. Susan Barton…represents the liberal white South African who sympathizes with the plight of his or her country’s non-whites. (145)

Coetzee’s reticence and elusiveness is found in his refusal to provide a “master discourse” on his own texts preferring instead to let the works speak for themselves. In an interview with Alan Thorold and Richard Wicksteed quoted in Dovey’s book, he refuses to comment on his “intentions,” eluding the interviewers’ attempt at categorization with the following response:

It seems to me that what you’re trying to do is absorb certain novels, my novels, into a political discourse…And what I am now resisting is the attempt to swallow my novels into a political discourse…So that attempts to swallow up the intention that lies in or behind a book of mine – let’s assume for the moment that there is an intention there – into some wider or more all-embracing, more swallowing, notion of social intention – I have to resist them because, frankly, my allegiances lie with the discourse of the novels and not with the discourse of politics. (55)

Part of his insistence on the particularity of the procedures of novelistic discourse is related to Coetzee’s own awareness of the way authorship and authority can operate as potentially colonizing. He shows a strong engagement with this in the way he foregrounds his narrators’ discourse in his novels.
Always aware of the complicity of his own discourse, he is suspicious of the kind of social-realism that sees the writer in South Africa, in particular, as the diagnostic organ of the body politic. Thus, in an article on fellow Afrikaner writer Andre Brink in “Andre Brink and the Censor,” Coetzee points to the paradox at the heart of such a metaphor and poses the question: “Is diagnosis carried out from inside or outside the body?” He continues:

Are Brink’s essays on the censor written from inside or outside a warring relationship with him? If from inside, how does he escape contagion by the censor’s paranoia (how does the diagnostic organ escape corruption by the sick body)? If from outside, how did the organ find its way out of the body? The problem is ultimately not one of knowing what to say about the censor, but of finding a position from which to say it. (72)

What Coetzee is drawing attention to here is the impossibility of the writer’s escaping the conditions around him/her, even if there is a conscious resistance to such conditions. In relation to censorship, more specifically, Coetzee is careful to include, rather than to exempt, his own writing. As he writes in a chapter in Giving Offense: Essays on Censorship:

Having lived through the heyday of South African censorship, seen its consequences not only on the careers of fellow-writers but on the totality of public discourse, and felt within myself some of its more secret and shameful effects, I have every reason to suspect that whatever infected [other writers]…whether real or delusional, has infected me too. That is to say, this very writing may be a specimen of the kind of paranoid discourse it seeks to describe. (37)
This awareness of his own complicity is an important aspect of all Coetzee’s novels, as well as of his critical insights. It emphasizes what he has described in *Doubling the Point* as his lack of ease with language

...that lays down the law, that is not provisional, that does not as one of its habitual motions glance back skeptically at its premises. (394)

Thus, while his work is often compared with other white South African writers like Nadine Gordimer, Breyten Breytenbach, and Andre Brink, he himself rejects what he sees as the polemic mode of such oppositional writing, that which he terms in “An Interview with J.M. Coetzee,” in *World Literature Today* as “structures of opposition, of Either Or, which I take it as my task to evade.” (108) this involves a rejection of the kind of realism that characterizes this political literature. He has said in “An Interview with J.M. Coetzee,” by Tony Morphet:

I don’t have much interest in, or can’t seriously engage myself with, the kind of realism that takes pride in copying the ‘real’ world. (64)

Coetzee’s own subject position in South African society is itself elusive. While like Breytenbach and Brink, Coetzee is of Afrikaans heritage, in *Doubling the Point*, he believes that “No Afrikaner would consider me an Afrikaner: and is clearly distanced from Afrikaner nationalism. Nor is he “of British ancestry” (341 & 342) and thus does not have particular allegiances to an English South African establishment. His insider/outsider status perhaps enables him to view the binary positions of white South African subjectivity (Afrikaner versus English-speaking) with equal dispassion.
English has been his first language since childhood and like Gordimer, Coetzee has only written novels in English. Yet while he questions his power or desire to “withdraw from the gang [of Afrikaners] or to be “counted apart” (Coetzee *Doubling* 343), what he calls his “ethno-linguistic” detachment also allows him a certain perspective on his own authority, a sense perhaps of the middle ground that characterizes his writing. While Coetzee may not wish to align himself with any one particular point of view, he describes himself, memorably, and in the third person, as someone who “cannot or will not, cannot and will not, join, shout, sing: his throat tenses up, revolts” (*Doubling* 394), he does not seek to distance himself from the collective “guilt” of the “audacious and well-planned crime against Africa” (*Doubling* 342) that was the apartheid system. As he says,

I would regard it as morally questionable to write something like the second part of *Dusklands – a fiction*, note – from a position that is not historically complicit. (343)

It is this meticulous awareness of his own position, which is also reflected in the foregrounding of his narrators’ positionality, that makes Coetzee’s work so ethically interesting and that has invited such lengthy debate about the relationship between “politics’ and “ethics” in his writing.

The continuing intensity of the debate within South African academic circles about the reception of Coetzee’s work is still evident in a critical exchange between Jean-Philippe Wade and David Attwell. Wade, in a review essay, “Doubling Back on
J.M. Coetzee,” links Coetzee’s work with the modernist” self-representation of powerlessness,” concluding that

In an analogous situation [to that of modernist German Marxism] of a totalitarian apartheid system which had crippled its historical antagonist, Coetzee launched his fictional project which similarly set in motion an endless auto-critique of Western colonial discourses from within a residual, complicit and politically impotent liberal aesthetic space. (216)

What is noticeable about the terms of this critique is the return to the early discourse in Coetzee criticism that looked at his work in the context of liberal humanist aesthetics. In a later issue of the journal, English in Africa, David Attwell in “‘The Naked Truth’: A Response to Jean-Philippe Wade,” seeks to “restore certain perspectives in the general critical discussion of Coetzee that Wade either misjudges or misrepresents.” (Atwell Naked 89)

Coetzee’s skepticism regarding terminology, his concern with the implications of discourse, including his own, can perhaps be traced to his training as a linguist and his career as an academic. He has commented on this aspect of his work in an interview with Jean Sevry, (1986), suggesting that in many ways he is “more interested in the linguistic than the literary side of academic profession,… .I think there is evidence of an interest in problems of language throughout my novels.”(1) Coetzee’s own critical and academic writing reflects these concerns, and much of it has been collected in the form of an intellectual autobiography interspersed with interviews by David Atwell in Doubling the Point, in which Coetzee responds with
uncharacteristic openness to David Attwell’s questions. In responding to one such question, Coetzee makes the important statement that he

...believes one has a duty (an ethical duty? – perhaps) not to submit to powers of discourse without question. (200)

In Jean Sevry’s interview, Coetzee links his academic and literary concerns with the “critical activity” of the literary critic, that is,

…that same concern with the importance of criticism which is to me a matter of taking nothing for granted. Everything is capable of being questioned. (1986: 6)

This resistance to closure characterizes his novels, too. Perhaps this is, in part, the reason for the burgeoning field of critical study on Coetzee: his novels invite, and then often subvert, interpretative analyses. It may also explain the sense of unease felt by many of his critics and commentators, the sense that, as David Attwell suggests in *J.M. Coetzee: South Africa and the Politics of Writing* suggests, any piece of writing about a novel of Coetzee’s can be seen as either, or both, a “tribute or a betrayal” (7)

The corpus of Coetzee criticism thus tends to focus around a number of wider critical and theoretical debates. In addition to the question of Coetzee’s political commitment, these debates hinge on competing claims of post-modern and post-colonial models. All of these issues are brought into play in critical discussions of Coetzee’s intertextuality and his use of allegory. Stephen Watson in “Colonialism and the Novels of J.M. Coetzee,” has commented that
Almost all the initial difficulties of his [Coetzee’s] novels vanish when one happens to have read the same books that he has. (380)

There have been a number of critics who have explored the specific texts with which Coetzee’s novels interact: thus Patrick Merivale in “Audible Palimpsests: Coetzee’s Kafka,” writes on “Coetzee’s Kafka,” exploring the links between Waiting for the Barbarians, Life & Times of Michael K, and Kafka’s work. Allan Gardiner in “J.M. Coetzee’s Dusklands: Colonial Encounters of the Robinsonian Kind,” writes on links between Dusklands and Robinson Crusoe, and most commentators on Foe have described it as a “postmodernist, post-colonial and feminist” rewriting of Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe.

Coetzee’s intertextuality can be seen not merely as part of a postmodernist playfulness but as having important post-colonial implications. He is through the intertextual nature of his fiction, calling attention to the act of writing itself – his own included – and the processes by which the politics of representation operate.

Similarly, Coetzee’s use of allegory has been variously interpreted as way of avoiding overt political comment through necessary indirection in an oppressive regime. Coetzee’s allegorical mode is common to a number of his novels, Waiting for the Barbarians has been a particular focus for critical discussion of Coetzee’s allegory, and Teresa Dovey’s “Waiting for the Barbarians: Allegory of Allegories,” in Critical Perspectives on J.M. Coetzee, outlines these discussions of Coetzee’s use of allegory. She goes on to suggest that:
In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, allegory is thematised as a means of articulating the liberal humanist crisis of interpretation, while at the same time allegory is employed as a structural device in order to imply the inevitable imbrications of the novel’s own discourse with the discourses it deconstructs. While *Waiting for the Barbarians* offers a critique of a particular failure of interpretation, it places under scrutiny its own interpretive practice and …that of certain discourses of criticism. (Huggan 141)

The Magistrate has a lesson for Joll that he has long meditated:

I mouth the words and watch him read them on my lips: “The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves,” I say. I nod and nod, driving the message home, “not on others,” I say: I repeat the words, pointing at my chest, pointing at his. He watches my lips, his thin lips move in imitation, or perhaps I derision, I do not know. (Coetzee *Waiting* 146-7)

The clearest example of allegory is that which appears to be formed by the remnant message slips that the magistrate has recovered from his archeological site.

It is the same with the rest of these slips.” I plunge my good hand into the chest and stir. They form an allegory. They can be read in many ways. Together they can be read as a domestic journal, or they can be read as a plan or 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” (Coetzee *Waiting* 112)

Two other aspects of Coetzee’s work that have attracted critical attention have been in the area of the politics of representation. One of the main questions asked has been: Does Coetzee’s representation of colonized “Others” and women (mainly through his white women narrators) in his novels subvert and disrupt patriarchal and colonialist modes of representation and containment, or as Benita Parry in her “Speech
and Silence in J.M. Coetzee,” suggests that they rather “inadvertently reprise the exclusionary colonialist gestures which the novels also criticize”? (Huggan 3) By focusing on the issue of silencing, Parry confronts the questions of appropriation and authenticity raised by Coetzee’s work.

Coetzee’s sentences drip with desire for writerly efficacy and then retreat from that desire, deforming the writer (and the syntax) into aggressor and victim at once:

So day by day I render myself into words and pack the words into the page like sweets: like sweets for my daughter, for her birthday, for the day of her birth. Words out of my body, drops of myself, for her to unpack in her own time, to take in, to suck, to absorb. As they say on the bottle: old fashioned drops, drops fashioned by the old, fashioned and packed with love, the love we have no alternative but to feel toward those to whom we give ourselves to devour or discard. (Coetzee Age 9)

These words by Mrs. Elizabeth Curren fall identical with the author behind them and an inexorable movement towards sentiment, shared feeling, the continuities of tradition – sweets, birthday, and love. Such sweets belong equally to the old woman and the would-be post colonial writer who has faulted the “failure of love” (97) which is mentioned in Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews. The allegory is a little too obvious, a little too “sweet” and very “old fashioned.” As author to narrator, as mother to the possibility of a new South Africa.

Coetzee throws many marked and unmarked categories, there lies a lack, there an excess, then an affirmation and a negation juxtaposed: now awaits alterity with these surprising hurls the pendulum swings timelessly in his narrative. Practicing a
crafty realism, Coetzee combines conspicuous artifice, moral suasion and realistic representation.

In the first novel, *Dusklands*, Coetzee adopts and adapts an intersecting set of discourse, ethnographic and historiographic, documentary and dictional, which describe the encounter between European and indigenous, usually in the narrative from of the journey of exploration and the frontier encounter. These constitute the earliest forms of writing about southern Africa and are modes of discourse that have persisted into the present.

Both Jacobus Coetzee and Eugene Dawn are shown engaged in a ruthless attempt to erect the self into being, the former via his Faustian penetration into the Southern African interior, the latter via the act of leaving his wife and abducting his son, whom he stabs in a ultimate gesture of self-reflexivity. They both fail in this attempt: Jacobus Coetzee fails because, paradoxically, his all-consuming advance into Africa eliminates everything outside of himself, destroying the limits which would allow the self to distinguish self from Other; Eugene Dawn fails as he is inevitably recaptured by the institutions embodying societal control; Jacobus Coetzee describing how he retreats into “the blindest alley of the labyrinth of the self” (Coetzee *Dusklands* 103) and Eugene Dawn referring to the labyrinth of his history which will lead to “the heart that hold [his] secret” which “will not die” (*Dusklands* 50).

The ontological query “I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am” (*Dusklands* 51), situated at the centre of the novel and voiced by Eugene Dawn, is
clearly a question which also concerns the identity of the writer of *Dusklands*. There is no simple answer to the question, which represents a culminating point in the history of western individualism. The novel’s structure allows one to read from front to back or back to front in an attempt to find an answer, and in this way deconstructs two opposed views of history, and the concomitant forms of identity established via the historical project. One of these is based on monocausality, and the other on the indeterminacy of a potentially infinite self-reflexivity.

Whereas the different sections of *Dusklands* articulate the repeated insistence on the possibility of achieving an individual identity, the structure of *In the Heart of the Country* is founded on the repeated failure of the single woman narrator to envisage erecting a self into being. Written in numbered segments, her speech does not attain the continuity of narrative at all: the segments function as separate, successive units, and the metaphoric signifying function is made to intrude in the domain of the motonymic function, which would allow for continuity. The narrator, Magda, is a woman on a Karoo farm, who spends her time engaged in introspection or railing against her omnipotent father. The mode of discourse adopted here appears to be the anti-pastoral of Olive Schreiner’s *The Story of an African Farm* (1883), a seminal novel in the context of white South African writing. In the history of colonization, this corresponds to the phase of agrarian settlement, when the land has been fenced in, boundaries established, and when the active penetration of the explorer is replaced by the sterility and stasis of rural life in the colony. Magda says:
I move through the world not as a knifeblade cutting the wind, or as a tower with eyes, like my father, but as a hole. I am a hole crying to be whole (Coetzee Heart 41)

At the end, Magda makes a virtue out of her apparent failure to erect a self into identity, preferring “to die an enigma with a full soul” than “to die emptied of [her] secrets” (137). Like Jacobus Coetzee and Eugene Dawn, she posits the existence of a secret self on the frontier between language and silence. The attempt to elicit a response from one of the victims of colonization becomes more central to the next novel, Waiting for the Barbarians. The ageing magistrate of a remote outpost of an unspecified empire embarks on a relationship with a barbarian girl, who, like the servant, Anna, in relation to the mistress, Magda cannot provide proof of his identity because she cannot return the look of recognition he seeks. Partially blinded by torture, she cannot reciprocate his look, his desire. His question is “What do I have to do to move you?” and he describes with horror the answer:

…in the image of a face masked by two glassy insect eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only my doubled image cast back at me. (Coetzee Waiting 44).

In this novel Coetzee adopts the liberal humanist discourse of novelists such as Alan Paton, Dan Jacobson, Laurens van der Post and the early Gordimer, a mode of discourse which, historically, was impotent in the face of the increasingly bureaucratized and militarized totalitarian control of the South African state. Through the figure of the Magistrate, Coetzee explores the attempts of this discourse to construct an identity for itself via the representation of the suffering victim: the
Magistrate’s obsessive gesture of massaging the barbarian girl’sscarred and damaged feet implies the fetishistic and guilt-ridden attachment of South African liberal humanist discourse to the figure of the victim.

The Magistrate does make the gesture of returning the girl to her people, but it is, at the same time, a gesture which he hopes will allow him to erect an identity for himself. Firstly, in restoring her to an originary state of wholeness, he hopes he will be able to achieve reciprocal recognition from an equal, and asks her to return with him, of her own choice. That this hope is an illusion, he realizes at the moment of handing her over, when he says:

There is only blankness, and desolation that there has to be such blankness. When I tighten my grip on her hand there is no answer. (Waiting 71) Secondly, the alliance with the girl becomes the means whereby he sets himself in opposition to “the guardians of Empire” and so is himself able to assume the identity of persecuted victim.

Crying out against the violence of the state, the Magistrate says:

I cannot save the prisoners, therefore let me save myself. Let it at the very least be said, if it ever comes to be said….that in this farthest outpost of Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian. (Waiting 107)

The notion of saving the self works metaphorically to imply the achievement of identity. Magda, in In the Heart of the Country, asks: “How shall I be saved” (16), lamenting her inability, in the absence of an interlocutor. The shift in historical
context makes the Magistrate’s desire to be saved something quite different. It is the desire of liberal humanist discourse to register its distance from a system which has rendered it quite impotent, to “save” the speaker or writer from being accused of complicity with this system.

Unlike Magda, the Magistrate does succeed in producing a continuous narrative, although at the end he regrets that he has failed to produce a history. The sense that he is somehow able to operate outside history, along with the absence of self-reflexivity would seem to suggest the tendency of liberal humanist discourse to see itself as “natural,” would seem to imply its failure to see itself as a particular mode of discourse arising out of certain historical conditions and as ineffectual once those conditions no longer pertain. Viewed in this way, the Magistrate’s sexual impotence becomes a mark of this loss of discursive power.

*Life & Times of Michael K* is even more centrally concerned with the inarticulate victim, as the title itself indicates. It is only one of Coetzee’s novels to have a heterodiegetic narrator, and this choice appears to be motivated by the genre adopted here: a self-effacing narrator articulates the experience of the victim, supposedly on his behalf, in order to tell a story which would otherwise not be told, to give a voice to one of the voiceless ones. The purpose is made explicit in the interposed autodiegetic narrative of the medical officer, who intercedes on behalf of the incarcerated Michael K, saying:
…listen to me, Michael. I am the only one who can save you. I am the only one who sees you for the original soul you are. (207)

At this point the medical officer/narrator does not acknowledge the way in which his own needs are served via the figure of K, but a series of subtle shifts register his attempt to construct a different type of relationship between himself and the victim who is Michael K. He progresses form the use of the referential pronoun, ‘he,’ in relation to K, to the pronouns of communication, ‘I and you.’ A dialogue is set up between the medical officer/ narrator and K; K is given speech, is made to pose the question “What am I to this man?”, a question which the medical officer himself asks in return, articulating, as do the other novels, the fundamental question concerning the identity of the speaker. Following this, the medical officer confesses that what he has wanted from K is his story (204), and that the figure of K has been made to articulate a meaning on his behalf:

Your stay in the camp was an allegory…of how scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without becoming a term in it. (288)

K’s obscurity, his talent for escaping and for surviving without food, make him a figure who can represent the possibility of eluding the meanings inherent in any system, of bypassing the hierarchy of authorities. What is significant here is the positive emphasis that this novel places on the ability to avoid constructing an identity. It is the equivalent of Magda, Jacobus Coetzee and Eugene Dawn’s insistence on a secret self, outside, but the weighting of the previous novels is reversed. This shift in
emphasis may be related to the fact that, from *Life & Times of Michael K* onwards, Coetzee’s novels inhabit contemporary discourses of opposition, so that his writing approximates their position more closely than it does the earlier modes of discourse it has inhabited. Coetzee is constrained to make use of their methods for registering both their opposition to various systems, and their affiliation with the victims of those systems. Because of this proximity it becomes even more important to avoid the pitfalls of these discourses he inhabits, pitfalls which have to do, precisely, with claims to identity and authority.

Short of remaining silent, Coetzee has to find a way of figuring an extreme form of marginality, of weakness, and he does this via the figure of Michael K, Susan Barton and Friday, and Elizabeth Curren and Vercueil.

As with Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*, a feminine discourse is represented in Susan Barton’s portrayal. With *Foe*, Coetzee moves into the contemporary discursive arena of feminism and an international discourse of postcolonialism. Susan Barton’s speech takes the form of an unanswered letter addressed to Foe, the author in relation to whom she attempts to negotiate a position of authority. While the novel as a whole enacts a rewriting of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* and also parts of *Roxana*, Susan Barton attempts to write her won story, and then the story of Friday, who has had his tongue cut out, and has also possibly been castrated.

Like Coetzee’s other narrators, Susan Barton raises ontological doubts:
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 and this girl a creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you? (133)

Representing a feminist discourse, she has wanted to establish her radical Otherness from masculine discourse, but recognizes at the point that, within discourse, one inevitably expresses the self via the Other which is the word, the third position between two subjects. From this perspective of radical Otherness she dreams of restoring him paradoxically, via language, to “the time before Cruso, the time before he lost his tongue” (Foe 60). Her gesture is similar to that of the Magistrate returning the barbarian girl to her people in the hope of restoring her to a pre-colonial wholeness and identity. And, like the efforts of both the Magistrate and the medical officer, the project of “saving” herself is an attempt at constructing an identity for herself in writing in a book which, as she tells Friday, “will make us famous throughout the land, and rich too.” (Foe 58)

It is important to recognize that Friday’s speechlessness does not mean that the colonized subject does not have a voice of his/her own. It suggests rather, that the colonized subject has no discursive authority within the field of western discourses. If Susan Barton’s feminine discourse, along with its strategic silences, represents the attempt to speak as Other, to evade masculine discourse, Friday’s tongueless, castrated body is testimony to this novel’s resolve not to speak for the Other. The concluding
image of the novel gestures towards a future time when an equal exchange will be possible, as Susan Barton lies face to face with Friday underwater, and feels “a slow stream without breath, without interruption: (157), coming from inside him and beating against her eyelids, against the skin of her face.

In Age of Iron, a feminine voice, that of Elizabeth Curren, a woman dying of cancer is presented. This novel unrelentingly visits the South African socio-political context as it depicts this age of iron in the late 1980s, an age of extreme violence and of utterly intransigent attitudes. Here, the black people of South Africa do have a voice; there is no need to refuse to speak on their behalf, because they are speaking for themselves. Through Elizabeth Curren, an ex-lecturer of Latin, Coetzee returns to the discourse of liberal humanism, but, unlike that of the Magistrate, it is a discourse that is truly marginal, hovering as it does between life and death. This is a self-reflexive liberal humanism, aware of its severely circumscribed position in this age of iron, and addressed to a daughter in America, gone into voluntary exile there until “the softer ages return in their cycle, the age of clay, the age of earth” (46)

While Elizabeth Curren records the events of her last days with clarity and compassion, and without guilt or self-pity, Elizabeth Curren also wants to be saved. She represents the possibility of a humanist response from readers in the future: “Come, says this letter: do not cut yourself off from me. My third word.” (127) This is the salvation desired by Magda and Susan Barton, the salvation which is the product of an achieved narrative brought to fruition by a receptive readership. A desire for
salvation akin to that of the Magistrate is also seen here who imagines he can save himself by publicly setting himself alight in front of the Houses of Parliament, “the house of shame,” (104) explaining to her companion and interlocutor, Vercueil: “I want to sell myself, redeem myself, but am full of confusion about how to do it.” (107)

She resists saying: “The truth is, there was always something false about that impulse, deeply false,” (129)

Elizabeth Curren is preoccupied with the notion of shame, and claims that her cancer is the result of the accumulation of shame. “That is how cancer comes about: from self-loathing the body turns malignant and begins to eat away at itself,” (132) she says, describing the terminal stages of a discourse that has been consumed by guilt.

She expresses an ambivalence concerning shame, both seeing its value and wanting to reject it as a mode of being. She tells Vercueil: “What is living inside me is something else, another word. And I am fighting for it, in my manner, fighting for it not be stifled.” (133) On the positive side, shame is “a touchstone, something that would always be there, something you could come back to, “like a blind person, to touch, to tell you where you were” (150). On the negative side, there seems to be no way of extricating the self from its convoluted, self-fuelling movements, as is implied when she says: “I did not wallow in it. Shame never became a shameful pleasure; it never ceased to gnaw me. I was not proud of it, I was ashamed of it.” (150) This expresses a central problematic for Coetzee in this novel: how to give expression to his shame, without proudly erecting a self into being through the confession of this shame.
Coetzee’s fictional characters maintain their silence as a means of symbolically eluding interpretation or being read, and thereby resisting domination. For Coetzee silence represents the freedom and autonomy of the intellectual and points up to the characters’ integrity as a purveyor of truth. In *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, he claims expansively that “the only truth is silence.” (286) Coetzee deftly negotiates the issue of the ethical responsibility of an intellectual reacting to the political exigencies while at the same time refusing to make politics an explicit affair. In fact, the ingenious figure of *Doubling the Point* that serves as title for 1992 Coetzee collaboration with David Atwell, together with “the phantom presence of the middle voice” mentioned in the brief 1984 “Note on Writing” (94-95) signposts the very in-between position that is the nexus of all writing.

In short, Coetzee, by tinkering with existing literary structure in “He and His Man” in a palimpsestuous way, demonstrates that writing fiction today means foregoing Romanticism’s utopia of a world reborn in the spirit of poetic legislators. Coetzee in his Nobel Address “He and His Man” illuminates, the fact that the author, “the hand that holds the pen is only the conduit of a signifying process” (34), which Coetzee elaborates in *Doubling the Point*.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians* the co-textualization of writing and the foregrounding of allegory as a way of reading remind of writtenness and the act of writing and indicate a tendency to defictionalize. When the Magistrate contemplates the apt reading of the poplar wood sticks readers may well link his conclusion about
the unreadability of the archeological finds to the way in which the novel is written as an open-ended allegory. Atwell argues that the purpose of the allegorical writing in Waiting for the Barbarians is to disseminate meaning so that the sign is not made subject to prevalent political discourse and its truth claims concentric circularity rather than linear progress towards a solution, is also textualized by means of space, with the seasons constituting a time which is not “the time of history.”

A concern with ways of writing beyond purposes of effect and efficacy can be deduced from Life & Times of Michael K. Amongst a range of indications the interpretive possibility of the book’s second section can be drawn upon to prove this. The Medical Officer connotes the literary author in various ways. Michael’s attempt at escaping from the camps and returning to the same and his stay at Kennilworth Camp raises many questions about the writer’s suggestive indications showing narrating a person’s painful trails at freeing himself from history, freeing himself from the impunity of the discourses of politics and war. It also indicates the resistance of the writer. But the writer’s resistance is very clear as he does not want to reduce Michael K to a poetic fictional figuration, to a figure who is a mere “story,” similar to the fictional stories which the Medical Officer experiences. The way of writing is so terse that it appears as if it were following some specific guidelines as imperatives. On the one hand pinning identities on Michael K has to be avoided, but on the other hand, the desire to produce a purely fictive or poetical unity of signifier and signified in the form of Michael K also has to be resisted – a purely poetical meaning what the
Dutch poet Achterberg achieves, according to Coetzee’s analysis of “The Ballad of the Gasfitter” in *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews* (69-90)

One can interpret *Foe* as a deliberate investigation of the conditions of the writing of the Other by means of a reconstruction of the writing of *Robinson Crusoe*. Foe’s writing refrains from offering a solution to the problem of colonizing writing. When the implied author revisits his writing and tries to enter Friday’s world, Friday does speak in his own terms, but this silences writing, signifying that for this writer too, the truth of Friday belongs to the domain of the unwritable. Friday is given voice, but not one which can be appropriated by Western linguistic and literary discourse. There are certain implications which point to the agent limited by a specific literary tradition, and his purposeful confinement within the boundaries of this tradition. Writing from the position of Mr. Foe and Barton and having earned an admirable claim of writing from the position of the conscientious but disconnected liberal in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Friday’s silence cannot be explained solely by the decision not to speak for or on behalf of the other who has been silenced by colonizing discourses. The very fact of literary production has consequences for the representation of whoever is the object of writing, as the literary debates between Mr. Foe and Susan Barton spell out. There is something about literary discursivity itself which is ethically compromising. Most interpretations of *Foe* see Mr. Foe as the auctorial and authoritative writer figure. However, in the course of dialogues with Barton he begins to speak as a deconstructionist, believing that all writing is a copy of a copy of a copy.
Barton’s desire for the truth of her object is however, also potentially impositioning. Barton represents the voice of the object of writing as substantial being, and ironically speaks for Friday, textualizing the writer desiring to speak for or on behalf of the other.

Benita Parry in “Speech and Silence in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee” claims that “doctrines of the respect for human rights and open attitudes in inter-human relationships can vouchsafe a non-masterly writing practice” (Sue Critical 37-65). The Moralist tendencies of much of the present day postcolonialist position are facilitated by the very western, theoretically and traditionally liberalist ethos which they militate against. In other words, they are speaking for or on behalf of the “Other” even as they militate against this colonizing and patronizing, if not pertinently unjust, colonial and literary practice. Instead of writing Friday from a self-critically enlightened postcolonial perspective, by way of atonement or correction, the literary silenced “Friday” of the tradition is set up as an ongoing challenge to literary writing. The writing refrains from producing a corrective truth, as observing a belief that the truth is still being written by God. This might also explain why Friday is textualized as a sign refusing appropriation. One is reminded of the Medical Officer’s words to Michael K in the novel preceding Foe:

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. (166)
The silence of Friday is an honouring of the unwritability of that reality which is Friday’s world and realm, namely his life, fate and death as a slave and that of slavery in general. The narrative erases itself at the end of Foe as a gesture of respect towards the reality of the Fridays of the world. It admits to the inability of writing as a linguistic and discursive practice to bridge the gap.

Disgrace shares Coetzee’s earlier fiction’s preoccupation with the otherness of the other and the form of engagement that this preoccupation may enable. Although this is the first of Coetzee’s novels to be set in a recognizably post-apartheid landscape, its dominant movement, like that of the previous novels, is determined by a tension between desire and responsibility. The novel examines the ability to transform the subject’s desire for the other into responsibility for the other. Lurie is himself implicated in the relations of power in the relations of power in this society and is thus party to that which he condemns. By extension, relations at all levels of South African society lack respect for the otherness of the other. Differently put, the political is characterized by the absence of the ethical. Exactly this point is made by the novel’s suggestion that the bond of selfless responsibility that should characterize the parents’ relation to the child – a bond which serves as a metaphor for the ethical relation not only in Disgrace, but also in earlier novels like Age of Iron has been broken. Coetzee’s principal concern in this novel, as it was in Age of Iron, is the interruption of the political by the ethical. Lurie reconciling to the filial bond in the penultimate scene in the novel indicates his assuming responsibility for Lucy, but also shows that
Lucy is inspired by his otherness. The scene signifies the eruption of the ethical into the political. The alteration of Lurie’s desire into responsibility has a well-defined metafictional dimension that articulates the text’s intention to engage affectively with history. *Disgrace* foregrounds the novel’s self-reflexive meditation on how the work may work by transforming the writer’s insatiable desire for the other, which is both the inspiration and ruination of the work, into an equally insatiable responsibility for the other. Stated slightly differently, the emphasis in this irreversible movement toward death or a response to the other that is attentional rather than intentional has as its corollary a form of writing which, by maintaining the otherness of the Other, enables the work to work.

One finds in Coetzee’s fiction a minimalist programme for prompting change which is, quite literally, undermined even as it is articulated. Convinced of the need for change in the society in which he writes but, at the same time, aware of the compromising nature of the ineluctable “worldliness” of the literary text, this writer has had to choose between subsiding into silence and adopting a strategy of paradox. Premised as it is on this uneasy balance between knowledge of implication and hope for transcendence, this strategy can, at best, generate only “intimations” of an alternative to the status quo, intimations which are therefore often either overlooked or ignored.

Coetzee uses various intellectual elements in his works. For just as there is nothing really original about the metaphysics of power already referred to, so there is
nothing specifically complex or particularly original in these elements as such. They would all form part of a certain type of academic training. The real intellectual difficulty of his fiction lies outside the works themselves, in Coetzee’s own status as an intellectual. In order to escape the demands of history, Coetzee’s characters are forever seeking to destroy that very consciousness which reminds them of their separation from the world of nature, others, and from themselves. This effort is merely a transposition in psychological terms of the conflict between being and action, as Stephen Watson in “Colonialism in the Novels of J.M. Coetzee” puts it,

It is only the consciousness never at one with itself that dwells in history and also makes it, the thing which is complete in itself inhabits a realm which is altogether outside of historical time (388).

There are times when one cannot escape the impression that Coetzee is struggling, albeit behind an extraordinary control and stylistic elegance, to combine his Western, modernist literary culture with an African historical reality which is hardly welcoming to it. Coetzee wants to join Europe with Africa but not in the old colonial relationship of dominance and subjugation. He wants to preserve the contemplative, mythmaking, sacralizing impulse at the heart of modernism and nevertheless respond to an actual historical moment in which such an impulse could not seem more of an irrelevancy. Coetzee does focus on which is perhaps unavoidable, that South Africa is part and parcel of a global historical process and that a certain mentality or mental structure goes hand in hand with it, is still rampant, here and elsewhere.

In these essays, there is a detailed study of linguistics and stylistics that gave Coetzee the foundations for the eventual mastery of this writing craft. The special interest of the studies is in the construction of a mobile point of view, mobile in both time and space. The point of view rests apparently within the utterances of the narrating character, but, because it is mobile, it simultaneously projects a view of the character from the outside, as it were. The fiction is characteristic of getting opened in a present time as the narrator – monologue unfolds the interior experience as it happens in its moment-to-moment sequence, but since this is also an experience that has already taken place, it falls also into the past. The reader becomes privileged by the text in two important ways. From the mobility in time, the reader enjoys more knowledge than the character himself about the trajectory of the interior experience and, through the spatial mobility of the point of view, the reader knows more about the conditions of life in which the character lives. The works of Coetzee serve of volley of quandaries with the readers mired in as much as Michael K’s “doctor” struggling with “elusive” meaning. It seems that Coetzee’s fictions are playing “games” which Dick Penner in the conclusion and epigraph of *J.M. Coetzee: Countries of the Mind*
crowns Coetzee’s words as having been revealed to him in a Writers’ workshop in 1984:

Whereas in the kind of game I am talking about
You can change the rules if you are good enough
You can change the rules for everybody if you are good enough.
You can change the game…..(131)

The games seemed engaging imbued as they are with a seriousness of the historical situation. Beckett set up his representational games within history in order to evacuate time and space and thus to defeat it. Coetzee’s games appeared to be more about eluding history. Coetzee’s “little Histories” came at big History form an angle. They played their games according to their own rules on a small forecourt in the great historical amphitheater. Coetzee refused to accept “big history” but he likewise refused to confront it on its own ground through taking some form of political position – to use the phrase from Coetzee’s essay on “Erasmus: Madness and Rivalry” in Giving Offense to be “the position….of nonposition” (84)

Coetzee is in search of ways of speaking to history from his own ground and in his own voice. In the last lines of In the Heart of the Country Coetzee’s elusiveness makes no escape in Magda’s passionate shout “I have uttered my life in my own voice throughout (what a consolation that is)” (Heart 151)

As the novels indicate and the essays confirm, Coetzee as few other South African from the star, was determined to make the languages and literatures of Europe
(including Russia) and America a part of his own ground. Coetzee has his habitation in a textual universe in which the relations between center and periphery can be infinitely recharted: he deems fit that the center could as well be at Prince Albert as at Prague.

Coetzee’s commentary on Zbigniew Herbert’s poem “Five Men” in Giving Offense and Doubling the Point illuminates in special ways the relations between the universe of texts and the conditions of history. The five men of the poem are condemned prisoners. The commentary proceeds thus:

They spend their last night talking about girls, remembering card games. In the morning they are taken out and shot. Herbert writes: “Therefore one can write poems about flowers, Greek shepherds and so forth.” A poem, then, justifying poems that stand back from calls to revolutionary action. Perhaps not a great poem… but the effect of that therefore remains imperious and triumphant.

Coetzee continues:

In Poland one can still address the five men in the cell, or their executioners in the yard, indirectly, via the almost infinite lattice that a shared European culture provides. In Africa the only address one can imagine is a brutally direct one, a sort of pure, unmediated representation; what short-circuits the imagination, what forces one’s face into the thing itself, is what I am here calling history. “The only address one can imagine”….on imagining this unimaginable, imagining a form of address that permits the play of writing to start taking place. (67-68)

The search for the appropriate “form of address” in the “absence of a shared culture” is what has guided Coetzee’s writing from the start. As the early experience of Dusklands showed so clearly, it was to be a form that was simultaneously both
inside and outside of history. Jacobus Coetzee, the putative ancestor, was to be both a historical figure and an imaginary construct narrating his life. The subsequent fictions have all employed some form of this basic structure, transforming South Africa into a “South Africa” in which the novels can make their own rules and play out their particular linguistic and conceptual games.

The reason Coetzee has proved to be so puzzling and elusive to his readers and especially to South Africans, lies within his distinction between the “almost infinite lattice” of European culture and the “unmediated representation” that he sees as characteristic of Africa. These unmediated representations promised surprises for the people in a historical crisis, even Coetzee’s endorsed possible mediations between history and fiction is indefatigable.

It is very much apt to cull the words from Coetzee’s Elizabeth Costello, when she says,

I am a writer. You may think I should say instead, I was a writer. But I am or was a writer because of who I am or was. I have not ceased to be what I am. As yet or so it feels to me. (199)

Coetzee, in fact is teaching us how to read him and how to read our reality.

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