

My Other-My Self: Post-Cartesian Ontological Possibilities in the Fiction of J.M. Coetzee

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ABSTRACT

The central argument of my study is that, among other matters, in his works, J.M. Coetzee could be said to demonstrate that the known Self is an embodied being and is not autonomous. With regard to the latter contention, Coetzee intimates that any two Subjects are implicated in each other's subjectivities in a reciprocal process that involves what Derek Attridge has called "irruptions of otherness" (2005: xii) into the Subject's subjectivity. These irruptions, which happen during the encounter, lead to a double loss of autonomy for each Subject and this phenomenon renders the relationship between Subjects non-dichotomous or non-binarianic.

In other words, the Subject does not produce the contents of his or her consciousness in a *sui generis* and *ex nihilo* fashion, and his or her ontological indebtedness to the Other constitutes his or her first loss of autonomy. As for those Others that do possess consciousness, the Subject is implicated in their consciousness and this constitutes the Subject's second loss of autonomy. These losses counter the near solipsistic Nagelian neo-Cartesianism and paves the way for imagining both intra- and inter-species "intersubjectivity". It is my view that this double loss of autonomy accounts for the sympathetic and empathetic imagination that we encounter in Coetzee's fiction.

Following Coetzee's intimations of intersubjectivity through irruptions of otherness, what I see as my contribution to studies on this author's work through this study is the link I have established between the physicalist strain within the philosophy of mind (whose central thesis is that consciousness is an embodied phenomenon) and a modified Kantian "metaphysics", especially Immanuel Kant's conception of concepts as comprising *form* and *content*. I have deployed this conception in demonstrating the Subject's ontological indebtedness to external sources of the content part of consciousness. And, through the Husserlian concept of intentionality, and Kant's (1929: 27) observation that we cannot have appearances without something that appears, I have linked the Subject to the sources of his or her content and thereby also demonstrated that the Subject is not eternally separated or alienated from those sources. Instead, the Subject is not simply contiguous but coterminous and co-extensive, albeit in a mediated way, with the external sources of the content part of his or her consciousness. Thus, while accepting the thesis of the Other's radical otherness, I modify the thesis of the Other's radical exteriority.

Ultimately, then, ontologically speaking, the Coetzeean project could be described as one of embodying and grounding the supposedly autonomous, solipsistic and free-floating/disembodied Cartesian Subject. This he does by alerting this Subject, first and foremost, to its embodiedness and, further to that, pointing out its ontological indebtedness to its Others and its implication in the Others's consciousnesses and so prevent it from continuing with its imperialistic and ecological barbarities. However, ethically speaking, beyond the reciprocal ethics that arises from mutual ontological indebtedness and implication, it is the selflessness that characterises a cruciform logic that comes across as the epitome of Coetzeean ethics.

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DEDICATION

In memory of Prof. Paul Mwaipaya.

And for:

Gladys Yose and Priscila Bambiso who welcomed me to the English Department at Rhodes with ceremony.

DECLARATION

I hereby certify that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted for examination at any other university before.

Signed: Damazio Mfuno

Date: 9th December, 2011

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Introduction

Coetzee, Consciousness, Identity and Domination: A Critical Overview.

Without consciousness the mind-body problem would be much less interesting. With consciousness it seems hopeless. And careful examination will show that no currently available concept of reduction is applicable to it. Perhaps a new theoretical form can be devised for the purpose, but such a solution if it exists, lies in the distant intellectual future. (Nagel, 1979: 166)

What is it like to be a bat? Asks Thomas Nagel . . . “Cogito, ergo sum” . . . It is a formula I have always been uncomfortable with. It implies that a being that does not do what we call thinking is somehow second class. To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being — not consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation — a heavily affective sensation — of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes’ key state, which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell. (Coetzee, 1999a: 33)

Friday is mute, but Friday does not disappear, because Friday is body. If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple . . . standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not ‘that which is not’, and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt. (Coetzee, 1992: 248)

We speak of *the dog with the sore foot* or *the bird with the broken wing*. But the dog does not think of itself in those terms, or the bird. To the dog, when it tries to walk, there is simply *I am pain*, to the bird, when it launches itself into flight, simply *I cannot*.

With us it seems different. The fact that such common locutions as “my leg,” “my eye,” “my brain,” and even “my body,” exist suggests that we believe there is some non-material, perhaps fictive, entity that stands in the relation of possessor to possessed to the body’s “parts” and even to the whole body. Or else the existence of such locutions shows that language cannot get purchase, cannot get going, until it has split up the unity of experience. (Coetzee, 2007: 59, emphasis original)

‘Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms,’ I tell the girl, struggling to explain what happened. (Coetzee, 1980: 42-43)

The study that follows is about the ontology of consciousness and subjectivity, or, more specifically, it is about embodied consciousness and “intersubjectivity”, as posited by J.M. Coetzee in his writings as I have come to understand them. Furthermore, my exploration of this kind of subjectivity is situated within the fields of post-colonial, post-gender and eco/zoological criticism, three fields that, to varying degrees, Coetzee has engaged with persistently since the 1970s. One could argue that J.M. Coetzee set it as his goal to challenge a Cartesian dichotomous or binaric ontology which, since the 16th century, has given licence to and accompanied various kinds of oppressive, discriminatory and exploitative mindsets such as colonialism, patriarchy and anthropocentrism.

The central argument of the study, or its thesis, is that, among other matters, in his works J.M. Coetzee could be said to suggest that, through the phenomenon of an “embodied consciousness” and “intentionality”, the Self is not autonomous in that aspects of the Other are actually, to an extent, integral parts of its subjectivity just as much as aspects of the Self are also, to an extent, an integral part of the Other’s subjectivity. In short, any two Subjects are implicated in each other’s subjectivities. As I will explain further in the course of the study, this lack of autonomy expresses itself in at least two forms: firstly, the embodied Subject constitutes his or her consciousness with content from his or her Others who are external to him or her, and thereby exists in a state of ontological indebtedness to those Others, and, secondly, since the Subject also becomes a part of the Others (by being implicated in their consciousness), he or she has no control over how those Others are going to configure him or her in their consciousnesses, and yet these are the configurations on which they will base their relationship with him or her. It is these two phenomena of ontological indebtedness and implication that result in a double loss of autonomy for any Subject and also, as I shall show, which account for the sympathetic and empathetic imagination which are central to Coetzee’s literary worldview.¹

As will become clear in the course of this chapter, and of the study as a whole, “intersubjectivity” here needs to be qualified: I do not mean that one Subject has unmediated access to the consciousness of the Other Subject; rather, that the two Subjects exist in a state of mutual ontological indebtedness as regards to the sources of the content of their consciousness, the very process that renders each one of them ontologically interdependent with Others rather than exist as autonomous Subjects. Viewed from that specific angle, all ethical and other relations between one Subject and another seem to be underpinned by the cardinal ontological realisation of the intersubjectivity that arises from precisely the embodiedness and indebted intentionality of

¹ Let me note, at this point, that I borrow the first part of the title for this study (My Other-My Self) from Barbara Johnson’s (1982) “My Monster/ My Self” which is her study of Mary Shelley’s novel titled *Frankenstein* (1818), a novel I have an abiding fascination for. While Johnson uses the formulation to express the specular and disquieting relationship between its protagonist, Victor Frankenstein, and his antagonist, the monster, the understanding in this study is not one of mirroring or menace, but is rather meant to express the central argument of the Subject’s ontological indebtedness to his or her Others and the Subject’s implication in the Others’ subjectivities, a situation that leads to a double loss of autonomy on each Subject’s part, hence the hyphenated construction. As for the second part, I am following Coetzee’s own approach towards his fiction-writing processes. In this regard, Coetzee (1992: 246) has said that fiction writing provides him with the freedom to explore beyond the boundaries set by critical academic work: “Where I do my liberating, my playing with *possibilities*, is in my fiction” (emphasis mine).

consciousness.² As such, in this study, we have in any given situation the Self-Subject and the Other-Subject in interchangeable positions depending on which Subject's consciousness is under consideration. Since I am dealing with instances of post-binary ontology in a quest for a post-colonial and "post-gender" era, rather than in the current still largely colonial and gendered era, whenever the terms "Subject" and "Other" are mentioned in this study, the Other, refers to the "Other Subject" (and, in a special way, if it is another human or animal or other existent possessing consciousness). This Other has traditionally, and mistakenly — as I think Coetzee argues in his works — been presented as "Object" in various discriminatory postulations of subjectivity. The most famous among these discussions have been the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy and the Hegelian master/slave consciousnesses. The social consequences of the Cartesian and Hegelian set-ups have manifested themselves, among others, in such practices as slavery, colonialism, racism, patriarchy and ecological crimes.

In Doubling the Point, Coetzee (1992: 246-248) posits the unignorable "isness" of the body and the intersubjectivity of embodied consciousness as an alternative construction of the kind of subjectivity that might aid in correcting the above clearly destructive traditional modes of subjectivity. Further, through Coetzee's (1992: 337) espousal of a cruciform logic, Hegelian Master/Slave contestation is robbed of its ontological sting. My study explores what an embodied, post-binary consciousness as advocated by J.M. Coetzee might be like and how it would operate in practice.³ The study is in keeping with observations made by numerous critics about the dangers of the fallacy of the Cartesian divided self which, in the words of Graham Pechey, propagates

[T]he belief that truth conceived as the clarity and distinctness of our ideas requires that meaning and materiality be kept apart, that anything else is archaic fable, fit only for women and children gathered around fires — for this illusion we have to thank

² Ideally, I should be required to put the term "intersubjectivity" in quotation marks throughout this thesis but I hope the qualification here waives that requirement and saves me the labour of such an undertaking. Now that the qualification has been offered, I will add that a further observation and contention would be that the more keenly Subjects interact, the more they become "intersubjective" (mediatedly, of course), and even more so in cases of intimacy (when intimacy is "etymologically" understood as "*into-me-see*"). But as will become clear in the course of the study, such intersubjectivity, being mediated and subject to the flux of being, is no protection against surprise and miscalculation.

³ In working out the theory that underpins my study I am by no means asserting that it is Coetzee's very own way of looking at intersubjectivity. Indeed, I do not want to commit the intentional fallacy by which a critic seeks to establish the "intention" of the author. I have never communicated with J.M. Coetzee and have never met him. Rather, I am reading Coetzee's works based on how they present themselves to me and in the context of the subject matter that they touch upon. This theory is just one among many other possible ways of looking at the nature of an embodied and intersubjective consciousness that Coetzee gestures at in various of his works.

nothing less than the whole dominant tradition of Western knowledge, which (as Charles Taylor puts it) ‘does violence to our ordinary, *embodied* way of experiencing’. (1999: 102, italics original) ⁴

At the root of these traditions is a rejection or devaluing of the Subject’s every Other, starting with the Subject’s own body. Related to the foregoing concerns, commenting on the arbitrariness or constructedness and, therefore, relativity of all the borders that humans have put in place be they national, political, interpersonal or otherwise, and drawing on Hommi Bhabha’s concept of a hybrid, third space, in an essay titled “Border Crossings: Self and Text”, Sue Kossew captures this post-Cartesian and post-binary orientation in Coetzee’s writing when she observes that:

J.M. Coetzee’s work has always engaged with the problematic of borders and thresholds It particularly engages with these problematic through his exploration of how borders relate to binaries; binaries of here and there, self and other, body and soul, human and animal, life and afterlife, inside and outside. Where binaries and boundaries mark out difference and separate one entity from another with the certainty of conviction, the process of unsettling these certainties draws attention to the constructedness of these divisions. It creates ambivalence, a ‘neither yes nor no’, a ‘both/and’ rather than an ‘either/or’, that is characteristic of all of Coetzee’s works. (2009: 61-62)

It is one of the aims of this study to explore what, according to Coetzee, renders these binaries and borders ontologically illusory and how a discovery of their illusion leads to some of his characters to transcend them.

My study comprises a total of seven chapters. In the first chapter, which serves as both introduction and theoretical exposition, I look at the literary and socio-political context within which J.M. Coetzee could be said to have operated right from his first novel *Dusklands* (1974) up to the publication of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). As will be evident from

⁴ In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor (1989) carries out an ambitious project of explicating Western civilisation. After outlining the difference between Platonic, Augustinian and Cartesian views of being, Taylor (1989: 146) zeroes in on the Cartesian perspective of internal certitude which views everything else outside (or material) as non-essential. He argues that “This is a view of the body as devoid of any spiritual essence or expressive dimension. But this involves more than just the rejection of the traditional ontology; it also does violence to our ordinary way of experiencing. We have to cease to see the material universe as a kind of medium, in which psychic contents like heat and pain, or the supposed Forms or Species of scholastic tradition, could be lodged or embodied or manifest themselves”. The clarity and directness of Taylor’s analysis of Cartesian ontology in a chapter titled “Descartes’s Disengaged Reason” in which he analyses how a *sui generis* reason (or what he alternatively calls the “hegemony of reason”) “instrumentalises” (that is, turns all into instruments), or “disenchants” or “neutralises” passions and the external world, is perhaps unparalleled among all the works I have engaged with on Cartesianism. It is a text I would recommend for anyone who is just starting on the philosophy of Rene Descartes or the Enlightenment. One other important factor I share with Taylor (1989: 8-9) is his view of ethics as deriving from ontology (or “socio-biology”, as he alternatively calls it), and with him this goes by the name of a “moral ontology”.

the period covered this was both during an Apartheid socio-political dispensation and immediately after the official fall of Apartheid. In this regard, in the second chapter, I look at *Dusklands* as the author's incisive diagnosis of the "metaphysics" governing imperialism generally and a statement of his own literary "manifesto". Through the character of Eugene Dawn, Coetzee explores the nature and entrapping effects of the Cartesian split consciousness that pits a supposedly disembodied mind against the body within the Subject, and which, consequently, also pits one Subject against other Subjects. This struggle is accompanied by a corresponding Hegelianism, a fundamentally phenomenological conception of subjectivity in which the goal of consciousness is to come to understand itself and Others transparently, a trajectory which Hegel had associated with the march of history.

Like *Dusklands*, though not next in line in terms of the chronology of J.M. Coetzee's oeuvre, *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) is pre-occupied with the mind of imperialism. The major difference with the former novel, though, is that we are here presented with at least one character, simply called the Magistrate, who comes to see through Empire's disinformation and censorship and decides, in his own way, to rebel against the colonial establishment and so try to transcend the entrapping effects suffered by the characters in *Dusklands*. However, the Magistrate's road towards his awakening to an embodied intersubjectivity which promises to save him from ontological entrapment is fraught with ambivalence which forms part of my analysis in the third chapter.

In *Age of Iron* (1990), Coetzee fleshes out the thesis of an embodied intersubjectivity through the character of Mrs Curren. Coetzee stages Mrs Curren's personal predicament (as someone diagnosed with terminal cancer and the consequent troubles she comes to have with her own body whose supposed betrayal of her she keenly feels), and her hitherto unacknowledged ontological indebtedness towards her racial Others, against a background of the socio-political upheaval occasioned, she believes, by this very unacknowledgement of an ontological debt

The link between Mrs Curren's cancerous condition and the death throes of apartheid has been noted by a number of critics thereby imparting a reciprocal symbolic significance to the two phenomena. It is a link whose relevance I share. But, further to this, what my study has sought to do is to explore the link between the two and the

trajectory of Mrs Curren's personal awakening to an intersubjective ontological awareness within the context of a dying socio-political milieu. I have done this through attempting to explain the irruptions of her Others into her being and her subsequent positing of two types of redemptive logics, namely a post-binary logic of "both-and", rather than that of "either-or" and, most important, her broaching of a generous and selfless "cruciform logic". The argument in my study of *Age of Iron* is that Coetzee's positing of these two kinds of logic marks a significant step in the liberating ontological and ethical development in his writing career. A discussion of *Age of Iron* is the focus in chapter four.

There are some concerns raised in *Age of Iron* that are carried over to *Disgrace* which I discuss in chapter five. We see, for instance, Coetzee's continuing interest in the animal Other as a Subject deserving of ethical consideration if humanity is to achieve a truly ontologically liberating and inclusive society. I note Coetzee's concern for the animal Other in *Waiting for the Barbarians* where it is the waterbuck that he uses as the turning point in the Magistrate's new conception of his liberatory intersubjectivity.

Chapter six is constituted by a discussion of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). In this "novel", a publication that I have termed Coetzee's literary *magnum opus* and *apologia*, the writer accords us a panoramic or "goatseye" view of his writing career, showcasing all the issues discussed in the previous novels. But, in this text, Coetzee does more than just give us a summary of his writing for, in addition to the sympathetic imagination, he takes things a few notches up and posits the "empathetic imagination" as the highest form of intersubjectivity.

The seventh, and final, chapter brings together the various strands of my argument in the study. In this chapter I distil the central observations in each of the preceding chapters while also noting a longitudinal/diachronic development in Coetzee's epistemic, ontological and ethical ideas over a period of over thirty five-years that covers the time of his writing to date. I also point out what I regard as my contribution to studies on this notable author whose relevance spans both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It may need noting, in this regard, that J.M. Coetzee was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in 2003 this being the highest recognition any author could aspire to as things stand globally.

The present chapter develops in two parts, with a total of eight sections and one subsection. The first section of the first part is the introduction which outlines the broader issues surrounding Cartesian ontology, the postulates of which J.M. Coetzee could be said to take to task in his works, both fictional and critical. It is in this section that I have also stated the thesis or the central argument of the study as a whole.

The second section of the first part deals with definitions of what I mean by “the body” in this study. Also the section carries out a literature review of critical works on Coetzee, specifically, and on subjectivity studies in general. Central to this section is the understanding of what is meant by the “Self” and the “Other”.

In part two, from the third to the sixth sections, I lay the foundations of what, in my view, an embodied ontology from which we can derive an embodied epistemology and so come to understand how an embodied ontology, such as the one J.M. Coetzee posits, would be like, both in its theory and praxis. Central here are issues of the nature of consciousness in general, and an embodied consciousness, in particular. The argument I advance here is that consciousness is constituted by concepts which, in Kantian metaphysics, are known to have both *form* and *content*. How we intuit or apprehend these concepts, determines our sense of who we are or who we are becoming, that is, our sense of our identity in our own right, as well as how we stand in relation to our Others. In the seventh section I explore at least three conceptions of ontology with the intention to demonstrate and distinguish positive and productive conceptions of being, from illusory and counter-productive ones. The latter conceptions are responsible for the false consciousness that Coetzee stages in book after book and, which he, ultimately, undermines. Often, in Coetzee’s works we come across characters who awaken from their “dogmatic slumber” of mere convention, into new forms of consciousness that seek to transcend the often reductive and shallow binaric conceptions of being that characterise most conventional ontologies.

The eighth, and final section, posits what an embodied Subject’s ethics that derives from the forms of ontologies explored in the preceding section, would be like, isolating the affirming from the stunting and deforming ontological conceptions. Central here is a view of ethics that is constitutional to the Subject who however is not autonomous but

indebted to his Others and so interdependent and intersubjective with them. This is a Subject whose autonomy is doubly put into question through his ontological indebtedness to his or her Others, but also whose ethical conduct is determined by how those Others configure him or her in their own consciousnesses in which he or she is implicated.⁵ A subsection within this section is the subject of the ontologically and ethically defining moment of “the encounter” between a Subject and its Other which I have likened to the “Fall”, a phenomenon that is at once imprisoning and liberating. Underlying all this discussion is the role that current developments in the physicalist school of philosophy of mind can play in the development and illumination of an anti-Cartesian, embodied ontology. The sections build on each other such that a subsequent section cannot be understood if an immediately preceding one has not been sufficiently grasped. What we have, overall, then, is an “organic” framework comprising an ontology, an epistemology and an ethics (with each part evolving from the other) whose anti-Cartesian stance arises from and amplifies the ideas of J.M. Coetzee as they manifest in his works.

Some Conceptions of the Body

My theoretical exploration in this study is against the backdrop of the postulates of the physicalist position within the philosophy of mind which I make clear in the course of this chapter. This position is opposed to Thomas Nagel’s neo-Cartesianism, which J.M. Coetzee also opposes across his writings — as the second epigraph above exemplifies. My theoretical system involves an exploration of an embodied and intersubjective ontology, epistemology and ethics. At the centre of the system is the notion of the “beingness” or “isness” of the body, in all its physical constitution and dispositions. Attendant on this conception of the body are Coetzee’s intimations of an embodied and intersubjective consciousness involving a Subject’s ontological indebtedness to the equally embodied Other, through the intentionality of consciousness that this relationship necessarily gives rise to. To my knowledge, these intimations or irruptions of otherness into the Subject have not yet been given any demonstrable ontological basis by critics of Coetzee’s works. But, as I repeatedly note in the course of my study, beyond his preoccupation with the body as an un-ignorably physical entity, this conception of embodied intersubjectivity

⁵ As I explain in the section on an embodied Self-Other ethics, the Socratic Delphic dictum “Know Thyself” has its correlate in the requirement for the Subject to periodically inquire from his or her Others what they think about him. This requirement is what underpins the operations of something akin to the Bakhtinian dialogic imagination as opposed to a monologic one.

seems to be is at the centre of Coetzee's anti-Cartesian project as all the epigraphs to this chapter above suggest.

Florence Pannetier (1995: 7) has explored Coetzee's deployment of the body in his writings, the body as it is, but more especially as "the part of the other which is immediately visible and likely to be manipulated, to receive the impact of violence", as opposed to the mind which, according to her, is more elusive. This conception, which, by the way, maintains the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy, is then used in her study as a metaphor for colonisation of all kinds as it is expressed especially in the Hegelian struggle between the Master and Slave consciousness. My study goes beyond an exploration such as Pannetier's by looking at how Coetzee views the Subject's body itself, contra Descartes, as a centre of a redemptive consciousness — a sympathetic and empathetic embodied consciousness — and how such intersubjectivity, once taken cognisance of, can prevent the violence against and colonisation of the Other that Pannetier mentions, because such violence will be recognised as violence that is also partly against the Subject himself or herself. However, a point is also made in my study to the effect that even where violence against (or colonisation of) the Other does take place, the Other will, by his or her nature, always try to elude or resist such violence or colonisation in whatever way possible and, as such, render the basis of the rejection of, or violence against, the Other by the Subject ontologically untenable.

Grant Hamilton (2005), on the other hand, makes a far more insightful exploration of what we could say is meant by "the body" and I intend to employ some of his insights in the present study. Hamilton (2005: 42-44) draws the understanding of the body from the ancients, especially the Stoics Diogenes and Simplicius. He states that for the Stoics, body refers to "the tangible structures of the world". For Diogenes, for instance, the body is "that which is extended in three [dimensions], length, breadth and depth". For Simplicius, the body can be understood from three perspectives. Firstly, the perspective of "substrates" which include the genetic relationship between bodies (42). Secondly, the perspective of "dispositions" and thirdly that of "relative dispositions" both of which refer to the body's "states of affairs' of itself or with respect to something else" (42). After outlining this understanding of the body, Hamilton (2005: 42) then concludes that, "[a]s such one is encouraged to move a discussion of bodies away from a simple consideration of the physical qualities towards a more profitable focus on tensions,

actions, and states of affair. That is to say, one must focus on the dynamic functions of bodies”. However, as his study progresses, Hamilton (2005: 43-44), following the Stoics, makes allowances for the existence of “incorporeal entities” as a counter to the corporeal, an allowance I do not make for in my study because I find the construction “incorporeal entity” internally inconsistent. Instead, in this study I intend to look at the all too corporeal body holistically, as encompassing all the above stated attributes, from the physical qualities (minus the genetic qualities) to various dispositions. Overall, in this regard, as Frances Mascia-Lee and Patricia Sharpe (2006: 87) correctly observe, the question Coetzee seems to be asking in his writings is: “What does it mean to be fleshed beings capable of suffering and cruelty and of imagination?”⁶

In the same vein, and this is central to my study, J.M. Coetzee argues the authority of the body as that which defies all textualization and endless doubt, as being its “own sign”, in an answer to David Attwell’s question regarding the ending of his novel *Foe*, in which Friday’s embodiedness comes to the fore:

However peremptory the ending of *Foe*, it is at least an ending, not a gesture toward an ending.

But, translated into your terms, your question can take a second form, as a question about power: is representation to be so robbed of power, by the endlessly sceptical process of textualization that those represented in/by the text — the feminine subject, the colonial subject — are to have no power either? . . . For Susan Barton, the question takes care of itself: the book is not *Foe*’s, it is hers, even in the form of the trace of her hunt for *Foe* to tell it for her. But Friday is the true test. Is his history of a mute subjection to remain drowned? I return to the theme of power. The last pages have a certain power. They close the text by force, so to speak: they confront head-on the endlessness of its scepticism.

Friday is mute, but Friday does not disappear, because Friday is body. If I look back over my own fiction, I see a simple . . . standard erected. That standard is the body. Whatever else, the body is not ‘that which is not’, and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt. (One can get away with such crudeness in fiction, one can’t in philosophy, I’m sure.)

Not grace, then, but at least the body . . . (1992: 248, emphasis original)

Coetzee identifies the body as a standard or leitmotif of his writing career. What, for ontology, are the implications of what he says in this interview? We need to bear in mind that his statement here is in answer to those aspects of post-structuralist and postmodernist practices of conceptions of being that delight in the so-called endless and

⁶ The understanding of the body or matter in this study is also cognizant of its opposite called “antimatter”. From all indications, antimatter seems, oxymoron-like though this sounds, to be just as embodied. But this is a study that explores post-binary possibilities and so the oxymoron may very well be champion here.

self-referential play of the linguistic sign, captured in the Derridean concepts of *differance* and dissemination. At the same time, Coetzee's answer is reminiscent of the Cartesian doubt regarding the existence of the body which we find in Descartes' (1980) Second and Sixth Meditations; a bout of doubt which, while leaving judgement on the actual existence of the body suspended, only serves to assure the Subject of its own existence as a disembodied and autonomous consciousness because, according to Descartes, the doubter must at least exist. Aware of both the Derridean and Cartesian "traps", Coetzee is careful to refer here to the body, in its totality, as at least constituting what I will later describe as among the "contingent origins" of the contents of consciousness and, as such, its existence cannot be subject to doubt. Furthermore, as I will observe in my discussion of the relationship between language and concepts, Coetzee is wary of the structuralist view of language and subjectivity hence his closing of *Foe* by "bodily force" as he puts it in this interview.

All things considered, as my study will show, Coetzee's reference to pain as proof of the existence of the body in the latter part of his answer above forms but one aspect of his conception of embodiedness, or of the un-ignorable being-there-ness of the body. His other, equally important, interests lie in the body and its mutability, the body and its rhythms and demands such as those of desire, love and sex and other such dispositions all of which give the Subject a sense of being a body, as well as strong intimations of being an embodied mind, possessing an embodied consciousness which is intersubjective with other similarly embodied consciousnesses. This understanding of consciousness makes room for human communion (love, sympathy, empathy) with fellow humans, as well as with other animals who are also bodies and possess embodied consciousnesses, such as that of the dog who is in pain and thinks "*I am pain*", and the bird with the broken wing, failing to fly, who thinks "*I cannot*", as Coetzee puts it in the last epigraph above, a point which I will come back to shortly.

As I have already hinted at above, I will situate my study within the fields of epistemology, ontology and ethics, with ontology being the primary field because, in my view, ontology is the bedrock of all inquiry since, first there is "being" and then all the other considerations can follow.⁷ And my view is that modern philosophy of mind —

⁷ In my opinion, a specific *episteme* needs to derive from a specific *ontology*. Technically speaking, all the aspects of a system of inquiry (cosmology, ontology, ethics, aesthetics, etc.) must necessarily be derived from a specific *ontology* and will have to be consistent with that *ontology* to be credible. However, while

especially the physicalist strain within it — has a lot to contribute to challenging the traditional Cartesian Self/Other binary construction and the identity and power relations that that construction gives rise to and sanctions. My appeal to this school of philosophy has been motivated by Coetzee’s (1999b) specific engagement with it in interrogating the assumptions behind Thomas Nagel’s position (a major figure in this school — appropriately regarded as a neo-Cartesian) on the human impossibility of imagining animal subjectivity in the former’s *The Lives of Animals*.

The theory that I am advancing as a guide to my study of Coetzee, like all theories, is not prescriptive; it proceeds from certain key premises associated with some observable material in my experience of reading Coetzee’s work and its validity can only be measured against the cogency of those premises. It should be assumed, therefore, that all statements that I make about Coetzee are tentative as they are based on my reading of his works from my own positionality as a critic of a certain, specific sort — which is as it should be. My interpretations cannot pretend to be “total” and “closed”, or to supersede all other previous interpretations of Coetzee’s works; they simply add to the mosaic or the gestalt of the scholarship on him. In doing so, I bear in mind that Coetzee (1988b: 4) does not approve of approaches that want to turn his fiction into a supplement to anything whatsoever. As he argues in the essay “The Novel Today”, for him: “a story is not a message with a covering . . . not a message plus a residue, the residue, the art with which the message is coated [I]here is no addition in stories On the keyboard on which they are written, the plus key does not work”. But Coetzee also mentions in the same essay, a fact which, it seems to me, has not been given sufficient attention within literary-critical circles, that his writings do engage with historical reality, but that they do

ontology is the primary term, where conscious subjectivity is concerned, how you know and what you know determines your conception of Self and of your relation to Others and this is where the need for epistemology comes in. The central feature of a system is the “functional” and that can be achieved only where the parts arise organically from one another, especially from ontology via epistemology. But how do we achieve synchrony among the various branches of a philosophical system? In this study I single out the relationship among ontology, epistemology and ethics in what I call a post-Cartesian onto-episteme-ethic of embodied Self-Other subjectivity, with the nature of concepts and, consequently, of self-consciousness, being at the centre of that system. Coetzee (2003: 77) himself does link the three aspects, namely epistemology, ontology and ethics, placing them on the same continuum, as inter-determining correlatives, when he argues in *Elizabeth Costello* that the knowledge we have is not abstract and that even in the process of creating fictional characters and situations, the author embodies those characters and situations; through his or her knowledge of them, they become him or her and he or she becomes them.

so in “a particular way” as advocated for by the Aristotelian distinction between history and art, and it is from that angle that I, too, approach his works.⁸

My main assumption in this study is that human or animal subjectivity is characterized by consciousness. Consciousness is a state or mode of being — in this study, *a la* J.M. Coetzee, a mode of “embodied being” or “embodied becoming” — informed or underpinned by the relationship between one Subject and other Subjects or other existents of whatever nature. In turn, one of the central premises of the study is that the Subject’s identity is constituted in and mediated through this consciousness, its consciousness. A Subject’s positing of her or his identity is closely tied to that Subject’s conception of her or his constitution of his or her consciousness and, in human Subjects especially, self-consciousness. Because of its centrality, therefore, it will be necessary that I explore in the study the nature of consciousness, that is, its constitution.

The present attempt is only a search among many other searches in the field of inter-subjectivity and, quite in keeping with its post-structuralist leanings (although there are structuralist claims of the supposed inescapability of the body or brute reality as an ontological fact), the claims it makes are not foundationalist; they make no pretensions to being axiomatic. Nevertheless, following Coetzee, the theory that underpins this study will appeal to the reader only if s/he accepts the existence or “isness” of the body or “being” as a key ontological premise, as Coetzee himself posits in the interview quoted above and elsewhere in his writings. One positive feature of my theory, though, is its eschewal of the temptation to turn the individual into a cog in the machine of society. In keeping with Coetzee’s wariness, especially with those ecological notions that seem to turn the individual being into merely a part of the system, rather than approach it in its own right, my approach revolves around the constitution of the consciousness and, hence, subjectivity of the individual Subject, and only then does it demonstrate how that Subject stands in relation to other Subjects in the collective.⁹

⁸ Noticing the distortion, within literary-critical circles, of his views as contained in this essay, Coetzee comes back to this topic in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) in a lesson titled “What is Realism?”, which I will discuss when I get to an analysis of that work.

⁹ An approach that puts ontology as its starting point avoids the traps of those theorists who put epistemology before ontology and therefore elevate the knowing Subject above the known Object or its Other. For instance, the empiricist philosopher George Berkeley posited that the proof of existence or the “essence” of anything lies solely in its being perceived by the Subject: “To be is to be perceived,” he posited. In other words, according to Berkeley, there is no existence independent of the perceiving Subject such that what one has not perceived cannot be said to exist. Although Berkeley’s thesis has a veneer of the ontological, its primary term is epistemology rather than ontology because, from an epistemological

Of course J.M. Coetzee raises a wide variety of issues in his writings and different critics have explored and continue to explore these issues from various angles as the ever mounting body of criticism on his fiction shows. While I will engage with these approaches, especially at those points where they intersect with mine, I have no business discounting any of them; they are valid in their own right depending on the premises they set out from. In any case, in the contribution towards knowledge, all ideas are important because they enable us to have as rounded a view of a particular subject as possible. Indeed, because being is so dynamic, there is no final point to knowledge, neither of oneself nor of any discipline or phenomenon, such that an attitude of open-mindedness, even to contrary views, is always urged for even by Coetzee (1996) himself. It is my view that this attitude partly explains the tentative endings of most of his novels.¹⁰

The theory that follows, and its application to Coetzee's works, affirms the centrality of the ontology of the body and is an attempt at providing a demonstrable basis for intimations of post-binary experiences that we find in the works of writers such as J.M. Coetzee and others similarly disposed. These latter intimations are those that Derek Attridge, speaking of Coetzee's novels, calls "irruptions of otherness" in an otherwise previously unsuspecting and seemingly settled Subject:

Coetzee's works both stage, and are, irruptions of otherness into our familiar worlds and they pose the question: what is our responsibility toward the other? The

point of view, an object cannot exist without the Subject that apprehends it. But according to the postulates of my study, ontology is primary because being first *is* before it is known. As such, to be is not to be perceived, but, at the risk of courting a tautology, to be is, first and foremost, exactly that: "to be" — with or without an apprehending Subject being present. Coetzee insists on this conception of being especially when his protagonist argues the case of the existence, independent of and indifferent to the Subject, of the little frogs of the Dulgannon river in the lesson "At the Gate" in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

¹⁰ I myself will not regret carrying out a study such as the one I am doing here if another scholar comes up with yet another reading that contradicts or challenges mine. I will know that, in a sense, I have contributed to his or her developing the ideas for his or her study, and I will be glad for the part I have played in that process. As Coetzee puts it in *Giving Offense* (1996), the proper attitude of a genuine intellectual is open-mindedness and self irony:

Complacent and yet not complacent, intellectuals[,] pointing to the Apollonian "Know yourself", criticize and encourage criticism of the foundations of their own belief systems. Such is their confidence that they may even welcome attacks on themselves, smiling when they are caricatured and insulted, responding with the keenest appreciation to the most probing, most perceptive thrusts. They particularly welcome accounts of their enterprise that attempt to relativise it, read it within a cultural and historical framework. They welcome such accounts and at once set about framing them in turn within the project of rationality, that is, set about recuperating them. (Poyner, 2006: 2)

What Coetzee says here does not always happen, not even in the academy. As such, it remains an ideal that must be insisted upon and striven for. As Voltaire, that champion of freedom of expression and right to hold ideas, no matter how controversial, said regarding freedom of expression and holding ideas: "I may not agree with what you have to say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it."

characters who encounter such irruptions evince a responsibility that is also in question in the novels' own responses to otherness, including that which is other to the tradition of fictional writing in Western culture and in our own responsibility as readers, as citizens, as living beings. The discomfort produced by Coetzee's novels is an aspect of this otherness (2005: xii)

What Coetzee aims at by staging these “irruptions of otherness” is to hint at the blindness of the Cartesian Subject to certain aspects of his or her being and thereby expose his or her sense of being settled and autonomous as illusory. It is an exploration of the “isness” or the unignorable-there-ness” of the body and the nature of these irruptions, as well as their various implications, that form the centrepiece of my study. In this regard, the contention in the study is that, to a certain extent, consciousness's bridging or transcending of the traditional Cartesian gap between mind and body, as proposed by authors of the intellectual orientation such as Coetzee's, is not mere idle talk or mythical, but that, by looking at embodiedness and the nature of these “irruptions of otherness” into the Subject, there could be found a demonstrable basis to Self/Other transcendence that these authors, among others, gesture toward. J.M. Coetzee, for one, has doggedly and persistently argued this point over the years and it seems to me very fitting at this point in our critical studies of his writings to work out a theory (built largely from evidence in his writing) that could account for his intimations of an embodied ontological intersubjectivity, particularly in light of the challenge that Thomas Nagel (Coetzee's arch-nemesis) throws at the intellectual community as the first epigraph shows.

The concept “irruptions of alterity” or “otherness” is not Attridge's invention. Among other critics, Mike Marais has also used it long before Attridge's application here although the two approach it differently (see Marais, 1993a: 8; 2005; 2009). A similar difference exists between Marais's views and those of Rosemary Jolly (1996; 2006). These differences of approach have important implications for questions of the Other and otherness even for my own study, hence I will need to clarify my position in relation to theirs. My approach to these critics will be one of arbitration and conciliation.

In this regard, I wish to reconcile Mike Marais, Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge in their discussion of the Other and “otherness” in general. Marais focuses on the radical otherness of the Other to the same as the basis of Coetzeean ethics (1997a: 11; 1998a; 2003a: 2005). As I will show, such a conception of otherness with regard to Coetzee, is only part of the story. Jolly, on the other hand, urges that we also take note of “the

distinct embodied other” as well to avoid casting the other in generic terms as “the unrepresentable” (1996: 143-145; 2006: 152-153). Both critics have a point, even if Jolly’s position is contradictory (a contradiction which, following Marais, I point out below). Coetzee deals with both aspects of the ontology of sameness and otherness. For example, the irruptions of Otherness into the Self (that result into the reciprocal type of ethical response) that one encounters in the relations between the Magistrate and his Others in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, or those between Mrs Curren and her Others in *Age of Iron*, or the latter David Lurie and the sheep and dogs in *Disgrace*, or those that Elizabeth Costello posits in *Elizabeth Costello*, etc. connote the implication of the Self and the Other into each other. On the other hand, the respect for the otherness of the Other (which is also an ethical response in its own right — and this is where perhaps the “un-relating relation” of Levinasian ethics comes in) depicted say in the indifference of the frogs on the banks of the Dulgannon river (whom the panel of judges has never encountered before) as pointed out by Elizabeth Costello in the lesson “At the Gate” in *Elizabeth Costello*, and the various instances of the otherness of the Other across Coetzee’s oeuvre, connote the radical otherness (not radical exteriority) of the Other in relation to the Self. Of course, to deny or downplay the existence of a specific or distinct embodied Other is the same thing as saying that otherness can exist without the Other existing. As I discuss later in this chapter, Immanuel Kant (1929: 27) warns against the mistaken notion that you can have appearance (that is, otherness) without something that appears (that is, a distinct, specific, embodied Other-in-itself, prior to representation). As such, to relate to the otherness of the Other, ultimately, is to relate to the Other-in-itself whose otherness one relates to but which cannot be represented since representation immediately implies the existence of the in-itself of that which has been represented, but which is always somewhere else. The Self is at the same time both Self and Other. In fact, since the Self comprehends itself mediately, and is ever in a state of flux, it is Other even to itself.

Marais is right in pointing out a contradiction in Jolly’s view of attempting to represent the “distinct embodied Other” (1998a) because, by its very nature, representation in general implies a dealing in otherness and the Other so-represented, although embodied, cannot maintain its distinctness or specificity — this is not to say, however, that a distinct, embodied Other does not exist and I explain conditions for the possibility of his or her existence below. However, responsible representation preserves the otherness of the Other by acknowledging that the Other, as represented, remains other, though not

radically exterior to the Same — except where the Same has not yet encountered the specific Other in question and who has, therefore, not been represented. Therefore, as Marais, following Levinas, constantly argues, the Other is indeed radically other and irreducible — hence his or her or its singularity.

Related to these conceptions, I also wish to reconcile Mike Marais's understanding of Otherness and that of Derek Attridge. Marais (2009: xii) adopts Maurice Blanchot's conception of otherness as "the excess or what is left over after signification has taken place" while Attridge's (2005: 99) conception is that otherness is produced by "the self-constituting act of the Same which then perceives it as Other". Signification in itself is a form of producing otherness because the end product of that process is not congruent to the brute Other upon, and in relation to, whom the signification takes place. As such the otherness of the Other is not only what is left over after signification has taken place; signification itself, as a mediated process, *produces* otherness, but it is that kind of otherness that is implicated in the Same and so it is at the same time both Same and Other, although always other. Therefore, in one sense, you could say that the Other exists regardless of whether the Self perceives it or not (otherwise we risk the Berkelian fallacy of "to be is to be perceived") and that is the distinct, embodied Other that Jolly should be referring to, but she does not, because by believing that such an Other can be represented, she contradicts herself. But also, in another sense, the Other is produced by the Self through the mediate nature of the process of apprehension which then casts it as Other, and that is what Attridge refers to. The otherness of the Other is also what is left over after signification has taken place, and this is what Marais refers to.

In my study, while upholding the thesis of the radical otherness of the Other, I do modify suggestions of the Other's radical exteriority. What my study of Coetzee finds problematic is the positing of radical exteriority between Subjects who have encountered each other: could this not be an act of entry through the backdoor of a recalcitrant Cartesianism whose project is to protect the supposedly absolute autonomy of the Subject, while disguising itself as an appeal to respect for the otherness of the Other? Or if the view of radical exteriority of the Other is championed by the Other, could it not be the wish of the Other to be left alone in the face of a hostile and intrusive Subject? Would such a quest not signal a fearful and self-protective alienation rather than a reciprocal ethics? My view is that radical exteriority can obtain only between Subjects who have not yet encountered each other, but not after the encounter and, with the

quantum physics challenge of a universe that is a plenum, even this type of exteriority may, ultimately, not exist at all. Marais's theoretical criticism of Coetzee's works straddles both the possibility of intersubjectivity, on the one hand, and its impossibility, on the other hand. As will become clear in the course of my study, I build upon all these critics' conceptions of the Other and otherness, and even more especially the views of David Attwell (2006: 37-38) on Coetzee's valorisation of the body as a new site of a redemptive ontology.

The intimation of a theoretically partially reducible embodied intersubjectivity (reducible while maintaining its irreducible otherness) by Coetzee has been an incremental process. Its progression can be traced all the way from the ontological impasse of *Dusklands* (1974) and *In the Heart of the Country* (1978), to an awakening to an embodied intersubjective conception of being as a solution to the violence and exploitation attendant upon the discriminatory relations engendered by a Cartesian conception of subjectivity that we see in his subsequent writings. We see this latter orientation from *Waiting for Barbarians* (1980) onwards. The urging for the respect of the otherness of the Other can be seen in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1985), while the increasing prominence of embodiedness in Coetzee's conception of subjectivity continues in *Foe*. Coetzee amplifies upon his conception of embodied intersubjectivity, even extending this "commonwealth" of the Subject's embodied intersubjectivity to the animal Other, in *Age of Iron* (1990), *The Master of Petersburg* (1994) and, more openly, in *Disgrace* (1999a), *The Lives of Animals* (1999b) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003). In my assessment, the novels selected for discussion in my study mark the high points in this progression along the trajectory of an embodied intersubjectivity that Coetzee posits in his oeuvre.¹¹

The Self and the Other: A Critical Context

Critical responses to the problems of subjectivity and the power relations attendant on constructions of subjectivity in colonial/postcolonial, gender and ecological literature have emanated from various schools of thought, most notably psychoanalysis. The

¹¹While I refer to *Foe*, especially as it deals with the unignorable-being-there-ness of the body, I do not think that this publication does so from the point of view of the imaginative form of intersubjectivity that I am exploring in this study — or, rather, it does not do so in as sustained a manner as do the books I have selected as my focus texts. Similarly, it seems to me that *Life and Times of Michael K* focuses more on the demand to respect the otherness of the Other rather than on a sustained staging of intersubjectivity as such. Another good novel I could have worked on along the lines of my thesis was *Master of Petersburg* but most of what goes on in this text has already been covered in *Age of Iron* and so its inclusion would have made the discussion repetitive.

standard vocabulary here tends to revolve around issues of Selfhood and Otherness. The Self is the mind, that self-determining and self-sufficient autonomous Subject of the Cartesian *cogito*, and the Other is the body, woman, the racialised/colonized or environment/insensate matter. Even though the conception of a Self who is all mind is often regarded as a given, the Other has received considerable attention and, in the process, has thrown some light on the nature of the supposedly autonomous Self.

Some psychoanalytic approaches conceive of the Other as a projection of “the darker side of the Self,” which acts as its counter, and could be demoniacal even (see, for example, Said, 1978; JanMahomed, 1985; and Kristeva, 1991). Such approaches view the Self’s construction in relation to the Other as specular but in a disfigured way. Another conception of the Other (especially the colonized Other) is that of a being ravaged by a split-consciousness through desiring to be in the places of both the coloniser and the colonised (see, for example, Memmi, 1991; Fanon, 1961 and 1968; and Bhabha, 1990 and 1994). Still other conceptions of the Other involve the vagaries of mimicry, with its attendant (and unsettling) menace, a process through which the Other is encouraged to imitate the colonial or dominating Self, but in the eyes of such a Self only ends up as a disfigured Self; that is, the Other becomes “like the Self, but not quite” (see, for example, Bhabha, 1994). Then there is the exploration of the potentials of cultural hybridity in which Self and Other are deemed to begin to merge, but in a relationship in which the Self does not acknowledge its own Otherness (see, for example, Bhabha, 1990).

However, as is possibly clear by this stage, the approach to post-colonial, ecological, and to a lesser extent post-gender, relations in this study is largely philosophical, not of the traditional Cartesian type, but a modern, physicalist or embodied tradition. While in various ways linked to the above positions, my study will explore J.M. Coetzee’s contribution to the debate from an angle that interrogates the Cartesian binary or dichotomous logic of “either Self or Other”, and focuses on the intimations in his writing of a logic of “both/and” or “and-or” (see Waugh, 1992a: 163-164) that an embodied conception of consciousness as propagated by the physicalist philosophy of mind affords.

The alternative logic or consciousness posited by J.M. Coetzee, I shall argue, makes room for an ontology in which the Self and the Other are not opposed but are inextricably

“intersubjective”, interdependent and coextensive with each other. This study therefore aims to examine and validate Coetzee’s conception of alternative logics/ontologies, especially his evocation of the concept of the primacy of the body, or, in Attwell’s (2006: 37-38) words, “the valorisation of the body”.

To put it more concretely, regarding Coetzee’s seeming ontological argument, and this is a point I will keep making from time to time, Attwell correctly observes that for Coetzee, a re-configuration of our consciousness in relation to the body may be a pre-requisite to our forging of post-binary ontologies: “the conditions of possibility for the development of a more redemptive consciousness might well be ontological before they are social; that is they may be related to a new consciousness and valorization of being itself” (2006: 37-38). It is the possible nature of this kind of consciousness that I am exploring in this study and, from my understanding, all pointers suggest that this would have to be an “embodied consciousness”, which would also be intentional and intersubjective.

While investigating the role of the body in the constitution of consciousness, W.J.B. Wood insightfully invokes Coetzee’s emphasis on the “isness” of the body in this phenomenon. He observes as follows in this regard:

What seems to me to be at issue here [in Coetzee’s literary project] is a re-conception of how Mind is constituted, and a reevaluation of the Body as a source and means to knowledge. Are Mind and Body interactive twin poles from which conjointly we derive our being, or are they to be accepted, in Cartesian fashion, as distinct and divided, with Mind reigning supreme in its control over the subjugated body? (1984: 131)

Later in the same article Wood argues definitively that it is from the body that everything derives (1984: 139). While by the time of the publication of *Disgrace* (1999a) this orientation has become far more explicit, especially with his direct questioning of the Cartesian ontology of “*cogito ergo sum*” Coetzee posits in its place “embodiedness”, and the related rejection of the limits that the neo-Cartesian Thomas Nagel places on the imagination, issues that Coetzee raises in *The Lives of Animals* (1999b). In reality, looking at the debate with the benefit of hindsight, one could say that Coetzee has been gesturing toward this form of consciousness, doggedly, all the way from *Dusklands* (1974) and one can trace its gradual development, whose trajectory is consistent with Coetzee’s own development of his conception of this kind of consciousness, in each subsequent

publication of his. In the present study I go a step further to investigate just what such embodiedness, as a re-conception of how mind is constituted, entails for the ontology of consciousness and subjectivity.

Furthermore, in her overview analysis of Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*, Elleke Boehmer also observes as follows in this regard:

As all Coetzee readers are aware, the writer has long been preoccupied with the epistemological problem of fully comprehending, of identifying with, extreme otherness, especially with the other's suffering body (Spivak 199:169-197). Think only of Lurie's self-appointed task of accompanying dead dogs to the incinerator in *Disgrace*. Now, in his novel-in-eight-lessons, *Elizabeth Costello* . . . he has given himself the opportunity at last to reflect self-consciously and openly on this problem. The element that draws together the disparate lecture tableaux that make up this novel-*manqué* is not only that they all involve the female novelist Elizabeth Costello, though that is of course significant, but that they concern 'embodying' (Lee 2003: 21). Every episode in the novel dramatises the stand-off between embodiment and reason, whether it is a question of Thomas Nagel imagining himself as a bat, Ted Hughes bodying himself forth as a jaguar, or an African novelist embodying the European novel form. Whether it concerns novelists entering the world of Molly Bloom or imagining themselves in Hitler's death camps, 'the notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal'. (2005: 229)

That Coetzee dramatises the stand-off between embodiment and reason is clear even in his direct rejection of the Cartesian standpoint as captured in the second epigraph above. But Coetzee's rejection of reason is not as total as may be assumed at first glance. As I note below, both Domic Head (2006) and Sam Durrant (2006) suspect that it is only a certain strain (a supposedly disembodied, ratiocinative strain) within reasoning circles that he appears to be uncomfortable with.

In other words, the thesis explores the possibility of an "intersubjective", embodied consciousness in contradistinction to the view of an exclusively ratiocinative consciousness in which reason is seen to be not only of a different order of existence, autonomous and the controlling faculty, but also *apart from* and *opposed to* the body. In this regard, talking specifically about Coetzee's literary project, Michela Canepari-Labib appositely notes that

[I]n his novels Coetzee demonstrates that the idea the Western world and its [Cartesian] philosophical tradition have of identity is inadequate in all respects, and [he] tries to stimulate the reader to search for new ways of relating to reality, in so far as, the author suggests, it is only by radically changing our perspective and our approach to our surrounding reality, other human beings and, finally, to our 'selves,' that the total extinction of humanity may be avoided. (2000: 125)

It is this search for new ways of relating to reality as hinted at by critics such as Labib (2000) and Attwell (2006) above that my study explores in greater detail with a view, following Coetzee's lead, to work out just what such alternative conceptions of being might operate like.

In this regard, as various post-colonial theorists, such as Peter Childs and Patrick Williams (1997) in *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* and Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (1989) in both *The Empire Writes Back* and the various theorists they gather together in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (1995), contend, it is common knowledge that the ultimate aim of the explorations by these various post-colonial scholars is to expose, undermine and invalidate the bases upon which discriminatory relations (colonial, gender, ecological, etc.) are founded. Among other proposals for the invalidation of the imperialist drive have been those approaches that deal with multiculturalism such as those advanced by theorists such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy; and those that propose a transcendence of the traditional identity boundaries by questioning the very bases of existential boundaries such as those by Hommi Bhabha and, to some extent, Kwame Anthony Appiah. Scholars like J.M Coetzee, however, attempt to question the ontological bases (by which is meant those to do with the ontology of consciousness itself) of discrimination itself and that is the angle that I, too, have adopted in this study. The Coetzeean project could be described as one of embodying and grounding the supposedly autonomous, solipsistic and free-floating Cartesian Subject by alerting it, first and foremost, to its embodiedness and further to that, pointing out its ontological indebtedness to its Others and its implication in the Others's consciousnesses and so prevent it from continuing with its imperialistic and ecological barbarities.

My study aims to critically analyse Coetzee's fiction and it has as its background his fictional treatment of the Cartesian notion of the "autonomous subject" and the implications and consequences of that notion as appropriated by colonial, gender and ecological discourse and praxis.¹² In keeping with the critical mode, the theory I am

¹² The colonized Other, of course, is closely related to the gendered Other. On this subject see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin (1989: 249) who, in *The Empire Writes Back*, note that: "In many different societies, women, like colonised subjects, have been relegated to the position of 'Other', 'colonised' by various forms of patriarchal domination". Another important reference on this link between the colonised and gendered Others is Anne McClintock's (1990) "Maidens, maps and mines: *King Solomon's Mines* and the reinvention

advancing in this study, both *arises* from and *amplifies* Coetzee's assumptions and as such, some aspects of this theory can best be described as "hypotheses" rather than "theory" in the strict sense of the term.¹³ I need to mention that, in so far as my study acknowledges the innate structural capacity of consciousness (as the body in its totality), to that extent it is structuralist in approach. But, given also that it acknowledges the individuality of this consciousness, its inherent positionality and situatedness, to that extent it is also post-structuralist. Following Coetzee, the study argues against autonomous subjectivity by demonstrating that the Subject is only partially autonomous, dependent as he or she is on her or his Others for the content of his subjectivity, and also being implicated in the Other's subjectivity. As I have noted earlier, Coetzee seems to have set himself the task of challenging the postulates of autonomous subjectivity by positing alternative epistemes and ontologies in his works.

While Coetzee's approach is too varied to be cursorily categorised, its anti-Cartesian bias is implicit in his references and allusions to the writings of Thomas Nagel who belongs to the tradition of the philosophy of mind.¹⁴ As such, I will analyse Nagel's position on the supposed human impossibility of imagining the reality or being of animal consciousness (and by implication the consciousness of another person) alongside those of others in that tradition who would make room for such a possibility. The epitome of this trajectory of positing an embodied consciousness in J.M. Coetzee's writing could be said to be found in his lecture-fiction publication *The Lives of Animals* (1999b) in which, at a critical point in defence of animal subjectivity, he has his character, Elizabeth Costello, aver:

of patriarchy in colonial South Africa," in which, in 'the Great Chain of Being', children and the colonised Other are on the same rung as women but at the bottommost rung are the "Khoisan" just before the chain tails off to animal and plant life. We will meet the Khoisan in the next chapter in a discussion of Coetzee's "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" in *Dusklands*.

¹³ Naturally, in scholarship you start with a hypothesis, or a set of hypotheses, which, upon sufficient testing, then can be formed into a generalisable theory. Both a hypothesis and a theory are considered to be never wrong or right; they can only either be supported or challenged through sufficient testing as I have said. But the key phrase here is "sufficient testing". The question that arises is: how much sufficiency is "sufficient"? This question arises because, upon further testing, with the emergence of new evidence, what may have passed for a theory before can get discredited and sink even lower than the level of a hypothesis. I am not unaware of these dangers to theorising which is why I prefer to call my system both a theory and some aspects of it hypotheses. The hope is that the system as a whole will not sink below the level of hypothesis altogether, but no theorist worth his or her salt can rule out such a future possibility in advance.

¹⁴ See, for example, Elizabeth Costello's reference in Coetzee's (1999a) *The Lives of Animals* (31-33, 33, 35, 101, 102) to Nagel's essay "What is it like to be a bat?" which is found in Nagel's (1979) *Mortal Questions*. However, Nagel is regarded as largely a neo-Cartesian theorist of the mind and is taken to task by his physicalist contemporaries. What I think are Coetzee's founded suspicions about his stance will be explored in this study.

What is it like to be a bat? Asks Thomas Nagel “Cogito, ergo sum” It is a formula I have always been uncomfortable with. It implies that a being that does not do what we call thinking is somehow second-class. To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being — not consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation — *a beavily affective sensation* — of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes’ key state, which has an empty feel to it: the feel of a pea rattling around in a shell. (Coetzee, 1999b: 33, emphasis mine)

There is more than a hint here that the embodied existence is all there is to consciousness. And, in the opposing of a disembodied Cartesian consciousness, an embodied consciousness is instead gestured towards.¹⁵ Complicit with the Cartesian ontology, in *Diary of a Bad Year*, Coetzee (2007) shows how the seeming internal split of human subjectivity is manifested in its representation in human language. He observes as follows, in this regard:

We speak of *the dog with the sore foot* or *the bird with the broken wing*. But the dog does not think of itself in those terms, or the bird. To the dog, when it tries to walk, there is simply *I am pain*, to the bird, when it launches itself into flight, simply *I cannot*. With us it seems different. The fact that such common locutions as “my leg,” “my eye,” “my brain,” and even “my body,” exist suggests that we believe there is some non-material, perhaps fictive, entity that stands in the relation of possessor to possessed to the body’s “parts” and even to the whole body. Or else the existence of such locutions shows that language cannot get purchase, cannot get going, until it has split up the unity of experience. (Coetzee, 2007: 59, emphasis original)

As I have hinted at above, what we see here is an understanding of an embodied subjectivity that is in keeping with physicalist conceptions of consciousness. For the physicalists, the mind must be *with* the rest of the body and be *of* it for it to escape the fate — one born of Cartesian illusion — of existing as “a pea rattling around in a shell”. Such a physicalist or embodied view of consciousness as posited here also lends credence to the standard objection, as that advanced by Patricia Waugh (1992a: 134), to Cartesianism’s “fetishization of pure reason as the locus of subjecthood”.¹⁶ Similarly, I

¹⁵ Perhaps it will be useful to point out that, by positing an embodied consciousness in this study, I am not dismissing the existence of the soul altogether. Even traditionally speaking, mind and soul are two different entities — although Descartes (1980: 15) sometimes views the two entities as one and the same. In my study I am looking at the mind, which is associated with consciousness, as being embodied. Coetzee says as much because, throughout his works, he maintains his use of the term “soul” even while he is positing embodied subjectivity. So, for instance, Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron* imagines her soul leaving her body like a butterfly.

¹⁶ Waugh (1992a: 134) notes as follows regarding this intersubjective consciousness: “Parts of other people, the parts we have had relationships with, are parts of us, so the self is both constant and fluid, ever in exchange, ever re-describing itself through its encounters with others. It seems to be this recognition of mediation as that which renders total self-determination impossible which so many male modernists and postmodernist writers find unacceptable”. But even on such a view, self-determination is possible because ultimately it is the Subject who organises the material so encountered and apprehended. Waugh (1992a: 164) further points out, in this regard, that “perhaps the most positive lesson of Postmodernism is that to

argue in this study, through the theory I am advancing, that it would be ontologically incorrect to say “I have a body” since such a statement seems to claim that there is an a priori “I” who in addition to being an “I” (supposedly a disembodied mind) also has a body. Rather one has to say, “I am a body”, a statement so holistic that it includes all the known and yet unknown human faculties. Further to this, Coetzee’s embodied Subject also seems to be saying “I am *in* the world and *of* it”, countering consciousness’s supposed alienation from the natural world, thereby.

Now Coetzee notes in the passage above that animals most likely do not experience this split of subjectivity that human language proposes. Is he, therefore, calling for a reconstitution of human language for humanity to regain this unity of experience? Possibly. What we do see Coetzee doing in his writings is a dogged search for conceptions of language that do not imply a split of subjectivity and, very often, he resorts to explorations of pre-verbal conceptions of subjectivity such as those he depicts in his references to the dog in pain and the bird with the broken wing above. The reason Coetzee does this is because of the supposed alienating or refracting quality of human language. I amplify upon this debate when I discuss the relationship between language, concepts and consciousness later in this chapter. Suffice to note here that when asked by David Attwell about what had attracted him to Kafka’s writings, Coetzee says that it was the former’s hinting at the possibility of consciousness outside language:

[. . .] Kafka at least hints that it is possible, for snatches, however brief, to think outside one’s own language, perhaps to report back on what it is like to think outside language itself. Why should one want to think outside language? Would there be anything worth thinking there? Ignore the question: what is interesting is the liberating possibility Kafka opens up. (1992: 198-199)

What Coetzee says here about Kafka constitutes the key when it comes to unveiling his own attempts at such a possibility of pre-verbal or post-verbal being. This challenge is adequately addressed in my theory on the difference philosophical epistemology sees between words and concepts that I discuss later in the chapter.¹⁷

see existence in terms of such an aesthetic model may be to recognise that “autonomy” can still be achieved but in ways which do not necessarily assert self by annihilating other”. In my study, through Coetzee’s works, I am trying to demonstrate how this kind of subjectivity as gestured towards by someone like Waugh here would be like in ontologically demonstrable terms.

¹⁷ As Maura Harrington (2006: 52-53) so insightfully observes, indeed, there seems to be no evidence whatsoever that shows that a language-based subjectivity is superior to a non-linguistic one. I myself know of people born without the ability to speak who seem to have a far keener and refined (and more interesting) sense of life than some who can speak that I also know.

Because of points of view such as the one being posited by Coetzee in his writings, it is tempting to view authors who engage in such re-conceptualisations of consciousness as revolting against rationality or philosophy in general. Overall, I think that it is not necessarily rationality in general that is in contention here, but a certain *mode* of transcendental or instrumental rationality that parcels out life into neat and exclusionary/oppositional categories of being. Among other manifestations, this type of rationality is found in Plato's doctrine of *forms*, Aristotle's binary logic or Descartes' *cogito*. Coetzee's inclusion of the story of Kafka's ape in the lesson "Realism" in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) illustrates the questioning of such modes of instrumental reason and their implications for human subjectivity. However, such a conception of consciousness as could be said is posited by J.M. Coetzee here puts the mind and the body on the same plane as embodied objective correlatives, with consciousness itself as suffusing the whole of a Subject's being. Ultimately, then, in Coetzee's view, the ontology of consciousness turns out to be not only embodied, but relational and "inter-subjective" too.

In this regard, J.M. Coetzee seems to be carrying out the projects of, among others, Theodor Adorno, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jurgen Habermas and Patricia Waugh that involve, not the abandoning of reason altogether, but rather revising and redefining Enlightenment's concepts of reason and subjectivity. Indeed, like Habermas and Waugh, most socially conscious philosophers will find intellectually problematic those wholesale attacks on philosophy as a discipline that do not discriminate between the various schools of thought within it; those that do not isolate those schools of thought that could be useful from those that are destructive and possibly illusory. In this revisionist project, Waugh (1992a: 134) especially, also points to the existence of a rationality that admits of both intersubjectivity and also the lack of absolute intersubjectivity between the Self and the Other.¹⁸

Dominic Head (2006) and Sam Durrant (2006) make similar observations regarding what they think are Coetzee's view(s) of reason or rationality in his writing. In his analysis of Coetzee's *The Lives of Animals* (1999b), Durrant (2006: 127) observes that "while Coetzee's fiction seems to suggest that it is thought, consciousness itself, that needs to be

¹⁸ For an exhaustive analysis of Waugh's arguments see Mike Marais' 1993 review of her two books on modernism and postmodernism titled *Post-modernism: A Reader* (1992a) and *Practising Postmodernism/ Reading Modernism* (1992b) and of Brian McHale's *Constructing Postmodernism* (1992).

bypassed, Costello at times sees it as sufficient to bypass a particular form of reason that she describes as ‘the specialism of a narrow self-regenerating [instrumentalist] intellectual tradition’”. Head, on the other hand, exposes the contradictions inherent in Costello’s seeming argument against reason, all the while also pointing out that it is practical, instrumental reason that is really under attack and not all forms of reason per se. He observes that:

Without relinquishing the desire to promote the sympathetic capacity, a focus of *The Lives of Animals*, and of *Elizabeth Costello* beyond it, is to highlight the contradiction inherent in that desire. For the sympathetic faculty, which the literary effect can promote, is identified by dint of intellectual effort, much as Costello’s war with reason has to be conducted through a process of careful reasoning. . . . [Elizabeth Costello] demonstrates that it is the essence of our being to be caught between sympathy and reason, much as Coetzee’s text pushes his readers through the same contradictory experience. (2006: 111)

The present study argues that there is space within rational argumentation to account for the embodied consciousness that Coetzee posits. My view, in this study, is that Coetzee wants us to develop an “affective” or “embodied” conception of reason, a kind of reason that, as part and parcel of an embodied subjectivity, will be able to feel, first and foremost, but, beyond that, it should be the type of reason that, realising its lack of autonomy, will come to acknowledge its own indebtedness to sources of its content, at the same time that it feels itself implicated in the Other’s subjectivity, doubling its lack of autonomy thereby.

Chapter One

Theoretical Framework: Post-Cartesian Embodied Subjectivity and Ethics in J.M. Coetzee's Fiction

An Embodied Ontology-cum-Epistemology: The Physicality of the Mind and its Implications for the Mind-Body Problem, the Self's Identity and Self-Other Ethics

In line with what I have identified as the Coetzeean project above, and closely following after him so as to shed some light on and amplify the author's assumptions and propositions, my own exposé unveils the organic nature and workings of an embodied consciousness. I start the discussion with the nature of concepts as the building blocks of consciousness. Later, I show how consciousness stands in relation to the external world with which it constantly interacts through what I view as ontological indebtedness and implication. The argument Coetzee seems to be advancing is that domination (be it in the form of slavery, colonialism, patriarchy, ecological crimes) and the discriminatory and estranged relations that it spawns are based on the illusion of the autonomous subject (extended to the group in the form of a collective "autonomous Subject"), and that a post-domination state that would restore inter-subjective relations, can be achieved only if that illusion has been demonstrably exposed and invalidated at the level of the constitution and conception of consciousness itself. I now turn to the task of unveiling and invalidating the said illusion in line with what J.M. Coetzee proposes.

In terms of epistemology, the major theorists I engage with are Emmanuel Kant (1929) and, to some extent, Christopher Peacocke (1992).¹⁹ And, among the philosophers of mind, my major theorists are Gilbert Ryle (1949), Thomas Nagel (1970, 1979 and 1995), Paul Churchland (1988), Anthony Kenny (1992), Jaegwon Kim (2000) and John Searle (1992, 1995 and 2004). This contextualisation will enable me to determine the validity of what critics have only identified as the various "transcendental" or "inexplicable" experiences that underpin the "irruptions of otherness" into the Subject as put forward by J.M. Coetzee in various of his works. For example, in "Dreams and Phantoms":

¹⁹ Of course, one can bring John Locke and David Hume into this group of epistemologists who have approached human identity from a consciousness perspective. However, although Kant has his own problems with his positing of the categories, he nevertheless is a more appropriate arbitrator in the sense that he modifies the thesis of the innate ideas of Descartes and that of the *tabula rasa* of Locke and Hume.

Waldo's Heritage in *Waiting for the Barbarians*", Andre Viola (1991: 160) makes the telling observation (which she also, by the way, applies to the works of Plomer, van der Post, Nadine Gordimer and Andre Brink) that in Coetzee's writing, "conflicts find a solution with the help of the semi-conscious activities of the characters". It is these semi-conscious activities, which Attridge (2005) has termed "irruptions of otherness" into the self, which I want to attempt to bring to consciousness in my study. The principal questions here are: how does Coetzee conceive of the Self and its relation to the Other? Do the inter-subjective experiences of the Subject seeing himself or herself in Others, and of seeing the Others in himself or herself, as depicted in Coetzee's works have any ontologically demonstrable basis? Can they be validated ontologically? The rest of this exposé seeks to provide such an ontological basis and validation by exploring what Coetzee's proposed embodied consciousness might be like and how it might operate. As a way of exploring the above issues with reference to Coetzee, I will formulate a post-Cartesian ontology and epistemology which, in turn, will generate an appropriate reciprocal "intersubjective" ethics — in what I term Self-Other subjectivity and Self-Other ethics. Three key concepts or assumptions govern my theory and to which everything else that is claimed in it can be appealed, and these are: consciousness's embodiedness, its mediatedness and its intentionality (the last is a reworking of the Husserlian notion of consciousness's "aboutness" or "directedness").²⁰

In the first chapter of *The Metaphysics of Mind*, Anthony Kenny gives the general outlines of what he has termed "Descartes' Myth", a myth he then proceeds to unravel in the rest of the book. He notes that:

Dualism is the idea that there are two worlds. There is the physical world which contains matter, and energy, and all the tangible contents of the universe including human bodies. Then there is another psychological world: mental events and states belong to a private world which is inaccessible to public observation. According to dualism the two separate realms of

²⁰ Cleary, and as I have already hinted at in the text above, I am not the first one to posit the possibility of overcoming the ontological gap between the "Self" and the "Other", or of taking to task the ontology of Cartesian Enlightenment. Philosophers such as Martin Buber, Theodor Adorno, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and most phenomenologists have been attempting to do just this since the early 20th Century. As I have found out in the course of my research, my approach shares similarities with, but is not congruent to, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1962) concept of the "Body-Subject" as adumbrated in his *The Phenomenology of Perception* and, later, revised in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1968). In fact, had I not developed my own framework, I could as easily have appealed to Merleau-Ponty's theorising — with appropriate modifications, of course, because, as is implicit in the title of the first text, Merleau-Ponty situates his study within phenomenology while I do not. Another close precursor is Theodor Adorno whose anti-Cartesian position is contained in writings such as his essay titled "Subject-Object" (1969) and in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). Also the Romantic quest for mystical connections with nature fall into this category.

mental and physical realities interact, if at all, only in a mysterious manner that transcends the normal rules of causality and evidence. (1992: 1)

It may be important to give a brief background to the ideas that I explore in this study and let me start with the perceived difference between pre-modernist and modernist conceptions of subjectivity because my approach has some affinities with the pre-modernist conception but, of course, in a modified form. It may seem like turning back the hands of time, but it is only by identifying where modernity took a wrong turn that we can “redeem” it.

Pre-modernist ontologies are generally associated with the absence of clear-cut distinctions between Subject and Object (see Buber 1970; Ong 1982; Malouf 1978 and 1993). In such ontologies the Subject and Object are assumed to be not just coterminous but mutually deterministic and unmediatedly co-extensive; the one indistinguishable or undifferentiated from the other. In Cartesian language, in such ontologies, there is only the object, the body, but no real mind worth taking note of. Such a construction has traditionally been applied to the colonised Other, women, animals, and what is called insensate nature.

On the other hand, binaric or dualistic thinking (which is presupposed by the split between the Subject and the Object) is closely associated with the ushering in of the modernist era (alternatively called the Enlightenment era) when the (Western) human psyche posited distance between the “Subject” (exclusively the un-extended mind) and the “Object” (the extended body) thereby opening up the natural world to scientific discovery, exploitation and manipulation, all for human comfort and gain. But this modernist psyche, it is argued, also made humanity “realise” that there was distance between one “autonomous” human consciousness and any other existent, including other minds, a “discovery” through which, in due course, because of the supposed distance, the Other became not only wholly exteriorised, but also, due to the consequent struggle for self-assertion, it also became “othered”, “objectified” or, even more crudely, “thingified”. One major result of this conception was that the already pernicious seed of discrimination and exploitation that may have accompanied Self/Other relations had now been given a “rational” impetus. Subjectivity became a matter of “either/or”, that is, either mind or body; either Self or (even against) Other.

The modernist era is closely associated with Rene Descartes who is deemed as its founding father. Descartes posited an internal immaterial “I” (the cogito) independent of the external material world, the body accompanying that specific “I” inclusive. This he captured in the famous maxim: “Cogito, ergo sum” (I think, therefore I am). The epigraph from J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals* (1999), in which his character, the novelist Elizabeth Costello, defends the rights of non-human beings, captures the essence of Cartesian dualistic ontology which, as we have noted, Patricia Waugh (1992a: 125) accuses of “...fetishiz[ing] Pure Reason as the locus of subjecthood”. In Cartesian ontology, reason (or mind) alone is said to constitute human self-consciousness, or the “I”, and this is opposed to the body or material phenomena. Furthermore, the modernist era became a marker between the “civilised” and the “primitive”. The latter were assumed to be hanging on to the apron of a supposedly pre-modernist, unmediated co-extensivity with the world around them and so unable to exploit that environment in any meaningful and extensive/intensive way for gain as a result. The “Burden” of the “Civilized”, then, became one of helping the “primitives” out of their pre-modern selves ontologically, culturally and materially.

Chronologically though, this is a simplified, if not simplistic, view of the emergence of the two types of psyches (that is, the “civilised” and the “primitive”). In fact, binaric or dualistic conception of subjectivity is much older than the so-called modernist era. Plato was perhaps the first to adumbrate a two-tier view of existence in his famous theory of reality which parcels life into the world of ideas or forms and the world of things, with the former existing prior to the latter and the two having only a tenuous relationship with each other. The gifted philosopher (presumably Plato himself) though, could have access to the world of ideas and so come to know reality in its essence. Aristotle, Plato’s own former pupil, disagreed with his former master on this matter by arguing that forms or ideas arise *from* and subsist *in* the world of material phenomena and not apart from and independent of them, thereby ushering in a reverse form of essentialism, a realistic essentialism. Contemporaneous with, or even pre-dating Plato, the various religions of old too posited a two-tier mode of existence with the human being assumed to have a material body and an immaterial soul and the soul outliving the former upon its dissolution. Materialist or largely immanent religions of a pantheistic nature were an exception to this binaric division as they made no such rigid distinctions within the

individual, nor between the individual and whatever they conceived of as the deity or deities.

One notices that all subsequent debates about the origin, nature, and relations of concepts/ideas (i.e. consciousness) and material phenomena have been expansions and variations on these two diametrically opposed positions, that is, the Platonic and the Aristotelian positions, and their religious antecedents and correlates. According to Michael Levin (1979: 50-54) in *Metaphysics and the Mind-Body Problem*, there have been in this debate over the ages positions such as “idealism”, which contends that there are only mental entities (54); “property dualism”, which contends that there are only physical entities, but that some physical entities have both physical and non-physical, psychological properties (50); and “property monism”, which argues that there are only physical entities, and all properties of physical entities are physical (50). From the 1950s onwards, with the marriage between philosophy of mind and the neurosciences, property monism has been gaining the upper hand and Cartesian dualism and its allies have come under severe attack – as the present chapter aims to show.

The dualistic view of human subjectivity, that the Subject can remain himself/herself “without having any body at all” is no longer popular among modern philosophers. However, Descartes’ view that was negatively intended to cast animals as merely “complicated machines” has been taken up and given a dusting up — and with some success — by physicalist philosophers of mind, in collaboration with the neuroscientists, to give us our modern-day conception of the mind as not only physical, but also existing on a continuum with the rest of the body and the natural world. Indeed, modern theories of the mind have jettisoned Cartesian dualism in earnest and have joined forces with the neurosciences to solve the ancient mind-body dichotomy puzzle, thereby paving the way for the study of consciousness in material or physical terms. This new approach has positive implications for the transcendence of the Self/Other dichotomy in identity construction. What this physicalism suggests is that consciousness has an embodied nature and whatever we regard as the mind part of consciousness is just as physical as anything else out there. As such, the grounds with which to counter Thomas Nagel’s musings on the non-reducibility of consciousness, as captured in the first epigraph to this

chapter, were actually being laid by his own contemporaries whose ideas I now build on to construct just such a model of possible reduction.²¹

Jaegwon Kim (2000), another of Nagel's contemporaries, gives a systematic historical outline of the physicalist tradition of the philosophy of mind. Kim traces the contemporary view of the mind as a physical entity to two pioneer theorists, Herbert Feigl in 1958 and J.J.C. Smart in 1959. Their theorising happened at a time when philosophy seemed to have reached a dead end as a viable discipline, paralysed by the centuries-old mind-body dichotomy debate. These two theorists early saw the need to align the study of the mind with the neurosciences to make some headway on the mind-body dichotomy debate. The result, as Kim notes, is a view of the mental as physical, yet distinctive. To assert firmly the view of the physicality of the mind, among other matters, Kim explores and dismisses the various dualist perspectives that have underpinned the debate so far, such as functionalism, anomalous monism, supervenience, realization, epiphenomenalism and emergentism which, though important, for reasons of space I will not discuss in this study.

But it is John Searle who has made it his lifetime project to reduce the mind and consciousness to the physical. In his book entitled *Rediscovery of the Mind*, Searle, like Kenny above, states the objective of his philosophising as follows:

Our contemporary worldview began to develop in the seventeenth century, and its development is continuing right through the late twentieth century. Historically, one of the keys to this development was the exclusion of consciousness from the subject matter of science by Descartes, Galileo, and others in the seventeenth century. On the Cartesian view, the natural sciences proper excluded "mind," *res cogitans*, and concerned themselves only with "matter," *res extensa*. The separation between mind and matter was a useful heuristic tool that facilitated a great deal of the progress that took place in the sciences. However, the separation is philosophically confused, and by the twentieth century it had become a massive obstacle to a scientific understanding of the place of consciousness within the natural world. One of the main aims of this book is to try to remove that obstacle, to bring consciousness

²¹ That we have to turn to the neurosciences in support of so-called "metaphysical" considerations of the constitution of the mind is no aberration on the part of modern philosophy. It simply needs recalling that philosophy did in fact start out as natural science. All the pre-Socratics were philosophers of nature. After Socrates, Aristotle is well known for having combined both philosophy and natural science. It is quite possible that Aristotle would have found fairly strange the division of his works into physics and metaphysics (or meta-ta-phuska in Greek), a division carried out only after his death by Andronicus of Rhodes (see Mwaipaya, 2005). Indeed, the reason metaphysics may have been scorned during Kant's time may be precisely because it is a misnomer, a Platonic shibboleth. Since the seventeenth century, all talk of *beyond or above* the physical has been viewed with deep suspicion — this is not to suggest that there is no such entities "beyond the physical" but that such, if existing, cannot be a subject of philosophical or scientific inquiry. In my view, whatever has traditionally been called metaphysics, after Andronicus introduced the term, should simply go by the name of cosmology or ontology and, although retaining its speculative quality, it should be analysed in its ontologically and physically demonstrable form.

back into the subject matter of science as a biological [physical] phenomenon like any other. To do that, we need to answer the dualistic objections of contemporary Cartesians. (1992: 85)²²

In the rest of the book Searle explores a decidedly physical link between the mind and the body by placing humans on the same continuum with nature, with the mind being subject to the same ontological pressures as the body. He notes that: “Consciousness, in short, is a biological feature of human and certain animal brains. It is caused by neurobiological processes and is as much a part of the natural biological order as any other biological features such as photosynthesis, digestion, or mitosis” (1992: 89-90).²³

Admittedly, the suggestion that concepts could be physical may at first sound like a trivialisation of consciousness, but it is one that gains cogency when we consider that it would be inconsistent for physicalists to posit a physical mind and then attribute to it a non-physical (disembodied) consciousness. Even as early as this I would contend that, on a physicalist understanding of the mind, the mental process of “abstraction”, conceptualisation or apprehension would therefore be viewed more as one of mediated “extraction” and subsequent “condensation” of physical *representations*, rather than as one of etherification. Abstraction becomes viewed as a physical process, yielding us physical concepts. According to this view, therefore, we can say that even what has been traditionally thought of as the reification fallacy (that says ideas cannot be treated as if they are physical entities) is not a fallacy in the first place. So, the concept, though a mediated representation of a physical entity, is itself physical and comes into being, in mediated form, only after the encounter between the body as substrate and the brute or un-ignorable existence of the encountered entity that occasioned its formation, and which it *points to* or *represents* or *is about* (intentionally), within a network of other concepts. The *form* of the concept is not from the entity, hence the notion of the content as a mediated mental *representation*. But on a physicalist understanding, the *form* itself is physical because the mind is physical and thought itself is a physical phenomenon.²⁴

²² I need to mention as early as this point that this view of conceptuality does not biologize consciousness; rather it physicalises it. That is, concepts should not be viewed as biological entities in genetic terms, but as physical entities/states and this is made clearer in the sections that follow.

²³ A point of correction and a word of caution, again: The correction is that Searle makes the mistake of limiting consciousness to the brain; my understanding, following Coetzee, is that consciousness suffuses the whole body. The caution is that “biological” in the physicalist tradition of philosophy of mind should be understood to refer to the mind in *physicalist* rather than *genetic* terms.

²⁴ For example, concepts primarily dependent on sight use the medium of light reflected off an individual Other, in a particular way, at specific angles and wavelengths, etc. in formulating their content of colour, for instance, which, as we know, does not subsist in the object but is only an effect of the wavelengths of light. Those concepts primarily dependent on touch/feel likewise use physical contact, texture, etc. all of

A further angle to a physicalist view of concepts and conceptuality is the possibility of one mind having an effect on other minds as found in materialist theorising on telepathy, telekinesis or any such phenomena that are claimed to occur across minds. Paul Churchland notes in this regard that:

The materialist can already suggest a possible mechanism for telepathy, for example. On his view thinking is an electrical activity within the brain. But according to electromagnetic theory, such changing motions of electric charges must produce electromagnetic waves radiating at the speed of light in all directions, waves that will contain information about the electrical activity that produced them. Such waves can subsequently have effects on the electrical activity of other brains, that is, on their thinking. Call this radio transmitter/receiver “theory of telepathy”. (1988: 17)

The musings on telepathy and telekinesis in Churchland’s text above are, of course, natural consequences of our understanding of the mind as physical. This is an interesting trajectory to explore in its own right although in the study of intersubjectivity in this dissertation I will limit myself to more humble phenomena of subjectivity than the contentious and complicated ones of telepathy or telekinesis. What I would observe, though, is that proven telepathy, especially, often happens between Subjects who have previously encountered each other and this perhaps also proves true the view about intentionality. However, an experience such as the one we call *déjà-vu* would point towards a source deeper than telepathy; it points to the plenum nature of being as advocated for by quantum physics.²⁵

which are representations, embodied representations, of whatever it is that is being conceptualised. Overall, however, each and every concept is formed and determined in a framework by all the senses and the intuition working in concert. A concept once formed, itself becomes part of the “form” for subsequent concepts. To reiterate the point: there is no one-on-one correspondence between the Subject and the external existents since what the Subject gains from coming into contact with these external existents are mediated representations of them. Nevertheless, the Subject becomes both indebted to, and coterminous and co-extensive with, those existents.

²⁵ While my approach to subjectivity is in accord with the conception of the universe as a plenum, as posited by a theorist such as Freya Mathews (1991: 54) in *The Ecological Self*, it departs from that position in that the plenum is to be understood as a compact wave of self-sufficient particles in the sense of Leibnizian monads, as Mathews seems to suggest. However, the idea that particles are indivisible, as posited by Quantum Mechanics, and as illustrated in the same text, would hugely benefit the theory in this study in the sense that, even though experience is mediated through the sense organs and the mind through the intuition, the material aspects of that experience nevertheless remain indivisible between those in the Subject and those outside him/her and therefore link that Subject with all of experience throughout the plenum like a wave. Every conscious node in the plenum would then be like a centrifugal and centripetal whirlpool at once attracting parts of other particles to itself as much as it too gets attracted to them and remaining “inseparably”, although mediatedly, connected to them.

Much as Searle (1992: 93-95) subscribes to the physicality of the mind, he notes that its special feature of consciousness (its perspectival nature) is difficult to account for in physicalist terms. This perspectival feature is subjective and because of this the problem that arises is that the third personal reduction of subjectivity remains elusive and is deemed impossible. Such a view of the mind has led to the resurgence of neo-Cartesianism among some modern philosophers of mind. For instance, while Jaegwon Kim, Anthony Kenny and others acknowledge that the mind is entirely physical, a theorist such as Thomas Nagel does not. In an essay titled "Panpsychism," Nagel (1979: 181-195) contends that if the mind is physical then all physical matter must be inherently mind-like, or it would be inconsistent that matter which produces consciousness in the mind is itself devoid of consciousness when it exists outside the mind. Such need not be the case, however. Those who argue for the physicality of mind emphasise that it is the configuration of matter in the body (or what in this study I call an "embodied consciousness") rather than matter itself that leads to the emergence of consciousness. This is a debate which has not yet been put to rest, but it is not of much consequence to the study at hand, because what I am really concerned about is the view that the mind is physical irrespective of whether individual matter comprising it is mind-like in its own right or becomes mind-like only from its specific and peculiar configuration in a living body.

Furthermore, Nagel and Searle share an important common ground: their view of the supposed irreducibility of the mental to the physical. It is a common ground that puts Searle's theorising in jeopardy, I think, because it renders his system internally inconsistent — although it is an inconsistency that can be cleared. Nagel argues that consciousness just is; it cannot be reduced to anything else, not even with the help of the neurosciences. Of course, talk of reduction in general, and specifically of reducing concepts to their substrates, has its own problems because such a reduction can be attempted only on an individual, subjective level, not from an "objective" third personal angle. The difficulty arises largely because of *qualia*, that is, "the sense of what it is like to be in a certain state" popularised by Nagel's (1979) question "what is it like to be a bat?". And since this is a subject that Nagel takes so much to heart and on account of which others (including, more recently, J.M. Coetzee, 1999) have accused him of perpetuating a kind of neo-Cartesianism, a closer treatment of the subject is called for. Some middle

ground will have to be established between the warring factions in the philosophy of mind in this regard, a task to which I now turn.

One of Nagel's antagonists is Jaegwon Kim (1994) to whom I have referred before. The latter seeks to reduce the operations and contents of the mind to its substrates. Kim is aware of the traps laid in the path of someone who tries to reduce anything to what could be said to be its constituent parts and makes specific reference to Nagel's objections in this regard. He opens chapter four of *Mind in a Physical World* with the following familiar complaint:

Expressions like "reduction", "reductionism," "reductionist theory," and "reductionist explanation" have become pejoratives not only in philosophy, on both sides of the Atlantic, but also in the general intellectual culture of today. They have become common epithets thrown at one's critical targets to tarnish them with intellectual naiveté and backwardness. To call someone a "reductionist," in high culture press, if not in serious philosophy, goes beyond mere criticism or expression of doctrinal disagreement; it is to put a person down, to heap scorn on him and his work. We used to read about "bourgeois reductionism" in left-wing press; we now regularly encounter charges of "biological reductionism," "sociological reductionism," "economic reductionism," and the like, in the writings about culture, race, gender, and social class. If you want to be politically correct in philosophical matters, you would not dare come anywhere near reductionism, nor a reductionist. It is interesting to note that philosophers who are engaged in what clearly seem like reductionist projects would not call themselves reductionists or advertise their work as reductionist programs. (1994: 187)

This is an interesting observation in support of "reductionist" programs, not least because it demystifies, but also redeems academic work, which, for the most part, being intellectual, is misdiagnosed as an abstract or ethereal activity. However, what I mean by reduction in this study is highly qualified and this will become clearer as the study progresses. For now it suffices for me to point out that, as I have already noted, the process of abstraction is itself physical, and hence physically reducible (in its irreducibility) to a greater extent. Now, as I have noted above, Nagel (1979) regards as impossible the reduction of the mental to the physical on "panpsychical" grounds arguing that if the mind were physical, its component parts must also be physical and that since such a physical mind would be composed of matter, matter in general, or some types of matter, are inherently mind-like even when they occur outside of the mind, that is, before they come to compose it. He contends that:

The demand for an account of how mental states necessarily appear in physical organisms cannot be satisfied by the discovery of uniform correlations between mental states and physical brain states, though that is how psycho-physical laws have traditionally been conceived. Instead, intrinsic properties of the components must be discovered from which

the mental properties of the system follow necessarily. This may be unattainable, but if mental phenomena have a causal explanation such properties must exist, and they will not be physical. (see Nagel, 1979: 187)

The problem with Nagel's demands is that he wants the physical properties believed to constitute the mental to be *intrinsically* mental or mind-like, if mental properties are to be reduced to the physical. But the question one might put to Nagel is: why should the individual components of the mind necessarily be intrinsically conscious and not achieve such states due to, and upon, their configuration in the embodied mind? To give a simple example to illustrate the point: hydrogen and oxygen molecules, for instance, are not intrinsically water separately; they become water only after they are configured in a certain way. Why should similar principles not apply to the matter that constitutes consciousness? Take note that the same hydrogen molecules, life-giving when combined with oxygen, can actually become a life-destroying explosive if configured in another way. As I have noted above, and I reiterate the point, whatever the case, whether particles are inherently mental-like, or they acquire the mental only when in the body, is immaterial to the debate at hand which holds that, in either case, we are dealing with a fundamentally physical phenomenon.

Kim, on the other hand, has difficulties imagining how it would be possible to reduce *qualia* to any physical substrate and opines that they are the only feature of mentality that perhaps could be said to be irreducible. I beg to differ. Since all concepts without exception are multiply realized, a *quale* can be likened to giant wave hovering over a huge body of water spreading in all directions. *Qualia* could be said to be the overall impression or conception of a present state of mind and therefore physical. Earlier I have noted how Grant Hamilton (2005), following the Stoics, talks of the body in its substrates and dispositions. A *quale* involves the totality of one's conceptual configuration of both conscious and unconscious concepts and of the resultant experience. It is precisely the sheer magnitude of any given *quale*, owing to the multiple realizability of concepts, which makes it difficult to reduce *qualia*, difficult but not impossible. An experience of the sublime, for instance, rather than being regarded as totally outside of conceptuality, could be conceived of as an attribute of the complex phenomenon of *qualia*. And when you add to this the fact that the mind itself, through the faculty of the imagination, creates its own concepts out of already formed concepts, one ends up with a hugely complex phenomenon.

While there can be no fully third personal reduction of the physical mental processes (which, as Other, are ultimately indeed irreducible), there can still be a partial subjective reduction thereof which would take into account even *qualia*. But there is a catch and it is this: freezing conceptual experience in a single huge synchronicity is not humanly possible (except perhaps after one is dead) because experience is always in a state of flux; even a movement backwards such as occurs in an act of remembering is in fact a diachronic movement forwards. It would take a Herculean mental effort to summon all one's conscious and unconscious concepts, establish all their possible networks, and then reduce them to their respective substrates.

The point here is that, while theoretically, the mind and its contents are reducible, it would take the death of the Subject, or an omniscient or God-like consciousness, that can, miraculously, freeze experience in a single huge synchronicity to be able to achieve this. In human terms, then, this proposed reduction remains only a possibility. In fact, on a subjective level, psychologists in general, and psychoanalysts in particular, have made it their business to help patients reduce present mental states to their physical event origins to get to the possible roots of a psychosis — such as the argument the psychologists give to Eugene Dawn in *Dusklands*, that his treatment “ought to start at [his] beginnings far in the past and work up gradually towards the present” (51). But even these attempts only scratch the surface of the gargantuan task that would have to be involved for a successful unravelling of consciousness to happen.

Nagel's contentions about the non-reducibility of consciousness make a lot of sense and, indeed, in agreement with him, a third-person reduction of *qualia* is virtually impossible. What needs pointing out, though, is that it is difficult totally to reduce not the physical mind or brain to its physical constituents, rather the difficulty lies in reducing the *contents* of the mind, especially, to their physical constituents in any “objective” sense (from a third person point of view that is). Even if one combined knowledge of the physical workings of a mind with the subjective sense of what it is like to be in such and such a state, not even a first-person reduction of one's mind would be possible. This impossibility is because by the time one tries to move backwards in the process of reducing a concept to its physical substrates what one now knows will have an impact on what one knew at an earlier stage, thus colouring the concept so much so that it becomes

a totally new experience or new concept altogether and acquiring a new *qualie*, too, in the process — the famous perpetual flux of reality as posited by Heraclitus.

Furthermore, and this is important, owing to the first-personal or perspectival nature of the process of concept formation, a concept once formed cannot be reduced to its constituting components; the concept gets caught up in the perpetual Heraclitean flux. The concept can exist only in synchronic time; it cannot be stretched across diachronic time and remain the same. There is only a *present* for a concept, but no sooner is that *present* settled than the concept's *becoming* sets in. Trying to go back to a previously formed concept is in fact moving forward in a new diachrony even if the activity has the illusion of moving backwards, and this movement creates new synchronies altogether — it is that kind of reconfiguration of old matter that in fact results into new concepts.

In other words, by the time you come back to a concept, it has mutated, like Proteus, and become a “different” concept not reducible to its earlier form. This is the case because the process of going back (revisionism) involves a certain ontologically unavoidable colouring or what is technically called *qualia* (represented by the questions “what is it like to be such and such?” or what is it it to be such and such? that respectively raise the question about the difference between what is called type identity and token identity). This colouring is on account of the new knowledge and perspective that you bring to the bygone event that occasioned the concept initially. Every concept is a specific, individuated concept only *at this very moment*, to use Derrida's view of a clotural reading (see Simon Critchley, 2007: 88-97). A specific concept obtains only *at this very moment*, and once you have moved on there is no coming back to it. This explains the difficulties attendant on the attempts at ontological or even causal reducibility of concepts as discussed above. In the essay “At the Gate” in *Elizabeth Costello*, Coetzee (2003) puts this aspect of consciousness to good use when he has Costello revise her confession to the panel and be able to justify the revision on the grounds that she is at once the same and different person every passing moment.

However, a specific concept, for it to be “recognized” at all during later forays, or indeed for it to maintain its individuality within the conceptual network, must necessarily retain certain of its broad outlines. This may be so except that, these outlines, are subject to constant “ontological” pressure from the other concepts within whose conceptual

networks each concept stands. But this is no disadvantage; it is the catalyst of “newness”. How so? When this pressure on specific parts of the network reaches a certain magnitude, either due to massive reconfiguration from within (through the processes of imagination and/or critical thinking), or due to external pressure on the conceptual network, such as from social upheaval, a kind of rupture occurs within that network and the old concept(s) transmute into “new” concept(s). It is through this process that inventions and shifts in mindsets are possible. The various momentous social or political changes can be attributed to these pressures on conceptual networks.

Furthermore, and this is very important, the originating circumstances of our concepts are already mediated and so “essential” or “ultimate” origins as such are an illusion; like a mirage, the ultimate origins of concepts always lie elsewhere, such that any talk of the ontological autochthony of concepts is excluded in advance. As such, in this study, when I talk about the origins of the content of consciousness, I am talking about “contingent” origins rather than “absolute” or “essential” origins. The problem of first-person and third person views of the mind that I have sketched in this section is important for an exploration of the possibility of Coetzee’s sympathetic/empathetic imagination which I discuss at a later stage as it touches on what, in the philosophy of mind, is called the problem of “other minds”. The question is: is it possible for two consciousnesses to be intersubjective? If so, in what sense? An examination of the phenomenon called intentionality might prove useful in answering these questions.

Intentionality of Concepts: Consciousness and the External World.

As I have hinted at above, the phenomenon of intentionality is crucial to my analysis of the ontological and ethical implications of some of the characters in Coetzee’s novels. Coetzee persists in featuring characters who, at various points, become aware, both introspectively and extrospectively, of “seeing” themselves in the Others and of “seeing” the Others in themselves as Joseph Galtung (1996: 46) would put it. The intentionality of concepts especially makes it possible to have such ontological co-extensiveness in our ordinary states of consciousness. But, what is intentionality in a philosophical sense? John Searle (2004) defines intentionality as follows:

“Intentionality” is a technical term used by philosophers to refer to that capacity of the mind by which mental states refer to, or are about, or are of objects and states of affairs in the world other than themselves. So, for example, if I have a belief it must be a belief that something is the case. If I have a desire, it must be a desire to do something or that something should happen. (2004: 112)

Searle is baffled by the “problem” of how it is possible for concepts to be “about” or to “refer to” existents outside the mind when they are supposedly securely “inside” the mind:

The problem of intentionality is second only to the problem of consciousness as supposedly difficult, perhaps impossibly difficult, problem in the philosophy of mind. Indeed, the problem of intentionality is something of a mirror image of the problem of consciousness. Just as it is supposed to be extremely difficult to fathom how mere bits of matter inside the skull could be conscious, or could, through their interactions, create consciousness, so it is difficult to imagine how mere bits of matter inside the skull could “refer” to” or be about something in the world beyond themselves, or could, through their interactions, create such reference.... [W]hat is it about the thought [about the sun being 93million light years away] that enables it to reach as far as the sun? Do I send mental rays all the way to the sun, just as the sun sends light rays all the way to the earth? *Unless there is some sort of connection between me and the sun, it is hard to imagine how my thoughts can be about the sun.* (2004: 112, emphasis original)

It is quite surprising that Searle does not see that, of course, there is a connection between him and the sun. If there were no such connection he would not have a conception of the sun in the first instance. What follows is an explanation of how I think intentionality is possible at all. Intentionality is possible because, even though the conscious Subject may not pay heed to his or her unconscious connection to the sources of the contents of his or her consciousness (either out of volitional or ignorant ingratitude), as per the demands of ontology, a Subject’s consciousness unconsciously always acknowledges this indebtedness. Intentionality is basically a function either of consciousness’s ongoing present interchange with the Other or, in the absence of a present Other, of memory. Consciousness “realises” that it does not produce the content of its concepts out of its own resources; it acquires them through perceptions or sensations from specific external existents in specific conceptual networks comprising difference and similarity, etc. As such unconsciously we know that we must always refer to these external existents for the validation of our own holistic being. It is this unconscious and unavoidable acknowledgement of ontological indebtedness that explains the phenomenon of intentionality.²⁶ So, when we say that the Subject constructs her or his reality, it should not be understood to mean that the Subject does so *sui generis* and *ex nihilo*, that is, exclusively out of his or her own internal resources without reference to the world external to it. Indeed, it is this interaction between the mind and

²⁶ Phenomena such as memory/reminiscing, nostalgia, etc. could be said to be precipitated by a subject’s deeply felt need to connect with the generating materials and circumstances of its concepts; it is a form of a Subject’s acknowledging his or her ontological indebtedness to those materials and circumstances that have come to constitute a part of the self. In the section on ethics I will also note how this unconscious acknowledgement by the mind, makes the unconscious pre-eminently and fundamentally ethical.

its external reality that enables the former to construct concepts at all. But this is an interaction and indebtedness that is lost on the so-called autonomous Subject. The autonomous Subject deludes himself or herself into supposing that he or she constructs his or her concepts exclusively *a priori*, out of the mind's own resources, and which he or she then imposes, or seeks to impose, on the external world.

The intentionality being referred to in this study is not occasioned by the subject; it is not the same thing as "to intend" (as in wanting to impose your will on the Other or the land, etc.). Rather, intentionality as meant here is to do with consciousness being "about something". Intentionality is a function of the nature of the interaction between the embodied mind and the contents of consciousness, these latter being derived from existents outside consciousness and consciousness in turn being "directed towards" or "being about" them. Such directedness or aboutness arises from consciousness being ontologically indebted to the external sources of its content. Intentionality, therefore, should not be understood in the ordinary sense of a subject projecting its own self onto existents outside of itself; rather it is about the subject, by virtue of being conscious of existents external to itself, being ontologically indebted to those existents as sources of the content of his or her consciousness. In short, this is not the intentionality of mastery of the Other but, rather, of being indebted to the Other. In this connection, while for a Subject *to know* (and knowledge in general) is traditionally viewed as violence against and mastery of the Other, in this study knowledge of the Other does not result into a mastery of the Other, but instead it is to become indebted to that which the Subject comes to know. It is for this reason that the irruptions of the Other into the Self referred to by Derek Attridge above result into a taking hostage of the Self by the Other and not its mastery. This nature of consciousness becomes clearer as the study progresses.

The way in which Coetzee (1999b) engages with the Nagelian position in *The Lives of Animals* will be crucial towards assessing his sense of the possibility of Self-Other transcendence. My view is that, in some way, Nagel needs to make allowance for the claims of the neurosciences if his position is to be plausible. For example, advances in the neurosciences have rendered the solipsist's position, which he seems to champion, untenable.²⁷ Since it is possible to reduce mental states to their physical substrates, a

²⁷ Solipsism, defined by John Searle (2004: 13-14) as "The view that I am the only person who has mental states", rejects the possibility of the existence of minds other than one's own. As such, it would be quite in order for a solipsist to come up to one, for instance, and say: "I am a solipsist, you don't exist". But would

partial third-person inference of the existence of another's consciousness is possible. Also, it is precisely because the Subject cannot construct his or her consciousness *sui generis* and *ex nihilo*, but must draw his or her content from the "objective" world outside her or him, that it is possible for such a Subject to infer consciousness in Others who present themselves as sensate beings as herself or himself. All conduct towards the Other Subject revolves around the embodied Self-Other Subject juggling between considerations of the subjective token-identity and the "objective" type-identities. Above all, as I explain in the section on ethics, the embodied Self-Other Subject will conduct itself towards an Other equally embodied Subject depending on what the former conceives to be the nature of its ontological indebtedness to that particular Other. An assessment of this indebtedness is crucial in the determination of the Subject's ethical conduct towards her or his Others.²⁸

An Embodied, Post-Cartesian Ontology of "Self-Other Subjectivity"

As I have noted above, subjectivity is characterised by consciousness and consciousness operates through the medium of concepts. These concepts, on the Kantian model, have both *form* and *content*. *Form* is innate to the mind part of consciousness, while the *content* is derived from sources external to the mind through a vast and intricate network of sense organs (*Critique of Pure Reason* 1929: 41). I need to note at this early stage, though, that my appeal to Kant is a guarded one. Like the Cartesian certainty of the primacy of the disembodied mind, Kant's metaphysics is foundationalist in nature since for him the innate transcendental concept — a product of pure reason in the form of an *a priori* category — *corresponds* to the intuited material in the external world.²⁹ My only debt to him is his positing of the mind's innate *ability* to conceptualise, although the products of this ability do not have to correspond to anything in the actual world *a priori* — it is simply an

she or he annul another's existence simply by means of that statement? Yes and no. If we reject the physicality of the mind, the solipsist can get away with any claim she or he chooses to make about herself or himself or about others or about the universe. But if we take into account the physicality of the mind and of consciousness, the solipsist's position stands no such chance of success; it simply becomes untenable because it can be assumed that there is a mutual impingement on any two entities whether they be deemed to possess consciousness or not — in Coetzee's *Dusklands* (1974), Jacobus Coetzee learns this lesson too well.

²⁸ Nagelian ethics takes into account the possibility of altruism. However, for Nagel (1970) the basis for altruism lies in one's realisation that one is just an individual among fellow individuals (see *The Possibility of Altruism*). This is certainly not a compelling enough explanation for some of the acts of bravery that characterise altruistic conduct. What compounds the problem is that in that text Nagel adopts an intrinsic kind of ethics. Yet a realisation that one is just an individual among individuals is clearly not intrinsic.

²⁹ The intuition in Kant is similar to his aesthetic judgement which, as a faculty, is both the source and centre for appraisal, of art and serves as the meeting point between pure reason (speculative) and practical reason (in its "brute", raw, sense).

innate ability (an active and shaping ability at that) and the only other attribute I can vouch for it, as per the postulates of my theory, is its physical nature. To reiterate the point, I do not subscribe to Kant's transcendental, innate concepts in the form of categories and so there is no correspondence between the Subject's innate ability or conditions of possibility that are involved in concept formation and the concepts formed. In other words, the Subject, through the process of concept-formation does not negate the otherness of the Other (representation or mediatedness already presupposes dealing in otherness); instead, it affirms that otherness, but not as radical exteriority, rather as the Other-in-the-Subject and hence views itself as a Self-Other Subject.

As I have observed, on the Kantian model, the mind provides only the *form* of concepts; the *content* of concepts is received from the external world in the form of intuitions which are experiential. The specific intuition gains its material through the various sense organs of the body which then serve as the first port of call of experience and the first point of mediation in the intuition, long before the mind actually constructs and collates these experiences and applies the *form* to them, a process which results into consciousness. It would be plausible to say that the various sense loci, in conjunction with the external entity, event or happening, constitute the interface where the mind constructs a specific experience, an intuition and eventually a concept of that experience. Consequently, my study further posits that while the ultimate processing unit of consciousness is the brain (alternatively called the mind and physical), consciousness is not localised in or restricted to the brain; consciousness is the body in its totality — a position which is quite in accord with Coetzee's full-bodied, anti-Cartesian ontology, or what D.H. Lawrence, speaking of his conception of "embodied" thought, described as "Man in his wholeness wholly attending" (see Michael Bell, 2006: 185).³⁰

On the Kantian view, and on the view of more recent epistemologists, such as Ayn Rand (1990a) and Christopher Peacocke (1992), all our knowledge is generated and held in the form of concepts. As I have hinted at above, our consciousness is understood to be constituted by concepts. And the process of concept formation and the concepts thus

³⁰ It needs reiterating, in this regard, that the conception of intersubjectivity comes about first and foremost due to the ontological indebtedness of consciousness to the sources of its content. But, more than this, intersubjectivity is also due to the phenomenon of "intentionality", a phenomenon which is at once both centrifugal and centripetal in its manifestation and operation. Intentionality ensures that consciousness is not just within the individual Subject's body. Rather, in an embodied process of reciprocal impinging on each other, each Subject's embodied consciousness surges/bodies forth to the Other as much as the Other also surges/bodies forth to the Subject.

formed play a vital role in the construction of our identity. At the most basic, if we grant — as I have done — that the mind is physical, it follows that concepts must be physical too. To posit a physical mind and then attribute to it non-physical concepts would be falling into a Cartesian trap, which, it must be admitted, is a deeply ingrained cast of mind. The sources of this trap lie largely in Platonic Idealism (a rather mystical theory of ideas) as well as a Cartesian desire for self-aggrandizement in thinking that we produce consciousness *ex nihilo*; that we can impose “ourselves” on Others whom we owe nothing ontologically.³¹

Language and Embodied Intersubjectivity

The question of language and subjectivity is, as I have noted, very central to Coetzee’s work and it is only proper that I discuss it in the context of the theory that I am constructing for a study of his works. Indeed, the relationship between concepts, language and consciousness is an important one to our understanding of Coetzee’s gesturing toward the pre-verbal, or beyond the verbal, in his conception of an embodied consciousness — such as the one he attributes to the dog in pain and the bird with the broken wing to which I referred earlier. Human beings come to possess the

³¹ I also need to note with Ayn Rand (1990a and b) and Christopher Peacocke (1992) that concepts are malleable, open-ended integers, extremely protean, open to reconfiguration and expansion; they are not localised in the bodily consciousness and this is due to the phenomenon of intentionality. As these theorists observe, concepts are formed by the Subject picking out similarities and differences among phenomena which are then crystallised accordingly, not into fixed, but open-ended and non-reducible networks. Rand (1990a: 99ff), especially, notes the malleability and open-endedness of concepts. In fact Rand’s theory of concepts is the most sustained I have ever come across in my readings on the subject. The major shortfall of her theory is that it attempts to be objective or realistic in the Aristotelian sense, which is not surprising because she was an avid admirer of Aristotelian philosophy and one can see this across her oeuvre, including in her Objectivist Aesthetics which resonates with Aristotle’s views of art that we find in the latter’s *Poetics*. Further, I also need to note with the physicalists such as Searle (2002) that concepts have a specific *quale* for a specific moment — the “what is it like” feel of Thomas Nagel. A concept is characterised by what I would call “conditions of possibility” which lie at the core of the faculty we call “imagination” (later I will subdivide this into the sympathetic and empathetic imagination, but the principles of their operations are basically the same). As I have just noted above, any concept is open-ended and malleable. A physical concept once formed gains unusual malleability in direct relation to space, especially, because it then has the whole reach of known present space (which is of enormous proportions already as it is) for its further actualisation or realisation. For any concept formed only “the sky becomes the limit”. For instance, if the concept of a curve has been formed from specific circumstances, in the projection of a possible curve the subject has the whole of present space (the known universe in its totality) in which to actualise it hence stretching the reach of that concept beyond the limited space in which the concept was initially formed. But, be that as it may, such a concept will still have to make reference to the outlines of its originating circumstances (however contingent they may be) for its own validation. A concept in the Subject’s mind has a two-fold sense of existence: its material derives from specific networks of reality to which it must make reference for its validation but, through the powers of imagination, it can also go beyond that reality by way of being projected onto all the known space available to the Subject at any material time, hence the illusion of concepts being non-physical. Not that the concept can be stretched like a band of rubber or heated metal. Rather the Subject will, by employing volition, imaginatively take into account all known or possible existents similar to whatever concept s/he has managed to come up with.

consciousness they have largely through language. But the relationship between words and concepts is a convoluted one. According to the postulates of my study, words and concepts are not one and the same thing. Philosophy clearly distinguishes between the two for, while a word is a unit of signification, a concept, according to philosophical epistemology, is an idea or a mental picture of a group or class of objects, formed by combining all their aspects; not only in their differences but also their similarities.³² Concepts exist anterior to the words employed to express them, even if words may point us to concepts. Concepts are representations of brute reality and words are representations of concepts. Take note, in this regard, that language acquisition is contextual; words are not acquired in a vacuum but are grasped only in relation to the existents they point towards which gives them both their semantic and pragmatic import.³³ Now, if concepts are representations of brute reality as encountered by a Subject, implying mediation (constructs), the words that arise to represent this encountered reality are, therefore, representations of representations (constructs of constructs), hence doubly or multiply removed from the brute reality of which the concepts are its “primary” representations. This should explain the refracting and, hence, largely alienating quality of language in relation to brute reality.

³² Coetzee clearly shares this view that there is a difference between words and concepts but he also insists on their possible relatedness. Answering a question put to him by David Attwell (1992: 59) on his existentialism Attwell asks: “Although the existential . . . dimension is clearly ruled by the linguistic, the former is still there as a ghostly possibility. In other words, the field of affect is by no means eclipsed or neutralised by the field of language?”. Coetzee (1992: 63) gives the following telling answer to this assessment: “An awareness, as you put pen to paper, that you are setting in train a certain play of signifiers with their own ghostly history of past interplay. Did Defoe have this kind of awareness? Did Hardy? One likes to think that they didn’t, that they had, so to speak, an easier time of it. But even if they did have this awareness, surely they couldn’t have found it hard to put it behind them, to isolate it in another compartment of the mind, while they attended to the serious business of Moll and the Constable, or Jude and Arabella. So perhaps you are right to call it simply a matter of culture, or cultures, that allowed them to get on with the job and we don’t. Hence the pathos — in a humdrum sense of the word — of our position: like children shut in the playroom, the room of textual play, looking wistfully through the bars at the enticing world of the grownups, one that we have been instructed to think of as the mere phantasmal world of *realism* but we stubbornly can’t help thinking of as the *real*”. Coetzee (1992: 63) goes on to speculate that rather than a mere shift in linguistic conception it is rather a shift in culture that has brought about this split between language and the world of things and so goes on to wonder: “Is the longing that what acts upon us should at least be ‘substantial’ part of that same wistfulness, that pathos? Do today’s children share with us that wistfulness, or are they happy in the playroom?”

³³ Bill Ashcroft (2001: 140-157) cites Giambattista Vico’s theory of the levels of refraction that can be detected in the relationship between language and reality, and how these levels of refraction reflect the various levels of social development attained by a society. He discusses the four tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche and irony as, on a progression, representing the relationship between levels of linguistic expression and social development. While this delineation may be useful to our understanding of the inter-determining, yet contingent and representational relationship between words and their referents, especially as it anchors language firmly in the environment from our interaction with which it springs, it risks grouping societies on a chimerical evolutionary scale. It would be safe to assume that all four tropes can still be found in all languages and that each mode is as “originary” as the other.

What I need to point out, though, is that, while I will discuss issues of language at various points in this study, their discussion adds or removes nothing from the conception of subjectivity that I am exploring in this study because, following Coetzee, the subjectivity I explore intimates at the kind one could find at the level of concepts, rather than that of words. What is important is that, ontologically speaking, from the physicalist point of view, the content part of concepts, on the Kantian model, provides a “coextensive link” between the Self and the Other. This link is not a merely contiguous link, but a coterminous one even if it is, of course, a mediated one. In effect, this understanding of co-extensiveness presents the process of concept formation or cognition (and indeed of subjectivity), as one of mediatedly abstracting aspects of the Other (in their embodiedness) by the Self, thereby proving that the content part of the Self’s subjectivity is partly constituted by material from its Others. In the philosophy of mind, this grasping of concepts is referred to as the process of *apprehension* (see Churchland, 1988: 73-75).

A word of caution though: the process of apprehension should not be confused with one of mere *assimilation* in which the Self subsumes the Other into itself by situating that Other into its a priori categories, or as simply a return to itself without taking into account the otherness or excess of the Other. Rather than appropriate the Other (which would imply control and mastery), apprehension results into the Self becoming ontologically indebted to that which it apprehends. There can be no _conscious Self without interaction or contact with the Other; such a Self, if possible at all, would be in the form of a zombie, a non-self. And what is most important in the ontology I am developing in this study is the argument that, according to J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* (77), whatever one can conceptualise (embodied conceptuality), one is constituted by it, it is a constitutive part of one’s consciousness and therefore of one’s Self. Also, on the physicalist view of the mind, any concept can, theoretically, if not hypothetically speaking, be “reduced” to its constituent parts thus rendering the contents of the mind coextensive with their sources, via intentionality. The “superstructure” that is consciousness has *contents* that are coextensive with their sources in the “base” domain of the external world even if their *form* may be innate to the mind. Therefore, we can confidently say the Self is both *in* the world and *of* the world.³⁴

³⁴ At face value, the consciousness adumbrated above may appear “appropriative” or “assimilative”, but it is not given that the embodied concepts are only representations, embodied representations, of the Subject’s Others with those Others retaining their Otherness in their own right, leaving the Self indebted to the Other. For such a Coetzeean Subject, absolute control of Others, and even of herself/himself, is out of the question because the Subject herself/himself comprehends herself/himself only as a representation

From the embodied epistemological considerations in the framework developed in this study, I can say, following Kant especially, that, ontologically, the appearances or representations are the link between the Self and the Other and, indirectly, also with the other-in-himself/herself/itself from whom the appearances as intuited representations necessarily issue, that is, the otherness of the Other which remains unknown. The question is: is it possible for there to be a radical (that is, absolute) gap between appearances and the things that are represented by those appearances? Can appearances be totally unconnected to that which they derive from? Surely, even the shadow on the wall of Plato's cave will reflect some aspects of the object of which it is a shadow. A spherical object, for instance, will not, unless another medium intervenes — which intervention would then act as an explanation of the change so effected — cast a rectangular shadow on the wall. This aspect, in addition to constituting the content part of the Subject's consciousness, in itself provides a link, even if tenuous (because mediated), between the Subject and that from which the appearances emanate. Though a constructivist to the core, Kant (1929: 27) himself admits the existence of this link through his acknowledgement of the existence of "objective" or "brute" reality, although he bemoans the fact that we cannot know such objective reality-in-itself. He notes that without objective reality there would be no appearances or else "we should be landed in the absurd conclusion that there can be appearances without anything that appears".

The admission by Kant above has at least two important consequences: firstly, the argument that there cannot be appearances without anything that appears gives pride of place to the existence of objective reality in its own right, independent of any constituting Subject. The second consequence is that we derive our material knowledge from appearances which represent something, even if we cannot and, indeed, need not, apprehend that something-in-itself, it being the preserve of the Other, its irreducible otherness. These points are cogent enough to dismiss the possibility of the autonomous Subject and lay the foundations instead for the possibility of the overcoming of the

of herself/himself since she or he comes to know herself/himself in a mediated way (this because the content part of his or her consciousness is arrived at mediately). The subject-in-himself/herself remains a *noumenon*. It follows also that the concept of self-knowledge is a *noumenon* and not a substantive one. Of course there is a difference with Cartesian or phenomenology's certitude about self-consciousness here. For Hegelian phenomenology, for instance, the Subject is the *noumenon* in the sense that he or she knows himself or herself immediately or transparently, self-consciousness being both the knower and the known (see Rauch and Sherman, 1999). On my model, though, self-consciousness remains the *noumenon* in the sense that, for the reasons already explained above, it cannot know itself-in-itself.

schism between a Self and its Others while preserving as “sacrosanct” the otherness of our Others both objectives which Coetzee seeks to achieve in his works.

The above set up renders the link between the mind and the appearances that constitute the content of its concepts organically co-extensive, as I have pointed out, not just by way of being contiguous but by being coterminous and “inter-subjective”, while remaining individuated and subjective, because mediated. Of course, these appearances which constitute the content of concepts are mediated through the Self, that is, from the Self’s point of view, from its embodied cognitive apparatus. But, that said, without these appearances the Self would not know the Other at all and also not know itself, that is, it would not be a conscious Self in the first instance. To the extent that the Self is involved in an embodied epistemological or cognitive relation with any Other, that Other (even if it is only at the level of the appearances) to the same extent, becomes an integral part of the Self. And, reciprocally, the same situation obtains for the Other Subject. The Self, then, is not alienated from the Other nor is the Other from the Self. The Self is “the Self-in-and-with-the-Other” and the Other is the “Other-in-and-with-the-Self”. This is the case for both because the *content* of their consciousness is constituted by material from each other which renders each dependent on the other for the source of the content of its consciousness, and thereby interdependent rather than autonomous.

Furthermore, as I note at the beginning of this chapter, since one Subject has no control over how the other Subject will configure aspects of him or her in his or her consciousness, this results into a further loss of autonomy considering that the second Subject can only relate to the first Subject based on this configuration which is prone to distancing, misrepresentation and miscognition and this explains why the otherness of the Other should always be taken into account in one Subject’s relationship with an Other Subject.³⁵ This conception of mutual ontological indebtedness and implication is

³⁵ I need to note at this point, rather broadly and parenthetically, that, among other things, the process of othering (which implies the conscious or unconscious rejection of intersubjectivity) involves at least two phenomena which can be deployed jointly or separately, and these phenomena are “distancing/elision” and “misrepresentation”. Distancing works by the Subject conceiving himself or herself as autonomous and separate from the Other against whom he or she must continually compete and/or elide altogether. Misrepresentation, akin to Homi Bhabha’s stereotype, involves the Subject (or group of Subjects) who, without bothering to respect the otherness of the Other, deliberately misreads that Other and proceeds to relate with that Other based on this misreading. Ultimately, this misreading leads to miscognition of the Other. Put in colonial and gender terms, because of the misreading of the external differences that mark off one group of people from another (skin colour and other features in the one case, and sexual organs and also other features, in the other case), one group, based on this spurious configuration of the radically different Other, thinks it valid to colonise or discriminate against that group.

what constitutes intersubjectivity in an embodied ontology. All these factors taken into account, overall, therefore, we can say that Coetzee's intersubjective Subject is perpetually a composite being and could more properly be designated by a compound ontological term of the "embodied Self-Other Subject". All the relevant notions of intersubjectivity (such as those we find in the *Ubuntu* philosophy and other kindred or cognate philosophies) and those of hybridity, liminality or the rhizomic (such as those of Homi Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, Stewart Hall, Kwame Anthony Appiah and others) converge here and, through my study, they are given their possible onto-rational basis.

However, we should always bear in mind that the fact of mediation preserves the otherness of both the Self and the Other which needs to always be taken into account.³⁶ It needs noting, too, that Coetzee's new Subject, with an embodied consciousness, is clearly not of the same order as the dominating/controlling rationality of the Enlightenment, in large measure dependent upon and indebted as she or he is to that with which she or he interacts, and therefore also limited by it and it too by this new Subject in a mutuality of impingement and "intersubjectivity". As I have pointed out elsewhere, with regard to intentionality as understood in this study, there is mutuality here and not the cognitive violence of ratiocinative consciousness. This mutual indebtedness is made possible through the phenomenon of intentionality as already discussed, that is, the "aboutness" or "directedness" of concepts and hence of consciousness.

The Dynamics of the "Unconscious", "Consciousness of" and at least two kinds of states of "Self-Consciousness"

³⁶ This becoming part of the Self has nothing to do with the Other becoming like the Self by way of mimicry. It is about the Self's psycho-epistemological processes of cognition which constitute not simply the Self's conception of its being or becoming, but its consciousness, its very ontology.

In view of the above, without necessarily totalising concepts or consciousness, it needs noting that impressionable and uncritical thinkers (and I have been uncritical before, and perhaps, sometimes still am) tend to have skewed or chimerical ontologies where they have concepts without having bothered about taking care of the conditions of possession and individuation of those concepts, or the pragmatics of the concepts. They have no personal grasp of the concepts behind the words and how the concepts relate to the external world and so end up with a false or inauthentic consciousness because they uncritically assimilate other people's values — other people's hegemonic or herd values as happens in mimicry or political propaganda. So, what they end up having are cobbled up simulacra of concepts or spurious concepts — the very stuff of chimeras and monstrosities. The uncritical adoption or production of concepts cannot fail to produce all manner of illusions including those about one's very being and how one stands in relation to others. Here occurrences such as discrimination against, and oppression of, one's Others are unavoidable; they follow naturally from the very nature of the misshapen ontology that one has fallen prey to.

A possible solution to the delusion suffered by the so-called autonomous Subject could be said to lie in unveiling the difference between a state of “consciousness of” and at least two types of states of “self-consciousness”. The difference between the three states forms the most important causative factor in the difference of subjectivity between a Subject who conceives of himself or herself as being apart from (and often against) the Other Subject, and a Subject who conceives of herself or himself as being intersubjectively related and ontologically indebted to the Other Subject. It is to an examination of these states that I now turn.

It seems to me that, in some ways, psychology’s positing of the two levels of the operations of the mind, namely, the unconscious and conscious levels, is very instructive in making possible the occurrence of the illusion of separation between the Self and its Other in which the conscious mind may be quite unaware of its own unconscious processes (which sometimes subvert the conscious processes). These unconscious processes include consciousness’s unavoidable link with and indebtedness to the Other in its overall constitution that is the focus in my study.³⁷ But, in what sense would this division between the unconscious and conscious processes make it possible to explain how the illusion of the Self’s radical alienation from the Other could be said to operate? Because I am looking at the conscious Subject, I will start with the state of “consciousness of” and then move on to at least two states of “self-consciousness” before coming to the role of “the unconscious” in the whole set up. This is the most speculative part of my theory but it necessarily arises from, and hinges largely on, the phenomenon of intentionality as adumbrated above which is reflected in almost all accounts of Coetzee’s characters’ supposedly “inexplicable” transforming encounters with their Others.

³⁷ The unconscious has an ambiguous existence among human beings. Its ambiguity shows in that, while it is a very real phenomenon, its processes are undermined by the fact that, since humans have volition, hence agency, an appeal to the activities of unconscious processes as an explanation or excuse for particular conduct (except in those clinically certified to be psychotic) is deemed inexcusable. The prevalent view of the unconscious is largely negative since it is regarded as pre-ethical and amoral; constituted by untamed drives. Yet that is also the level where consciousness springs from. In this regard, Sam Durrant (2003) has observed that, for Lacan, the status of the unconscious is ethical in the sense that it alerts one to one’s responsibilities although usually only after one’s failure to act ethically and prevent an unpleasant situation from occurring in the first place. An analysis of the unconscious such as the one above alerts us to the point which I make in this study that, while it is at the unconscious level that consciousness operates, it is to inter-subjective self-consciousness that we have to appeal as a window on, and a return to, this unconscious. In such a state we have a self-consciousness that tries to be in tune with its unconscious and to be reconciled with it. I am talking here of that self-consciousness which has given due recognition to the inter-subjective ontological operations of its unconscious.

“Consciousness of”, as such, is a state possessed by virtually any sentient being. A state of “consciousness of” could be seen as one of the herd mentality which manifests in the “inauthentic” or “false consciousness”. It is a state of the conventional (manifested in willed ignorance or mere conventional blindness). This state of “consciousness of” is perhaps the most prevalent among conscious beings. It is a state of illusion (which humans share with other animals) and its illusory nature depends on the supposition that what a being is “conscious of” is wholly exterior and ontologically unconnected to that being. In such a state, a particular being views itself as being *apart from* and, because of the inevitable competition for resources in the struggle for survival, it also views itself as *against* every other being. Whatever “alliances of the similar” in the struggle for survival that can be entered into at this level are characterised by these two notions of “apartness from” and “opposition to” all those dissimilar, in some respect or other, to the herd — this is the herd mentality that Mrs Curren in Coetzee’s *Age of Iron* calls a herd of sheep bleating “I” “I” “I”! (1990: 80). It is a mentality that obtains on the black side as well, exemplified in Mr Thabane, Bheki and their largely blind “comradeship” (1990: 150).

However, the alliance of the herd itself is as fragile as the surface bonds of similarity of the externals that it is based on. Egoistic self-interest, individualism and communism might all thrive here but there certainly is no individuation at all. Fundamentally, in this state people conceive of themselves only as part of the group and of their being as indistinguishable from that of the collective — even when they are self-interested individualists, the “I” “I” “I”. And it is the solely and purely animalistic need for survival that lies behind this search for exterior similarities. It is easy to see why keeping humans apart, as was the case in Apartheid or other forms of segregationist policies, makes it easier for the groups subjected to such apartness on both sides to turn violently on each other because they have only a shallow and vacuous contact with one another and so are forced to exist at the level of mere “consciousness of” when relating with others.

This state of “consciousness of” is what one could call an “extrospective consciousness”. It is only the really perceptive on both sides who can achieve a liberating form of “self-consciousness” (which is both extrospective and introspective) where the other group is concerned because, whatever other similarities that obtain among human beings, they remain external and, therefore, superficial. In reality, because of the intentionality of consciousness and each individual’s positionality or situatedness in the formation and

building of consciousness, no two people, even if they belong to the same “gender” or “race” or “ethnic group”, are the same. As such, if we have to look for the grounds for ontological bonds between any two or more people we have to look further afield beyond gender, race, or ethnicity, in such sources as the nature of the ontology of consciousness itself, both in its extrospective and introspective states.³⁸

In this regard, it does not seem to be the case at all that the so-called “natural man” or Rousseau’s “Noble savage” (an epithet that includes, women, animals, the colonised Other) automatically and self-consciously recognises and acknowledges his or her intersubjectivity with the Other (such as land, nature, animals and fellow human beings, etc), as is often supposed in colonial and some phenomenological assumptions of the primordial or autochthonous Other.³⁹ Arguably such recognition and acknowledgement cannot conceivably take place at the level of “consciousness of” or mere extrospective consciousness (be it among the supposed pre-modern or the modern/post-modern individual), but at the level of “intersubjective self-consciousness” which is both extrospective and introspective. In a state of nature, individuals, afflicted by untamed impulses and drives of various kinds, are more likely to operate in ways akin to what Thomas Hobbes in *The Leviathan* calls a state of “a war of all against all”.⁴⁰ Indeed, while intersubjectivity takes place all the time at the unconscious level, the “typical” conscious being, by being conscious, initially conceives of herself or himself as existing at the level of a state of “consciousness of” or of “extrospective consciousness” in relation to his or her Others — the Hegelian struggle for independence from and mastery over, the environment that culminates into a Master and a Slave being exemplar. The moment intimations of recognition and acknowledgement of intersubjectivity begin to manifest in

³⁸ In this regard, in his essay titled “The Democratic Chorus and the Individual Choice” Lionel Abrahams arrives at precisely a similar conclusion that I posit here about authentic (because properly individuated) and in-authentic (because it is merely a herd self) subjectivities. For Abrahams (1995: 25), what proves our intersubjectivity is language and its manifestation in art. In this study, while including language as an aspect of consciousness, following J.M. Coetzee, I extend the exploration of this intersubjectivity to sources even outside language, in the body itself and its intentional, embodied consciousness.

³⁹ Maria Boletsi (2007) explores how the notion of “the noble savage” came about following Rousseau’s extolling the virtues of naturalness found among illiterate societies as opposed to the bastardised one of the tyranny of literacy. This point was later taken up by Levi-Strauss and others suggesting that the oral is superior to the written.

⁴⁰ Coetzee (2007: 3-5), in his usual revolt against huge systems that tend to turn individuals into cogs, questions the Hobbesian justification for the emergence of states, arguing whether humans would not be better off in their state of nature. This is a curious proposal if you consider the complexity of human life today, especially. Of course, more decentralised and less exclusive states would be a great idea to counter the coercive and instrumentalisation of political systems that reduce all of us into mere statistical data; into cogs.

an individual, we are no longer dealing with a conscious being in a purely natural state of “consciousness of” but with a being in a state beyond that stage.

While intersubjectivity is what really obtains at the unconscious levels of being, it awaits recognition and acknowledgement for it to have a meaningful impact on the conduct of the Subject at the conscious level. Since this conscious awareness could be said to take place at the level of “intersubjective self-consciousness”, a state of “intersubjective self-consciousness” is thus one of return to or a rediscovery of one’s own unconscious processes — this is where the unconscious comes in. It is ignorance of this unconscious intersubjectivity that leads to the “cancerous schizophrenia” that lies at the root of all forms of discrimination against the Other, and hence against the Self as Mrs Curren comes to describe it in *Age of Iron*.⁴¹

The movement from a state of “consciousness of” to one of “intersubjective self-consciousness” does not come cheaply, though; often it involves a sufficiently deeply personal or collective curiosity or, as is often the case, crisis (in the latter case, a crisis that exposes the inadequacy of one’s once-upon-a-time herd or laissez-faire mentality, as Coetzee exemplifies, among others, in the characters of the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Elizabeth Curren in *Age of Iron* and David Lurie in *Disgrace*, for example), or through exposure to formal training in the traditional school system (such as established rites of passage ceremonies and or other such traditional fora), and-or through academic disciplines.⁴²

⁴¹ That animals experience the unconscious link between themselves and their Others, or that, by being conscious, they are also in a state of “consciousness of”, is not open to doubt. But that they can readily reach any significant level of understanding the nature of a mediated “self-consciousness” and understand a return to their unconscious processes as analysed above, is a question that I leave open. Their general conduct to date does not seem to bear proof of such a capability, but that does not entitle us to discriminate against them. I would be the last person to introduce new arbitrary criteria for whom to admit into the ethical community and whom to exclude from it. In fact, this inability to achieve significant levels of self-consciousness is not limited to animals; at any given time there are us humans who, due to age constraints or lack of self-analysis even in their adult lives, remain at the level of mere “consciousness of”, a level at which the Self is conceived of as apart from and, consequently, against the Other. I discuss these issues more fully in my analysis of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

⁴² Some people may see in this division of people into those who exist at the level of “consciousness of” and those who exist at the level of either of the two types of “self-consciousness” another way of discriminating *against* some types of people. That is not the point. The point is not one of discriminating *against* but discriminating *between* different types of people based on their conception of their own subjectivity and, how an employment of volition (judiciously, injudiciously or otherwise) in relation to that conception, influences their actual conduct towards Others. Due to the deeply divided past from which we come, it is very tempting to espouse a sense of equality that seeks to gloss over differences of any sort among individual people, an attitude that takes us back to the same premises upon which the initial divisions were founded in the first place, the premise that said “*they* are all the same”. Equality does not mean sameness; different individuals are simply that: different, and it is acknowledgement of this

In a state of “self-consciousness” the Subject (whatever his or her race, sex, language) turns in upon himself or herself as a field of focus in the process of what could be termed a state of “thinking that one thinks” (see Rosenthal, 1993). At this stage the Subject begins to define herself or himself in his or her own right (as opposed to merely defining oneself as part — and wholly at the mercy — of the herd) in his or her individuated relation to other Subjects. But even in this state at least two trajectories can be discerned, one supposedly autonomous and illusory (because solipsistic, such as the one arrived at by Descartes) and the other intersubjective and more realistic, being both extrospective and introspective. In the former case, self-consciousness becomes a tool for megalomaniacal self-aggrandisement; it is in fact still a state of “consciousness of” but, through self-deception and sleight of hand, passes itself off for a state of genuine “self-consciousness”. In this state of false “self-consciousness”, the contents of consciousness are inexplicably conceived of as being somehow innate, *a priori* and *sui generis*. Possessed by an autonomous Subject (in essence, a disembodied mind), who, being opposed to everything else that is not mind in the struggle for survival that must necessarily ensue, fulfils her or his own fantasies of the Nietzschean unbridled will to power.⁴³

difference, as well as of our intersubjectivity with each other, that leads, ultimately, to respect for each and every individual. One redeeming factor about the formulation in my study is that it identifies at least three types of consciousnesses rather than just two thereby avoiding binaric and Manichean traps. Further to this, pointing out of differences does not have to lead to judgement of who is “good” and who is “evil” — I would want to make it “value-free”, my only interest being in demonstrating the ontological difference between individuals, which is a fact of life. For instance, the racist and the non-racist are equal as human beings but they cannot be said to have the same ontological conception of themselves and are, therefore, equal but different. While theory arises from observable conditions, it also speculates and that being its nature there can be no certitude and therefore no judgement hence the value-free approach I want to espouse in this study. For instance, it seems to me that Coetzee’s (1992) early sense of ethnic marginality as related in an autobiographical sketch in his concluding interview with David Attwell, and later amplified upon in both his fictionalised memoirs *Boyhood* (1997) and *Youth* (2002), constituted his initial sense of an “ontological crisis” and this went a long way towards questioning the false security and the tempting illusion of belonging to a herd and so prevented in him the development of a secure binaric conception of his ethnic ontological imperatives.

⁴³ In J.M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands*, the character Jacobus Coetzee is an example of such a consciousness that exercises an unbridled will to power. In the same vein, in the section on ethics, I will point out how, in the states of “consciousness of” and that of an illusory “self-consciousness”, what philanthropic humans consider to be ethical virtues such as duty, altruism, sympathy, compassion, etc. are externalised; the “benevolent” autonomous Subject performs them *on* and *for* the Other who is regarded as being wholly exterior to itself. Above all, they are mistakenly regarded as acts of “selflessness”. As for the not so benevolent “autonomous” Subject, such a Subject either keeps to her or his “autonomous” self or, more likely, because she or he conceives of herself or himself as being in competition with her or his exteriorised Others, she or he will try to maintain her or his integrity and fulfilment often by “throwing her or his weight around” as a way of her or his conception of self-actualisation, for self-actualisation is what any Subject constantly aspires to. But in a state of intersubjective “self-consciousness” the Subject recognises and acknowledges her or his ontological indebtedness to the Other, such that the said virtues are, first and foremost, a form of ontological self-validation and ontological debt repayment.

In a state of “intersubjective self-consciousness”, it dawns upon the individual Subject that the contents of his or her consciousness, which s/he was previously mistakenly conscious of as innate to her/his consciousness, could not have been innate after all; that his or her consciousness is both extrospective and introspective; that aspects of what such a subject previously conceived of as existing wholly external to her or his consciousness are also within that very Subject herself/himself even if only as embodied representations. Following this realisation, however, a major problem arises, namely how to conceive of what the Subject is “self-conscious of” within herself or himself in relation to its sources outside the Subject. Here we also find differences of approach with some approaches being liberating while others being imprisoning, unwittingly so, as they manifest the risk of the very Cartesian imperialism that they seek to avoid. A mediated conception of embodiedness represents the liberating form of self-consciousness while intimations of unmediated embodiedness as those posited by certain strains of Phenomenology represent the imprisoning form of self-consciousness. In mediated embodiedness, concepts, the building blocks of consciousness, are conceived of as “representations”, not narrowly as disembodied mental representations, and restricted to an equally disembodied mind, but as suffusion, an embodied suffusion that also bodies forth and, together with the phenomenon of intentionality, creates a centrifugal and centripetal exchange of being between subjects with consciousness as well as between those deemed to be without consciousness. It is this mutuality that accounts for the sympathetic and empathetic imagination around which Coetzeean ethics revolves in his writings, to a discussion of which I now turn.

But this ethics should not be deemed to be a deterministic and restrictive one, conceiving of the Subject as an ontological debtor on a leash of ontological indebtedness. Through the faculty of the imagination, and Coetzee’s broaching of a “cruciform logic” (*Doubling*, 337), my model makes room for acts of generosity and selflessness, respectively. Generosity and selflessness begin at the point where the Subject conducts herself or himself towards her or his Others in a manner that exceeds her or his own estimate of indebtedness to those particular Others or a situation in which he or she willingly forgoes to demand what he or she is ontologically owed by his or her Others. Generosity shows imagination on the part of such a Subject who is generous; it is an act of “self-fullness” rather than “selflessness”. Selflessness, on the other hand, can only be claimed by a Subject who is owed by another Subject but chooses not to insist on being “paid” his or her ontological due and this is what Coetzee regards as the ultimate form of ethics which finds expression in a cruciform logic. Ultimately, both generosity and selflessness point to volition on the part of the Subject engaged in them. What this means is that, while the Subject’s autonomy is not absolute, through the powers of volition, there is a measure of autonomy that can be exercised.

The Sympathetic and Empathetic Imagination

The following formulation is very crucial if we are to lend credence (even if a little bit qualified) to Elizabeth Costello's saying that there are no bounds to the sympathetic and empathetic imaginations, and, in a sense, it forms the centrepiece of the whole theory that guides my study. Also with this section, having laid down all the groundwork that I needed, I can also now address Thomas Nagel's positing of a radical gap between any two consciousnesses, and especially that between consciousnesses across the "species boundary" as he calls it in his [in]famous essay. The observation is that it is from the embodiedness and the centrifugal and centripetal bodying forth of consciousness that we can deduce the operations of both the "sympathetic imagination" and the "empathetic imagination". Through his character Elizabeth Costello, J.M. Coetzee (2003: 96) posits that, contra Nagelian disembodied imagination, these kinds of imaginative acts are "a matter . . . not of inhabiting another mind but of inhabiting another body". How is this possible? To validate this contention we have to go back to the nature of an embodied consciousness that I have just sketched so far.

In the sympathetic imagination, the Subject who sympathises achieves this because, by being implicated with the Other as part of that Other's consciousness (which constitutes the second loss of autonomy), he or she recognises an embodied disposition in the Other subject that he also knows exists in himself and, given that he is just as embodied as the Other, by coming to imagine the Other's embodied disposition, he or she experiences it *with the Other in him*. And so, for instance, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, we have the Magistrate sympathise with the tortured victims, most notably, the barbarian girl whom he finds himself responsible for. He can also anticipate what the waterbuck would go through if he goes ahead to shoot it. In *Disgrace*, David Lurie comes to experience similar dispositions in relation to his Others, including animals.

In the empathetic imagination, on the other hand, because the Subject knows that aspects of the Other are a part of himself or herself, and that he or she is ontologically indebted to that Other (which constitutes the first loss of autonomy), he or she can then imagine experiencing the disposition of the Other *in the place of that Other*, in the Other's ontology, and so be in the Other's shoes, as it were. And so we have Coetzee, in *Elizabeth Costello*, posit this as the highest form of "intersubjectivity", of "our ability to think ourselves into the being of another" (80), when he urges for us to walk flank to flank

with the beast to the slaughter, or to imagine ourselves as the Jews in the cattle trucks (79).

However, there are certain limits imposed that prevent an absolute congruence of disposition, and these limits arise from the very process of apprehension, from its very mediatedness. A realisation is reached that what is represented is not only a mediated state of being, but that there must also be something over and above the representation, or it would not be a representation in the first place. A representation is *related to* but is also *different from* what it represents. This leads to both maintenance of individual subjectivity (but a subjectivity that arises partly from, and in conjunction with, the Other) as well as being mindful of the “over and above” of what is represented. This “over and above” is what constitutes the privileged otherness of the Other, what constitutes the Other’s irreducible uniqueness. So, through representation, there are ontological limits, and these limits are necessary for the maintenance of the subjectivity of both the Self and the Other.⁴⁴

In terms of subjectivity, at this stage we have a conception of consciousness as an embodied interpenetration of introspective and extrospective processes in which a realisation is reached by the Subject that s/he is inescapably interdependent with and indebted to entities outside herself/himself, which partly constitute her/his being, and to which s/he must constantly refer for the validation of the contents of its consciousness. Accompanying this latter conception is an assumption that one’s being also impinges on other beings and, in a special way, on beings the Subject deems to possess consciousness. On this assumption rests the Subject’s ontological need for recognition by other Subjects. As I discuss more fully shortly, the fulfilment of this need leads to the Subject’s sense of validation but its un-fulfilment leads to the Subject’s sense of ontological self-doubt. The doubt is accompanied by resentment and feelings of being dishonoured and rejected, or being taken advantage of — because at the level of the unconscious the mutually intersubjective indebtedness can still be felt, even if it is not consciously acknowledged. A sense of disquiet then sets in which could turn violent as a way of

⁴⁴ Two possible scenarios have already been posited before in the history of ideas in which these limits were abolished. The first of these we find in Gottfried Leibniz who, after positing the monadic consciousness, proceeds to posit an overarching consciousness that subsumes all the monadic consciousnesses. The second of these was proposed by Baruch Spinoza who posited that being was One and that individuals were simply parts of that one huge Being. Both the Leibnizian overarching consciousness and the Spinozan Being have been associated with the being of God traditionally, and, more recently, with quantum physics, and so they may yet yield us something worthwhile — if modified.

eliciting some recognition of the other Subject as is their ontological right. Among those ostensibly rejected, this resentment and quest for recognition is directed outwards towards those who exclude them, but among the latter it is turned inwards and is manifested as shrinkage of being (a kind of zombification) resulting from the consciously unacknowledged indebtedness through their violation of the demands of intentionality as already discussed above. Coetzee demonstrates this phenomenon in various works and in various ways. The most direct presentation is in *Age of Iron* where he presents the shrinkage or stuntedness of being of the youth, both black and white (1998: 7).⁴⁵

It is quite plausible to deduce from the foregoing analysis that all forms of domination and discrimination that are engaged in by individuals who exhibit imperialist, racist, sexist or psychopathic conduct, or ecological degradation etc., stem from living at either the level of mere “consciousness of” or that of illusory self-consciousness, as manifested in autonomous subjectivity. And such states are breeding grounds of various forms of ontological “cancerous schizophrenia”, since at the unconscious level the Subject’s consciousness acknowledges her or his ontological indebtedness to the Other, but this is a fact that is not “self-consciously” affirmed at the conscious level, hence the malignant split.

Ethics of an Embodied, “Intersubjective”, Self-Other Subjectivity.⁴⁶

What kind of Ethics can we derive from the above Ontology-cum-Epistemology? From the preceding argumentation and demonstration, it should be clear that that the embodied Self-Other Subject be ethical towards its Others — whether that Other be a fellow human being, an animal, a tree or a stone — is not, at the barest minimum, a question of charity or generosity; rather it is a fundamental requirement of the embodied

⁴⁵ It is a commonly accepted observation that in a situation of oppression, at a deeper psychic level, the oppressor suffers as much as the oppressed. In *In The Heart of a Country*, Coetzee associates this rejection and oppression with the acute loneliness of those of the oppressor group who at some point are forced to reach out to the Other in ways that seem to be a reflection of the previous rejection asserting herself or himself with a vengeance. In *Age of Iron*, he seems to associate this phenomenon with incidences of physical and metaphorical cancer among the oppressor group. Indeed, especially in extreme cases of repression of this unconscious bond between the Self and one’s Others, the unconscious can force its way to the fore in unexpected and often very graphic ways, as if exacting a vengeance. It is at such times that the Subject who does not acknowledge her or his ontological indebtedness to the Other, hence rejecting a part of herself or himself in the process, for no apparent reason, awakens to a realisation of the unacknowledged and rejected bond, and may, as a result, act contrary to his or her previously avowed position.

⁴⁶ I need to note at the outset, by way of a disclaimer, that the ontological indebtedness that underpins the Self-Other ethics is fundamentally different from that posited by Nietzsche (1994) in *The Genealogy of Morals*.

Self-Other Subject's very ontology of its embodied and intersubjective consciousness.⁴⁷ On my model, being ethical towards the Other is a question of the embodied Self-Other Subject's validation of herself or himself and acknowledgement of his or her Others that are an integral part of his or her consciousness while taking into account their otherness. In short, the cornerstone of the embodied Self-Other ethics is an act of Self and Other-validation, through an acknowledgement of one's ontological indebtedness to one's Others and implication in their consciousness.

If it can be demonstrated that the embodied Self contains within it aspects of the Other, that alone could do more than all the sermonising about what ethical conduct ought to be. Talk of love, sympathy or empathy remains empty where the rationale for such phenomena is not provided. In fact most humans are very sceptical about the validity of the aforesaid phenomena due to their being prone to sleight of hand or fallacious application as in emotional arm-twisting, or in the appeal to pity (*argumentum ad misericordiam*).⁴⁸ In my theory I try to strip these phenomena of their ontological mystique and present them as they could be like and so save them from the appeal to pity or sentiments. Sentiments come in only depending on the value that the Subject attaches to the Other whose aspects have become an integral part of himself in the overall Self-Other subjectivity.

The Encounter

On the model in this theory, it is important to note that ontologically, the moment of the *encounter*, that is, the moment the embodied Subject gets into contact with the other embodied Self-Other Subject, is a defining moment. It is the moment when the Self is "taken prisoner" by the Other and there is no escape from the "prison-house" of the *encounter*. Even if the Self turns away at this very moment, it is too late, the "Fall" has

⁴⁷ As I have noted above, generosity starts from a point where the Self-Other knowingly reaches out to the other Self-Other more than she or he is indebted to that Self-Other and that is not always a positive step because in some cases it becomes a case of patronage. But the concept "charity" has such negative connotations that I prefer to avoid it and opt for the concept "generosity". When the Subject knowingly reaches out to the Other less than he or she owes the Other, it is called meanness and shows a defect in that Subject's conception of indebtedness.

⁴⁸ Kant's ethics of duty, especially his categorical imperative, coupled with his "kingdom of ends", points towards a Self-Other ethics but it does not provide a rationale that would bind one to apply them to oneself on clearly rational grounds. The appeal to duty, unless properly motivated or accounted for, can very easily lend itself to a charge of 'charity', where the other is not within the self but wholly exteriorised. If duty arises from one's acknowledgement of one's ontological indebtedness to the Other Subject it is appropriate. As I have noted above, unlike an attitude of generosity, an attitude of charity is not only patronising, it is also ontologically mistaken as it connotes an autonomous Subject performing a benevolent act *on* and *for* the Other. I prefer not to use it.

already happened, all talk of “before the Fall” becomes impossible and what has now become the Self-Other Subject can only try to deal with the after-effects of this “Fall”. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the Magistrate’s encounter with the waterbuck, which he is inexplicably prevented from killing, forms the decisive moment in his coming into an awareness of his intersubjectivity with his Others and it throws light on all his other encounters such as that with the barbarian girl, and the fisherfolk baby who sickens and dies in the “prison” yard and numerous others. In *Age of Iron* (1998), for instance, Mrs Curren is shown awakening to an encounter, initially, with the tramp Vercueil who squats in her alley, and, later, during her visit to the burning township, especially after seeing the battered, rain-soaked, corpse of Bheki, and she remarks: “Now my eyes are open and I can never close them again” (103).

Further to this, the *encounter* is not always wilful; often it has the nature of what Coetzee (1998: 137) in the same text (*Age of Iron*) terms a “cruciform logic”, that is, the logic of the cross or the crucifixion which “takes one where one does not want to go”. Johan Jacobs (2004) explores the kind of cruciform logic that Coetzee employs in his writings, but he approaches this matter from a style point of view of the figure of the chiasmus. But, ethically, and on the level of subject matter, too, what Coetzee (1992) himself says in *Doubling the Point*, in this connection, is plainer. Talking about the problems he has with direct political participation which can sometimes involve violence, though not a professing Christian, Coetzee nevertheless expounds a deep truth about Christianity and that is what he terms a “cruciform logic”:

I cannot but think if all of us imagined violence as violence against ourselves, perhaps we would have peace. Or to explain myself in another way: 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 interpretation, Freudian, Marxian, or whatever, that we can give to it. (*Doubling*, 337)

Coetzee again and again employs this cruciform logic, with its appeal to unmerited suffering, to break the various cycles of violent contestation that he stages in his novels.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ And here let me make what, it seems to me, is an important observation: although he wants to espouse a wholly human centred ethics, without reference to anything beyond it, Coetzee finds that that is possible only to a certain extent beyond which you reach a dead-end. This is because Coetzee and company are as much beneficiaries of, and fundamentally implicated in, Graeco-Roman heritage as the Judeo-Christian heritage, the latter which they downplay. For instance, take note that while J.M. Coetzee (1992: 250) may not be a practising Christian yet, when it comes to what would be regarded as a supreme ethical act, it is the Cruciform logic, a fundamentally Christian logic, that, ultimately, is paramount in his ethical system (*Doubling*, 337). While Coetzee appropriately disclaims being a herald of society, his view of an ethical society is not wholly human centred either. Coetzee (1992: 340) says the following about what he thinks

Also to be noted is the fact that any *encounter* involves unavoidable risk-taking for both the embodied Self and the Other. In the case of the Other who also possesses consciousness, for example, neither Subject knows beforehand what to expect. As part of the trauma attendant on the *encounter*, in some cases it takes personal or collective disgrace for the Self to awaken to a realisation of the presence of the Other in herself or himself, in her or his embodied Self-Other subjectivity, as a number of Coetzee's important characters come to realise.⁵⁰ In this regard, the encounter is like the fate of a newborn baby taking in the first air into its lungs which makes it cry, painful yet life-giving. Even in the best of circumstances, the process of the aspects of the Other becoming part of the Self involves some form of trauma, confusion and adjustment of varying magnitude, with the trauma worsening when the circumstances are not favourable. The unfavourable circumstances could be due to, among other things, the ignorance of one or both parties, of the fact that by virtue of their contact the two are psycho-epistemo-ontologically fated to become a part of each other in their respective overall integral ontological embodied Self-Other subjectivity. The ignorance could be due to existing in the state of "consciousness of" or an illusory state of autonomous "self-consciousness". The encounter (whether with another subject possessing a consciousness or one without a consciousness) is an unavoidable risk-taking and any

underpins an ethical society "I don't believe that any form of community can exist where people do not share the same sense of what is just and what is not just. To put it another way, community has its basis in an awareness and acceptance of a common justice. You use the word *faith*. Let me be more cautious and stay with *awareness*: awareness of an idea of justice, somewhere, that transcends laws and lawmaking. Such an awareness is not absent from our lives." Even Coetzee's (1992: 199) intellectual humility as expressed in his deference to Kafka as he acknowledges his debts to the latter is not just analogous to, but, in fact, fundamentally of Christian origin. It is reminiscent of and a direct allusion to and secularised position of John the Baptist's deference to Jesus whose sandals he says he is not fit to carry or whose thong he is not fit to loose (Matthew 3:11/Mark 1:7). Even Coetzee's sentience-based ethical stance towards animals in "The Lives of Animals", if stretched to its logical limits, would look very much like the eschatological view of paradisiacal life that we find in Isaiah 11:1-10 in which even the lion finally eats grass. I am not disappointed at discovering these parallels; rather, I am amused.

⁵⁰ It has been a well-known psychological phenomenon that a deep curiosity about one's self or crisis in one's life (the near-death experience, say) or integrity awakens one to a heightened apprehension of one's being. Indeed, self-consciousness does not come cheaply and, while everyone attains a state of "consciousness of" not everyone achieves a state of "self-consciousness". There is a difference between the two states as I have adumbrated in the section titled "consciousness of" and at least two states of "self-consciousness". As I have noted before, human children, for instance, cannot be said to have any meaningful sense of self-consciousness. At the other extreme, it is possible to trudge through one's whole life without achieving a state of self-consciousness. But as our discussion of apprehension above shows, self-consciousness involves the process of "thinking that one thinks". While animals obviously think, it is perhaps on the score of "thinking that one thinks" where they could be found wanting. But it is doubtful if many of us human beings always engage in the process of "thinking that one thinks" anyway, which makes our discrimination against animals arbitrary since the same standard could apply to a sizeable portion of us at any given time. As such, added to the fact that any form of discrimination is violence against one's own Self-Other subjectivity, we have no rational justification to discriminate against animals or nature.

Subject had better make the most of it because the coming into being of her or his very self-consciousness depends on it; without the encounter no Subject could awaken to consciousness, let alone self-consciousness; she or he would be nothing but a zombie.

Furthermore, what we need to take into account, and at a more intricate level that goes beyond the initial encounter, is that each concept (which is the form in which each Subject apprehends the other during the encounter) attains a value at the moment of or during the ongoing process of its formation. As part of its nature, each concept is supposed to be value-laden and the value itself — like the *quale* — is physical. It is this value-laden nature of concepts that underlies ethics. At the most basic, this assigning of value is unconditional and mandatory; it is the value assigned by virtue of the *encounter*. Simply by virtue of aspects of the Other becoming a part of the Self or aspects of the Self becoming part of the Other, the Other so encountered is accorded some kind of value by the Subject, being a part of the embodied Self's own constitution. This happens to the Subject *despite itself*, that is, despite its volitional preferences — as Elizabeth Curren discovers with respect to both Vercueil and John in the “cruciform logic” of Coetzee's *Age of Iron*. But this basic and unavoidable value is not all there is to a concept; further value, or a lack of it, is dependent, among other things, on the manner the concept was formed — including issues of disposition, amity or hostility, sense of wellbeing or discomfort, the immediate network or cluster of related concepts it belongs to, as well as its position and role in the overall network that constitutes the embodied Subject's consciousness. This value is not a fixed attribute. It so happens that, due to the constant flux of being, what may be regarded as of low value at one moment attains a more prominent status at another moment depending on the network of concepts that are in the ascendant position in the overall network, at that particular moment, and it is this constant flux that underlies personal or social change/ renewal.⁵¹

As must be clear by now, on my model, ethics is not only relational and reciprocal, but is possible only towards aspects of the Other that have become part of the embodied Self in the overall ontology of the embodied Self-Other Subject to which aspects such a subject then becomes indebted — given that it is the Other that provides the content of the Subject's concepts which in turn constitute the embodied Self-Other Subject's

⁵¹ According to Joshua Landy (2001) in the article “Les Moi en Moi: The Proustian Self in Philosophical Perspective”, Marcel Proust dramatises a similar phenomenon of the changing fortunes of what Proust regards as the various selves inhabiting the Self.

consciousness. This situation obtains even in the case where the Other is deemed not to possess consciousness itself (such as a tree, a stone, a river, lake or an ocean, etc.).⁵² In this latter case, the embodied Self-Other Subject who does not possess consciousness also contributes content to the embodied Self-Other Subject's ontology during the *encounter* and the Subject with consciousness will have to deal with that Other as a part of him/herself since even in this case he or she enters a relation of indebtedness with that Other in an embodied Self-Other intersubjectivity. What happens during the fateful moment of the *encounter* dictates this requirement.

On the other hand, that which one does not know (that is, the absolute or irreducible otherness of the Other, its *noumenon*) will have to be suspended — a guarded ethical agnosticism towards such otherness would be one of the ontologically possible positions to adopt considering that that otherness has not yet or may never, (and, indeed, in some cases, need not) become part of the Self-Other Subject in any recognisable way whatever. This ethical agnosticism is grounded in the fact that there is always something “over and above” what any embodied Self can know or apprehend about the Other Self — on top of the fact that the embodied Self knows the Other Subject through various forms of mediation and, therefore, only as representations of those Others and not the Others-in-themselves. In other words, there will always be something “other” about another Self, including those aspects that have been apprehended because apprehension is by mediation and its products are representations and not things-in-themselves.

If by *respect* for the otherness of the Other is meant holding the otherness of the Other in high regard just because of its otherness, then the Self is not obliged to *respect* the otherness of the Other. There is no point for the Self in trying to respect what she or he does not know about another as there is a danger that it may be in conflict with what the Self would have respect for. Rather the Self needs to take *the otherness* of the Other into account when dealing with that Other or when doing something that has to do with the Other. The Self has to, as far as possible, always leave room for “the benefit of doubt”, to be agnostic, by, in the case of the Other who is human, for example, making sure they ask that Other's opinion on matters directly relating to that particular Other. Rather than call it respect for *the otherness* of the Other, the approach in my study is putting an obligation on any Subject to take *the otherness* of the Other “into account”.

⁵² This theory is also intended for eco-critical and gender circles.

It is difficult to imagine, on the model that I propose in this study, now that the Self is in fact the embodied Self-Other Subject, if it is possible for the embodied Self to be unethical and discriminatory towards the Others in its embodied Self-Other subjectivity without suffering some injury to its own constitution. We could say that a possible reason people are not ethical towards their Others (in whatever mould these Others are conceived), and thereby being unethical towards themselves as Self-Other Subjects, is because they live under the illusion of the autonomy of the Self as expressed in the Cartesian autonomous subject, for instance, or the illusion of the Other as wholly exterior to themselves as in the state of mere “consciousness of”. And while most illusions are futile and dangerous, what makes this particular type of illusion most dangerous is that an artificial chasm is opened up at the level of the psycho-epistemological constitution of the deluded Self-Other. At that level the embodied Self-Other, unknown to itself, suffers as much harm as the Other between whom the artificial chasm is deemed to exist. Such a deluded Self-Other thrives on a form of ontological neglect due to a fundamental failure to acknowledge the sources of its psycho-epistemological (and hence ontological) *content* — and, consequently, such a Subject’s life tends to be vapid and shallowly lived. At the unconscious level, any embodied Subject or Self-Other carries within it an unacknowledged debt to the Other Subject whose aspects are right within its Self-Other subjectivity — even if only as a mediated representation — and which constitute the *content* part of his or her consciousness in his or her overall embodied Self-Other subjectivity.

Following from the above understanding of the constitution of the embodied Subject, ethics cannot be an imposition or a prescription: the embodied Self-Other Subject is his or her own ethical standard. Not that the embodied Self-Other Subject is beyond any ethics whatsoever or is “Beyond Good and Evil” in the Nietzschean sense — that would be going the illusory way of the autonomous subject. Rather, how any embodied Self-Other Subject will conduct himself/herself towards another embodied Self-Other Subject will be guided by how s/he would conduct herself/himself towards herself/himself while respecting the otherness of the other, being the embodied Self-Other Subject that s/he is. The embodied Self-Other Subject must identify her/his own “golden mean” in her/his ethical conduct towards other embodied Self-Other Subjects. Coetzee’s (1988b) spirited and famous refusal to subject his writing to the supposed

demands of history (which constitutes an external imposition and prescription) is an illustration of just this self-referential demand of Self-Other subjectivity and ethics. Also, answering David Attwell's question on what drives his writing, Coetzee (1992: 339-40) points to "something constitutional to [myself], what one might loosely call conscience" The embodied Self-Other Subject can be ethical to the other embodied Self-Other Subject only to the extent, and according to the place, that the other Self-Other Subject has been configured as part of a perpetually unifying Self-Other Subject's value system. And, as I have noted above, the Self-Other Subject's value system is first and foremost based on an acknowledgement of the other embodied Self-Other Subject's contribution to its own constitution of subjectivity. Beyond that basic acknowledgement, further value, or a lack of it, depends on what role the other Self-Other is deemed to be playing in the embodied Self-Other's subjectivity. The more value the Other is deemed to be adding to the Self-Other's subjectivity, the more closely will the Self-Other Subject identify with that Other — and the less likely s/he will be violent towards that Other. How the Other-Subject configures the first Subject also matters here and the first Subject will have to also look for signs of this configuration in its action towards the second Subject and this is a more difficult task because there is no unmediated access to the consciousness of another. As I have already hinted at elsewhere, one way to work this out is to develop something akin to a Bakhtinian dialogic imagination whereby "self-knowledge" is to be complimented by the knowledge Others have of the Subject.

While the embodied Self-Other Subject is her or his own ethical standard, it so happens that she or he really has no choice but to be ethical towards other embodied Self-Other Subjects. For the embodied Self-Other Subject, ethics is not charity, it is a matter of her or his own validation and that of Others, and the price of being unethical is high: the price is a kind of schizophrenia — a split Self-Other subjectivity, that is, the Self-Other Subject divided against its embodied Self-Other subjectivity. This makes sense of Patricia Waugh's (1992a: 121) contention that the Self cannot destroy the Other without at the same time doing violence to itself: "[t]he destruction of the other . . . cannot be accomplished without an accompanying effect of fragmentation of the self". In the same connection, in an essay titled "Africa Within Us", Douglass Livingstone (1976), paints an even more graphic picture of such Other and Self destruction for those who try to deny or get rid of the Other part of themselves, an assessment that fits in, almost literally, with Coetzee's *Age of Iron*:

A living body is of course subject to certain immutable laws. A body divided against itself, as someone I'm sure said, dies — as in various types of cancer for instance, where some cells, not content with their orderly dissimilarities yet underlying unity of purpose with the blokes over the road, differ yet again from their associates, and in trying to impose their ways on the others, destroy the whole world they occupy. Dying too in the process, of course: the inexorable final goal of which they are no doubt mindlessly aware while the heady process of Antigone-like resurrection ensues. (qtd. by Brown, 2002: 97)

Speaking in relation to human relations with animals, Coetzee hints at the possibility of the occurrence of such self death at the psychic level, precisely a level at which the actual operations of consciousness take place. He notes that “If you concede that the animal rights movement can never succeed in this primary goal [of stopping the killing of animals for meat or for sport], then it seems that the best we can achieve is to show to as many people as we can what the spiritual and psychic cost is of continuing to treat animals as we do, and thus perhaps to change their hearts.” http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/j/j_m_coetzee.html-15-04-2007. Here the point is that each time the embodied Self-Other Subject fails to acknowledge the Other in its own constitution of subjectivity it suffers a kind of “small death” or ontological stuntedness or deformity, in that area and if such rejection becomes a tendency the web of “small deaths” leads to an absolute ontological short-circuit as is the case with the misanthrope (such as a pre-meditated or serial murderer) or, more generally, the psychopath — which refers to the death of conscience, that ability to recognise oneself in the Other and the Other in oneself.

However, it is also conceivable that the embodied Self-Other Subject's rejection of a part of itself causes a crisis not only in the embodied Self-Other Subject that is rejecting a part of itself, but also in the rejected part as well; and to resolve this crisis the rejected part is forced to find its way back to where it believes it rightfully belongs. This assertion of belonging may explain the insurrections and revolts that sooner or later almost always break out anywhere discriminatory relations exist, be they interpersonal or inter-group. In this regard, Freya Mathews observes a similar phenomenon with respect to the unacknowledgement of the monster by Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*:

A world which rids itself of Frankenstein by simply banishing him or withdrawing its support will not be liberated from his power, for in these circumstances his spirit, repressed, will wax strong, and come to visit the world in many guises, even to dominate. The world which has tried to reject him will be shaken, unsure of itself, living in fear of a spectre it cannot now confront. The way to deal with Frankenstein is to convert him [assign him his

due place in one's Self-Other subjectivity], to enlist his support in creating a new vision
(1991: 49)

Ontologically speaking, the reason for this restlessness is not very difficult to speculate on; it can be traced to the problem of the un-ignorable existence of “Other minds” and that of intentionality. This is so because the only way any embodied Self-Other Subject can get affirmed is by getting signs of acknowledgement from the Other mind as it cannot “see” or experience herself/himself in the Other consciousness directly. The demand for acknowledgement arises from the reciprocal nature of the ontological facts of consciousness as a relation and, at a deeper level, indebtedness to the Other owing to the intentionality of consciousness. Over and above the ontological demands of the intentionality of consciousness, the need and demand to both acknowledge and be acknowledged by another embodied Self-Other Subject is rooted in the Subject's conception of her or his own integrity as an integral being, but most important of all, his or her conception of his or her awareness of his or her own uniqueness as a subject-in-himself or in-herself. From this awareness could be said to spring the accompanying notions of self-honour, self-worth, self-command, etc., those virtues that mark out a fully individuated embodied Self-Other from one who is only partially so because he or she lacks such awareness. Lack of such a mutual acknowledgement between Subjects unconsciously calls each embodied Self-Other Subject's integrity into question and it is an unsettling state for any embodied Self-Other Subject to be in.⁵³

But a similar restlessness may be observed in the Self-Other Subject whose approach is not acknowledged by the other Self-Other Subject who also has a consciousness. Martin Buber notes in this regard that:

⁵³ In the preface to *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison (1952) presents us with a character who is so unacknowledged by the people he sees around him that he develops a compulsive need to bump himself into these people to elicit some form of response from them, if only to assure himself that he indeed exists — and also somehow force them to acknowledge him. At another level, a lack of ontological recognition could also explain experiences such as loneliness and the widely registered experience is that, unacknowledged, you could feel lonely even when you are in a crowd of people, but, if acknowledged, you could be alone and yet not be lonely as depicted in F. Scott Fitzgerald's (1925) novel *The Great Gatsby*. In similar terms to mine, Charles Taylor (1989) discusses how respect and dignity (and, one might add, honour) operate among humans. He attributes these phenomena to “[O]ur awareness that we appear before others, that we stand in public space, and that this space is potentially one of respect or contempt, of pride or shame. Our style of movement expresses how we see ourselves as enjoying respect or lacking it, as commanding it or failing to do so. Some people flit through public space as though avoiding it, others rush through as though hoping to sidestep the issue of how they appear in it by the very serious purpose with which they transit through it; others again saunter through with assurance, savouring their moments within it; still others swagger, confident of how their presence marks it . . .” (1989: 15).

Whoever sees a whole being and must reject it is no longer in the dominion of hatred but in the human limitation of the capacity to say You. It does happen to men [sic] that a human being confronts them and they are unable to address him with the basic word that always involves an affirmation of the being one addresses and then they have to reject either the other person or themselves. When-entering-into-relationship comes to this barrier, it recognizes its own relativity which disappears only when this barrier is removed. (1970: 68)

At the barest minimum, the greeting and its return provide a forum for the satisfaction of the need for mutual acknowledgement by co-conscious Subjects as here put forward by Buber. In the fashion of the trope of “the Noble Savage” again, Buber (1970: 70) gives examples of greetings he thinks are ontologically more genuine than others such as the “I see you, I see you too” of the Zulus; or the native American variant “Smell me!” Note especially that in the latter case, it is actually the Self-Other Subject beseeching the other Self-Other Subject to acknowledge him/her — Eugene Dawn’s view of solipsist America’s incursion into Vietnam in *Dusklands* (1974), to a discussion of which I will turn shortly — is illustrative of this scenario.⁵⁴

This need for acknowledgement arises because, as I have noted above, while the Self-Other Subject may be convinced of its own existence, if this conviction is not validated, or borne out by an acknowledgement from “Other minds” that he or she comes across, and suspects to be equally conscious as himself (judging perhaps from the Other’s sense of awareness and conscious action), that conviction may be put into question, hence the ensuing restlessness. This should explain why the intersubjective Self-Other Subject will not only acknowledge its debt to the other Self-Other Subject by acknowledging that Other but will also expect some form of acknowledgement from the Other itself — thereby giving credence to a reciprocal psycho-ontological process and, following from it, a reciprocal embodied ethics.

What needs to be borne in mind, though, is that the Subject is not just in a relation of indebtedness to the other embodied Self-Other Subjects; the embodied Self-Other Subject is also ontologically owed by them. The embodied Self-Other Subject stands in a relation of both responsibilities towards, and rights from, the other embodied Self-Other Subjects. Since I have observed that both the notions of the “autonomous subject” or “solipsism” are ontologically illusory, the embodied Self-Other Subject has a right to

⁵⁴ While on this point, it needs investigating if the English form of “sending regards” can be traced to the French word for seeing “regarde”, which would then translate as “sending I see you” — which does not strike one as much different from Buber’s examples of *Bantu* greetings.

demand that it be recognized and acknowledged by the other embodied Self-Other Subject because it is owed a debt of having ontologically contributed towards the latter's embodied Self-Other subjectivity. In that regard, it is quite possible that even a Self-Other who entertained the illusion of being an "autonomous" and "disembodied" Subject would doubt himself or herself if there was no validation whatsoever of his/her being in some way, as *Dusklands* shows with respect to the characters of Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee.

While the Self-Other Subject is his or her own ethical standard, a group of Self-Others can, by provisional consensus, determine how a Subject could understand his or her ontological indebtedness to the group and what modes of action are expected from a specific Subject in acknowledgement of such a debt — again, the dialogic imagination comes in here. Ultimately, though, it is left to the individual Subject to work out the specifics of her or his own ontological indebtedness. In this sense, ethical conduct, all of ethics, revolves around the Self-Other approximating a balance between what and how much she or he ontologically owes and what and how much she or he is owed.

To reiterate the point, ethics cannot be prescribed for the Subject. All that Others can do is simply make promptings and press on the Subject claims of being owed. Such claims are important to enable the Subject properly assess its closest "approximate" indebtedness. "Approximate" because no Self-Other Subject can properly repay its ontological debt because, due to the otherness of the Other as well as its own otherness, there will always be something over and above what the Subject can both know and, in turn, do based on such mediated and impartial knowledge of both its Self-Otherness and of the Other. But the other Self-Other Subject can also be either generous or mean towards the Self-Other Subject; generous when, out of choice, she or he does not press claims for what she or he is convinced is owed by the Subject or gives out more than he or she owes, and mean when he or she demands more than she or he knows is due to her or him. Ultimately, though, each Subject has to work out his or her own "golden mean".

In place of the Hegelian Master-Slave paradigm which is adversarial and characterised by acrimony, the relation adumbrated here is closer to Paulo Freire's (1971) Subject-Subject relation, which is most likely a reworking of Hegel's Master-Slave paradigm. Freire insists

(regarding intersubjectivity) on the difference between the dialogical and anti-dialogical human relationships:

The dialogical theory of action does not involve a Subject, who dominates by virtue of conquest, and a dominated object. Instead, there are Subjects who meet to name the world in order to transform it. If at a certain historical moment the oppressed . . . are unable to fulfil their vocation as Subjects, the posing of their very oppression as a problem (which always involves some form of action) will help them achieve this vocation. (1971: 148)

All in all, my personal point of view is that, whatever its uncertainties, possible dangers and the trauma that is attendant on the process, *encountering* (beyond the basic and unavoidable stage of initial encounter) is a risk worth taking. This is because, for the most part, the more any Subject encounters the Other the more rounded Self-Other Subject he or she becomes, contributing to the Other as much as gaining from her/him in the exchange and thereby expanding his or her ontological horizon. Each *encounter* is potentially both an imprisoning and, paradoxical though it sounds, liberatory “prison house”. Either way, to know is not to master the Other, but to be indebted to him/her/it. So, ultimately then, knowledge is indeed power but not in the traditional Baconian or Foucauldian sense of the knower mastering and potentially imposing himself on the known (see Reingard Nethersole 2005: 256). Rather, knowledge entails an expansion of one’s ontological horizon but which involves indebtedness to one’s Others and a due acknowledgement of this indebtedness would benefit both the knower and the known, reciprocally. It is when acknowledgement of this indebtedness is ignored that the Subject becomes a force in its own right — often, a force for destruction.

Ultimately, if I were asked to sum up what I think Coetzee drives at, I will identify two trajectories, one ontological and the other, related to and deriving from the first, ethical. Ontologically speaking, Coetzee’s empathetic imagination constitutes the epitome of his worldview, while ethically speaking, beyond the ethics of mutual ontological indebtedness and implication, it is the selflessness that characterises a cruciform logic that is the epitome of Coetzeean ethics.

Chapter Two

Dusklands: J.M. Coetzee's Diagnosis of the "Metaphysics"⁵⁵ of Domination and an authorial "Manifesto"

[T]he voice which our broadcasting projects into Vietnamese homes is the voice of neither father nor brother. It is the voice of the doubting self, the voice of Rene Descartes driving his wedge between the self in the world and the self that contemplates that self. The voices of our Chieu Hoi (surrender/reconciliation) programming are wholly Cartesian. Their record is not a happy one.... [T]hey have failed because they speak out of an alienated *doppelganger* rationality for which there is no precedent in Vietnamese thought. We attempt to embody the ghost inside the villager, but there has never been any ghost there. (Coetzee, 1974: 21)

When the earth conspires incestuously with her sons, should our recourse not be to the goddess of *techné* who springs from our brains. Is it not time that the mother earth is supplanted by her own faithful daughter, shaped without woman's part? The age of Athene dawns. In the Indo-China Theatre we play out the drama of the end of the tellurian age and the marriage of the sky-god with his parthenogene daughter-queen. If the play has been poor, it is because we have stumbled about the stage asleep, not knowing the meaning of our acts. Now I bring their meaning to light in that blinding moment of ascending meta-historical consciousness in which we begin to shape our own myths. (Coetzee, 1974: 28)

There is only one problem in Vietnam and that is the problem of victory. The problem of victory is very technical. We must believe this. Victory is a matter of sufficient force, and we dispose over sufficient force. (Coetzee, 1974: 29)

I begin this chapter with an overview of the place of J.M. Coetzee's writing within the corpus of South African writing and criticism. Thereafter, I discuss *Dusklands* (1974) as J.M. Coetzee's exploration of the nature and import of the Cartesian crisis of a ratiocinative autonomous subjectivity and of the Hegelian teleological view of history according to which the end or aim of history is the unfolding of consciousness (the ascending meta-historical consciousness of the second epigraph above) on its way towards total self-knowledge, a process which, when accomplished, will lead to the end of history as we know it. In other words, all events in history are, in a Voltaire-an satirical quip, "necessary evils" whose *telos* or ultimate goal is for consciousness to come to know itself fully and transparently and thereby be at one with itself (Coetzee's epigraph from Flaubert which he introduces the second novella with is also a pointer towards imperialism's peculiar interest in history). In Coetzee's writing, the rejection of these two

⁵⁵ I use the term "metaphysics" advisedly arguing as I do in footnote 21 above that I do not recognise it in its traditional philosophical usage.

viewpoints are reflected both in the lives of individuals and in the socio-cultural workings of the body-politic.⁵⁶

J.M. Coetzee's two novellas that constitute *Dusklands* (1974) can be viewed as “diagnostic” and “manifesto-like”. This is because the issues with which he is concerned in these texts in various ways play themselves out again and again in his subsequent writing. The dense but tersely argued “diagnosis” (the two novellas, put together, span a total of only 129 pages with the main thesis being established in the first 51 pages) is that the prevalent Western conception of being, characterised by “separateness” and “domination” as exemplified in the Cartesian mind-body dichotomy, is not only ontologically illusory but also destructive both to the self that subscribes to it and to the Others that that self encounters. The devaluation of the body part of this conception of being, and the ensuing drive towards its domination occasioned by this deprecation, has led to what we now view as the schisms and excesses at the centre of “Western” individualism at a personal level (Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee exemplify this aspect) and the institutionalised discrimination against and domination of the body and all that that body has come to signify namely women, non-Western peoples, and the land or nature. In this connection, in a very well researched and comprehensive article titled “‘The Labyrinth of my History’: J.M. Coetzee’s *Dusklands*,” David Attwell (1993) explores a wide range of Western texts (mostly institutional) that J.M. Coetzee most likely parodies and uses as sources for his two novellas that constitute this novel, texts whose Cartesian and imperial inclinations are quite blatant.⁵⁷ I build on this exposition to construct my own understanding of the sources of the Cartesian crisis that is experienced by the protagonists of the two novellas.

By way of amplifying the foregoing contention, I will observe that what is commonly known as the “Cartesian crisis” involves first and foremost a divided self who privileges the mind part of itself over its body. Following from that initial internal split comes the division between this split self and another self against whom it opposes itself, a phenomenon that ultimately manifests in that most barbaric of fallacies which goes by

⁵⁶ On the Hegelian thesis of history see also Francis Fukuyama's (1992) *The End of History and the Last Man* in which Fukuyama argues that Western Democracy, as practiced from the late 20th Century, is the highest form of human political organisation and, with it in place, that marks the end of history. However, contrary to such millenarian views of history, Mike Marais (1993d and 2003b) points out the ateleological view of history in some of Coetzee's writings.

⁵⁷ By way of ironic parody, Coetzee's main character is aptly called Eugene Dawn, with the two names implying “eugenics” and “progress” or “enlightenment”, respectively.

the appellation *argumentum ad baculum*, that is “the appeal to brute force” or “might means right”.⁵⁸ According to this fallacy, the more powerful one is the worthier he or she is of being. The third epigraph above, in which Dawn narrowly views victory as simply a matter of force, captures just such a mentality. In this regard, notice how both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee value “the gun and its metaphors”: not only does the gun serve as a link or “copula” with the outside but also as deceptive proof of the self’s existence as being in opposition to or against the other who is deemed to be entirely outside that self (1974: 18 and 84-86). This conception of one’s being easily finds expression in the domination and exploitation of the colonised Others (because they possess no weapon of comparable strength to the gun and its variants); of women (who, whether by natural biology or force of socialisation, have tended to be physically weaker), and the environment (because it is virtually defenceless — and in the hope of finding an alternative habitable planet in outer space in an age of space exploration). Eugene Dawn hints at this latter hope when he asserts the Americans’ right to destroy Vietnamese landscape (a metonymy for the earth) considering it dispensable (30-31). Ironically, though, the appeal to force can also be a desperate attempt by the split self, terrified by its solipsism, at gaining validation and acknowledgement from its others, as is illustrated in Dawn’s analysis of a solipsistic America’s incursion into Vietnam in the hope that the Vietnamese, through fighting back in earnest, will prove America’s own existence.

Indeed, it is a bleak and seemingly hopeless, but frank image of conflicted colonial mentality that we are presented with in this text. Stephen Watson (1996) explores this bleakness at length and concludes that Coetzee’s works portray a failed dialectic but, then, he appositely observes that there remains in all of Coetzee’s texts “that passionate hunger . . . to escape the warped relationships that colonialism fosters” (36). In this regard, in the immediately subsequent novels, namely *In The Heart of The Country* (1977), and *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), J.M. Coetzee is already exploring ways of overcoming this Cartesian entrapment and, by extension, proposes a solution to imperialism’s domination and exploitation of its Others and their resources, both human and natural. Coetzee is among those authors who have to be credited with challenging Enlightenment’s rationality and its attendant bifurcated subjectivity, as well as challenging the conceptions of history that support the violence attendant on such a subjectivity. Contrary to the supposedly disembodied Cartesian *cogito*, the body in Coetzee’s writing in

⁵⁸ Or, put even more crudely, “if you don’t agree with me, I will beat or kill you”.

and of itself becomes a site of a new form of consciousness — an embodied consciousness. This view of subjectivity, as I have noted in the previous chapter, has led David Attwell (2006: 37-38) to suggest that, for Coetzee, a re-configuration of our consciousness in relation to the body may be a pre-requisite to our forging of post-binary ontologies. He observes that “the conditions of possibility for the development of a more redemptive consciousness might well be ontological before they are social; that is they may be related to a new consciousness and valorizations of being itself”. As Coetzee (2002: 159-60) himself points out in his fictionalised memoir, *Youth*, in his writing, all the binaric or dichotomous conceptions of being are rendered suspect and spurious, hence his substitution of the exclusionary logic of “either-or” with an inclusive and fluid one of “both-and”.

With specific reference to the South African situation — which he views as an extension of the phenomenon of imperialism elsewhere in the world (see Attwell, 1993: 14), Coetzee proposes a shift of focus from the effusively expressed love of the land by White South Africans to a love of the indigenous people they co-inhabit this land with (see Coetzee, [1988b]1992: 96-99). Indeed, from *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) onwards, the reader meets characters who, without conscious forethought, gradually move from willed or conventional ignorance of their ontological indebtedness to the Other, and of their implication in the subjectivity of the Other, to an opening up to and acknowledgement of this debt and implication, while at the same time taking into account the Other’s otherness. And as his drive to shift focus intensifies, J.M. Coetzee begins to include even animals in the category of those needing ontological recognition — not only in their own right, but also as a way of more deeply acknowledging the various parts and aspects of the ontology of our own consciousnesses. Perhaps the earliest example of this new direction can be found in *In the Heart of the Country* (one only needs to remember the flies and animals that Magda, like Jacobus Coetzee before her, theorises could be a world of delight in their own right which is closed off from her); in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (the waterbuck stag which the Magistrate fails to kill), and, more openly, in *Age of Iron* (1990) with the special place Coetzee accords to Vercueil’s dog and, later, the chickens on the farm which Florence’s husband tends. The overall result has been a progressive discounting of a disembodied conception of the mind and instead giving due regard to the place of the Other, or the body part, in the mind-body dichotomy,

establishing it as the seat of subjectivity. In Coetzee's works, the mind, then, is conceived of as being embodied after all.

Be that as it may, Coetzee's response to the problem of the Cartesian crisis, or the Hegelian thesis of history that involves the struggle between Master and Slave consciousnesses, and their consequences, is exploratory rather than polemical and prescriptive, much to the discomfort of some South African readers and critics (for example Michael Vaughan [1982], Stephen Watson [1996], Peter Knox-Shaw [1996]) who have accused him of displaying a lack of concern for the plight of the oppressed through his eschewal of a frontal "either-or" engagement with what they prescriptively considered to be the political demands of the time.⁵⁹ This charge led Coetzee (1988b) to put up his well-known defence of the rivalry between politics and art in the essay "The Novel Today".

My analysis of the two novellas in *Dusklands* involves what I regard to be Coetzee's exploration of his twin aims of analysing the Cartesian crisis and the Hegelian thesis of history and their implications and consequences both on an individual level (as manifested in the personalities of the characters Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee) and their institutional manifestation (exemplified by America's ill-fated incursion into Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s and Jacobus Coetzee and his party's dealings with the Namaqua Hottentots in the 1700s). Structurally, the two novellas are presented as diachronically coextensive. Yet, the twentieth-century narrative precedes the eighteenth-century one, but for a good reason. The character Eugene Dawn in "The Vietnam Project" is intended to be cast as a metaphysical avatar or descendant of the Jacobus Coetzee in "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee." As I have already noted J.M Coetzee is on record to have said that he sees the South African situation as a manifestation of the general thrust of western imperialism elsewhere.

My analysis of "The Vietnam Project" explores the following key issues in relation to the subject at hand: I look at Eugene Dawn's view of himself as a creative or contemplative/meditative personality and what, in the context of the postulates of this

⁵⁹ These critics have also accused Coetzee of according a blind eye to the material dynamics of imperialism. I am not being a Coetzee apologist but I find such a charge baffling. By linking a Cartesian mindset to domination of the Other surely Coetzee has more than hinted at the material motives underpinning the imperial project. Domination cannot be engaged in for its own sake; it is always to exploit those dominated. In fact even the economic motives are hinted at in "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" itself.

study, is implied by this view. I also examine the troubled relationship between Eugene Dawn and his superiors at the New Life Project, with its steep Self/Other hierarchical gradient, whereas Dawn, paradoxically and vainly, wishes for a far more rhizomic and horizontal relationship where he too counts as an important player. Furthermore, I explore Eugene Dawn's Cartesian or Platonic relationship with his wife, a relationship which, barren and oppositional, closely mirrors his relationship with his superiors. Finally, I also discuss the war's effect on the lush Vietnamese "jungles" (while there is actual Vietnam that J.M. Coetzee is dealing with at some level Vietnam also serves as a metonymic image for the earth at large) and the Cartesian basis for and consequences of such environmental crimes. Throughout, my exploration is against the background of the Cartesian dichotomous ontology and the Hegelian thesis of history as the unfolding of consciousness; of consciousness moving towards knowing itself transparently the goal of which being the end of history itself when this consciousness will finally have come to know itself fully. America's incursion into Vietnam is seen by Eugene Dawn as part of this "ascending meta-historical consciousness" (28), as the second epigraph to this chapter points out.⁶⁰

Politically, as Stewart Burns (1990) points out in *Social Movements of the 1960s: Searching for Democracy*, America wanted to use Vietnam as an example to all others not to interfere with the former's capitalist imperialistic project:

From the outset American policymakers had perceived Vietnam as a "test case". If they could frustrate a successful war of national liberation — significantly, in the only country in the world that had won independence from colonial rule under Communist leadership — it would set an example that might deter misguided national (and regional) self-determination in other parts of the globe more vital to US economic and strategic interests, such as the Mideast. (1990: 66)

Burns (1990: 105) also notes that part of the reason why the Vietnam war proved so intractable and protracted was because it was a proxy war between Cold War powers, with Russia and China aiding the Vietnamese. But in *Dusklands*, through the character of Eugene Dawn, J.M. Coetzee explores the metaphysical underpinnings of not only the war in Vietnam but also imperialism in general, an exploration which I discuss in the sections that follow.

⁶⁰ The Vietnam war, which was fought between 1965 and 1973, was a very unpopular war both at home and abroad. J.M. Coetzee, then a member of staff at the University of Texas, is on record to have participated in demonstrations against issues related to it (see *Doubling*, 50-53).

Eugene Dawn describes himself as a highly creative person and a thinker (1). But we as readers know him to be a split being/personality/self, in keeping with the Cartesian conception of an autonomous subject that is *sui generis* and possessive of a consciousness whose contents are generated *ex nihilo*. As basic proof of this aspect of his being, first and foremost, Dawn creates a Vietnam of his own mind in his report. He then proceeds to make recommendations to the American military based on this not only phantom-like, but also grossly othered Vietnam. Interestingly, although excessively chimerical, Dawn's view of Vietnam does not differ substantively from the actual conduct of the American military there (with its unbridled application of physical and chemical force) thereby rendering Dawn and America *doppelgangers* of each other in every sense.

It is important, in this regard, to observe that culturally and politically, the contents of Dawn's report are as revealing of Dawn's own personality as that of the people — and the institutions behind them — who commissioned him to write it. Towards the very end of his Vietnam Project Report, Eugene Dawn, aware of his own schizophrenic split (“broken halves of ourselves” 31), anxiety stricken and delirious (“I have to pull myself together” [31]), makes a deeply personal confession, an emotional and intellectual unburdening of himself, which aptly sums up his own existential predicament and that of the America he represents. Dawn is afflicted by the Cartesian crisis, as emerges in his confession, interestingly called a “postscript”, which he addresses to Coetzee personally and asks him to remove from the main report:

I am in a bad way as I write these words. My health is poor. I have a treacherous wife, an unhappy home, unsympathetic superiors. I suffer from headaches. I sleep badly. I am eating myself out. If I knew how to take holidays perhaps I would take one. But I see things and have a duty towards history that cannot wait. . . . It is my duty to point out our duty. I sit in libraries and see things. I am in an honourable line of bookish men who have sat in libraries and had visions of great clarity. I name no names. You must listen. I speak with the voice of things to come. I speak in troubled times and tell you how to be as children again. I speak to the broken halves of ourselves and tell them to embrace, loving the worst in us equally with the best. Tear this off, Coetzee, it is a postscript, it goes to you, listen to me. (1974: 31)

Clearly, this confession reflects on the nature of the Cartesian crisis and the Hegelian thesis of history, and outlines their consequences for those afflicted by them with regard to personal, interpersonal as well as political relations. Interestingly, just three paragraphs before the confession, J.M. Coetzee, in outlining the physical devastation of Vietnam and hinting at the environmental crimes perpetrated by the Americans, alludes to the Hegelian thesis of history as the unfolding of consciousness, thus giving us a holistic

picture of his intentions in the text. I want to dwell on these intentions in some detail in the succeeding sections of this analysis.

The mood in which the report has been composed is one of desperation. Much as Dawn would like to believe that he is engaged in a noble task, he cannot shrug off his nagging sense of the futility of the whole imperialistic project. His participation in it is characterised by ambivalence, swinging between hope/commitment and despair: the war has not been successful at all in phases I-III, and, with more and more formerly colonised nations gaining independence, the future of empire building, an activity he regards as heroic, looks bleak. This position both reflects and compounds his already split personality, hence his desperation. It is noteworthy, in this regard, that Dawn, feeling cramped and hedged in by his superiors at the New Life Project, says of himself that he has an “exploring temperament”, and that had he “lived two hundred years ago” he “would have had a continent to explore, to map, to open to colonization” (33). His participation in this project can be seen as a last ditch attempt to save a dying cause as he himself poignantly observes in the following passage:

I am unfortunately unable to carry on creative work in the library. My creative spasm comes only in the early hours of the morning when the enemy in my body is too sleepy to throw up walls against the forays of my brain. The Vietnam report has been composed facing east into the rising sun and in a mood of poignant regret (*poindere*, to pierce) that I am rooted in the evening lands. None of this is reflected in the report itself. When I have duties to fulfil I fulfil them. (6-7)

It is tempting to speculate from this passage that Dawn’s participation in the Vietnam project is driven more by a sense of blind or habituated duty than genuine conviction and belief in its eventual and ultimate success. However, given that he deeply regrets the death of the age of empire, it must nevertheless be interpreted as a serious blow to his sense of being.

Ambivalence aside, it is because Dawn is himself a split self, and a representative of Western metaphysics and its conception of history, who works hard to have his mind dominate the body that leads, in large measure, to his problematic relationships, most notably between himself and his equally Cartesian superiors, on the one hand, and with his wife Marilyn, on the other. But, what constitutes Dawn’s Cartesian personality and how does it manifest itself? Just as Descartes dismissed the role that the body plays in his subjectivity, Dawn thinks his body prevents him from achieving great things

intellectually.⁶¹ Dawn's narrative being largely a monologue, I isolate and synthesise his character from his meditations and confessions about himself. The major question here is: In what senses does Dawn conceptualise himself as creative? As the narrative unfolds, we begin to detect that Dawn views himself as creative in the Cartesian and Hegelian ascending consciousness way. It is these twin conceptions that lead to Dawn's downfall in his confrontation with his more powerful and cunning superior, called Coetzee, at the New Life Project. It is the same conceptions of consciousness that also lead to America's disgrace in Vietnam, the collapse of Dawn's marriage to Marilyn, and eventually his kidnapping of his son Martin and subsequent sequestration in a mental institution.

As I have noted above, quite early in the narrative Eugene Dawn describes himself as "a thinker, a creative person, one not without value to the world" (1). Like Descartes (1980) in *The Meditations*, Dawn conceives of himself as composed of an immaterial mind and a material body. For most of the narrative he privileges the mind as the sole site of his autonomous subjectivity, its consciousness is *sui generis*, and, strangest of all perhaps, its contents are innate to it, generated *ex nihilo*. This Cartesian cast of mind shows most clearly in his views about himself, especially in the relationship between his mind and body and his less than satisfactory marital relationship with Marilyn.

In this regard, each time Dawn refers to his body or bodily functions, he describes them in a very deprecating way. It is evident that he hates his body. After mentioning how he has noticed that, just when he wants to concentrate on his intellectual work, his fingers "curl and clench" in the palms of his hands and his fist "clenches" and his toes also "curl into the soles of his feet" (4), he expresses his open dislike of his whole body and wishes he had another (5). These bodily acts, against his conscious will, reflect what he says in *The Psychology of Gesture* Charlotte Wolff calls signs of depression. Dawn thus fears that Coetzee might pick on these gestures and use them against him by discrediting his work on their account. He thus has to constantly use the power of what he calls his will (or mind) to keep his undisciplined body under some control. Rather than view them as existing on the same continuum, Dawn talks about the will (mind) and the body as separate entities and employs the former to control, and even dominate, the latter. But

⁶¹ Although Descartes, in his reflections on the Pineal gland, makes allowances for a direct, if only a tenuous, link between the mind and the body, this gland is regarded by him as the point at which the mind, ever autonomous and superior, gives commands and directions to the body and not vice versa; it is, diode-like, a one-way traffic.

because of the great demands of the task, and also his body's insistence on asserting itself, he does so only on "important occasions" (5). And, as I have noted, he even wishes he had another body, in the hope that a different, more pliable, body would easily subject itself to the control of his mind, the supposedly disembodied "I" that exists prior to, or independent of, that body.⁶²

But in Dawn's Cartesian metaphysics the dichotomy is in-eradicable. This shows very clearly in a passage that comes just six paragraphs after he has acerbically expressed his hatred of his body. Dawn notices that while the working conditions in the Harry Truman Library are ideal for his mind to soar, his body makes this difficult, and describes the latter and its functions in the following Realistic-cum-Naturalistic fashion:

The lights of Harry S. Truman hum in their reserved, fatherly way. The temperature is 72. Hemmed in with walls of books, I should be in paradise. But my body betrays me. I read, my face starts to lose its life, a stabbing begins in my head, then, as I beat through gales of yawns to fix my weeping eyes on the page, my back begins to petrify in the scholar's hook. The ropes of muscle that spread from the spine curl in suckers around my neck, over my clavicles, under my armpits, across my chest. Tendrils creep down legs and arms. Clamped round my body this parasite star-fish dies in rictus. Its tentacles grow brittle. I straighten my back and hear bands creak. Behind my temples too, behind my cheekbones, behind my lips the glacier creeps inward toward its epicentre behind my eyes. My eyeballs ache, my mouth constricts. If this inner face of mine, this vizor of muscle, had features, they would be the monstrous troglodyte features of a man who bunches his sleeping eyes and mouth as a totally unacceptable dream forces itself into him. From head to foot I am the subject of a revolting body. Only the organs of my abdomen keep their blind freedom: the liver, the pancreas, the gut, and of course the heart, squelching against one another like unborn octuplets. (7-8)⁶³

While Dawn can hardly be said to be the typical naturalistic character, his body acts in a naturalistic way — as all bodies do — against his conscious will. The above description, however, is of a body that is not only at odds with a supposedly disembodied mind, but it is at odds with itself too with some of its parts running riot against their fellow parts, even threatening to constrict and choke them. Douglas Livingstone's metaphoric description of a (cancerous) body against itself in the essay "Africa Within Us" (1977) to which I referred in the previous chapter, is quite apt here.

⁶² As I mention in my theoretical exposition in the previous chapter, in Coetzee's quest for embodiedness, it would be a mistake for one to say "I have a body" as this statement supposes that there is an anterior being, an "I" (supposedly mind), who has "a body". Instead, it would be more appropriate for an embodied Self-Other Subject to say "I am a body". He makes a similar statement in reference to animal subjectivity in *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007: 59).

⁶³ Dawn's situation here is reminiscent (by way of contrast) of Descartes' (1980: 17) position as he was writing the *Meditations* when the latter averred that he was not disturbed by passions of any kind at the time.

I have noted that Dawn's above description of his body carries naturalistic and realistic overtones. In *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M.H. Abrams (1999: 260-61) defines realism as that kind of writing that is written to give the effect that it represents life and the social world as it seems to the common reader, evoking the sense that its characters might in fact exist, and that such things might well happen and that the presentation tends to involve the commonplace and the everyday, represented in minute detail, in a reportorial, circumstantial, matter-of-fact, and seemingly unselective way. On the other hand, Abrams (1999: 262) defines Naturalism as that manner of writing that "presents with scientific objectivity and with elaborate documentation, sometimes including an almost medical frankness about activities and bodily functions usually unmentioned in earlier literature". J.M. Coetzee's catalogue-like presentation of details in Dawn's life above conforms to the tenets of Realism while the actual description of the body parts and their functions conforms to the tenets of Naturalism as defined by Abrams.

Now, as I will keep pointing out throughout this study, in my discussion of the relationship between style and an embodied consciousness, while J.M. Coetzee tends to eschew realism as an approach in his writing, one notices that from time to time he makes exceptions to this rule and gives lengthy "realistic" descriptions of things and situations. Where such a strategy is resorted to, however, its aim is for emphasis or to reinforce and demonstrate the demands of brute reality or of the Other — to use Derek Attridge's (2005: xii) expression, its "un-ignorable being-there-ness". In Kantian terms, this points to Immanuel Kant's (1929: 27) acknowledgement of both the phenomenal and *noumenal* states of being as captured in his observation that "it would be absurd to talk of appearances without something that appears". Coetzee's stylistic tactic here attests to his commitment to the places of both the given or brute reality as posited by realism and the constructed reality of post-structuralism in the ontology of consciousness. In the present case Coetzee employs this strategy to demonstrate, in the person of Dawn, the problems of the mind/body dichotomy and the depth of Dawn's hatred of his own body as a result of his Cartesian over-valuing of his supposedly disembodied mind.⁶⁴ Characteristically, in the next paragraph Dawn calls his penis "a length of gristle" (8) and

⁶⁴ In Hegelian terms, the body here could also be said to be engaged in the life and death struggle with a masterful mind.

says that is the one that effects his sad connection with Marilyn.⁶⁵ This self-conception sets the stage for J.M. Coetzee's exploration of the unhappy relationship between Dawn and his wife to a discussion of which I now turn.

Dawn's views of Marilyn are less than flattering and their sexual life is less than satisfactory. Like most of what Dawn does, his sex with Marilyn is presented more as a fulfilment of duty than an act of lovemaking: "The fault is not mine. I do my duty. Whereas I cannot escape the suspicion that my wife is disengaged" (8). The mistake could be said to lie in Dawn's denial of his body and its needs in preference for the activities of what he regards as his disembodied mind. Even during what is supposed to be the stage of orgasm Dawn cannot bring himself to let go of his controlling mind and, in describing his sexual intercourse with his wife, he employs imagery that properly belongs to the act of defecation and its corresponding facilities of disposal rather than imagery of copulation. He says of his orgasms: "The word which at such moments flashes its tail across the heavens of *my never quite extinguished consciousness* is *evacuation*: my seed drips like urine into the futile sewers of Marilyn's reproductive ducts." (8, my emphasis).⁶⁶ In keeping with his deprecatory view of bodily functions of sexual intercourse, semen becomes faecal matter and Marilyn's oviducts become a sewerage system. It can be noted that Dawn's controlling and dominating rationality makes it impossible for him to ever forge any meaningful union with any other person, not even his wife. Dawn wants a wife who will simply be an appendage to him. Marilyn is only good for looking at but not to be heard or engaged with. Like everyone and everything else, for Dawn, with his *sui generis*, disembodied consciousness, Marilyn is not ontologically a part of himself; she is the othered Other, ignorable, so he thinks. As an aspect of this desire for domination Dawn prefers to be a voyeur in relating with his wife rather than reciprocally engage with her as a human being in her own right. He wishes "to creep in on her" like he read in a novel in which "a householder is arrested for peeping at his wife" (12) and, indeed, Dawn gets to act out this fantasy one day (35). He

⁶⁵ One can't help thinking about the early David Lurie in another of Coetzee's novel *Disgrace* (1999a) who at one point also contemplates castrating himself to punish what he considers to be his errant body.

⁶⁶ While I was doing my introduction to philosophy as an undergraduate, our professor noted that there is a difference between thinking and reasoning. Thinking is what we do all the time we are conscious while reasoning is a sort of systematisation of our thoughts. He did cite examples though of times when neither thinking nor reasoning is possible such as when we are unconscious as in sleep or in a coma and also during an orgasm. Yet Dawn insists on thinking even as he is having an orgasm, which goes to show the extremes to which he pushes his controlling rationality.

even wishes he could watch her making love with other men instead of having sex with her himself, apparently to prove that she is a desirable woman (12).

Earlier, Dawn believes that, being possessed of a higher degree of consciousness, he understands Marilyn and her friends better than they understand themselves (10). As I mentioned in the theoretical exposition, it seems to me that Phenomenology's wish to swing the pendulum to its opposite extreme from the Cartesian extreme resulted in a reverse ontological quagmire. Of course, both Cartesianism and Phenomenology share the now discredited notion that the Subject's own consciousness is transparent to itself. But it seems to me that Phenomenology's quest for unmediated consciousness, coupled with its claims to be able to pin down or have access to the primordial or essences — in short, the positing of an autochthonous Subject — is deeply problematic. It needs emphasizing that this Phenomenological trend in thinking, in which *immediacy* is supposed to be the central feature, seems to have no actual basis in reality, not even on an introspective level. Not even within the Self are the contents of its self-consciousness available to that Self without mediation. As such, the observation of behaviour in the Other Subject on its own, as Dawn here suggests, cannot tell one much about that Other's subjectivity. So, for Dawn to claim that he knows Marilyn and her friends transparently, as he does in this text, is another marker of his delusions.

Ironically, Marilyn and her friends seem to have far more ontological depth than Dawn gives them credit for. As they are trying to figure out what may have become of Dawn since he took up his job at the New Life Project, they correctly suspect him of suffering from “psychic brutalisation” due to the war and use Kurtzian terms in describing it. As Dawn says, “Marilyn and her friends believe that everyone who approaches the innermost mechanism of the war suffers a vision of horror which depraves him utterly” (10). Dawn's secrecy about his work is similar to the lie Marlowe tells to Kurtz's intended, in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, about the true condition of Kurtz, by saying the latter's dying words were that he loved her when in fact his dying words were “The horror! The horror!” In that novel, Kurtz's dying words point to a realisation and acknowledgement of his own implication in the excesses of the colonial enterprise in the Congo. Of course Dawn, ever self-confident, and probably dabbling with Phenomenology's claims to the transparency of consciousness (in this case expressed as a form of behaviourism), thinks Marilyn and her friends hopelessly blind for thinking that

there is something hidden about his new personality and so avers: “She believes I have a secret, a cancer of shameful knowledge There are no secrets . . . everything is on the surface and visible in mere behaviour, to those who have eyes to see” (10-11).

What is clear in this text is that Dawn is as alienated from Marilyn (or women in general) as he is from his body. In this regard, Dawn himself asserts: “(I have an intuitive understanding of women though I feel no sympathy for them). My life with Marilyn has become a continual battle to keep my poise of mind against her hysterical assaults and the pressure of my enemy body” (8, brackets original). And, because she feels rejected, Marilyn also withdraws from Dawn who says of her: “She feels herself empty and wishes to be filled, yet her emptiness is such that every entry into her she feels as invasion and possession” (8). But this withdrawal is only from Dawn. Since she needs to seek ontological acknowledgement from the Other, Dawn suspects that she is seeing other men on Wednesdays when she has unspecified appointments in San Diego — ostensibly for therapy and shopping (11). What Dawn does have proof of, however, is that Marilyn has resorted to an indulgence in pornography, and possibly masturbation. If this is the case, then it is possible that, because of being invalidated, Marilyn herself has been bitten by the solipsistic bug. This Dawn realises when he sees a nude photo of her in her black leather writing case where formerly his photograph used to be (13). Marilyn’s new ontological conception at this point could be said to be a case of a self turning on itself through narcissism, a condition not very different from Dawn’s Cartesian predicament. An alternative interpretation of this new behaviour, though, could be that because she is being ignored by her husband she on occasion doubts her existence or her ability to charm men — given that the nude photograph is of herself — and so keeps this photograph as a visible tool for ontological self-assurance and self-acknowledgement. It comes down to the unsettling doubt or fear of non-existence, of being a mere spectre, which we see in Dawn himself when he is ignored by Coetzee, or solipsistic America in Vietnam and later Jacobus Coetzee’s imaginary rejection by the Hottentots. On another level, in what is called the psychology of oppression, Dawn presents Marilyn as taking her frustrations with him out on their son Martin, one who is less powerful than herself (8). This accusation (whether true or only imagined) as well as the fear that she is turning

him into a sissy (8-9) then serves as the grounds and “justification” for Dawn’s kidnapping of Martin towards the end of the narrative.⁶⁷

One could say that what Dawn wants is a total domination of Others and a sleeping form, like inert matter, is what in his view he considers to be the absolute Other that is even more worthy of domination and exploitation because it is defenceless and poses no real threat to the Cartesian self. In this regard, Dawn says that he likes Marilyn more when she is asleep and thereby least likely to respond or pose any challenge to him through what he calls her nagging. He thus wishes they could devise a way of making love while she is asleep (12). Eventually, Dawn, now in a mental asylum, regrets marrying Marilyn when he says: “I am glad I do not have to think about Marilyn. Most of the trouble in my life has been caused by women, and Marilyn was certainly my worst mistake” (46). It is not only with Marilyn that he has failed to bond though; it is just that, in his view, she was the worst of them all.

While I have observed that Dawn deprecates his body and his Others, I also need to observe that when he talks about his mind and its accomplishments he does so in a very positive and even arrogant way. I have already noted how Dawn high-soundingly believes himself to possess “a high degree of consciousness” as he and Coetzee battle for dominance at the New Life Project (5). Later, he calls his writings “protective fabrications” (14); they protect him from the painful reality of the actual war about which he writes. This passage appears in a section where Dawn mentions that he prefers print (“his protective fabrications”) to the voice on Marilyn’s radio which he finds unsettling, especially as it mentions bomb tonnage and target recitals in the Vietnam war (14). Dismissing oral cultures as primitive, and held back by their pre-modernist conceptions of being in their relations to one another and to their environment, Walter Ong (1977) argues that it is writing or literacy that leads to the harnessing and exploitation of the environment that characterises civilised living as it exposes the distance that exists between the subject and the object. Similarly, in this regard, Dawn consciously finds the written word more bearable than the voice. He knows that print is supposed to aid Cartesianism: it distances and separates since it is at a further remove from brute reality

⁶⁷ Dawn could even be said to have paedophilia and incestuous propensities. He even confesses that he would swoon over a sleeping child (12). These proclivities could be his real reason for kidnapping his son.

than is the voice, thereby making domination of the Other less injurious to the self's conception of itself: "Print ... is sadism, and properly evokes terror. The message of the newspaper is: "I can say anything and not be moved. Watch as I permute my 52 affectless signs". Print is the hard master with the whip, print reading a weeping search for signs of mercy" (15). In Dawn's "dog-eat-dog" world — since "[o]nly the strong can hold course through history's doldrums" (9) — you cannot afford to be emotional, which, unfortunately, is what the voice will move you to. As such you need the hardness of print, or so Dawn avers. Coetzee comes back to this subject in subsequent publications, most notably, in the lesson titled "The Novel in Africa" in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

Elsewhere, in boasting about his autonomous subjectivity and its ability to create out of his own resources without reference to anything outside of him, Dawn likens himself to a spider spinning the web out of itself:

I have *Herzog* and *Voss*, two reputable books, at my elbow, and I spend many analytic hours puzzling out the tricks which their authors perform to give their monologues (they are after all no better than I, sitting day after day in solitary rooms secreting words as the spider secretes its web — the image is not my own) the air of a real world through the looking glass. A lexicon of common nouns seems to be prerequisite. Perhaps I was not born to be a writer. (38)

In the passage above, the self-referential, even specular, nature of these creations is hinted at in the image of a looking-glass and Dawn here again comes across as hopelessly narcissistic — this looking glass has its correlate in Jacobus Coetzee's wish for a pool into which he can gaze at himself (103). In a similar vein, Dawn prefers chimerical fabrications to a proper engagement with brute reality as a form of escapism. And, so, offered an opportunity to visit Vietnam so that he can gain firsthand experience of the war, Dawn tells us that he declined, preferring to puzzle out the problem of Vietnam and strategise about it from the comfort of the Harry Truman Library:

Print-reading is a slave habit. I discovered this truth, as I discovered all truths in my Vietnam report, by introspection. Vietnam, like everything else, is inside me, and in Vietnam, with a little diligence, a little patience, all truths about man's nature... The truth of my Vietnam formulations already begins to shimmer, as you can see, through the neat ranks of script. When these are transposed into print their authority will be blinding. (15)

Descartes' thesis of an autonomous mind seems deeply flawed. Even when one looks at the act of meditation or contemplation, the content of that meditation cannot be said to be wholly innate to the mind, generated *ex nihilo*; the content of consciousness shows

directedness or aboutness (that is, intentionality). In other words, mediatedness properly taken into account, the content of consciousness is always about or directed towards something outside the meditating self to which that self is then ontologically indebted. To talk of a “content-less” state of consciousness is a contradiction in terms and consciousness cannot “clone” itself. Yet, here, Dawn elevates introspection to a god, not only self-generating, but also bringing things into being out of nothing. It is this very dichotomy and spirit of mind that underpins the assessments and recommendations that Dawn makes in his Vietnam Report, the playing out of which I discuss in the sections that follow.

Having made a preliminary exploration of the sources of Dawn’s ontological entrapment, I now turn to Dawn’s acrimonious relationship with those he calls his “unsympathetic superiors” and how his Cartesian and Hegelian worldview, and the worldview of his superiors, contribute to his conflict with them. As a firm believer in the rightness of America’s cause in Vietnam, Dawn feels he has a duty to contribute ideologically towards the success of the mission (hence his dabbling with mythography) as well as physically (through the brute force that he recommends for the military campaigns). To him this incursion is premised on the supposedly solipsistic America’s quest for self-validation in the unfolding consciousness of its own Cartesian-cum-Hegelian self (18). There are indeed divisions among those tasked with carrying out the mission of strategising America’s success in Vietnam. These divisions arise, largely, out of the personal ambition of the parties involved and the drudgery and strictures of bureaucracy with which those in authority frustrate those they perceive to be threats to their positions and ambitions. These conflicts are spelt out right at the beginning of the narrative and so set the tug-of-war tone that characterises it in its entirety.

At the New Life Project, carried out at the Kennedy Institute to aid in the war effort, relations are strained largely because their structure is stiffly hierarchical, with steep Self/Other gradients. This in itself is a form of institutionalised othering. Those on the top tiers of the structure not only discriminate against those below them but are also shown to shamelessly parasitize on their juniors (1). As Dawn points out, Coetzee was once a creative person himself but the strictures and drudgery of bureaucracy have sapped him dry of his creative powers and reduced him to a parasite (1). Elsewhere, in complaining about the depressing effects of the uninspiring environs of his library carrel

in the Harry S. Truman Library, and of his office at the Kennedy Institute, as well as the drudgery and boredom of his working conditions, Dawn also attacks this stiff hierarchical ordering of structures at The New Life Project:

My carrel in the library is gray, with a gray bookrack and a little gray drawer for stationery. My office at the Kennedy Institute is also gray. Gray desks and fluorescent lighting: 1950s functionalism. *I have toyed with the idea of complaining but cannot think of a way of doing so without opening myself to counterattack. Hardwoods are for the managers. So I grind my teeth and suffer.* Gray planes, the shadowless green light under which like a pale stunned deep-sea fish I float, seep into the grayest centres of memory and drown me in reveries of love and hatred for that self of mine who exhausted the fire of his twenty-third, twenty-fourth, and twenty-fifth years beneath the fluorescent glare of Datamatic longing in dying periods for 5PM with its hesperian promise. (my emphasis, 7)

These are hardly ideal conditions for the fulfilment of the Hesperian promise of the golden apples of America. With such experiences, Dawn is acutely aware of the dangers of simply embedding himself within the system (the cardinal danger of becoming a cog in the war machine), and is keen to set himself apart as deserving of special attention. This demand is genuine and justified but because it is compounded by his already Cartesian disposition it makes him come across as delusional and a snob, with catastrophic consequences for him where Coetzee, his superior, is concerned. In the world of isolate individualism to which he subscribes, he cannot expect a horizontal and rhizomic administrative structure nor special attention from anyone. Instead, competition and domination are the driving principles here and, since he subscribes to this ontology, he had better reconcile himself to it.

Dawn is a self-centred snob who does not accept criticism, however justified — and this is because, as he says of himself, he has grown up always receiving praise (5). For instance, his superior's analysis of his report is both objective (dispassionate) and subjective (self-interested). Objective in the sense that he does not disagree with it in terms of its substance; in fact he finds its suggestions potentially useful and, in his view, quite cutting edge too. I will quote at some length what Coetzee says about Dawn and his report to illustrate this position:

I never imagined that this department would one day be producing work of an *avant-garde* nature... I must commend you. I enjoyed reading your first chapters. You write well. It will be a pleasure to be associated with so well-finished a piece of research.... Which is not to say ... of course, that everyone has to agree with what you say. You are working in a novel and contentious field and must expect contention.... I didn't ask you to drop by, however, to discuss the substance of your report, in which - let

me repeat it — you say some important things which our contractors are going to have to seriously think about. (2-3)

However, Coetzee later points out that it is the manner of Dawn's presentation, especially the apparently snobbish *tone* (3-4) of the report, with which he finds fault, and demands that it be revised accordingly. Among other things, Dawn includes in his report complex algebraic equations that would indeed irritate the less intellectually inclined among the military bureaucracy (see, for example, the section titled *Victory*, pp 28-31). Nevertheless, well-intended though Coetzee's assessment sounds, he is at the same time keen to put Dawn in his place and so preserve the rigid hierarchy that he seems to have come to like. Coetzee reminds Dawn, albeit fallaciously, that the latter is a junior, lacking in experience, thereby berating him (3). Dawn, too, firm in his belief that he is right, sees only what he wants to see, namely that Coetzee's assessment is driven exclusively by the fear of being supplanted by a more promising junior, and that the stage has therefore been set for a Hegelian Master-Servant dialectic between them:

The rejection of my report [by Coetzee] has been a bewildering experience, though, being possessed of a high degree of consciousness, I have never been unprepared for it. At the moment when one ceases to be the pupil, I have told myself, at the moment when one starts to strike out for oneself, one must expect one's teachers to feel betrayed and to strike back in envy. The petty reaction of Coetzee to my essay is to be expected in a bureaucrat whose position is threatened by an up-and-coming subordinate who will not follow the slow, well-trodden path to the top. He is the old bull, I the young bull. (5)

Dawn describes Coetzee's reaction as petty. Even those parts of the assessment that can pass for Coetzee's sound advice are summarily dismissed by him and reductively interpreted as driven wholly by envy. Dawn's narcissistic love for self-reference and self-assurance are manifest in statements such as "I have told myself" and that he is "possessed of a high degree of consciousness." Fiercely protective of his individuality though he is, Dawn does not in turn view Coetzee as an individual in his own right; instead he fallaciously views him in generic terms as the classic old bull protective of what it regards as its territory from potential usurpers. That Coetzee is slightly envious of Dawn cannot be totally dismissed. However, this envy is not an all-consuming one (it can even be interpreted as the envy of genuine admiration rather than that of ill-will), and certainly does not underpin all of what Coetzee says about Dawn's report. One can only surmise that it is impossible to avoid this kind of scenario in a Cartesian ontology in which each Subject conceives of itself as totally separate from the Other and,

consequently, pits itself against the Other Subject, if only to preserve its autonomy. Ultimately, not even “identical interests” will override the need for such Subjects to try and dominate each other.⁶⁸

Accordingly, Dawn himself presents the working relations at the New Life Project as largely “monadic”.⁶⁹ As Dawn observes, everyone in the project is assigned a cubicle “because we are monads” (33). However, the cubicles mentioned above are made of glass, suggesting that the individuals occupying them are constantly under surveillance (ostensibly, as Dawn puts it, “to discourage our eccentricities” [33]) by an overarching consciousness who, in Leibnizian terms, is identified with God. It is impossible not to notice the self-contradictory nature and untenability of Cartesian individualism here. Indeed, even in the West, the advocacy of extreme individuality is at the same time countered by the omnipresent overseer character aptly captured in the Orwellian expression “Big Brother (or Uncle Sam) is Watching You”(see George Orwell’s 1984). Later, hopeless a husband though he is, even when he wants to try and be romantic, Dawn can’t bring himself to make intimate calls to his wife because “All calls are monitored by Internal Security” (35) — Michel Foucault’s (1979) conception of the Panopticon in *Discipline and Punish* proves apposite here.⁷⁰

Furthermore, these cubicles are also claustrophobically imprisoning, hence their later description by Dawn as “cells” (33). This is an apt description given that Dawn identifies self-interest, in its narrow egoistical sense, as the real driving force among the members of the project, with Coetzee exhibiting this self-interested disposition in its extreme form:

I am mistaken if I think that Coetzee will save me. Coetzee made his fortune in game theory. He has no natural sympathy with a mythographic approach to the problem of

⁶⁸ An example is often cited about how, right at the peak of empire building abroad by European countries such as France, Britain, Spain, Portugal and Italy, the Western Imperialist drive turned in upon itself when Germany, being not very keen on overseas colonies — which it viewed as degenerate and therefore had far fewer of them than its stature at the time would have permitted — embarked on the colonisation of Western Europe itself! See, in this regard, George Frederickson’s (2002) analysis of racism and White supremacy in *Racism: A Short History*.

⁶⁹ It was Gottfried Leibniz who propounded monadology as a theory of subjectivity according to which subjects are conceived of as pre-determined and totally independent entities, independent of any other entities and united, if at all, only by a universal consciousness which he identified with God (see Rogers, 1932).

⁷⁰ In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1979) Foucault explores the history of the prison system and notices how prisons have operated on a principle of a uni-directional surveillance assumption — from the warden to the prisoner. And it seems, understandably so, that after 9/11 this need for surveillance in the West has become even more of an imperative.

control. He starts with the axiom that people act identically if their self-interests are identical. His career has been built on the self and its interests. (34)

The description here is of an ego-centred subjectivity which even Dawn, the hitherto arch-defender of Cartesian subjectivity, is increasingly finding to be stifling as well as bruising. This is a subjectivity in which the Self's identity is conceived in Cartesian or Hegelian terms of a Self against an Other, Master and Slave, not a self of post-binarian 'inter-subjectivity' as is proposed again and again by J.M. Coetzee in his subsequent writings, nor, for that matter, a cooperative subjectivity as that described by Paulo Freire (1993).

While Dawn presents the early stages of his tug-of-war with Coetzee as "adversarial," the later stages, as already hinted at above, involve the latter and his staff (obviously on instructions from Coetzee) totally ignoring the former's presence, thereby effectively turning him into Ralph Ellison's invisible man. The avoidance that Coetzee instructs is largely because of Dawn's own uncooperative and snobbish disposition. But, as Dawn finds out, the position of an invisible man is ontologically unsettling for one so treated and so he is determined to resist it:

Coetzee hopes that I will go away. The word has been passed around that I do not exist. His secretary smiles her grave smile and looks down. But I do not go away. If they refuse to see me I will become the ghost of their corridors, the one who rings the telephones, who does not flush the toilet. (34)

Indeed, Coetzee's solipsistic ignoring of Dawn is ontologically untenable; because of consciousness's intentionality and therefore indebtedness to the Other. Such a step is a self-deception on the part of the self engaging in it which when put to scrutiny cannot stand. And so, like Ellison's invisible man who deliberately bumps into the people who ignore him to elicit some response and so assure himself that he exists after all, Dawn intends being an implacable irritant to Coetzee and to those he regards as his "minions". He promises to become a ghost in their corridors; one who "rings their telephones and does not flush the toilets" (34). By this stage of their tug-of-war relationship, then, Dawn and Coetzee have become the perfect *doppelgangers* that a Cartesian cast of mind engenders who, like Frankenstein and his monster, or Hegel's contending consciousnesses, are pitted against each other unto death, if need be.

But what exactly is contained in Dawn's Vietnam report, and are there points of disagreement between him and his superior in terms of substance? What does Dawn's report tell us about the "metaphysical" reasons for America's presence in Vietnam and about Western imperialism in general? As I have already noted above, it can be argued that, in terms of disposition, there are no major differences between Coetzee and Dawn; they are both the controlling type and in fact are pitted against each other precisely because of this disposition — Coetzee's endorsement of the content of Dawn's report in his assessment of it is proof of such a disposition. Their differences are not about the substance of the report but about who controls and dominates whom; it is a "game of control" that Coetzee subtly sets rolling. As Dawn observes, and perhaps on this we can believe him (since it is clear from Coetzee's own statements about Dawn's station in the hierarchy that he wishes for it to remain that way), Coetzee made his name in game theory (34). While he agrees with most of what Dawn says in his report, Coetzee cannot help being somewhat envious of what he views as Dawn's cutting edge ingenuity. One would say that this is a natural enough reaction at the levels exhibited by Coetzee here, but which, for his own megalomaniacal purposes, as I have already noted above, Dawn magnifies and misinterprets as Coetzee's all-consuming fear of being upstaged by a junior (5). In the same vein, elsewhere, brushing aside what he suspects are his wife's suspicions that his changed behaviour (since he began working for the New Life Project) seems to border on deviancy, Dawn, in an *ad hominem* fashion, derogatorily brands Coetzee and other "unpatriotic" Americans (possibly those who were demonstrating against its continuation) as the real deviants. In his view, these people are betraying America's historical vision and purpose of "might means right" on her journey towards the unfolding of consciousness: "Nor, in the true myth of America, is it I who am the deviant but the cynic Coetzee together with all those who no longer feel the authentic American destiny crackling within them and stiffening their marrow. Only the strong can hold course through history's doldrums" (9).

But it is the contents of Dawn's report that reveal what is at stake/play in the rest of the novella. Dawn's view of himself and America's view of itself are congruent. The actual contents of his report reveal how Dawn's split personality is also reflected in America's dichotomous dealings with her Others, thereby making of Dawn a somewhat symbolic or representative character since he wilfully aligns his ontological conception with that of the mainstream or orthodox American body-politic.

In the transition to Dawn's report proper, J.M. Coetzee provides a passage in which Dawn comments on the 24 photographs that are part of the material that he is using in its compilation. Dawn introduces the photographs and the "stabilizing" function they serve in his work on the report by pointing out that he responds to pictures more warmly than he does to print (13-14). Of course, it can be argued that the image (as in a photograph) because of its seeming immediacy, is at less of a remove from the object it represents than is the written description of the same object — I have already discussed Dawn's relationship to print and voice. Thus Dawn, ever the "voyeur", finds himself responding with some warmth to the photographs and, interestingly, it is from the effect of this thawing of his otherwise Cartesian being that we get rare insight into what even he subconsciously acknowledges as the real nature of the American predicament in Vietnam. This honest admission is, however, totally absent from the report proper in the writing of which his Cartesian self predominates, except in the postscript where, as I have noted elsewhere, Dawn bares his soul to Coetzee.

In the first photograph, Dawn sees Clifford Loman, a huge American man weighing in at 220lb, and a sergeant in the 1st Air Cavalry, copulating with a tiny Vietnamese woman whom Dawn suspects could very well be a young girl. From the look of things, this could be a case of rape. Loman is the agent; he is having sex with the woman with a flagrant display of masculinity, as if in a Dionysian orgy:

Loman shows off his strength: arching backward with his hands on his buttocks he lifts the woman on his erect penis. Perhaps even walks with her, for her hands are thrown out as if she is trying to keep her balance. He smiles broadly; she turns a sleepy, foolish face on the unknown photographer. (14)

The unequal nature of this relationship is evident both in the differences in the physical constitution and strength of the two players, and in the differences in their demeanour: he smiles while she has a sleepy and foolish look, not quite a picture of co-agency. So unequal are the participants in this act that even if it were consensual the overall impression one gets is of domination and exploitation of the Other as captured in the fallacy of "might means right". This impression is reinforced by Dawn's reference to widespread rape of Vietnamese women by American soldiers after his description of the third photograph: "We forced ourselves deeper than we had ever gone into their women; but when we came back we were still alone, and the women like stones" (18-19).

Loman's domination and exploitation of this particular Vietnamese woman is fundamentally linked to America's overall domination and exploitation of the Vietnamese people and the wanton destruction of their land.

The second photograph is of Special Forces sergeants Berry and Wilson holding severed heads of Vietnamese as trophies (16). What immediately comes to mind is the homestead of Kurtz in the Congo in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1991), which is surrounded by stakes on which hung severed heads of Congolese. What makes this reference apt here is that J.M. Coetzee seems to link the Vietnamese horror to the Kurtzian one in the Belgian Congo as already alluded to earlier.

The third and final photograph, described below, is perhaps the one that is most revealing of, not only the tactics for obtaining information from captured Viet Cong, but also the metaphysical reasons behind America's incursion into Vietnam, namely the malady of the ontologically unacknowledged Master. America, emerging as a superpower after the Second World War (along with Russia), drunk on power, has become a solipsistic giant who, turning in upon itself due to a lack of another strong enough to validate its existence, now doubts its own existence too. This existential doubt has precipitated the need to seek ontological validation by trying to elicit an acknowledgement of her ontological reality by engaging in a Hegelian Master and Slave struggle with the Vietnamese. After describing at some length the devastation and massive loss of Vietnamese life in the war by various combat strategies — psychological, chemical, and physical as depicted in the photograph — Dawn has a damning assessment of its aftermath and the assessment is that the results of this devastation are not any less disquieting for Solipsistic America:

These poisoned bodies, mad floating people of the camps, who had been - let me say it - the finest of their generation, courageous, fraternal - it is they who are the occasion of all my woe! Why could they not accept us? We could have loved them: our hatred of them grew only out of broken hopes. We brought them our pitiable selves, trembling on the edge of inexistence, and asked only that they acknowledge us... Our nightmare was 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. We landed on the shores of Vietnam clutching our arms and pleading for someone to stand up without flinching to these probes of reality: if you will prove yourself, we shouted, you will prove us too, and we will love you endlessly and shower you with gifts. But like everything else they withered before us.... (18)

America's existence is here described as solipsistic and spectral and hence ontologically unsettling. As I mention in the theoretical exposition, even a dominant self who regards himself or herself as autonomous would eventually find it ontologically unsettling should it happen that he or she is not acknowledged by his or her Others. This is so because, at the unconscious level, consciousness, owing to its intentionality, is acutely aware of its ontological indebtedness to the other for its own coming into being, an acknowledgement which does not go away simply through the conscious Subject's wilful rejection of the Other. This ontological state of affairs prompts the Subject to seek acknowledgement from another Subject whom it suspects to be equally conscious. In the present case, like Hegel's absolute Master, America has totally destroyed the Vietnamese people and so can gain no acknowledgement from them. The description here is akin to Hegel's unsettling relationship between a master and a slave who has become too slavish and who thus cannot acknowledge him having been reduced to a mere zombie.⁷¹ In *In the Heart of the Country* (1978), through Magda's father's spells of violence towards his servants, J.M. Coetzee also explores the possibility that the Master's violence towards the slave could be motivated by the Master's wish to beat the too slavish slave out of this slavishness.

The Report Proper

The main purpose of Dawn's project (written in 1973) is to investigate why propaganda and America's conduct of the war in general have not been successful in phases I-III (1965 -72) and so suggest more effective strategies for what he envisions to be phases IV-VI (1973 -77). The first part of his project report examines the role and place of propaganda (as a psychological strategy) in war and the second part deals with how propaganda and brute physical and chemical forces can aid one another to achieve a decisive victory for America. In this regard, Dawn observes that "There is military air-

⁷¹ This observation was not quite borne out by American experiences in Vietnam, where they met with stiff resistance and got bogged down in a protracted war which ended in America capitulating. As Burns (1990) points out, apart from the continued protests against the continuation of the war by the American public, the American administration of Nixon was internally split by the Watergate scandal and Nixon's subsequent impeachment made it difficult for the incoming administration of Gerald Ford to sustain the war any longer. And with the fall of Saigon (the North Vietnamese Capital which was immediately renamed Ho Chi Minh City) the CIA station chief, barricaded within the embassy building and with the last Americans in choppers on the embassy roof, sent a statement that has been immortalised in political circles: "It has been a long and hard fight and we have lost. Those who fail to learn from history are forced to repeat it. Let us hope that we will not have another Vietnam experience and that we have learnt our lesson. Saigon signing off" (115). Writing in 1973, Dawn, and perhaps J.M. Coetzee, could not quite have foreseen this dramatic turn of events. The once solipsistic Goliath had at last had its existence "proved" by the Vietnamese dwarf.

war with military targets; there is also a political air-war whose purpose is to destroy the enemy's capacity to sustain himself psychically" (29-30). A little later, he also counsels, "We should not sneer at [chemical] spray techniques" (31).

After indicating that the purpose of propaganda is to destroy the morale of the enemy while creating confidence in one's soldiers, Dawn maintains that American propaganda programmes in Vietnam have thus far not been effective. He therefore comes up with hypotheses as to why this has been the case. As I have noted, there are three approaches to the question of Vietnam as put forward by Dawn, namely the psychological approach, the chemical, and the physical. As for the psychological strategy, Dawn espouses the suggestions by anthropologist Franz Boas who posits that if one group of people want to "take over the direction of another society they should guide it from within its cultural framework or else eradicate its culture and impose new structures" (21). In that regard Dawn asks the following searching question, the answer to which will prove crucial to the suggestions he then puts forward: "[I]s there a factor in the psychic and psychosocial constitution of the insurgent population that makes it resistant to penetration by our programs?" (20).

Dawn thinks that the assumptions from which previous attempts started were mistaken in that they thought that the Vietnamese already considered themselves as individuals in the Western Cartesian sense: "It is a mistake to think of the Vietnamese individuals, for their culture prepares them to subordinate individual interest to the interests of family or band or hamlet . . . Our failure stems from the mistake that we attempt to embody the ghost inside the villager, but there has never been any ghost there" (21) This formulation refers to J.J. Smart's conception of Cartesian ontology as "A ghost in a Machine" (see Kim, 2000). Dawn's observation is that the Vietnamese are not yet Cartesian and it is mistaken to approach them as such. But the suggested solution, quite an impractical one, is to turn them into some kind of Cartesians. In that regard he has adopted Boaz's second recommendation on how one group can take over the direction of another society. He bases his position on the supposed success of a covert assassination operation called CT during which the Vietnamese were singled out arbitrarily for punishment thereby creating in the rest of the population the impression that those singled out must have committed some crime. Dawn avers: "What is the lesson of CT? CT teaches that when the cohesiveness of the group is weakened the threshold of

breakdown in each of its members drops. Conversely it teaches that to attack the group as a group without fragmenting it does not reduce the psychic capacity of its members to resist. Many of our Vietnam programs . . . show poor results from neglect of this principle. There is only one rule in Vietnam: fragment, individualise . . .” (25).

With regard to the infliction of brute physical and chemical forces, Dawn is unequivocal. In the case of physical force, he proposes what I would describe as a “total onslaught”, while proposals regarding chemical force suggest a kind of a “scorched-earth” strategy. Both proposals not only ring of the fallacy of “might means right” but also reflect the Cartesian’s total dereliction of ethical duty towards the Other, be they human, animal or the environment. In this regard Dawn asserts that: “There is only one problem in Vietnam and that is the problem of victory. The problem of victory is technical. We must believe this. Victory is a matter of sufficient force, and we dispose over sufficient force” (29). Further, Dawn aptly notes that force can also be used to achieve psychic ends, as is evident in the results of the terror operations run against Vietnamese civilians by laying waste their villages, in order to “[demonstrate] to the absent VC menfolk just how vulnerable their homes and families were” (23). The chemical attack involves the spraying of the Vietnamese crops and jungles with PROP-12 which as Dawn observes is “a soil poison, a dramatic poison which . . . washed into the soil, attacks the bonds in dark silicates and deposits a top skin of gray ashy grit”(31). Then there were also the napalm bombs “whose flesh-ripping jellied gasoline . . . served as the most glaring symbol of the Vietnamese carnage” (Burns, 1990: 79).

In a characteristically Cartesian obsession with measuring, fragmenting and individualising, Dawn propounds an algebraic formula for success which, ironically, rests on probabilities, thereby interrogating or undermining his own Cartesian basis of “exactness” and “precision”: “We cannot know until we can measure. But in political air-war there is no easy measure like the body-count. Therefore we use probability measures . . .” (30). Here Dawn admits the limits of his own Cartesian standpoint, exposing the bouts of doubt that plague him from time to time about the supposed absolute rightness of this position. The question he secretly asks himself is whether or not it is possible that the doubting self knows itself fully as Descartes had posited, or that the Self will ever eventually come to know itself fully as Phenomenology in general posits. This questioning has direct links to the questioning of the Hegelian thesis of history as the

unfolding of consciousness on its journey towards full self-knowledge on which Dawn bases his “metaphysical” *telos* of events such as the war in Vietnam.

Let me reiterate, in this regard, that Dawn’s mood swings between hope and despair, as is particularly evident in the last two sections of his report. I will quote at some length a densely argued section in which, mixing classical myth and recent developments in space-science, he outlines how much faith he has in his Cartesian autonomous subjectivity, which seeks to get rid of the Other totally (Vietnamese human as well as the earth) in its quest to fulfil itself, and also propounds the Hegelian thesis of history, thereby justifying the devastation of the Vietnamese people and their land:

But has the master-myth of history not outdated the fiction of earth and heaven? We live no longer by tilling the earth but by devouring her and her waste products. We signed our repudiation of her with flights toward new celestial loves. We have the capacity to breed out of our own head.... In Indo-China we play out the drama of the end of the tellurian age and the marriage of the sky-god with his parthonegene daughter-queen. If the play has been poor, it is because we have stumbled about the stage asleep, not knowing the meaning of our acts. Now I bring their meaning to light in that blinding moment of ascending meta-historical consciousness in which we begin to shape our own myths. (28)

In this passage the Cartesian subject is at the zenith of its delusional self-conception of absolute autonomy. It arrogantly, but falsely, believes that it produces everything else out of its own resources; needing neither the earth nor the real human mother to reproduce, it simply clones itself. There is something of the Frankensteinian “daredevilry” in the Cartesian Subject that is depicted here. Mary Shelley’s character, Victor Frankenstein, in the novel of the same title, not only creates life but does so without the aid of the human female, thereby negating the role that females play in the propagation of the species and rendering them dispensable thereby. Further, the Cartesian Subject believes that he or she can destroy the earth because he or she can find a celestial home to replace it with.⁷² Dawn’s world, like Frankenstein’s, is a universe where everything is not only possible but also permissible; everything is a necessary evil in this the best of all possible worlds, all in the name of a Hegelian “ascending meta-historical consciousness”. Thereafter, Dawn calls this process “the road of evolutionary duty toward the glory of consciousness” (29).

⁷² There are hints of over-confidence in the exploits of space exploration here, with America landing the first man on the moon in 1969 just three years previous to J.M. Coetzee’s publication of this novel.

However, a few paragraphs later, Dawn, delirious and guilt-wracked, realises how far he is taking his theorising and the signs of his ambivalence and doubt start to show. While working on his theory of probability with regard to the conduct of the war, he suddenly makes a rare admission of being conflicted:

For years now we have attacked the earth, explicitly in the defoliation of crops and jungle, implicitly in aleatoric shelling and bombing. Let us, in the act of ascending consciousness mentioned above, admit the meaning of our acts...They know our guilt at devastating the earth and know that our fiction of aiming at the 0.058% of a man crossing the spot we strike at the moment we strike it is a guilty lie. Press back such atavistic guilt! Our future belongs not to the earth but to the stars. Let us show the enemy that he stands naked in a dying landscape. (30-31)

While the moral considerations of this mission are, surprisingly, of concern to him, he feels powerless to flesh them out for, as he indicates in his report, he is compelled to “work on the assumption that the military believe in their own explanations when they assign a solely military value to terror operations” (23). One can argue that this is simply a sign of Dawn’s own split personality: while his “intersubjective” unconscious mind — that faithful mirror of the operations of consciousness — wants him to acknowledge his ontological indebtedness to the Vietnamese Other, his conscious Cartesian self counsels, *a la* Nietzsche, “the morality of the strong” since in the same report he also counsels the use of indiscriminate brute force to achieve a victory at all cost (29). Like the tics and spasms that Dawn has to bring under control by sheer will-power, but without success, he here counsels the autonomous Subject and hopes for it to press back the guilt it acknowledges simply by calling it “atavistic” — the autonomous subject’s illusion here of dismissal or disavowal of what it regards as the unpleasant Other about himself. It is not surprising therefore that it is immediately after making this confession that Dawn appends the aforementioned postscript to the report in which he lays bare his soul to Coetzee and details his existential anguish (31). Little wonder, too, that after the submission of this internally conflicted report (reflective of his own acute split self), Dawn kidnaps his son, Martin, is tracked down by the police, stabs Martin (who he holds hostage and behind whom he hides for protection in the ensuing hostage rescue drama), and is confined to a mental institution.

According to Dawn, who by the end of the narrative is wavering between holding on to a Cartesian ontology and its renunciation, America ultimately curses itself for adopting a

Cartesian ontology that hubristically promised a God-like existence but which has only succeeded in landing them in an ontological quicksand:

From tears we grew exasperated. Having proved to our sad selves that these are 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.
(19)

It is in the context of ennui and dejection that Dawn writes his report and makes the kind of assessment and recommendations that he does, hence the futility that he confesses in the postscript.

There is hope, though, for Dawn's and, by extension, America's future recovery. For instance, towards the end of the narrative, tired of his delusional existence, he toys with the possibility of jettisoning his Cartesian cast of mind and settling for a simpler and more realistic one. In another of J.M. Coetzee's resorts to realism, Dawn observes:

There is no doubt that contact with reality can be invigorating. I hope that the firm and prolonged intercourse with reality, if I can manage it, will have a good effect on my character as well as my health, and perhaps even improve my writing. I wish that I were more adequate to the vision of the snowcapped ranges that is mine if...I turn my eyes upward and slightly to the left...I would appreciate a firm grasp of cicadas, Dutch elm blight, and orioles, to mention three names, and the capacity to spin them into long, dense paragraphs which would give the reader a clear sense of *the complex natural reality in whose midst I now indubitably am*. (38, emphasis mine)

While previously, following in the footsteps of Descartes, Dawn would have doubted the existence of any of the entities he has listed above; by presenting us with a detailed catalogue of the entities in his surroundings, both immediate and remote, here he acknowledges their "un-ignorable being-there-ness" (Attridge, 2005: 13). Of course, Dawn seems to swing dangerously towards the classic sense of realism in the Aristotelian sense where ideas arise from and subsist in the entities unlike in the modern Kantian sense (of course, minus the *a priori* categories) where reality is created by a subject's interaction with entities outside of himself or herself. Further to this, Dawn, well-known for his Platonic view of love and sex, in a marked departure from his earlier stance on these matters, even entertains the idea of deriving satisfaction from actually having sex with a woman:

This morning I brought up the issues of a thing against my thigh. I drifted to the surface and found a smile on my lips. I will raise this fragment at this morning's

interview. It is a great help to my doctors that I record my dreams, and dreams about women are I am sure as important to my cure as dreams about Vietnam. (51)

Also, rather than continuing to regard himself as a ratiocinative autonomous subject, he begins to acknowledge the place and role of brute reality in his subjectivity. In this regard, though in some respects mistaken in their diagnosis of the causes of Dawn's mental breakdown, the medical staff at the mental institution know their patient is wilfully, though mistakenly alienated from this reality. It is in view of this that they counsel that he form attachments rather than conceive of himself as an isolate being:

They have my welfare at heart...I do all I can to help them. I believe that I help them by cathecting my love on to my room. It is part of my cure to learn to form stable attachments. When I am set loose in the outside world I will have to transfer my attachments to new objects. I think at the present of an apartment, a one-room apartment with a kitchenette for my food and a bathroom for my other needs. (45)⁷³

This meditation follows on another in which Dawn extends his search and wish for the corporeality of brute reality to language and conceives of himself as living in words and the words living in him: "IT HAS ALL come down to this ... my bed, my window, my door, my walls, my room. These words I love. I sit them on my lap to burnish and fondle.... I live in them and they in me" (45). The pendulum seems to have swung from the extreme idealism of Plato — expressed here in Cartesianism — to the extreme realism of Aristotle where words, concepts and things are one and the same. Neither position, it seems to me, quite captures the view of the nature of reality which I am adumbrating in this study (of the Kantian type — though with modifications), that reality is mediated, part brute or given and part constructed. Once again, both sections referred to above reflect J.M. Coetzee's occasional resort to realism as a mode of writing to emphasise Dawn's acute need for contact with brute reality as part of his cure.

While there is hope for Dawn's eventual recovery, there is, nonetheless, a long way to go before this can be achieved because, as he himself observes, his problems reach back to his childhood:

I am eager to confront life a second time, but I am not impatient to get out. There is still my entire childhood to work through before I can expect to get to the bottom of

⁷³ The secret that Dawn says is what draws the medical staff to him is J.M Coetzee's signalling of the otherness of the Other which needs to be taken into account in the relationship between any two subjects. It is a point Coetzee goes back to again and again in his writing, most notably in the case of the lifeworld of the Hottentots, the subjectivity of Michael K and the subjectivity of the animal Other in general.

my story . . . In my cell in the heart of America, with my private toilet in the corner, I ponder and ponder. I have high hopes of finding whose fault I am. (51)

In fact, Dawn's hope of finding out whose fault he is may very well have to go beyond his childhood. The fault pre-dates him by at least three centuries, since it goes back to the era of Descartes and Jacobus Coetzee, as well as the century immediately preceding his birth, the era of Hegel. In other words, he was born into the fault and I believe that it is the sources of this fault that J.M. Coetzee wishes to explore in the second novella titled "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" to whose discussion I now turn.

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The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee

He threatens to have a history in which I shall be a term. Such is the material basis of the malady of the master's soul. So often, waking or dreaming, has his soul lived through the approach of the savage that this has become an ideal form of the life of penetration. (86)

We reached the crest of a slight eminence and stopped to look back and smoke a pipe. . . . I was calmer. My mind bobbed in my body like a bottle on the sea. I was happy. (109)

Through their deaths I, who after they had expelled me had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality. (113)

As David Attwell has repeatedly observed (see, for example, 1991: 29; 1993: 35; 2004: 115), Eugene Dawn begins his narrative by articulating his sense of having been ontologically predetermined: "My Name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that. Here goes."⁷⁴ And by the time his story ends we see him trying to find out whose fault he is (51). It seems that Dawn's fault can be traced to the Enlightenment, and the subsequent institutionalisation of the Cartesian conception of being in terms of which reason or mind are regarded as the seat of subjectivity with the consequent division between Self and Other. The decline in Europe of the influence of the traditional "organic" conceptions of being, and more collective forms of social organisation, in the wake of the emergence of the individualistic tenets of the Enlightenment, and compounded by the subsequent rise of the industrial revolution/capitalism, had a number of

⁷⁴ In the 1993 publication Attwell points out the various historical sources of J.M. Coetzee's materials in the writing of both novellas that constitute *Dusklands*, sources that Coetzee does not imitate but rather parodies and whose authority he thereby undermines for his own artistic purposes.

unforeseeable consequences both at home and abroad. These consequences included the rapid rise of industrialisation and capitalism and the expansion and justification of colonisation, ostensibly to feed the burgeoning industrialist-cum-capitalist society in Europe and the Americas. Accounts of the brutalities of the Industrial Revolution, the concomitant rise of the capitalist system of economic enterprise and its consequences in Europe itself portend badly indeed for the later encounter between the West and its colonial Others. Taking into account the proletarianisation and brutalisation of large numbers of white people during this period, the question one asks oneself is: could the colonised Other have fared any better in the face of such intra-othering that was already underway in Europe itself?

While differences in skin colour would have provided a convenient excuse for the othering and subsequent exploitation of the people in the colonies, it is not uncommon for studies of colonialism to argue that race was not the only driving force behind imperial discrimination and exploitation of the colonised, but also class (as argue Michael Vaughan [1982] and others). It has been noted in various circles that, in fact, quite a number of the Europeans who went to the colonies had themselves been socially marginalised back home and they brought with them the very attitudes that had, in the first place, led to their marginalisation.

Furthermore, the role of a self-serving Christianity — as practised in Europe — in the colonial drive cannot be underestimated. The proselytizing mission could not totally avoid the official conceptions of being, and the so-called heathen became the perfect Other who needed to be turned into the Self, not in their own right, but as mimic beings of Western culture.⁷⁵ It is against this colonial-cum-religious background that in this narrative Jacobus Coetzee sees himself variously as a tamer of the wild, a coloniser and a missionary to the “heathen”, such as the Hottentots and Bushmen. J.S. Coetzee (who was the author’s ancestor) in his afterword to Jacobus Coetzee’s narrative observes as follows, in this regard:

⁷⁵ But as Homi Bhabha (1994: 85-92) notes in the essay “Of Mimicry and Man”, because of its inherent shortcomings, mimicry eventually leads to menace arising from the skewed copying on the part of those mimicking. However, mimicry was only one use to which religion and Western Culture were put. Under apartheid as a religious system, the black Other was absolutely other whose role in the scheme of things was to be the hewer of wood and drawer of water as per the curse that Noah rained upon his errant son Ham (Gen 9: 20-27). The Afrikaners were the new chosen race, the new Jewry, and they had the black other and their lands for their inheritance. It was a paradoxical and queer kind of inheritance which had to be kept at arms length even as it was supposed to contribute towards the Afrikaners’ comfort by forcibly giving up their lands and providing cheap or free labour.

I cannot refrain from quoting that most eminent of British missionaries John Phillip, whose words reveal only too well his coreligionists' collusion in the imperial mission: "While our missionaries are everywhere scattering the seeds of civilisation, social order, and happiness, they are by the most unexceptionable means extending British interests, British influence, and the British Empire. Wherever the missionary places his standard among a savage tribe, their prejudices against the colonial government give way and their dependence upon the colony is increased by the creation of artificial wants". (118-119)

Regarding such colonial views such as that of the Hottentots as savage that we see in the passage above, anthropologists Lynn Meskell and Lindsay Weiss (2006: 90) note the flagrant corruptions of colonial taxonomy in its labelling of the supposed Hottentot personality which included the view that he or she is an idle being. J.M. Coetzee (1988a:12-35) himself harps upon these observations in *White Writing* in which he notes that because of differences in modes of living, and the refusal of the Hottentot — due to their nomadic lifestyle — to be incorporated into the settled economy of the colonists as a source of cheap labour, the Hottentots could only be read, reductively, as having a lazy nature. With regard to labelling, as I will note at various points in this discussion, Jacobus Coetzee, too, comes to the land of the Hottentots armed, not only with the gun, but also with a number of stereotypical labels, but which fail to stick on the latter and this "failure of fit" causes the former to experience an existential crisis brought on by a sense of disconfirmation.

Jacobus Coetzee is a dissembler, obsessed with proving his pre-determined assumptions of a supposed unbridgeable ontological and cultural chasm between the colonists and the native Bushmen and Hottentots. We note that in the first encounter between Jacobus Coetzee's party and the Hottentots, the former states that he has come in search of elephant tusks which his people prize (71). This agenda of his mission is cleverly couched as a desire for cultural exchange between the colonists and the Namaqua Hottentots. Coetzee mentions that he has heard a lot of great things about the Namaquas:

We came in peace. We brought gifts and promises of friendship. We were simple hunters. We sought permission to hunt the elephant in the land of the Namaqua. . . . Travellers had spoken of the hospitality and generosity of the great Namaqua people and we had come to pay our respects and offer our friendship. In our wagon we brought gifts which we understood the Namaqua people prized, tobacco and rolled copper We wished to buy fresh oxen. We would pay well. (71)

This position of mutual exchange is reiterated a few paragraphs later (74-75). However, Jacobus Coetzee's talk of seeking cultural exchange is a mere disguise because what stands out clearly from the very beginning of his narrative is his obsessive search for differences between the collective or herd self of the colonists, on the one hand, and the Bushmen and the Hottentots, on the other. Jacobus Coetzee engages in what this study has termed the dynamics of "distancing" and "misrepresentation" that govern discriminatory relations and which often result into "miscognition" of the Other and "disconfirmation" of the discriminating Subject. Jacobus Coetzee's obsessive search for difference is not so much that he can respect the otherness of his Others but rather to cast the Others, in Manichean terms, as inferior and evil and thereby disrespect, dominate and exploit them. For Jacobus Coetzee, the Other exists not in his or her own right but, in Jungian terms, s/he becomes merely the dark side to the self (JanMohamed, 1985).

Always one to maintain a rigid Self/Other binary socio-ontological regime, Jacobus Coetzee is deeply concerned that the material and cultural differences between the colonists and the indigenes, the Hottentots especially, are disappearing:

There are those of our people who live like Hottentots. . . . Our children play with servants' children and who is to say who copies whom? In hard times how can differences be maintained? We pick up their way of life . . . as they pick up ours. (61)

What has occasioned this crisis and obsession for a search for difference, more than anything else, is the colonists' envy of the rising Hottentot bourgeoisie, exemplified by Adam Wijnand who in just five years has become very rich, owning "ten thousand head of cattle, as much land as he can patrol and a stableful of women"(65-66). At this point too can be noticed Jacobus Coetzee's othering not only of Bushmen and Hottentots as ethnic groups but also of women, be they colonist women or colonised women. It will be noted that the word "stable" is usually reserved for the dwelling place of horses and other domesticated animals. This othering of the Other, both sexual and ethnic, is discernible throughout this narrative.

Jacobus Coetzee does not attribute this disappearance of radical difference between the colonists and the natives to the ontological fact of consciousness, its embodiedness, mediatedness, and especially its relational intentionality. Instead, he reductively (because narrow and shallow) attributes it to "hard times". For an ontology predicated on

difference, separateness and the consequent competition such as Jacobus Coetzee's, this disappearance of difference is not a small matter. But, rather than question the ontological basis of this assumed difference, Jacobus Coetzee takes offence at its disappearance and is prepared to maintain what he regards as the divinely ordained privileged position of the colonists. Characteristically, he appeals to religion to prop up the threatened status quo of the colonists: "The one gulf that divides us from the Hottentots is our Christianity. We are Christians, a folk with a destiny" (61). An appeal to religion as a source of authority is a well-known tactic which has been both used and abused throughout history.⁷⁶ And, having set up this "meta-physical" standard of difference, Jacobus Coetzee feels the privileged position of the colonists reaffirmed, if not on the material, then at least on a "metaphysical" plane.

But, to firmly entrench the privileged position of the colonists, Jacobus Coetzee stops at nothing, from appeal to guile (the *ad hominem* denigration of the other) to use of force (*ad baculum* or "might means right") in the shape of the gun and its metaphors. To achieve the dehumanisation of the Other, as ethnic groups, the Bushmen and Hottentots are cast as animals and, accordingly, animal metaphor is used in describing their being. As Homi Bhabha (1994: 66-84) has observed, stereotype is a favoured tactic of othering the Other in order to fix and contain what has been designated as his or her otherness. According to Jacobus Coetzee, the Bushman is the worse of the two groups. The Hottentot is master of "sly civility" (cf. Bhabha, 1994: 93-101), a false creature, an actor who is metaphysically bankrupt since s/he does not have a belief in the after-life but only pretends to adopt Christianity as a survival strategy (61). The Bushman, on the other hand, makes no such pretensions; instead he or she is a master of cunning and is more animal-like than the Hottentot. Thus the Bushman ethnic group are variously likened to baboons (62), dogs (62), jackals (63); their gatherings as troops, bands, etc (63). The Bushman women fare even worse; they are absolute others, expendable and disposable, who can even be used as "breeders" of children for the master's labour force (65), a common enough practice even during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, especially for poor masters who could not afford to buy slaves of their own.

⁷⁶ During the trans-Atlantic slave trade, for instance, both the slavers and the enslaved deployed different interpretations of religion to defend their diametrically opposed causes. As Allister Sparks (1990) so insightfully observes in *The Mind of South Africa*, Apartheid itself was an example of just such an other-worldly appeal to a certain self-serving interpretation of the Christian religion to justify its political existence and enforcement.

To illustrate this degrading perception of the Bushman woman, Jacobus Coetzee compares the colonist woman and the Bushman woman. He first notes the subaltern position of both groups as Other. But he hastens to mention that the colonist woman is tied into property relationships, whereas the Bushman woman is a proper chattel herself:

[A] Bushman girl is tied into nothing, literally nothing. She may be alive but she is as good as dead. She has seen you kill the men who represented power to her, she has seen them shot down like dogs. You have become power itself now and she nothing, a rag you wipe yourself on and throw away. She is completely disposable. She is something for nothing, free. She can kick and scream but she knows she is lost. That is the freedom she offers, the freedom of the abandoned. She has no attachments, not even the well-known attachment to life. She has given up the ghost; she is flooded instead with your will. Her response to you is absolutely congruent to your will. She is the ultimate love you have borne your own desires alienated in a foreign body and pegged out waiting for your pleasure. (65-66)

The zombification of the Bushman woman here is absolute and later, in a fit of solipsism, it will manifest itself in Jacobus Coetzee's love of entities that can least offer him reciprocity or challenge — stones (102).⁷⁷ As we have seen, this desire for total domination is also apparent in Eugene Dawn's love of sleeping women and children (12). (J.M. Coetzee explores the enforced ontological entrapment and subaltern position of the colonist woman in greater detail in *In The Heart of The Country* [1978]).

Furthermore, the sexual innuendo in the above quotation is unmistakable. The opening sentence of the paragraph in which the passage occurs is a confession of sexual liaisons between the male, white colonists and Bushman women. Given that the Bushmen are animals to the colonists, one cannot help noticing the self-incriminating confession of bestiality here. While the colonists know that Bushmen are human, they, in order to dominate them, cast them as animals, and so find themselves “risking” the charge of bestiality. But one would have taken this seriously if only one did not know, as Bhabha avers in the essay referred to above, how stereotype works and the contradictions that it entangles itself in the process. So, for instance, the Other is at once both totally knowable, transparent (such as Jacobus Coetzee's supposed knowledge of the Hottentots [67]) and “totally inscrutable”.

⁷⁷ Although it is the Bushman woman whom Jacobus Coetzee zombifies here, what happened to a Hottentot called Sara Baartman, who was tricked into believing that she would be offered a dignified and well paying job in Europe but only ended up being a specimen of Hottentot female sexuality as the black Venus, on display both in life on the podia of entertainment, and in death in a French museum, is just one example of the zombification of the Other.

The colonists are so keen on proving Hottentot and Bushman savagery that various strategies are devised to try and prove this assumed savagery. For instance, to prove the assumed cannibalism of the Hottentots, they roast a Bushman whom they have just shot and offer him to the Hottentots to eat. The latter refuse politely giving the excuse that he was “too sinewy” to eat (64).⁷⁸ Although nothing seems to be proving the colonists stereotypes, throughout his journey to the land of the Namaquas, Jacobus Coetzee, in his personal capacity, is still interested to prove the barbarism and savagery of the Hottentots. And when his expectations of their assumed savagery are not met this leads to a deep existential crisis which has very dire consequences for both him and them. For instance, the mass coitus that he expects when he watches their “Nama Dove” dance does not happen (91-92); the savage treatment he was expecting from them when he falls ill does not happen either (87-88). Eventually, he asks: “were they real savages these Hottentots?” (103-104). But, instead of considering the possibility that he may have been mistaken in his preconceptions of them, that he has misrepresented and so “miscognised” them, he is so disillusioned that he begins to doubt his own existence and slide more and more into solipsism, hence his later massacre of them, in an ontological bid to prove his own existence.

Aside from his attempts to investigate supposed Hottentot savage existence, and so cast himself as superior to them, Jacobus Coetzee’s narcissistic self-obsession is evident from very early on in the narrative. Like Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee is obsessed with exercising his mind in acts of self-control, and he has a clear sense of the division between the mind and the body and wishes for his mind to dominate his body. As for narcissism, and a tinge of hubris, while he and his party have endured great hardship to reach the land of the Namaquas, Jacobus Coetzee sets himself apart from the rest of them and gives himself all the credit for the progress so far: “My Hottentots and my oxen had given me faithful service; but the success of the expedition had flowed from my own enterprises and exertions. It was I who planned each day’s march and scouted out the road. . . . They saw me as their father. They would have died without me” (68). The autonomous, even God-like, poise assumed by Coetzee here is quite evident in his thinking that all issued from him and that his servants and animals would have perished without him. In time,

⁷⁸ One is here reminded of the Congolese who are boating with Marlowe on the Congo river in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (1902). Although they are on the verge of starvation they do not kill and eat neither one of their own nor the white people, much to Marlowe’s amazement because this disciplined conduct of theirs flies in the face of his expectations of them as cannibals.

this self-obsession will lead to attempts at full blown solipsism and outright hubris, which ends in the massacre of Hottentots and the precipitation of existential angst and nihilism, which point to a failure of just such an attempt at a supposed self-sufficiency. Donald Powers points out, in this regard, that both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee are only solipsists of a kind but who cannot quite achieve this illusory state:

We observe in Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee two characters who entertain the ideal of an autonomous . . . existence. They imagine the mind separate from the body, they dream of the self sustained with the self alone. They do not acknowledge their reliance on others to validate their being, they draw to themselves all powers of self determination. Yet in their engagements with other people it emerges that they are only self-sufficient to a degree and no more; they require others to affirm their individuality. Coetzee is concerned to demonstrate this basic fact of lived reality. (2006: 112-12)

Coetzee's encounter with the Namaqua is marked with ambivalence. Although he regards them as the "enemy" (69) even before he has properly interacted with them, typical of the anxiety attendant on some encounters between a Self and an Other, his initial impressions of the Namaqua are very positive. Contrasting them to his own "domesticated" Hottentots, whom he thinks have a false consciousness judging from the way they interact with him — he is even moved to approach these "wild" Hottentots as equals: "A wild Hottentot, the kind that met us that day, one who has lived all his life in a state of nature, has his Hottentot integrity. He sits straight, he stands straight, he looks you in the eye. It is a pretty thing to see, this confidence, for a change, for one who has moved so long among the cunning and the cowardly . . ." (69-70). So far this has been a meeting of ontologically reciprocal "equals". However, Jacobus Coetzee, always on the search for differences, cannot bring himself to regard these Hottentots as his equals and so he immediately puts them in what he believes to be their proper place by appealing this time not to religion but to that other favourite fallacy of the ontologically threatened: the potential for force that he commands relative to that of the Hottentots. In this regard, he begins by pointing out that this self-confidence in the Hottentots is based on "an illusion of equivalence" (70). It should not be an illusion though; it must be based on any subject's sense of self-worth and honour arising from the uniqueness of subjecthood that I referred to in chapter one. But Jacobus Coetzee appeals to the fallacy of "might means right" (or here adjusted to "might means being") to discount this sense of self-worth exhibited by the Namaquas because, as he notes, he and his party have "three muskets" while they have nothing (70).

Interestingly — and tellingly too — what happens immediately after this citing of difference is that Jacobus Coetzee’s tale becomes more and more suspect with at least four possible plots to choose from, a tactic which J.M. Coetzee uses, as Watson (1996) points out, to show how a sole witness can falsify facts to suit his or her own purposes. (It is a tactic that will also be used to describe Klawer’s “double death” later [99-101] or to describe the possible contest into which he could have entered into with the Hottentots during what he calls his captivity [104-105]). These strategies also reflect J.M. Coetzee’s resort to the postmodernist tactics of meta-fiction in which the author comments on his or her own writing processes in the course of writing.

In this regard, in her book titled *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction*, Patricia Waugh observes:

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text. . . . [Metafiction shows] a celebration of the power of the creative imagination together with an uncertainty about the validity of its representations; an extreme self-consciousness about language, literary form and the act of writing fictions; a pervasive insecurity about the relationship of fiction to reality; a parodic, playful, excessive or deceptively naïve style of writing. (1984: 2)

Not that this is simply some “fantastical” kind of writing. Waugh makes the point clear when she says that, rather than ignore realism altogether, metafiction makes realism stand as “control” to metafictional writing:

Metafiction . . . does not abandon ‘the real world’ for the narcissistic pleasures of the imagination. What it does is re-examine the conventions of realism in order to discover — through its own self-reflection — a fictional form that is culturally relevant and comprehensible to contemporary readers. In showing us how literary fiction creates its imaginary worlds, metafiction helps us to understand how the reality we live day by day is similarly constructed, similarly ‘written’. (1984: 18)

In other words, Waugh (1984: 29) notes, reality is not “something simply given. Reality is manufactured”. I discuss at some length in the next chapter regarding J.M. Coetzee’s own forays into metafiction. What I can observe here is that, in the hands of Jacobus Coetzee, this metafictional “falsification” leads to a less than impressive view of the Hottentots as a group that he soon develops, a view whose veracity stands doubtful as a

result. He describes the Hottentots as thieves and infantile beings when they “ransack” his wagons and “filch” tobacco, especially, while their supposed “chief” is watching without restraining them (71-75).⁷⁹ Accordingly, Jacobus Coetzee works even harder to set himself apart from these supposed thieves and infants to avoid degenerating to their base level: “I had forgotten the terrors that the communal life of the Hottentots can hold for the established soul” (76-77). It will be recalled here that the colonial fear of degeneration was quite central to what was regarded as the civilising mission in the colonies. This led to a number of apartheid-like laws in most colonies meant to limit as much as possible contact between the European (Caucasian) colonisers and the natives.

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Having given an outline of Jacobus Coetzee as a character, I need to note at this point that, from the foregoing discussion, Coetzee comes across as Dawn’s metaphysical ancestor and it is to him that origins of Dawn’s malaise can be traced. Coetzee exhibits the seeds of the same neuroses that afflict Dawn centuries later. (In a sense by lining up all these Coetzees in both narratives, J.M. Coetzee, the author, is implicating himself in a history of imperial domination and exploitation as has been observed by critics such as David Attwell (1993). J.M. Coetzee (1992: 343) confesses as much in an interview with Attwell in which he observes that he could not have written this narrative if he did not consider himself personally implicated through his ancestors.

For instance, like Dawn in the previous narrative, Jacobus Coetzee, too, is obsessed with being in control of what he conceives of as his self or his soul, which he regards as quite distinct from his body. When, soon after his arrival among the Hottentots, young Hottentot boys jokingly and innocently mock him by calling him “Long-Nose” (77), instead of laughing along, he presents himself as having taken offence yet being in control of his emotions: “Patiently, like an equestrian statue, I waited for their chieftain

⁷⁹ Of course it seems that Jacobus Coetzee’s blanket praise for “man in his natural state” as he does with the Hottentots before things turn sour between them is mistaken. Such praise stems from the myth of “the noble savage” as noted in my theoretical exposition. This is a state of “consciousness of” which cannot be taken seriously. In this regard, I am persuaded to agree with the view expressed by Thomas Hobbes in his *The Leviathan* where, as we have already noted, he aptly notes that there can be no real civilised social organisation for man in his natural state because it is a state of “a war of all against all”. But the solution he proposes to this chaos is tyrannical.

⁸⁰ On this topic see Stephan’s essay on notions of progress and degeneration in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries in Edward Chamberlin and Gilman Sander (1985) *Degeneration, The Dark Side of Progress*, and George Fredrickson’s (2002) analysis of the same in *Racism: A Short History*.

to receive me”(77). A short while later, in the ensuing commotion about the ransacking of his wagons, a woman sexually entices Jacobus Coetzee to put him at ease and, perhaps, reduce him to the same level as them by pointing out that he may look different from them racially but there are some common denominators, sexual desire being one such. But Jacobus Coetzee’s response to this is almost to shoot her (79). Furthermore, escaping his sequestration in a menstruating women’s hut he watches an erotic Nama Dance but can only do so from a distance and, like Dawn, only in a voyeuristic way too: “I have always enjoyed watching coitus whether of animals or of slaves. Nothing human is alien to me. So, overmastering my anxiety I continued to watch until a cool night breeze sent me back to my bed” (92). And then, imagining his ritual dismemberment by the Hottentots, he thinks that like the Zenonian beetle he can stoically endure such an occurrence with the help of his mind (87-88). Later, having returned to massacre the Hottentots, he describes the state of his mind before the act by describing it in terms that portray it as existing separately from his body: “I was calmer. My mind bobbed in my body like a bottle on the sea. I was happy” (109), a conception of subjectivity reminiscent of J.J. Smart’s “Ghost in a machine” image (Kim, 2000).

But Jacobus’ Cartesian posturing does not last long because, shortly after his initial encounter with the Namaqua Hottentots, as I have already hinted at, he falls ill and finds himself totally at the mercy of the very people he has despised by calling them uncivilised. Following his illness, this champion of self-control and equipoise has lost all ability to exercise these “virtues”. His rather shameful sickness shows him for what he is — and should be, namely that he is just a human being like everyone else and not the god he supposed (and desires) the Hottentots mistake him for when he earlier muses: “Perhaps on my horse and with the sun over my right shoulder I looked like a god, a god of the kind they did not yet have. The Hottentots are a primitive people” (75).

Jacobus’ sickness is of the type the Hottentots take to be spiritually dangerous and they accordingly quarantine him in a place no less ignominious (so he thinks) as their own menstruating women’s huts which are situated away from the rest of the village, on the other side of the river (76). The irony of this is that, in his mind, Jacobus Coetzee does not just look at this as a case of medical precaution but probably thinks he has been reduced to the zombie status to which he had consigned the Bushman woman as I have pointed out elsewhere. This and other imaginary wrongs suffered by him, precipitate in

him an existential crisis. Yet it is during these realistic-cum-naturalistic moments to do with his illness (such as his hourly parting of his buttocks to finger the carbuncle, his relieving himself in the pot or in the bushes or the river, as well as his keeping of the dates of the journeys — although this aspect may well be a case of seeking control through a sort of book-keeping mentality), when he overcomes his solipsistic self and omnipotent fantasies, and comes “down-to-earth”, so to say. I need to note, again, at this point, that in the presentation of Jacobus Coetzee’s merely human self in this narrative, too, J.M. Coetzee’s style is not very different from that in the previous one in the case of Eugene Dawn. When he wants to point out the constructedness of fiction and of reality, J.M. Coetzee resorts to modernist and postmodernist metafictional tactics as I have already noted. But when he wants to emphasise the un-ignorable-being-there-ness of the body and of brute reality, as opposed to the Cartesian doubt, he resorts to the immediacy and graphic quality of realism-cum-naturalism.

At the same time that Jacobus Coetzee is lying sick in a hut meant for menstruating Hottentot women, falling in and out of consciousness, he experiences Cartesian-like meditations in which he outlines his ontological conceptions of himself in relation to his Others. He swings between his love for solipsism and the angst it causes him. These meditations could be said to be informed by a combination of Phenomenology and Cartesianism — of course this could be said to be a calculated anachronism on the part of J.M. Coetzee because Phenomenology arose only much later in the 20th Century. Jacobus Coetzee’s ontology is a mix of the extrospection of the transparency of Phenomenology and the introspection of the transparency of Descartes. Initially, he exhibits a false sense of intentionality since his subjectivity is couched in terms of only the mind bodying forth, extrospectively projecting itself onto, and controlling, the world around it. He even doubts the possible existence of interiors (that is, of things-in-themselves), falsely believing in ontological transparency, that everything is as it appears. A central tenet of phenomenology is that things are as they appear or as they manifest or “presence” themselves. As I point out in the previous chapter, this was in reaction to both the Cartesian tenet of interiors, later amplified by Kant when he posited the noumenal world of things-in-themselves, opposing it to a world of phenomena or of appearances. Phenomenology opposes itself to the noumenal world, arguing that the world of appearances is all there is to being.

In his quest to dominate and control, Jacobus Coetzee finds phenomenology a useful colonial tool as it assures him that things are as they appear and that he can then attribute to himself what Emmanuel Levinas, following Sartre, deplored as an assimilative or ingestive ontology (see Critchley, 2007: 5-6). Consciousness' mediatedness militates against this supposed ontological assimilationism. Jacobus Coetzee's doubts about the existence of interiors is akin to Dawn's denying any depth to Marilyn and her friends, taking them to be transparent and counselling that one only has to observe someone's behaviour to grasp the "essence" of the person (11). It is when Jacobus Coetzee comes upon what he calls the "alien certainties of sun and stone" (83) that he is shocked into revising his earlier rejection of interiors. These phenomena, seemingly impenetrable to his "ingesting eye," bring to his attention the possibility of the existence of things-in-themselves, a possibility which later, having massacred all the Hottentots, makes him wonder if he had not thereby destroyed something of inestimable value after all (113).

However, the consummate omnipotent solipsist that Jacobus Coetzee is, he very quickly abandons this trajectory of the possibility of things existing-in-themselves; of things being immune to his assimilationist and projectionist ontology. So we next find him, Cartesian-like, doubting the existence of all else external to himself. But then, finding this untenable, he phenomenologically reaches a conclusion that is the polar opposite of the one that Descartes reached: "I am all that I see" (84). It seems to me that it is as much an error to suppose that everything, including one's subjectivity, issues from the ratiocinative self which is then projected onto the world, as to suppose that everything is outside us and so not a part of our being. Indeed, the moment a Subject posits a radical gap between himself/herself and the Other (as in Cartesianism) such a Subject, because of the inevitable competition for resources, is bound to do violence to that Other. On the other hand, a Subject who believes s/he can ontologically gain access to himself/herself and to the Other without consciousnesses' mediatedness (as in Phenomenology) is also bound to do violence to the Other because if such a Subject's picture of that Other does not conform to what s/he has of him or her, there will ensue a struggle for control of that Other's subjectivity to force him or her to conform to the pre-determined image. It is not surprising, therefore that, since the Hottentots have not conformed to what Jacobus Coetzee thinks he knows about them (as we have already seen), the next turn of events eventually leads to precisely such violence. And the gun plays a central role in this violence.

In this regard, initially, like solipsistic America in the previous narrative, Jacobus Coetzee appeals to the gun to prove his existence. By killing the Other (the hare, for instance [85]) he gets the temporary relief that he is not a hopeless Cartesian subject trapped in his own ontologically disquieting solipsistic world: “The gun stands for the hope that there exists that which is other than oneself” (84). And, in characteristic J.M. Coetzee style, there follows a lengthy passage in which Jacobus Coetzee is trying to prove the un-ignorable existence of just such a world outside of himself by listing the animals he has killed with the gun (84). But even then difference must be maintained. As such he avers that what differentiates him from the “savage” Hottentot is his possession of the gun, it frees him from space, while the savage is enslaved to space. Again and again, Jacobus Coetzee notes that he is “in the world but not of it” while the savage conceives of himself/herself as both “in the world and of it” (86). Later, intent on separating himself from the Hottentots, he declares “I am among you but I am not of you” (98).

However, in a very revealing passage, couched in the prospect of the Hegelian struggle of Master and Slave, Jacobus Coetzee points out what truly precipitates his existential angst, namely the fear of being conquered and objectified:

Savages do not have guns. This is the effective meaning of savagery, which we may define as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer’s mastery of space. The relation of master and savage is a spatial relation Across this annulus I behold him approach bearing the wilderness in his heart. On the far side he is nothing to me and I probably nothing to him. On the near side mutual fear will drive us to our little comedies of man and man, prospector and guide, benefactor and beneficiary, victim and assassin, teacher and pupil, father and child. He crosses it, 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. Such is the material basis of the malady of the master’s soul. So often, waking or dreaming, has his soul lived through the approach of the savage that this has become an ideal form of the life of penetration. (86)

There is nothing noble about not having discovered the manufacturing of guns or any of the modern technological devices as Aimee Cesaire (1956), tongue-in-cheek, celebrates in his *Return To My Native Land*. However, yet again, we see here difference or otherness being set up as something negative; something to use against those one is different from by way of excluding and controlling them. It is evident here that, obsessed as he is with taming the wild by numbering and measuring it — as “a hero of enumeration” (85) —

Jacobus Coetzee has such a phobia for the seeming boundlessness of space in the wild. His major fear is that he may be swallowed up by both space and by Hottentot ontology and so become a term in their history. Earlier, he complains that in the wild he loses his sense of boundaries and so feels alienated (84). In this connection, Johan Geertsema's (2006: 109-110) discussion of Dan Roodt's sense of Afrikaner identity reflects just such a mentality of the quasi exile of the colonist, at once too far from Europe and too close to Africa so as to fail to identify fully with either place, an inability that renders them to conceive of themselves as an in-between people, existing in the South African land but not of it. For similar reasons Jacobus Coetzee later fails to achieve a sense of the sublime when confronted with the wilderness which is the land of the Namaqua, succumbing instead to an existential angst which he calls a "failure of the imagination" (109). Ironically, Roodt argues that this in-betweenness is the identity that befits a land so unamenable to the sublime as the Karoo (which, according to him, metonymically stands for South Africa) and it is the Afrikaner (no longer European but not fully African either) who best exemplifies or embodies this and who therefore can have a claim of nativity in it.

But Jacobus Coetzee can claim no nativity in this land; he is not interested in ontological reciprocity or cultural exchange as he claims at the beginning of the narrative, but in distancing, controlling, dominating and exploiting the Other. While he fears becoming a term in Hottentot history, later, disillusioned that what he had expected of the Hottentot savagery has not materialised, attributing it what he regards as their lack of depth, he instead begins to look for the place of the Hottentot in *his* history and thereby wanting to turn *them* into a term in *his* history (103). Among other things, J.M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) explores just such self-inflicted existential terrors of the colonist including the imaginary fear of being swamped by the indigenes and becoming a term in their history (see Jerzy Koch and Pawel Zajac, 2006).

Yet, much as Jacobus Coetzee wants to separate himself from the Hottentots, and delve into a solipsistic existence while among them, he is deeply afraid of the angst that this solipsism occasions. Mistakenly feeling ignored by the Hottentots, because they quarantine him in a menstruating women's hut, he dislikes them even more for it (of course, being quarantined cannot be interpreted as being ignored; the Hottentots are only taking precautions against the dangers which, according to their understanding, a

sickness such as Coetzee's is capable of bringing to society at large. Otherwise the Hottentots attend to all his physical and health needs). Thus fearing that he is becoming a spectre, initially he hourly fingers his carbuncle to assure himself that he still exists (87-88). In affirming the un-ignorable being-there-ness of the body, we have noted that J.M. Coetzee (1992: 248) argues that it is the pain that the body feels that is a counter against all the doubts of its existence — Jacobus Coetzee appeals to exactly this thesis of the body in pain to prove his at times doubtful existence.

But it seems that this pain is not enough to assure Coetzee of his existence. As such he engages in a series of events to further prove his now “doubtful” existence. To prove to himself that he has not degenerated to the state of a spectre, during one of the nights, he wakes up and goes to watch the erotic Hottentot dances. At this point, he appropriately describes himself as “a ghost” (90) — but while there he also wants to prove his stereotype of the Hottentot as sexually licentious and lecherous, a stereotype that is not confirmed as I have already discussed. Progressively, Jacobus Coetzee takes this search to prove his existence way too far when he engages in a fistfight with the children of the village who, in playing a practical joke with him, have snatched his clothes while he is relieving himself in the river (95-96). The savagery with which he attacks the children (he even bites off the ear from one of them [96]) is a sign of a desperate attempt to prove his existence which he believes has been seriously put into question.

The unwarranted violence engaged in above foreshadows the violence with which he later takes his revenge on the Hottentot settlement. His desperation also shows when, having left the ailing Klaver in the wild, after unceremoniously leaving the Hottentot community in the aftermath of the fistfight with the young boys, he celebrates his aloneness (what he calls casting off of attachments [99]) with a desperate attempt to prove that he still exists:

I was alone. I had no Klaver to record. I exulted like a young man whose mother has just died. Here I was, free to initiate myself into the desert. I yodelled, I growled, I hissed, I roared, I screamed, I clucked, I whistled; I danced, I stamped, I grovelled, I spun; I sat on the earth, I spat on the earth, I kicked it, I hugged it, I clawed it. Every possible copula was enacted that could link the world to an elephant hunter armed with a bow and crazed with freedom after seventy days of watching eyes and listening ears (101)

Like Dawn's mirror experience alluded to earlier, Jacobus Coetzee too wishes for a specular, narcissistic and almost Cartesian-like experience when he hopes to find a dark pool in which he might see himself "as others had seen him" (103). In other words, he wants to look at himself from a position apart from and outside himself. Yet, Jacobus Coetzee's love for solipsism fails at exactly the point when he thinks he is most capable of achieving it. Casting off human attachments, he nevertheless seeks alternative attachments in the shape of hitting himself against the earth thereby proving that something other than him also exists. And J.M. Coetzee's usual realistic-cum naturalistic approach becomes appropriate here too.

Further, Jacobus Coetzee, like Eugene Dawn, wants to be with those entities that are least likely to reciprocate or pose a challenge to him — he even prays that these entities should not love him in return. A little later he says the following, in this regard:

"God," I shouted, "God, God, God, why do you love me so?" I frothed and dribbled. There was neither thunder nor lightning. I laughed till the muscles that cribbed my skull ached. "I love you too, God. I love everything. I love the stones and the sand and the bushes and the sky and Klauer and those others and every worm, every fly in the world. But God, don't let them love me." It was nice to hear this come out. But the stones I decided, so introverted, so occupied in quietly being, were after all my favourites. (101-102)

Jacobus even engages in a narcissistic erotic experience where he rubs his feet against each other in ecstasy, and his thighs lie together "like lovers" and then he even embraces himself (102). His references to the Zeno beetle that follow on this self-absorbed experience are an attempt at stoic self-transcendence which later leads to a sense of nihilism (later he will use this image and understanding of a possible infinite regression consciousness to protect himself against feeling remorse and fear of punishment for his wanton massacre of the Hottentots).⁸¹

Thus, mistakenly feeling ignored and spurned, like solipsistic America seeking acknowledgement from Vietnam in the previous narrative, Jacobus Coetzee, now deranged and spectral, is in search of ontological acknowledgement and affirmation from anything living that he comes across. The route towards this is marked by excessive and senseless violence. He kills a calf, and later, a lamb simply to glut his bloodlust (106).

⁸¹ Attwell (1993: 52-53) notes, with Teresa Dovey, that because he finds it impossible to define himself in isolation, even Jacobus Coetzee's ditty, *Hottentot, Hottentot/ I am not a Hottentot*, "traps him precisely in the relational position from which he is trying to escape".

It is during his vengeful journey to the land of the Namaquas that Jacobus Coetzee assumes the worst aspects of the role of colonist-cum-missionary. He starts out with a statement of the superiority of the colonist by appealing to religion and the saga comes full circle when he appoints himself the angel of judgement with the flaming sword: “As explorer of the wilderness I have always thought myself an evangelist and endeavoured to bring to the heathen the gospel of the sparrow, which falls but falls with design” (107-108). This is grim humour, rendered even more callous by Jacobus Coetzee’s musings on his possible sexual arousal by the defenceless Hottentot girl whom he first shoots as he enters the village. He himself notes the irony when he says “I could not think of any of the Hottentot girls I might want except perhaps the girl who had fallen so straightforwardly to the first shot. One could always stroke oneself with an irony like that” (109). As a way of rationalising his actions, Jacobus Coetzee regards his massacre of the Hottentots as a sacrificial killing (109).

However, there is a more fundamental ontological explanation to Jacobus Coetzee’s actions than the veneer of religion that he brings to them. Like Dawn’s suggestion to individualise the Vietnamese in order to break their resistance, which he believes resides in their communal conceptions of being, Jacobus Coetzee too, used to measuring, fragmenting, individualising and numbering in the taming of the wild, finds the seemingly seamless and interpenetrative or inter-subjective life of the Hottentots and their “untamed” wilderness disorientating and a source of existential angst. So, having pronounced the sentence of death on the Hottentots he separates his former servants from the rest of the group in an attempt at fragmenting and individualising them (107). Then he meditates on his actions thus: “For months I had nourished myself on this day, which I had populated with retribution and death My despair was despair at the undifferentiated plenum, which is after all the void dressed up as being” (108). A total plenum is inconceivable to Jacobus Coetzee; he has to put in vacua to fragment it in order to be able to number it, hence his action of separation here (85). Elsewhere he regards being as a plenum but interspaced with vacua (88). As I observe in the previous chapter, Freya Matthews (1991) in *The Ecological Self*, borrowing from quantum physics’ seamless view of being, argues for a fluid and seamless plenum — what she calls geometrodynamics — as opposed to the Newtonian atomic conception of being. Such a conception is unthinkable for Jacobus Coetzee and so, accordingly, unimaginable

savagery is visited upon the Hottentots to reduce them to number. In his failure to come to terms with a seamless world, he suffers what he calls “a failure of the imagination before the void” (109), a failure which prevents him from seeing or conceiving of his being in the subjectivity of Hottentots, and seeing or conceiving of the Hottentots’ being in his subjectivity.

There are at least two forms of “failure of the imagination”, one enabling and the other disabling. In positive terms, the “failure of the imagination” can refer to the sublime where a Subject is confronted with a scene or an event whose *quale* (or *qualia* for plural, that is, the feel of “what it is like to be”) simply cannot be fully grasped in any discernible sense. This experience, though equally baffling, is an enriching experience as it delves into the depths of one’s being and, because of its openness, may eventually crystallise into something positive. In negative terms, and because of its closed and stifling nature, the overwhelming *quale* can lead to the disorientation and “burden of being” (also known as “angst” or “dread”) as popularised in the philosophical writings of Søren Kierkegaard and, later, by existentialists. Jacobus Coetzee’s “failure of the imagination” touches on this latter sense. Because of his solipsism, he fails to imagine the existence of other minds in their own right, or where those other minds might fit into his own mind. We have here a case of the failure of both the sympathetic and empathetic imagination (J.M. Coetzee takes up the theme of the place of the imagination in ethical conduct again and again in his subsequent writing especially as regards Thomas Nagel’s theorising around this subject as I have noted in the previous chapter).

However, this ontologically overwhelming state of affairs gives rise to an even more profound existential crisis in Jacobus Coetzee. Surprisingly, it is the killing of Plaatje, the most hated Hottentot of his servants, which precipitates the crisis that I have just discussed above. Plaatje’s lingering death suddenly reminds Jacobus Coetzee of his childhood when he would break necks of birds and how he would weep at seeing those he botched and had to watch them die slow deaths with himself agonising over them (112). Although he hated him in life, despite his conscious self, Coetzee gets a similar feeling for Plaatje in his dying moments that he had for the dying chickens that he reminisces about. And as Plaatje lies dying in his arms, Jacobus Coetzee’s body lends credence to this feeling by asserting itself in all its embodiedness, its un-ignorable-being-there. He says, in this regard, “A muscle worked in my jaw” (113). The involuntary

nature of the movement, against his conscious self-control and equipoise, is proof of the “irruption of the Other” (that is, of his body). This irruption awakens in him the subsequent contemplation of the possibility of the otherness of the Other (which needs to be taken into account in the self’s dealings with its others) and of what his responsibility towards this Otherness should be or should have been. In a profoundly self-critical mode, not in keeping with his usual disposition, Jacobus Coetzee wonders: “how do I know that Johannes, Plaatje, or even Adonis, not to speak of the Hottentot dead, was not an immense world of delight closed off to all my senses. May I not have killed something of inestimable value?” (113).⁸²

However, this self-criticism is only a temporary relief because Jacobus Coetzee’s autonomous subjectivity reasserts itself once more. Firstly, in the George Berkeley fashion of “to be is to be perceived”, a conception that makes ontology dependent solely on epistemology, reducing the Other to a merely epistemic representation thereby, Jacobus believes that if he stops thinking about something then it does not exist anymore. Speaking about his now dead servants he muses that in fact they died the day he had cast them out of his head (113).⁸³ Thus he prepares himself for his further self-justification by arguing that the point of his raid was for him to regain his being which had been cast into doubt by his encounter with the Hottentots. He believes, erroneously, that the Hottentots did not fully acknowledge and affirm his being: “What did the deaths of all these people achieve? Through their deaths I, who they had me expelled had wandered the desert like a pallid symbol, again asserted my reality” (113). And again, in religious overtones, calls the massacre a sacrifice on his own behalf and on behalf of his colonist countrymen (113). Also, in keeping with the Hegelian thesis of history that we saw in “The Vietnam Project”, Jacobus Coetzee here looks at himself simply as “a tool in the hands of history” (114).

Yet Jacobus Coetzee cannot entirely brush aside the nagging guilt occasioned by the massacre, hence his next question: “Will I suffer? I too am afraid of death. . . . Yet the

⁸² J.M. Coetzee takes up this theme in his subsequent writings, especially in Magda’s musings on the life of flies and animals in *In The Heart of the Country* (1977), the pre-reflective being and consciousness of Michael K in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1985), the place of Vercueil’s dog and the chickens on the farm where Florence’s husband works in *Age of Iron* (1980), the lives of dogs in *Disgrace* (1999a) and, more seriously, in *The Lives of Animals* (1999b) and, even more explicitly, in the possible experience of the frogs in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

⁸³ As I have already noted, the empiricist philosopher, George Berkeley, posited that the proof of existence of anything is its being perceived. In other words, there is no existence independent of the perceiving Subject such that what one has not perceived cannot be said to exist.

truer truth is that my death is merely a winter story I tell to frighten myself, to make my blankets more cosy. A world without me is inconceivable” (114). But again, his solipsistic self reasserts itself once more and he exonerates himself by assuming a stoicism that borders on both hubris and nihilism: “I know my lessons. I too can retreat before a beckoning finger through the infinite corridors of my self . . .” (114). If retreating before the beckoning finger is to assert one’s otherness before intrusive selves, it becomes a positive feature, but this is not the case with Jacobus Coetzee here. His infinite regress is of the Cartesian or the monadic type of absolute separateness from the Other. As I noted earlier, Jacobus’s references to the Zeno beetle are an attempt at stoic self-transcendence which can only lead to a sense of nihilism. He uses this image and understanding of a possible infinite regression of consciousness to protect himself against feeling remorse and fear of punishment for his wanton massacre of the Hottentots. Indeed, it seems that a self that infinitely regresses into itself, like the Zeno beetle he loves, cannot help the trap of nihilism which, ultimately, is the fate that Jacobus Coetzee’s courts by the end of the narrative.

While by the end of the first novella we see Dawn beginning to work out whose fault he could be, neither of the protagonists of novellas that comprise *Dusklands* achieves any proper sense of escape from ontological entrapment. In subsequent novels, however, J.M Coetzee works towards freeing his characters from such entrapment by positing more redemptive subjectivities. While we see some of these attempts being gestured at in *In The Heart of The Country*, it is in *Waiting for the Barbarians* where these intimations are given a clearer direction. As such, it is to a discussion of the latter novel that I now turn.

Chapter Three

Waiting for the Barbarians: A Nascent Embodied Intersubjectivity.

He picks his way uncertainly among the strange furniture but does not remove the dark glasses. (1)

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, if there is ever anyone in some remote future interested to know the way we lived, that in this farthest outpost of the empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian. (Coetzee, 1980: 114)

They were interested only in demonstrating to me what it meant to live in the body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe is pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself. (Coetzee, 1980: 126)

It may be true that the world as it stands is no illusion, no evil dream of a night. It may be that we wake up to it ineluctably, that we can neither forget it nor dispense with it. (Coetzee, 1980: 156)

While the main characters of the novellas that constitute *Dusklands* are avowed Cartesians, or at least start out with a Cartesian cast of mind, J.M. Coetzee, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, (1980) presents us with a far more varied picture in terms of characterisation. Although he retains Cartesian-oriented characters such as Colonel Joll, Sergeant Mandel, and men of the Third Bureau, these have a counterpoint in a character whom we know only as the Magistrate who, faced with the excesses, absurdities and barbarities of colonialism, gradually begins to feel compelled to take sides with the colonised. Consequently, he finds himself imprisoned, tortured and increasingly ostracised by the agents of Empire who doubt his motives and allegiance to it.

As a number of critics have already observed (see, for example, Watson, 1996) one is reminded, through the character of the Magistrate, of Albert Memmi's incisive study of the colonial experience in *The Coloniser and The Colonised* (1957). Like Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* (1977) and Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron* (1990), the Magistrate's position mirrors that of the coloniser who refuses to adhere to the tenets of colonialism but nevertheless feels himself or herself implicated in the colonial system by virtue of ethnically belonging to the colonising group. In fact, like the coloniser who refuses, the Magistrate's aim in telling the story of Empire is to exonerate himself and set the record straight for posterity, as is suggested by the second epigraph to this chapter. But the Magistrate has other related and equally important motives for

telling this story and these include exploring the processes by which he himself came to question imperialism. Ultimately, he denounces what he considers to be the illusory ontological basis for the whole exercise of empire building. In this regard, Teresa Dovey (1988: 208-209) points out that the identity question on which this novel centres is that “of a group which defines itself in contradistinction to another group; which indeed finds its *raison d’être* in the threat, real or imagined, posed by this other group”. In a similar vein, Maria Boletsi (2007: 68) observes that the notion of the barbarian as *barbarian* “operates as the constitutive outside of civilisation and [serves to] feed the superiority of the civilized”. In tracing its etymology, she states that the ancient Greek word “barbarian”

[I]s supposed to imitate the incomprehensible mumblings of the language of foreign peoples, sounding like ‘bar-bar’ As such, it has a double implication: on a first level, it signifies a lack of understanding on the part of the other, since the language of the other is perceived as meaningless sounds. At the same time it suggests an unwillingness to understand the other and thus to make the encounter with the other a [purely] communicative occasion. Consequently, the term barbarian entails a collective construction of the other in a way that helps the civilised subject itself – by specifying its negative limits. (2007: 68)

Boletsi (2007: 68) further notes that such negative limits do not remain simply linguistic but are extended to include the imagining of supposedly unbridgeable cultural differences — predictably so, language being one of the means through which a people express their culture.

Mike Marais (2000b: 137) also argues that the natives as barbarians are “an ideological construct that validates Empire’s sense of its own significance by affirming its status as a superior, civilized culture. In the absence of this construct, Empire cannot exist”. Marais (2000b: 137) then observes that as the narrative unfolds “it becomes increasingly evident that the native inhabitants of the area do not fit in the role of ‘barbarian’ and ‘foe’ that empire has created for them. In each reported attack or case of rape or plunder, there is little certainty that the barbarians are actually responsible”. He thus concludes that, “by creating an identity, albeit spurious, for the cultural other, Empire in a sense ‘authors’ that other” (2000b: 138). In my previous chapter, I pointed out a similar process at work in Jacobus Coetzee’s stereotypical view of the Namaquas who, when they do not conform to his culture’s stereotypes, precipitate in him an ontological crisis.

It is precisely such a binaric construction of identity, as identified by Dovey, Boletsi and Marais above, that J.M. Coetzee, through the character of the Magistrate, attempts to question in

Waiting for the Barbarians. As Dovey (1988: 212) further observes, with specific reference to the Magistrate's self-reflexive use of language, this novel "represent[s] a historical situation, and a state of consciousness which is a response to this situation". In my analysis of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, I attempt an ontological explication of the Magistrate's transforming state of consciousness, especially his as yet largely unconscious and inchoate intimations of intersubjectivity with his Others. After his depiction of the ontological entrapment of the main characters of *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country*, Coetzee, in this novel, gestures towards a kind of subjectivity that offers a release from such debilitating entrapment. This freedom comes in the form of intimations of an embodied, intersubjective consciousness that the Magistrate, gradually and painfully, comes to recognise and acknowledge. The purpose of this chapter, then, is to explore the process by which the Magistrate comes to develop intimations of this new consciousness.

In the first chapter of *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Coetzee, again showing great economy and organisation, sets down almost all the major issues that he intends to tackle in this novel. Some of these issues, for instance, the false ontological consciousness of the Subject's autonomy that leads to a stunted and skewed conception of its relation to other beings, hark back to those he broaches in *Dusklands* and *In the Heart of the Country*. He also expands upon the denial of the validity and place of the body in the development of a Subject's consciousness, and the violence against that body consequent on this denial. And, in Colonel Joll, Mandel and their men, we meet, yet again, the ruthless warfare strategies promoted by Eugene Dawn in "The Vietnam Project", and those implemented by Jacobus Coetzee in his senseless punitive raid on the Namaqua Hottentots in "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee". All these depredations, Coetzee seems to be saying, stem from a denial of the body and the possibility of a redemptive embodied intersubjectivity attendant on the Subject's conception of himself or herself and Others fundamentally and primarily as bodies. In Coetzee's works, this denial of the body is associated with the ontological blindness underpinning the Subject's false sense of autonomy and drives discriminatory, imperialistic, and exploitative impulses.

In line with the foregoing, I will single out at least three major areas for discussion in this chapter. The first of these is the problem of willed ontological blindness or the kind of deliberate false consciousness engendered by hegemonic ideologies. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, such distortions are suggested by Colonel Joll's dark glasses (1). Willed ontological blindness is closely associated with the place of the body in human ontology and the dehumanising and

alienating effects that its denial, particularly through torture, has on its being. Also associated with the place of the body are the shortfalls of torture as a tool for arriving at truth that is not predetermined by the torturer, attesting not only to the mediated nature of intersubjectivity but also to a failure of imagination on the part of the torturer. The issues of the indeterminate or relative nature of truth are broached here as well (3-5).

The second area of discussion involves the issue of the “coloniser who refuses” that is staged in the character and tribulations of the Magistrate. What further complicates the Magistrate’s position in this regard is the psychopathic tendencies, and therefore lack of a sympathetic imagination, of members of the Third Bureau who, sadistically torture and kill some barbarians with impunity and almost kill the Magistrate himself. When coupled with official bureaucracy, this lack, more often than not, makes a mockery of justice and constrains us to live, as the Magistrate avers, in a “world of the second best” (152). Coetzee’s concern with justice in this novel generates striking parallels with Franz Kafka’s writings such as *The Trial* (1925), to which I will refer from time to time in my discussion.

The third area that will be treated in this chapter is the unpredictable nature of the encounter between a Self and an Other, as emerges in the Magistrate’s supposedly “strange” and “inexplicable” ontological experiences. These experiences involve, for instance, the Magistrate’s initially detached observation of a baby among the prisoners, a baby whose subsequent death “surprisingly” leaves the Magistrate ontologically unsettled (22-23). A little later, as his own sense of crisis deepens with the mounting torture incidents, this “inexplicable” distress also worsens and extends to his encounter with the “barbarian” girl who is tactfully introduced towards the end of the first chapter of *Waiting for the Barbarians* (24). Yet another of these encounters is the Magistrate’s experience with the waterbuck which he, “inexplicably”, cannot kill. This incident is pivotal in the text as it demonstrates the Magistrate’s nearly conscious awakening to his double loss of autonomy and the emergence of a nascent conception of intersubjectivity. Associated with these encounters is the intersubjectivity that arises from the intentionality of the embodied consciousnesses of the Subjects involved. Collectively, these encounters amount to what Derek Attridge has termed “irruptions of otherness into the Self” (2005: xii). Structurally, then, the foregoing is the order in which I will discuss this novel.

Discrimination and Extrospective Consciousness

Throughout *Waiting for Barbarians*, a clear contrast is staged between the Magistrate and the agents of Empire, represented by Colonel Joll and Sergeant Mandel. The latter two and their men are involved in senseless and unprovoked military campaigns against the so-called “barbarians”, and they use torture and other extra-judicial means against anyone suspected of being an enemy of Empire. On the other hand, the Magistrate is implicated in the colonial enterprise only by virtue of ethnically belonging to the colonising group; he does not consciously and wilfully share Empire’s ideology. Instead, he reaches out to everyone and every being that enters his ontological circle, be they coloniser or colonised, wild or domesticated animals, and even the land. Most importantly, without premeditation, he finds himself ontologically acknowledging those who would ordinarily be least deserving of his attention, like the barbarian girl for whom he begins to feel responsible and for whom his sense of responsibility is expressed in his feeding and sheltering her and, inexplicably, through the daily ritual of washing her body. But how is this contrast between the Magistrate and his detractors staged in this novel?

In this narrative, Colonel Joll exhibits the base and debased aspects of the autonomous Subject or the *cogito*. Since he has no wish for reciprocity with anyone around him, it is clear that Joll conceives of himself as an autonomous subject. This outlook is signalled in the novel’s opening paragraph by the dark glasses he wears:

I have never seen anything like it: two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire. Is he blind? I could understand it if he wanted to hide blind eyes. But he is not blind. The discs are dark, they look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them. He tells me they are a new invention. ‘They protect one’s eyes against the glare of the sun,’ he says. (1)

The ostensible explanation for Joll’s somewhat idiosyncratic practice is that it offers protection “against the glare of the sun”. However, just two paragraphs later, the falseness of this explanation emerges when he is shown wearing the dark glasses even indoors where they are not needed: “He picks his way uncertainly among the strange furniture but does not remove the dark glasses” (1). A little later, the Magistrate calls Joll’s habit “the paltry mystery of dark shields hiding healthy eyes” (4), and, thereafter, “an absurd affectation” (14). Since it manifests as the avoidance of the gaze of the Other, the image of the dark glasses suggests an exclusively “extrospective consciousness” or mere “consciousness of” and signals the wilful or ignorant ontological blindness that a combination of Cartesian ontology and hegemonic ideologies such

as imperialism, engender in those who uncritically subscribe to them. This is a consciousness that does not acknowledge its ontological indebtedness to or intersubjectivity with its Others; instead it views these Others as wholly external to itself and imposes its will on them.

Colonel Joll's wilful blindness prevents him from realising and acknowledging his ontological indebtedness to the Other, and therefore leads to a gross dereliction of his ontological duty to his Others. Joll's stance raises the issue of "ontological neglect" because it is clear that, despite his refusal to acknowledge this debt, he is able to see the Other and is therefore indebted to him or her. It is only towards the end of the novel, after his expeditionary force has been defeated, and his dark glasses have been knocked from his face, that he begins, and only just begins, to see the untenability of his earlier ontological posturing.

Compounding to the wilful blindness of the likes of Joll is the rigid, bureaucratic and arbitrary nature of the operations of the Third Bureau, which invites comparison with the bureaucracy and arbitrariness that we see in Franz Kafka's 1925 novel, *The Trial*.⁸⁴ Indeed, much that happens during the mission of Colonel Joll and Mandel lacks justification and is arbitrary. To begin with, the arrival of the Third Bureau, with sensational rumours of a barbarian uprising, unsettles a hitherto peaceful district. These false rumours are fabricated in the capital and are spread to the rest of the country, and then acted upon even in places where action is not called for such as in the Magistrate's district.⁸⁵ While the Magistrate observes that Colonel Joll is "here under the emergency powers" (1), this particular district is not at war at all. Instead, the town, with its sleeping soldiers and security guards, appears perfectly tranquil (2). The picture that the Magistrate paints is hardly one of a town at war although the people who really hold sway in the capital think otherwise. For this reason, when Colonel Joll begins to bring in his "prisoners of war" there are not even prison cells in which to remand them. As the Magistrate explains, "We do not have facilities for prisoners. . . . There is not much crime here and the penalty is

⁸⁴In "Audible Palimpsests: Coetzee's Kafka", Patricia Merivale (1996) explores links between Coetzee's characters across his oeuvre and those of Franz Kafka. Coetzee (1992: 199-200) himself admits to these links in an interview with David Attwell.

⁸⁵Numerous critics have argued that the spreading of these rumours is a self-serving act to reassure Empire of its precarious identity by casting those who are different as other. These critics point to C.P. Cavafy's poem of the same title as Coetzee's novel which stages the way in which the failure of the barbarians to arrive — because they never existed in the first place — leads to an existential crisis among the colonists, who have constructed their identity in opposition to these imaginary barbarians (see, for instance, Attwell, 1993: 71; Cheng, 2003; Castillo, 1986: 79-80). We see a similar process at work in the encounter between the Americans and the Vietnamese in "The Vietnam Project" section of *Dusklands* and in Jacobus Coetzee's expectation of savagery from the Hottentots he encounters in the second section of the novel. In all such cases, the invaders' expectations are shown to be a product of false consciousness, a self-projection, and so contribute nothing tangible to the Self's ontological conception — hence the existential angst that inevitably and invariably follows these encounters.

usually a fine or compulsory labour” (2). Accordingly, Joll’s so-called prisoners are quartered in a storeroom for grain.

Further, nothing can be more arbitrary than the manner in which the first two prisoners (an old man and a boy) are captured. After a raid some twenty miles away from their headquarters, Joll and his men simply capture anyone they come across (3). The two prisoners claim that they were coming to see a doctor about the young man’s wound suffered in an unrelated event (3-4). Joll and his men provide a reason for their capture that is fallacious and reflective of the fallacy of false cause: *post hoc ergo propter hoc* (“after the thing, therefore because of the thing”) that is, because they were found after the raid, they must have participated in it, or so the reasoning goes.⁸⁶ In fact, in a case of *effect* becoming *cause*, the Magistrate’s observations indicate that Joll’s military expeditions may very well have precipitated the raids by the barbarians closer to the fort. But because a Cartesian ontology supposedly produces consciousness from its own resources, which it then projects onto the outside reality, it cannot escape producing chimeras such as those that issue from Empire and its representatives. More arbitrary arrests thus take place when the first fisher-folk are brought in. The reason for their capture is that they hid themselves after they saw the soldiers coming. This explanation prompts the Magistrate to exclaim indignantly: “I could curse with vexation. A policeman! The reasoning of a policeman!” (19). As I have already observed, Empire fabricates rumours and acts on them irrespective of what actually obtains on the ground. Later, like Joseph K, the Magistrate himself is arrested and for a long time never charged or tried. While tortured, he, unlike K, is not killed.

Besides their bureaucratic cast of mind, Colonel Joll and his men are presented as autonomous Cartesian machines, mistaken in their conception of their ontological selves and alienated from their own bodies and feelings. They not only fail to develop an empathetic imagination in relation to their Others, they are also unable to conceive of the Other in the integral composition of their Selves. In this vein, examining the ontology of the institutional torturer (a

⁸⁶ The arbitrariness of the old man’s and the young man’s arrest in *Waiting for the Barbarians* bears comparison with the arrest of Joseph K in Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* (1985). Kafka’s novel opens as follows: “Someone must have been telling lies about Joseph K for, without having done anything wrong, he was arrested one fine morning” (1985: 7). In this novel, Kafka tells the story of a character called Joseph K, a bank clerk, who is arrested on an undisclosed allegation and is for several years made to go through all manner of absurdities and indignities under a mysterious justice system. It is a system that no-one really understands, not even the people working within it. Throughout this period, K never gets to know what crime he is suspected of having committed, thereby rendering the justice system not only mysterious but also obscure and arbitrary. Eventually, he is summarily executed by two agents of the system.

torturer who, apparently himself or herself has undergone some form of torture as part of his or her training), Barbara Eckstein observes as follows:

[W]hat may well allow the torturer to tolerate or even ignore the prisoner's pain — despite, or even because of the fact that he himself may have experienced torture — is an indoctrination in otherness, an atmosphere of otherness. This is the Cartesian otherness of the body separated unequivocally from the mind, the soul, and the sources of truth. (The torturer, separated from his body, may not even credit his pain). (1990: 78)

In Eckstein's view, only an integration of all the components that constitute the human being can prevent the torturer from carrying out his or her barbaric assignments. Indeed, since it involves 'distancing' through the infliction of pain, the torturers' method of finding out truth from the prisoners is as alienating as the ontological gap that Joll imposes between himself and Others, which is imaged in the novel by the dark glasses he wears. Also, self-serving and pedantic as they are, the Bureau's search for truth is for *the* truth rather than *a* truth. Their truth is a pre-determined and totalised one (a truth of correspondences or of Cartesian certitude), as opposed to one that is relative, mediated or contextual. It is truth with a capital "T" (and therefore resonates with Kafka's use of the upper case in the first letter of the word "Law" to show the oppressive nature of a narrowly legalistic view of the law). So, for instance, the Magistrate wryly explains the following to Colonel Joll's first prisoners: "Father, do you see this gentleman? This gentleman is visiting us from the capital His work is to find out the truth. That is all he does. He finds out the truth . . ." (3). In saying this to the prisoner, the Magistrate is only trying to be polite (in keeping with the demands of official praxis) and, perhaps, satirical too because, later, when they are by themselves, he pointedly asks Joll whether it is possible, while torturing someone, to establish when the person is lying or telling the truth (5).⁸⁷

Moreover, the misconception of truth under which Joll and his men are labouring, presupposes that through the administration of pain you can get to the otherness of the Other, that is, to the-other-in-him/herself. The Magistrate later remarks on this misconception as follows: "Looking at him [that is, Colonel Joll] I wonder how he felt the very first time: did he, invited as an apprentice to twist the pincers or turn the screw or whatever it is they do, shudder even a little to know that at that instant he was trespassing into the forbidden?" (13). The "forbidden"

⁸⁷ In *The Body in Pain*, Elaine Scarry (1985: 41-42) observes that, in its reliance on pain to extract information from the one tortured, torture reverses the trial and the sequence of cause and effect. She notes that while a court trial studies evidence that may lead to punishment, torture uses punishment to generate evidence that may lead to a trial.

to which the Magistrate here refers could be said to be the irreducible otherness of the Other; the *noumenon*. This interpretation gains support when the Magistrate's reflection on Joll's response to torture is read in conjunction with his own experience of trying to read the marks on the barbarian girl's body in his desperate bid to find an explanation for the ontological basis of his largely non-erotic and seemingly disinterested relationship with her. He finds that he can only go so far in this exercise and wryly likens his search to a torturer's attempt at reaching the unmediated being or the irreducible otherness of the Other:

I have just come back from the bed of a woman for whom, in the year I have known her, I have not for a moment had to interrogate my desire: to desire her has meant to enfold her and enter her, to pierce her surface and stir the quiet of her interior into an ecstatic storm; then to retreat, to subside 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! (46)

The Magistrate's failure to read the inner being of the barbarian girl is only to be expected considering that the Self's encounter with the Other is always mediated. By seeking to discover the barbarian girl's being without mediation, he falls prey to the charge of trying to commit ontological violence on the Other, the cardinal crime of Phenomenology. The torturers, on the other hand, use the phenomenal otherness of the Other (in this case, the Other's bodily pain) to reach what they consider to be his or her real, *noumenal* Self, the Other-in-him/herself. But this Other-in-himself/herself is always elusive because that aspect of him or her is a *noumenon* and therefore ungraspable and irreducible, a fact which the Magistrate only gradually and painfully learns — I will shortly note the paradox inherent in an attempt at reading the Other's consciousness through the body by people who discount the body in their conception of subjectivity.

It should be noted, in this regard, that although the Magistrate is unconsciously well-disposed towards the "barbarian" Others, it is only after many subsequent encounters with a range of his others that he begins somehow to relate with them in terms of the demands of his ontological indebtedness to them. Elsewhere, in his initial attempts to decipher the barbarian girl, the Magistrate finds that he can discern only the "doubled image of himself" cast back at him:

With a shift of horror I behold the answer that has been waiting all the time to offer itself to me in the image of a face masked by two black glassy eyes from which there comes no reciprocal gaze but only my doubled image cast back at me. It is I who am seducing myself, out of vanity, into these meanings and correspondences. (47)

When the Self approaches an Other, she or he does not do so as a clean or empty slate, a *tabula rasa*, but brings to the encounter certain preconceptions which are sometimes disconfirmed. Similarly, here, the Magistrate encounters the barbarian girl with preconceptions he has internalised from his cultural upbringing about the Others being barbarians and, consequently, has defined expectations of them. In other words, the Magistrate is predisposed to respond to the barbarian girl *as a barbarian* by his location in a culture which locates his values and attitudes to others. That is, he *expects* the girl to behave like a barbarian. Because of her undecipherability due to her silences, though, these expectations are not confirmed and his preconceptions are therefore cast back at him. But things do not remain this way for long. As I later note, eventually the Magistrate and the barbarian girl reach an amicable way of “knowing” each other — not through language but, as the barbarian girl would prefer, pre-verbally. The barbarian girl wants to be responded to individually rather than stereotypically as a “barbarian”. In my introductory chapter, it will be recalled, I argue, with regard to the dangers of the herd mentality, that an exclusively extrospective consciousness amounts to very little indeed where Self-Other relations are concerned. From his initial frustrations, it is clear that what is required during the Magistrate’s encounters with his Others is an open and critical mind, a disposition he eventually acquires, albeit at some cost.

But the need for an open mind is not the last of the Magistrate’s learning problems. We notice that, for the greater part of the narrative, he is torn between his place within the paradigms of Empire and his unconscious realisation of the need to break free of these. At one point, sickened by all the torture that he knows is taking place within the fort, he, in desperation, even contemplates a genocide of the barbarians on behalf of Empire, a vision of horror in which the barbarians are marched to the desert and terminated so that a new start can be made (26). It is clear, though, that the Magistrate is likely repeating what Imperial propaganda may be suggesting to remind himself of the extremes to which Empire could go in its ever-burning desire to perpetuate itself. I advance this point because, immediately after suggesting the genocide, the Magistrate distances himself from it by noting that genocide would not be his way of doing things (26). After his encounter with the barbarians, he suspects that one can only deal with its ontological consequences; there can be no new start since such a start would be ontologically impossible. A new start would also require the extermination of the coloniser since, as Patricia Waugh (1992a: 121) aptly notes, the Self, being ontologically implicated with

him or her, cannot get rid of the Other without doing violence to its own being.⁸⁸ This does not mean that genocides or murders are impossible; indeed they have taken place and continue to do so. What we do not immediately and openly see, though, is the ontological effect they possibly have on those who have participated in them.⁸⁹

The Ambivalent Nature of the Magistrate's Colonial Implication

Broadly speaking, there is no question about the Magistrate's complicity with Empire. I have already noted how this character approaches the barbarian girl, and the barbarians in general, from his situatedness within the epistemic paradigms of Empire. But he does not wear this complicity with Empire as a badge of honour or willfully. Indeed, up until the time of his imprisonment and subsequent torture, the Magistrate is wracked with a suspicion that he may not be doing enough to stand up for what is noble and that he should break ranks with Empire entirely. Michela Canepari-Labib (2005: 93) observes that the novel's focus on the Magistrate's suspicions implicitly criticises the liberal mentality, which is often accused of fence-sitting. In the same vein, Lionel Abrahams, in his review of the novel, points out some aspects of the patronising attitude that the Magistrate has held in the thirty years he has spent as overseer of the fort and its surrounding regions, an attitude that smacks of liberalism:

Of his [the Magistrate's] past in this situation we learn a few things. He has never found reason to build a prison, preferring to fine offenders of the law or to sentence them to spells of labour Under his regime relations with the nomadic barbarians of the desert have taken the form of trade which he has restricted to barter to avoid introducing them to money and to liquor. The suggestion of 'paternalism' delicately illustrates this kind of moral vulnerability that renders his goodness enigmatic throughout. (1981: 84)

At times the Magistrate even shares the stereotypes of Empire and only gradually and painfully does he eventually transcend them. For instance, after Colonel Joll's expedition has brought in

⁸⁸ As I observe in my introductory chapter, Coetzee, too, believes that the one who inflicts violence also suffers psychic damage to his own being as well (see page 68).

⁸⁹ A cartoon by Jonathan Shapiro that appeared in *The Sowetan* of 24th October 1997, and which is included in a collection titled *Zapiro* (1998), comments on how the torturers also claimed to have suffered from their participation in torture on behalf of apartheid. The artist depicts three former operatives undergoing psychotherapy. The first one claims, "I killed for apartheid. Now I suffer post-traumatic stress". The second one says "I killed and tortured. Everyone hates me". And the third one says "Same here . . . 'sniff' . . . and I hate myself!". The three operatives are then shown asking for reparations for their conditions, to which a representative of the reparations bureau answers "This everyone's a victim of apartheid thing is getting out of hand!" While Shapiro is possibly trying to point out possible abuse of the process of the TRC, it is not unlikely that those who discriminate against their Others suffer as much psychic damage from doing so as those discriminated against, as the theory that underpins this study posits. Coetzee himself has hinted at this possibility in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), in which, in the lesson titled "At the Gate", Costello claims that she is a secretary for both the victims and those who victimise them because even the latter suffer in the process.

a group of barbarians that includes mothers with suckling babies and toddlers, the Magistrate remarks as follows about the group:

In a day or two these savages seem to forget they ever had a home. Seduced utterly by the free and plentiful food . . . they relax, smile at everyone [S]o little does it seem to have taken to lure them out of a state of nature. . . . For a few days the fisherfolk are a diversion, with their strange gabbling, their vast appetites, their animal shamelessness, their volatile tempers Then altogether we lose sympathy with them. The filth, the smell, the noise of their quarrelling and coughing become too much (20-21)

A few things are not in order here. The Magistrate's "observations" are not quite in keeping with one who seems to have unlearned his racial prejudices — and we should here bear in mind that he wants to be remembered as one who in his heart is not a barbarian (114). First, he calls the prisoners "savages", a stereotypical view of the colonised by the coloniser, given that colonialism was disguised as a civilising mission. Secondly, one detects in the passage the stereotypical representation of the colonised as children with a short memory, and therefore virtually without a history; the only history they can have is the one that has been imposed on them by Empire. Of course, later, as a corrective measure, the Magistrate talks about not wishing Empire to impose its own history on the barbarians (169). Thirdly, there is implicit in this passage the stereotype of the colonised as easily seduced by, and utterly under the influence of, the so-called "base appetites" of food, drink and sex. Here it is food that has made Colonel Joll's innocent prisoners forget their plight as prisoners. Finally, this description of the barbarians invokes that of the uncultured and uncivilised Hobbesian natural man in a state of "a war of all against all" as adumbrated in *The Leviathan*, and thus conforms to the standard stereotypical representation of the colonised Other as being without order or sense of government. Since the behaviour of the captives is obviously due to the utterly dehumanising conditions in which they are kept, the Magistrate's observations are very likely coloured by what his culture has taught him to expect of "barbarians".

Also, at one stage in the relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl, the former buys a young fox from a trapper, which he tries to nurse back to health and raises it in his room. He is debating whether to return it to the wild or to keep it, and observes that if he should keep it "people will say I keep two wild animals in my rooms" (37). When he notices that the barbarian girl does not find the joke amusing as it demeans her, the Magistrate quickly corrects himself by remarking, "Of course it is not the same" (37).

Maria Boletsi, who has also observed the conflicted position of the Magistrate in relation to Empire in this novel, argues that the Magistrate does not succeed in overcoming his implication in the social structures of Empire. She puts her case as follows:

The Magistrate's position in Coetzee's novel is . . . ambivalent: he is an insider of the Empire but not quite. Living as he does in a convenient state of ignorance and tranquillity, he gradually moves into a position of uncertainty and doubt. He questions the certainties and truths of colonialist discourse and takes an oppositional stance. He realises, however, that switching sides is not merely a matter of choice. Despite his good intentions, he cannot avoid his complicity with the discourse of Empire . . . [because] the subject does not pre-exist, but emerges and operates only within (and as) the matrix of social relations. The authoritative discourse of the Empire, within which the Magistrate has been shaped as a subject, is not something he can discard since it is not external to his being. Caught up in a position where he can belong neither to the oppressors nor the oppressed, his identity becomes a site of conflicting claims. Consequently, his narrative becomes a battlefield of opposed discourses marked by the Magistrate's attempt to make a difference, to become, as Colonel Joll ironically calls him – "The one Just Man". (2007: 77)

Much as a Subject "emerges and operates within the matrix of social relations", I partly disagree with Boletsi's deterministic stance on subjecthood as stated above, especially as applied to *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Surely, through the "strange" experiences that Coetzee makes the Magistrate undergo in the course of the novel, the latter comes to discard the "authoritative discourse of Empire" and reconstitutes himself outside of it. And since, as I intend to show, the Magistrate gradually works himself out of his inherited position, it may suggest that the Subject is not entirely and eternally "imprisoned" in the discourse or matrix of social relations as Boletsi posits; rather it may show that there is an outside position at certain levels which the Subject can reach for. As must be clear from my introductory chapter, in this study I associate this outside level with conceptions of being at the level of the pre-verbal or that of a critical "self-consciousness of". Further, I argue that pre-existing social discourse can be transcended by the Subject's imagination in all three of its aspects, namely imagination as projection, imagination as reconstitution/reconfiguration, and imagination in its sympathetic and empathetic modes.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ In various critical works, Mike Marais (see, for instance, 1993c: 6-7; 1994: 333-348 and 1998b) makes similar observations about the subject's implication in the discourses of power. However, in one instance Marais posits the possibility of transcendence using the example of Mrs Curren's rediscovery of her "authentic self" as an instance of gaining an awareness of an alternative ethical community, one that exists beyond laws and lawmaking. Nevertheless, elsewhere, Marais argues that Coetzee only gestures at such transcendence but does not actually stage it. Talking of *Disgrace*, for instance, Marais (2003b: 273) observes that "it is only through an acknowledgement of his or her location in culture, and an ateleological questioning of the local nature of the forms of knowledge available within that culture, that the individual may *begin* to treat other beings respectfully". I will be more charitable towards Coetzee's characters, especially those from the Magistrate onwards. The process of questioning that Marais proposes presupposes that the individual who engages in it has already achieved the feat of "stepping back" from the discourse of his or her society, like the person who sees flickers of light on the wall of Plato's cave. This "stepping back" is a form of partial "transcendence" and the projected trajectory of the

While the Magistrate starts off as an adherent of liberalism, in the course of the narrative, he revises this stance and takes concrete steps to address its shortfalls. It may be important to note that the Magistrate is implicated in the colonial enterprise by virtue of having been born into the colonising group; he was not part of the original colonising group, and this implication by birth can create problems of its own which Coetzee alludes to again and again such as in the cases of Eugene Dawn and, later, Elizabeth Curren. The question becomes: what does one who has been born into an oppressive social dispensation do both to unlearn his or her unjustified privilege, and also, ultimately, to bring such privilege to an end for the group as a whole? This is the conundrum that the Magistrate has to work through in the course of the narrative. If by the end of the narrative he attains the status of a “hero”, as he indeed does, he achieves this status in a rather unremarkable way, that is, by awakening to his responsibility to rise up and be counted through ambivalence, bewilderment and indirection. The Magistrate is not a saint or a Christ-like figure; Coetzee shows him to be “human-all-too-human”, and this makes his efforts all the more admirable and praiseworthy.

In this regard, although the Magistrate makes ontological miscalculations in the course of the narrative, as I shall presently argue, the overall diagnosis of the Magistrate as “the other side of Empire” (148-149) is not a correct one. Such a diagnosis does not hold true for the entire narrative — perhaps only its initial stages, that is, those stages that precede his clean break with Joll. In this I concur with J.B. Wood (1984: 129) who also views it as anomalous. As I show below, in fact, the Magistrate reads himself in this way in the context of reminiscence. With the benefit of hindsight, he now looks at his former self, before the clean break with Joll, as *having been* the other side of empire (148-149). Back in the early stages of the narrative, this thesis would indeed have held true when, as, for instance, he speaks about his own invasive probing into the barbarian girl’s experiences of torture, correctly saying, “The distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is very negligible; I shudder” (29). But by the end of the narrative, when he engages in the said reminiscence, he has had *intimations* of the possibility of a better

process must yield significant levels of “transcendence”, especially after such an individual discovers that the language employed by imperialism represents deliberately distorted concepts designed to satisfy the collective self-interest of the colonising group. As for *Disgrace*, Lucy Lurie achieves such transcendence through a cruciform logic. Let us bear in mind that Lucy does not deserve the rape as atonement for the past that was apartheid as her father seems to suggest at various stages of the narrative (the most likely reason for the rape seems to be to drive her off the land so Petrus could have all of it to himself which then constitutes a form of reverse dispossession). Even if there was need for redistribution of resources during the post-apartheid era, white women cannot be part of the booty that needs sharing or redistributing — both Louise Bethlehem (2003: 180) and J.B. Wood (1999) make this point clear. It is the bearing of this unmerited punishment that is meted out to Lucy, and her selfless response to it (in keeping with Coetzee’s fundamentals of a cruciform logic as discussed in the section on ethics in my introductory chapter), that renders her approach one of transcendence.

situation obtaining between Empire and its Others. Although the narrative is told in the eternal present tense, we are aware of the passage of time over four seasons, and therefore that, by the end of the narrative, at least a year has elapsed since the events of its narration began unfolding. As Lionel Abrahams points out, the Magistrate's present status is almost diametrically opposed to his earlier one:

In what manner his year of trial has changed him is indicated in the past tense of a sentence like: 'I was the lie that Empire tells itself when times are easy, he (Joll) the truth that Empire tells when harsh winds blow.' He is no longer that lie – a lie about pity and about mere shame in the face of injustice, perhaps also about the rule of law and 'peace at any price'. He learnt much about the price of resistance to evil. (1981: 87)

Whatever illusion the narrator's eternal present tense might entice us with, we, as critics, cannot be oblivious to the passage of time in the narrative itself and, indeed, to the remarkable changes that the Magistrate's personality undergoes.

We also need to note that by the time he is about to break with Joll and his men, when the Magistrate is being questioned by Mandel on his relationship with the barbarians shortly before being subjected to the mock hanging, the Magistrate meditates on Joll's and the members of the Third Bureau's work of torture and finds nothing in himself that can now really link him with them:

I look into his clear blue eyes, as clear as if there were crystal lenses slipped over his eyeballs. He looks back at me. I have no idea what he sees. Thinking of him, I have said the words *torture . . . torturer* to myself, but they are strange words, and the more I repeat them the more strange they grow, till they lie like stones on my tongue. Perhaps this man, and the man he brings along to help him with his work, and their Colonel, are torturers, perhaps that is their designation on the three cards in a pay-office somewhere in the capital, though it is more likely that the cards call them security officers. (129, emphasis original)

After his mock hanging (during which he nearly dies) he is left in no doubt at all about the differences of worldview between his and that of the members of the Third Bureau and so he sets himself in even more open opposition to them. However, even before this break, it is clear to see that the Magistrate's personality is far more insightful than Joll, Mandel and the other agents of Empire, a difference that Coetzee stages from the very first sentence of the novel when the Magistrate wonders if Joll is blind. In fact, Coetzee is not as hard on the Magistrate as the thesis that he is the other side of Empire seems to suggest. Teresa Dovey notes Coetzee's answer to a question put to him by Folke Rhedin about Magda's attempts to escape the structure of the Master/Slave relationship in relation to both her father and the servants Hendrik and Klein-Anna:

She [Magda] is the one who makes the massive effort to escape, but there's no saying whether she escapes, much in the same way as we can say that the Magistrate in the third book makes an effort, but who is to say that the effort goes far enough? So in one way these people are not trapped in their situation. Or let me put it another way, perhaps they are trapped in their situation but they don't resign themselves to being trapped in their situation. But whether they get out of it in their lifetime, that is another question. (1988: 219)⁹¹

Here Coetzee captures the ambivalent nature of the Magistrate's implication in colonialism and the Cartesian assumptions that underlie it, and gestures towards the possibility of this character's overcoming such implication.

The Saving Dimension of an Embodied Consciousness

What one notices in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is that, from the very beginning of the narrative, it is the Magistrate's valuing of the body that saves him from the depredations of imperialism. Empire and its agents, owing to their general Cartesian deprecation of the body, and the fact that they view it only as an instrument for some desired end, are shown to lack a sympathetic imagination. Conversely, in the Magistrate's view, the body and its brute ontological facts constitute the most faithful expression of human ontology — hence his abiding desire to awaken in Colonel Joll and the sergeant an awareness of their own embodiedness and consequent ontological indebtedness and, through this indebtedness, their interconnection with their Others. This awareness of the embodiedness and intentionality of consciousness is apparent in a number of events that enable the Magistrate to arrive at the conclusion that the body is central in the formulation of consciousness, an abiding belief in the centrality of the body which attains an almost “axiomatic” status with him.

⁹¹ In fact, the Magistrate is simply an improvement on Magda, who is in many ways his precursor. Krzysztof Kowalczyk comments as follows on her attempts to transcend the conflicted personality imposed on her by colonial and patriarchal structures:

In this writing, in this fiction, in this story, in this metafiction, in this diary, in this underdeveloped, wondrously rich narrative, does Magda ever get anywhere? The answer is *no*, because it takes more than one person to establish a social relationship, and others, father or Hendrik had become too contaminated with colonialism, no matter what lot, which rung in the ladder, fell to them, to be able to put up more than just reflections of the old system. She budes but does not get far in her own story (life). The situation hampers her movements, her narrative is ‘perpetually on the brink of the inchoate’. And the answer is yes, *because* she is able to communicate her concerns in a manner that makes us ask after her: what have *I* been doing on this barbarous frontier? (1992: 25, emphasis original)

For the most part, as I point out in this chapter, the “inchoate” is also what largely describes the Magistrate's awakening to his intersubjectivity with his Others, although he is some steps ahead of Magda in that regard.

In this connection, as I discuss more fully below, Coetzee’s graphic presentation of the tortured and murdered old man in the early stages of the narrative points to his sense of what Attridge calls “the un-ignorable being-there-ness of the Other”. The body of the murdered old man constitutes that un-ignorable Other. What happens with respect to the old man’s battered body is, later in the text, followed by the Magistrate’s exploration of the mutilation of the barbarian girl’s body and his ministrations to the captured barbarians in the wake of the intensification of Joll’s raid of the “barbarian” territory. Appalled by the torture inflicted on the captured barbarians, the Magistrate, himself Joll’s prisoner at the time, decides to intervene only to end up being classed together with the barbarians himself. His debilitating flogging leads him to exclaim, “We are a great miracle of creation! But from some blows this miraculous body cannot repair itself!” (117). The statement brings to mind the ubiquity of the un-ignorable “body in pain”⁹² in *Waiting for the Barbarians* and this is a point that Coetzee himself has argued passionately elsewhere in which the body’s susceptibility to feelings of pain counters all Cartesian doubts of its existence when the former says:

Whatever else, the body is not ‘that which is not’, and the proof that it *is* is the pain it feels. The body with its pain becomes a counter to the endless trials of doubt [. . .]. Not grace then, but at least the body. Let me put it baldly: in South Africa it is not possible to deny the authority of suffering and therefore of the body. [. . .] And let me again be unambiguous: it is not that one grants the authority of the suffering body; the suffering body takes this authority; that is its power. (1992: 248, emphasis original)

In the interview from which this passage comes, Coetzee decries the view that all reality is merely constructed, almost *ex nihilo*, by the *cogito*, or that it is a product of the extreme forms of constructivism and subject to the perpetual de-centering and dissemination of *differance* that are associated with some trends within post-modernist circles. Rather, in the Kantian sense, the reality that constitutes consciousness is a construct that derives from the Subject’s interaction

⁹² The expression “the body in pain” is from Elaine Scarry’s work of the same title referred to earlier in which she posits the linguistic inexpressibility of bodily pain (1985). She observes that pain destroys or defies language (1985: 6). This description of pain is similar to the Magistrate’s moans and groans during his torture which the torturers and those watching derisively misinterpret for barbarian language (the scene in *Waiting* is, of course, an allusion to Christ’s cry on the cross in the Ahmraic/Aramaic rather than the straight Hebrew language: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani”, which those standing by mistake for Christ’s calling out to Elijah to come and rescue him). Such an observation lends credence to the distinction I make in this study between concepts and words because it is clear that, although not amenable to linguistic expression, the subject still has an experiential concept of pain at the very moment he or she experiences it and as such concepts can and do exist before, outside of or beyond language. What I may not agree with Scarry is her view that pain is a contentless and self-referential concept because, as I note in my introductory chapter, intimations of “contentless” and “self-referential” concepts are largely Cartesian and it is unlikely that J.M. Coetzee would be at ease with them. In the same chapter, I note with the physicalist philosopher John Searle that a sensation of pain is occasioned by the firing of the C-fibre neurons. As such, pain must be *about* something and is not without content. Ultimately, this debate is not meant to say that I am right and Scarry is wrong; it simply means we have different views on the same subject.

with brute reality; it is not constructed out of nothing. And for Coetzee the body and its pain, and indeed all of reality, are of this Kantian order and not that of Descartes or Derrida.

Commenting on Coetzee's depiction of the ubiquity of the un-ignorable "body in pain" in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, despite the novel's dehistoricised time and obscure geographical setting, Lynn Meskell and Lindsay Weiss (2006), following Sam Durrant (2004), see in Coetzee's strategy a way of making his narrative attain an application beyond the possibly geographical confines of South Africa and the historical moment of apartheid and thereby transcend them:

What is the place of history for Coetzee, particularly in South Africa? Returning to the central characterisation of *Waiting for the Barbarians* and answering to some of his critics, [the] lack of specificity or naming in his own fictional writing finds more pointed ethical confrontation in his essays. In his novels, the central individuals are often 'unhomely' figures of and for alterity, they *embody* precisely that material history of suffering that the narrative is unable to *represent*. Their bodily presence indicates the un-mournable, unverbalizable history, a material history that refuses to be translated into words or conjured away by language What many commentators have found difficult to grasp is that, rather than mimetically reproducing the past's historical facticity, Coetzee's writing wrestles with the material, bodily affect of that history Coetzee's novels . . . relentlessly force us to confront the brute, indigestible materiality of the suffering that began with European colonisation (2006: 96-97, italics original)

However, as I note in my introductory chapter, Coetzee's concern with the body goes beyond questions of pain and discomfort, important to him though these obviously are. More broadly, he wants to present the body and its various facets (including the body that is the universe and its totality of existents). So, for instance, concerning his view on the un-ignorableness of the body and the intersubjectivity of an embodied consciousness, Coetzee has the Magistrate relate a most remarkable example of how bodies literally impinge on each other and so put the Self's autonomy into question. The instance in question occurs when, thrown out of the settlement and living the life of a beggar and wanderer among the fisher-folk (for whom he cleans fish in return for food [141-142]), he is bumped into by a woman who, fearful of soldiers, is running away, as does everyone else in the village. When she eventually frees herself, the impact of her body on the Magistrate's body leaves an almost permanent mark: "Like a bruise my flesh retains the imprint of the body that for a few seconds rested against me" (147). This particular experience enables him to realise that bodies impact on one another in various ways and arouse different reactions in one another, such as pain, love, hatred. For example, besides the physical imprint, the Magistrate's encounter with the woman in the night also arouses in him sexual feelings which occasion the following confession:

I fear what I am capable of: of coming back tomorrow in daylight still aching with the memory and asking questions until I discover who it was who ran into me in the dark, so as to build upon her, child or woman, an even more ridiculous erotic adventure. There is no limit to the foolishness of men of my age. Our only excuse is that we leave no mark of our own on the girls who pass through our hands: our convoluted desires, our ritualised lovemaking, our elephantine ecstasies are soon forgotten, they shrug off our clumsy dance as they drive straight as arrows into the arms of the men whose children they will bear, the young and vigorous and direct. (147)

Although the Magistrate is moved erotically by this otherwise accidental encounter, he does not over-glorify the body as the Cartesians do the mind or reason. We see in the passage above that he is acutely conscious of the body's shortfalls and this leads him to an acknowledgement of his own declining sexual prowess. Nevertheless, as he observes, once severely deprived of its needs, the body can assert its demands in a very compelling way. He discovers this fact when, due to his imprisonment, he has not had sex for a long time and so gets an erection that, despite the summoning of all his will power, simply will not go away: "I have not slept with a woman since I returned from the desert. Now at this most inappropriate of times my sex begins to reassert itself. I sleep badly and wake up in the mornings with a sullen erection growing like a branch out of my groin." (163). Much as he tries to wish it away, this unwilling desire does not let up; not even with the help of medication he purchases from a local herbalist. To find some relief, he feels compelled to make love to an old acquaintance of his, a married woman, Mai, whose husband is away and who is also nursing a baby. But the social inappropriateness of this course of action soon dawns on him and he discontinues the arrangement (166). Also it will be recalled that, earlier, he disregards the public's opinion of him by taking in the barbarian girl. He argues that he cannot "play the part of a man of iron or a saintly widower. Sniggers, jokes, knowing looks — these are part of the price I am resigned to paying" (35). Of course, these suspicions of the public turn out to be mistaken given that he does not quite have erotic feelings for this girl and does not have sex with her at this stage. Overall, however, unlike Eugene Dawn in the previous chapter, the Magistrate is in touch with his sexuality and, hence his body.

Also, in this narrative, even the body's endurance levels are shown to be limited. Unlike the Cartesians who believe they can withstand any amount of pain by dissociating the body from the mind, the Magistrate believes otherwise. For example, the Magistrate observes that, during torture, extreme pain could lead to false confessions from the one tortured so as to avoid further pain (126). In his own case, he does not even pretend not to feel pain as a Cartesian would. In fact, as I have already pointed out, the Cartesian-like torturers actually use the body

as their gateway to the mind, even though they claim the existence of a radical gap between the two in which only the latter affects the former. For this reason, the Magistrate counsels the tortured openly to show their torturers their discomfort and thereby attempt ontologically to disarm them (141). And so, in keeping with his earlier position, when Mandel and his men try to obtain information from him through extra-judicial means, such as a public mock hanging, he is not ashamed of declaring his pain and fear and, consequently, is cut down just before he chokes to death (128-131). In the Magistrate's view, this tactic almost always stands a chance of being successful. In my view, however, there would be exceptions. For instance, as Eckstein (1990) observes above, I do not see it working with a torturer who is an avowed Cartesian; he or she would simply sadistically enjoy the "spectacle". But he or she would possibly suffer the consequences of such ontological neglect at some point as already discussed in cases of genocides and murders above.

Because of all that happens to him, the Magistrate is convinced that, unlike Descartes, who solipsistically doubted the existence of everything apart from the mind, he cannot doubt the existence of his own body, or dismiss the brute universe out there as being merely a clever dream played on him by an evil genius, as Descartes (1980: 22) speculates in the first Meditation. The clearest proof of the un-ignorable existence of the world outside the Self comes when the Magistrate, after the soldiers have deserted the town, decides to return to his old room wishing to find that things have changed and that the world has become a better place in his absence. Here he finds that, except for a few changes, most of the items are much as they were before his imprisonment and his subsequent wanderings. This fairly stable state of affairs makes him doubt the possibility that the external world is an illusion and he thus concedes the following: "It may be true that the world as it stands is no illusion, no evil dream of a night. It may be that we wake up to it ineluctably, that we can neither forget it nor dispense with it." (156).⁹³

Seeing that nothing has changed for the better after all, and that, with the Third Bureau's provocation of the barbarians, the town is in real danger of being overrun, the Magistrate prays for a fresh start for his people and the chapter ends with him dreaming of "a saviour with a sword who will scatter the enemy hosts and forgive us the errors that have been committed by others in our name and grant us a second chance to build our earthly paradise" (157). Does the

⁹³ In physicalist terms, even the contents of an ordinary dream are a reconfiguration of already encountered material. If there should be a dream that is attributed to "revelation", the contents of such a dream can only come from sources outside the subject and are not created *ex nihilo* by the Subject himself or herself.

Magistrate now believe in fresh starts? Not at all. As I point out in my introductory chapter, an encounter cannot be reversed; it can only be worked through.⁹⁴ And so, after each encounter with his various Others, the Magistrate searches for ways of working through it and he seems to note that what can be gained through the attention he pays to the body is most redemptive in this regard. Among these searches is also that which is borne out in the reality before or beyond language — obviously an embodied and experiential one — which I presently explore.

The Pre-verbal and an Embodied Consciousness

As I note in my introductory chapter, Coetzee has long associated embodiedness with the pre-verbal or beyond the verbal. This is because of the contested ability of language faithfully to represent reality. For instance, Coetzee (2007: 59) cites the way in which humans, through language, seem to drive a wedge between what they regard as the “I” and their bodies in which the latter seem to be the possession of an anterior “I” — such as we find in sentences like “I have a body” or “I have pain”. Conversely, he contrasts this conception of being to that of animals and birds (which have no language) in which he believes no such schisms exist — such as in a dog who is in pain and whose only conception of it is “*I am pain*”, or a bird with the broken wing and is unable to fly whose only conception is “*I cannot*”. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, too, Coetzee strives to stage an embodied relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl, one occurring at the level of the pre-verbal: the two seem to connect best at the pre-linguistic level which, according to Coetzee, affords the opportunity of establishing a closer relationship with brute reality than is possible in language.⁹⁵ This resort to the pre-verbal is predictable considering that, first and foremost, the Magistrate and the girl do not quite share the same language. Significantly, therefore, when the Magistrate initially tries to establish from

⁹⁴ Just as Albert Memmi (1957) argues regarding the precarious position of the coloniser who refuses, the Magistrate is not blind to the fact that, although he is not party to what Empire has done to the barbarians, he may nevertheless be implicated in it by virtue of ethnically belonging to the colonising group, and so, irrespective of his non-allegiance to colonialism, may suffer the same fate as the other members of his ethnic group. But, Memmi’s analysis comes across as somewhat reductive and, historically, events have not always borne all his postulations out. Indeed, as I will point out at some length in the concluding section, after displaying such heroism as the Magistrate has done in this narrative, it is unlikely that the ‘barbarians’, in the event that they overrun the fort, would lump such a man together with Colonel Joll and Sergeant Mandel. Actually, as an ethnic group, the colonised’s ontology may be generous enough to forgive even Colonel Joll and Sergeant Mandel, as happened with the general amnesty of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, for instance.

⁹⁵ However, as I keep pointing out, there is no conclusive evidence that language radically alienates us from brute reality. In fact, phenomena such as onomatopoeia suggest that, through language, the connection between humans and brute reality is simply refracted, which is as it should be, given that language is a system of representing brute reality and all representations, by virtue of being representations, mediate what is being represented. What obtains before language is a concept of the situation or state of being and is not a generic experience; it is singular, even though it occurs within a network of similarities and differences. For purposes of communication, language tries to render this otherwise very singular concept, ‘generic’ and repeatable for a particular linguistic community. Nevertheless, each member of a linguistic community experiences the concept behind the word in a very personal and singular way such that a concept only *seems* the same and shared, when in practice it is not.

the girl what the men of the Bureau may have done to her, she is exasperatingly silent. At the same time, the Magistrate increasingly comes to realise that his attachment to her is beyond or anterior to language; it is an attachment of one embodied subject to another: “I touch my lips to her forehead. ‘What did they do to you?’ I murmur. My tongue is slow, I sway on my feet with exhaustion.’ Why don’t you want to tell me? ‘She shakes her head. . . . I mumble. She gives no sign that she has even heard me. My arm folds around her, my lips are at the hollow of her ear. I struggle to speak; then blackness falls” (34). It may well be that the barbarian girl is mistrustful of relations that have been established through the language of the coloniser which has already falsely constructed her as a “barbarian”. On the other hand, the Magistrate has made no effort to learn her language either — a fact he later sorely regrets (78). Perhaps a new language or a new usage of language will have to be devised, one that will take into account their intersubjectivity and restore both to the subject position to which they ontologically, and by rights, belong.⁹⁶ Tellingly, when the two eventually do make love in the desert as they are journeying towards her people, no words pass between them, they speak a language of one body to the other, and when the Magistrate offers to take her back to the fort with him, she demonstrates her position as a co-Subject by emphatically turning down his offer (77-78).⁹⁷

As mentioned above, the barbarian girl dislikes it that the Magistrate talks at all and makes this known when he is relating to her an incident in which he is suddenly prevented from killing a waterbuck by an awareness of an “inexplicable” irruption of otherness into his being:

Today I leave my horse hobbled where the line of marsh grass ends on the bleak south-west shore and begin to push my way through the reeds. . . . Almost at once, with absurd good fortune, I come upon a waterbuck . . . , we gaze at each other. My pulse does not quicken: evidently it is not important to me that the ram die. . . . In the clear silence of the morning I find an obscure sentiment lurking at the edge of

⁹⁶ One is here reminded of Magda’s entrapment in a discriminatory language, as expressed in her complaint about being unable to establish a sense of community between herself and the servants Hendrik and his wife Klein-Anna in *In the Heart of the Country*: “The language that should pass between myself and these people was subverted by my father and cannot be recovered . . . I was born into a language of hierarchy, of distance and perspective. It was my father tongue. I do not say it is the language my heart wants to speak, I feel too much the pathos of its distances, but it is all we have” (1978: 97). One could say that Magda, the ‘barbarian’ girl and Lucy Lurie are united in one aspect: they all want to inhabit Subject positions without themselves in turn objectifying their Others.

⁹⁷ In quite a striking way, the relationship between the Magistrate and the barbarian girl in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is comparable to the one between David Lurie and his daughter Lucy in *Disgrace*. As a man and as her father, Lurie too wants to find out exactly what the rapists did to Lucy and force her to press charges against her rapists but she steadfastly refuses to let him in on what, from her own sense of her situatedness, she regards as a strictly private affair. What both the barbarian girl and Lucy want is for their positions as Subjects and their otherness to be acknowledged and respected. In a sense, a similar analysis of respect for the otherness of the Other can be extended to the relationship between the medical officer and Michael K in *Life & Times of Michael K*, Susan Barton and Friday in *Foe* and, to a degree, Mrs Curren and Vercueil in *Age of Iron*. Through the staging of these relationships, Coetzee raises the question of the ontological condition of the mutual indebtedness and mediatedness of consciousness and the demand to respect the otherness of the Other, a demand I discuss in greater detail in my analysis of *Disgrace*.

my consciousness. With the buck suspended in immobility, there seems to be time for all things, time even to turn my gaze inward and see what it is that has robbed the hunt of its savour: the sense that this has become no longer a morning's hunting but an occasion on which either the proud ram bleeds to death on the ice or the old hunter misses his aim; that for this frozen moment the stars are locked in a configuration in which events are not themselves but stand for other things. . . . 'Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms,' I tell the girl, struggling to explain what happened. (42-43)

This is a pivotal passage in the text, a turning point in the Magistrate's conception of his intersubjectivity with not only this waterbuck, but subsequently also with all his Others.⁹⁸ Referring to the unconscious connection that the Magistrate comes to feel for his Others, Andre Viola (1991: 160) observes that in Coetzee's writing, "conflicts find a solution with the help of the semi-conscious activities of the characters". But, ontologically speaking, what could these unconscious experiences point towards?

So far, the Magistrate has had no conscious explanation for his semi-conscious experiences but in this particular instance he attempts to work out their *modus operandi*. What we suspect happens here is that, since the Magistrate hunts not for subsistence but for fun — a sort of trophy hunting — the senselessness of such wanton killing seems to have unconsciously dawned on him, closely related as it is to the torture and killing of the barbarians by Empire. In his encounter with this particular waterbuck, the initial relationship is of a Self and a wholly exterior Other: at first the Magistrate sees the animal as existing entirely outside of his being (pointing to extrospective consciousness), as an object to be annihilated. A little later, though, through its gaze, he turns inward (introspective consciousness) and still "sees" or "experiences" the waterbuck in his being. He notices, that is, that the waterbuck has onto-conceptually become a part of his own being, even as it is also an Other in its own right and that it would be senseless to kill it for sport (just as he would not simply amputate a part of himself for sport so too would it be unethical to violate the otherness of the Other). At this point his consciousness could be said to have unconsciously achieved an integral state with an acknowledgement of both its extrospective and introspective intentional natures. In other words, it seems here that the Magistrate has received intimations of his intersubjectivity with the waterbuck — of the

⁹⁸ In this connection, Josephine Donovan (2004: 6) does a commendable job of exploring Coetzee's engagement with animals in his oeuvre, generally, and in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, specifically. Comparing him to other authors who also attempt to grant subjectivity to the animals that figure in their work, she observes that "few of their human characters exhibit the intense empathetic identification with animal suffering and loss of dignity as do Coetzee's. This is what makes his work so original and groundbreaking in the area of fictional treatment of human-animal relations". But, in a very surprising move, Donovan, perhaps to turn this otherwise gender-neutral phenomenon into that of gender, has chosen to call this response a "process of feminisation" (2004: 2) and at several points refers to the reaction as "visceral empathy", an expression which often leaves the distinction between reason and emotions intact.

ontological mutual implication of its being with his own. And, as is the case in his experiences of the “fisherfolk” baby who dies, in the encounter with the waterbuck, he yet again comes to acknowledge his lack of absolute ontological autonomy, even in relation to the animal Other. For this reason he confesses: “Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms” (43).

In her reading of the Magistrate’s encounter with the waterbuck, although she does not call it an occasion of intersubjectivity, Maria Boletsi describes what happens to him as “ontological dislocation”, and argues that it “opens the way for an interrogation of the fixed categories on which the Magistrate’s life had been built” (2007: 79). Indeed, it can be a disquieting feeling for the Subject, who previously conceived of his or her subjectivity as autonomous, to realise that she or he owes the content of his or her consciousness to sources external to his or her ‘self’ and is therefore ontologically intersubjective with and indebted to those sources, and so implicated in their subjectivity. But, as with much else, these unconscious intimations need to be brought to consciousness for them to become useful in a Subject’s ethical awareness. By the end of the novel, the Magistrate does not quite achieve such conscious intersubjectivity or transcendence but he does develop an openness to its possibility.

Furthermore, “objectively” speaking, the Magistrate can be said to “know” the pain the waterbuck will experience if he shoots it. I have previously referred to John Searle’s argument that the stimulation of the c-fibre nerve is responsible for the sensation of pain and this is something we could assume in an “objective” sense — even if we have not asked the waterbuck’s subjective opinion on the matter. At this point though, with his own self-examination, we could say that the Magistrate’s previously unconscious experiences of being intersubjective with his Others are now being given some form of acknowledgement, an acknowledgement which, although still inchoate, may yet form the basis on which a Self-Other ethics will begin to apply.

Coetzee has prepared us for the reaction of the Magistrate to his encounter with the waterbuck in the scene in which he is flogged. While being flogged, the Magistrate refers to the human body as “a miracle of creation”, but then quickly realises that this view of the body is couched in humanistic terms and so amends it by pointing out that humans carelessly crush insects under their feet which are also miracles of creation in their own right (118). This latter observation points to the breadth of the Magistrate’s imagination which, extending as it does to

the non-human Other, becomes all-inclusive. In contrast to this range of imagination, as the Magistrate observes, the barbarian girl has an instrumental, pragmatic cast of mind “Didn’t you want to shoot the buck?” she asks him in the passage above. And, later, she says, “You should not go hunting if you don’t enjoy it” (43). It is this kind of binaric mindset that easily lends itself to the exploitation of one’s Others. Perhaps, Coetzee is warning us that such a cast of mind is a human and not a race-specific phenomenon and so must be countered wherever it manifests itself. In this regard, the barbarian girl may feel an unconscious attachment to her Others, but this phenomenon on its own is not the same thing as imagination in either its projectionist or sympathetic/empathetic modes. As I note in my introductory chapter, unless the unconsciously felt tug of intersubjectivity is brought to conscious acknowledgement, the so-called natural man is no different from the so-called civilised man when it comes Self/Other relations.⁹⁹

Deployed judiciously the imagination leads to an expansion of being allowing us to invent. Ontologically, it is very closely associated with the ability to sympathise and even empathise, thereby enabling the Self to “see” itself in the Other, and to “see” the Other in its Self; that is, to be both extrospective and introspective. It is this ability that the Magistrate gradually gains, as is evident in his experience with the waterbuck. That is, the Magistrate becomes broad-minded enough to recognise intimations of irruptions of his Others into his being. For instance, during his banishment and subsequent wanderings, we later see the Magistrate gladly receive “wet kisses” from a dog (149). Also, towards the end of the novel, as winter approaches and the storms begin, he spares a thought for wild animals which, during a storm, have no cover and have to “turn their back to the wind and endure” (168).¹⁰⁰

One could say that such experiences of intersubjectivity are due to the embodied consciousness’s often unconscious and unacknowledged intentionality. This is further evident when, having returned from his wanderings, the Magistrate learns from Mai that one of the girls he was fond of has left town in the exodus currently underway due to fear of an impending barbarian attack. The news of her departure hits him hard and he is moved to

⁹⁹ Coetzee comes back to this subject first in *Age of Iron* with its entrenched logic of “either-or” and, subsequently, in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) in his re-narration of Frantz Kafka’s short story “A Report to an Academy” (1917). In Kafka’s story, an ape called Red Peter learns human behaviour to escape his captors but Coetzee reconstructs the story to show his captors actually teaching the ape human behaviour through a series of exclusively practical lessons involving how to get food, mostly. These lessons, while helpful with the practical needs of life, do not teach Red Peter to develop his faculty of imagination, since they are tied to the merely practical lessons of how to obtain food, thereby encouraging in him the development of instrumental rather than speculative reason.

¹⁰⁰ J.M. Coetzee returns to this concern for the animal Other again and again in his later writings, most prominently in *Disgrace* (1999a), *The Lives of Animals* (1999b) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

remark as follows: “What I did not know was how longing could store itself away in the hollows of one’s bones and then one day without warning flood out. . . . When you said she was gone, I confess, it was as if something had struck me here, in the breast. A blow” (140-141). This confession reveals the often unconsciously felt intentionality of the embodied consciousness acknowledging its indebtedness to the Other, and thereby affirming its intersubjectivity with it. We notice also that the Magistrate feels the pain of his imprisonment the most when he has been put in the isolation cell and has no one to talk to or interact with (87). And, as I observe in my first chapter, an embodied and intersubjective consciousness can validate itself only in continued reference to the external sources of its contents. As the Magistrate comes to realise through his longings and loneliness, these experiences form the basis for “intersubjectivity” in general.

From my discussion, it follows that Coetzee is deeply suspicious of all conceptions of subjectivity that focus on a supposedly *sui generis* disembodied mind or consciousness and that he attributes to this misconception, and all related binaric constructions, most of the confusions of subjectivity that underpin discriminatory relations — including those that involve torture. However, the acknowledgement of an embodied consciousness, rooted in the body’s interaction with existents outside itself, leads to a kind of ontological redemption for those who previously disregarded the body’s role in the ontology of our consciousness. In *Waiting for the Barbarians* we come across characters who see the body as inconsequential and use it only to try to get to the mind of their victims through activities such as torture. In contradistinction to this outlook, Coetzee (1992: 248; 1999a: 33) sets up the body as a definitive benchmark against which all else can be measured, a process in which consciousness itself comes to be viewed as an embodied, intersubjective affair. It is these differences in orientation between the Magistrate and members of the Third Bureau that mark the different trajectories they take regarding Empire’s proper relations with the barbarians. So, again and again in this novel, we find the humane Magistrate pitted against the men of the Third Bureau. What this contrast clarifies is that it is the latter, rather than the natives, who are the true barbarians.¹⁰¹ And it is the disregard for the Self’s acknowledgement of its embodiedness and that of its Others and the former’s consequent indebtedness to the latter (through the mutual implication that results from the embodied irruptions attendant on the encounter), more than anything else, that seems to account for the barbarities of members of the Third Bureau.

¹⁰¹ Of course, although better disposed towards the surrounding environment, the Magistrate is for a long time not entirely at one with it as evidenced in his regular hunting of animals as part of his leisure — until he is stopped in his tracks by his “inexplicable” experience with the waterbuck as I have discussed above.

In conclusion, J.M. Coetzee has created a fairly credible character in the Magistrate. As I have noted elsewhere, the Magistrate is no saint or Christ. True to life, he has painfully to work through the confusions that emanate from his implication in the colonial enterprise by virtue of his ethnicity and the kind of socialisation that it affords him. Much as the Magistrate wants to distance himself from the colonial enterprise, he on occasion finds himself caught up in some of its tendencies, especially that of colonial/racial stereotypes. It would seem that in an environment of deeply entrenched discrimination such as racism, patriarchy, and ethnicity, it is immensely difficult fully to unlearn one's prejudices and reconfigure one's ontological conception accordingly. The Subject thus sometimes finds himself/herself unconsciously guilty of discrimination. What saves individuals such as the Magistrate, though, is their good intentions.

In this connection, as Barbara Eckstein observes regarding the ending of the novel, which narrates the Magistrate's recurrent dream of a young girl building a castle (or so it at first seems to him — because it turns out she is building a snowman instead), he learns at least two major issues from his experiences in this text, namely the indivisibility of consciousness and the importance of a humble attitude towards and respect for his Others:

[What he sees in his waking life at last] is not, however, a fort or a castle, an elaborate barrier protecting civilization. It is a snowman: a body with eyes, ears, nose and mouth. It is a clumsy body, a crude artistic text, defying humans' desire to make nature in our image and ourselves the centre of the universe. It is nevertheless, a kind of body, an individual, alive, in the imagination, whose sentience precedes the civilization maintained within the forts. . . . [I]n the meantime, Coetzee suggests, it is wise not to separate the vulnerability of the body from the will of the mind and voice.

Implicit in Coetzee's conclusion is a modest proposal. As the Magistrate walks away from the children he thinks, "This is not the scene I dreamed of. Like much else nowadays I leave it feeling stupid". He is on a "road that may lead nowhere" but feeling stupid is neither despair nor humiliation. It is the absence of a controlling language and disembodied certainty. It is humility, the humility he tried to achieve by the gesture of washing the girl's crippled feet. That was the beginning of his deconstructive process, this humility, that serves the body, the word, the soul and the state. (93)

It is very appropriate that Eckstein links the recurring dream and the Magistrate's relationship with the barbarian girl. To all appearances, the two phenomena are very closely related, for the dreams prefigure the Magistrate's later encounter with the barbarian girl, and their continuation after her return to her people reminds him of his ontological indebtedness to her (and, by extension, to all his Others). His encounter with the children he has been dreaming about in real life at the end of the novel is the culmination of his lessons throughout the narrative. Viola

(1991) discusses the dream sequence in this novel and makes the telling point that dreams illuminate the Magistrate's waking life in the same way that his waking life feeds into them and so deepen his awareness of his extrospective and introspective states of consciousness.

From Eckstein's, Viola's, and my own analysis, then, we note that the Magistrate becomes not only self-critical but also self-correcting. And, what is even more critical for us to bear in mind is that, by and large, in this narrative, the Magistrate, by siding with the barbarians, knows that he is putting himself in the way of mortal danger, which confirms his courage and sense of principle, despite his own persistent self-doubt on this matter. He aspires to noble emotions (as the one man who was not a barbarian) while the agents of the empire aspire only to base emotions.

By the end of the narrative, the Magistrate has also grown wiser. As he ponders writing a history of Empire, he now even consciously distances himself from what David Attwell (1993: 84-85) calls "the stock-in-trade images of cataclysm and triumph of the narratives of Empire". Appropriately, the Magistrate dismisses all the false views of history that go with the romanticization of Empire and settles for an approach that is tentative and self-critical. Tellingly, in this regard, although the Magistrate has learnt quite a lot over time which he could boast about, his sense of humility is reflected in his following admission that is tinged with Socratic irony: "I think: "There is something staring me in the face and still I do not see it"" (170). The Magistrate knows by now that an appropriate attitude is one of open-mindedness which requires continuous searching. Appropriately, Harold Fromm points out the indeterminate endings of most of Coetzee's novels and attributes these to the author's own refusal to be prescriptive:

Coetzee seems to have taken on the only plausible role for a fin-de-siècle sceptical wise man who sees too much for his own good. As a sensitizer rather than a Doctrinizer, he has linned with skill a multiplicity of human possibilities, veering toward a handful of what seem like desirable choices but always acutely conscious of the treacherousness of history and the self-deceptions of human consciousness. (2000: 343-344)

One can argue that, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the most important transformations that the Magistrate undergoes in light of his most profound experiences is his awakening to his own embodiedness and to intimations of his embodied intersubjectivity with his Others, be they human or animal. Of course, these intimations are largely still inchoate with regard to their full

conscious acknowledgement and only in *Age of Iron*, published a decade later, do we find a bolder attempt in that direction.

If we consider all the above points, I am persuaded to agree with J.B.W. Wood's (1984: 129) observation, to which I alluded earlier, that the Magistrate's assessment of his own position within Empire as the other side of imperial rule is not a correct one in the present, only in the past. Coetzee's sketching of the Magistrate as a character follows the trajectory of what we know to be the traditional heroic plot. We observe the Magistrate's situation change from the complacency that costs him his "good fortune" — albeit a false kind of fortune — and then goes through a period of disgrace and tribulation and then he is finally restored, by default, to his former position but this time as a wiser person open to whatever the future might hold — (that includes a future with the "barbarians" as compatriots and waterbucks that throw into doubt the supposed ontological autonomy of the Subject). And, like a true hero, the Magistrate would not want to blow his own trumpet about his heroism; that duty falls on us.

Chapter Four

Age of Iron: Embodied Intersubjectivity and a Post-Binary Logic of “Both-And”

Six pages already, and all about a man you have never met and never will. Why do I write about him? Because he is and is not I. Because in the look he gives me I see myself in a way that can be written. . . . When I write about him I write about myself. When I write about his dog I write about myself; when I write about the house I write about myself. Man, house, dog: no matter what the word, through it I stretch out a hand to you. In another world I would not need words. I would appear on your doorstep. ‘I have come for a visit,’ I would say, and that would be the end of words. But in this world, in this time, I must reach out to you in words. 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. . . . Words out of my body, drops of myself, for her to unpack in her own time, to take in, to suck, to absorb. (Coetzee, 1998: 9)

You say it is time to win or lose. Let me tell you something about that *win or lose*. Let me tell you something about that *or*. (Coetzee, 1998: 144-145, emphasis original)

It’s like being on trial for your life and being allowed only two words, Yes and No. Whenever you take a breath to speak out, you are warned by the judges: ‘Yes or No: no speeches.’ ‘Yes’ you say. Yet all the time you feel other words stirring inside you like life in the womb. (Coetzee, 1998: 145)

Yes. No, emphatically no. Yes and no. Both. (Coetzee, 2003: 221)

Age of Iron (1990) is a novel in the form of a letter. It belongs to the fictional genre called “the epistolary novel”. Written to her long self-exiled daughter over several days, months even, by the novel’s ailing protagonist, Mrs Curren, the letter in some ways also resembles a journal. It details the everyday happenings in the latter’s life, starting from the day on which she is told that her cancer is terminal, and her subsequent encounter with a squatter on her premises on returning from the hospital. The coincidence of these two events holds some fascination for Mrs Curren that both crucially and fundamentally redeems her and, as I shall argue, in her possible misreading of its further import, also dooms her.

At the level of plot, at least three lines of tension run through this novel: first, the confirmation that Mrs Curren receives of the news of her terminal cancer, together with her gradual and tortured struggle to come to terms with this news; secondly, the irruption of the vagrant, Vercueil, into her conscious life, and her working out how and where to place him, if at all, in her being; and, thirdly, the socio-political tension that is threatening to tear South Africa apart. These three trajectories interweave and converge. In this regard, the metaphorical relationship between the socio-political state of South Africa in an age of iron, Mrs Curren’s cold and loveless house, and her cancer-wracked body has been noted by a number of critics (among others Probyn, 1998: 214-225; Marais, 2009: 105; Attridge, 2005: 102, Kossew, 1996: 190-191;

Canepari-Labib, 2005: 268-272, Reading, 1990, Graham Huggan, 1996). Rather than labour this point, then, I shall simply note that one can also trace in the story at least two ontological trajectories: on the one hand, filial or biological ontological considerations between Mrs Curren and her self-exiled daughter, and, on the other hand, the embodied intersubjective ontology of Mrs Curren's newfound consciousness in relation to Vercueil and all her Others.

Furthermore, critics such as Graham Huggan (1996) and Derek Attridge (2000 and 2005) have explored Coetzee's allusion to the Hesiod myth of the cycle of the ages of gold, silver, bronze and iron — in that order — and their implications for this novel. It is not my intention to repeat what has already been discussed by these critics. Suffice to note, here, that Mrs Curren points out that Hesiod's age of iron is characterised by an acute lack of love, both filial and *agape* (50). It is Mrs Curren's awakening (through a post-binary, embodied consciousness) to such love, in an age in which it is supposed to be totally absent, that makes this narrative most remarkable. The kind of love in question takes the form of Mrs Curren's consciousness of an intersubjectivity with her Others that is based not on politically imposed prescriptions, but on what she believes is her ontological indebtedness to them and her implication in their subjectivity.

Although they appear in novels published a decade apart, Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron* closely resembles the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The most noteworthy common denominator between them is that, though both belong to the colonising group, through personal and collective socio-political crises, they come to refuse to subscribe to the tenets of colonialism. Both protagonists may be read in terms of Albert Memmi's coloniser who refuses, to which I have referred in my previous chapter. In the course of their respective narratives, both these characters experience gripping irruptions of otherness into their Selves: in the case of the Magistrate, these irruptions take the form of the fisherfolk baby who dies, the waterbuck he is prevented from killing and the tortured barbarian girl; in the case of Mrs Curren, they involve the tramp and squatter, Vercueil. It is these seemingly "inexplicable" experiences that enable the two characters to awaken to their embodied intersubjectivity with the colonised group. The newfound conception of their subjectivity prevents them from taking sides with the colonising group against the colonised group. Instead, they try (and to varying degrees succeed) to reach out to the colonised "reciprocally". These two novels mark a significant progression from the tragic and entrapping Self/Other relations that characterised *Dusklands* (1974) and *In The Heart of The Country* (1977).

Talking specifically about *Age of Iron*, David Attwell observes that this text marks a significant step in the development and vision of Coetzee's writing:

Age of Iron shows that the transitions taking place in Coetzee's novels are inexplicable except as the consequence of a consistent and increasingly refined sense of the historicity of fictional discourse under South African conditions. This is true of the forms of authority the novels invoke and scrutinize, the notions of textuality they inscribe, and the ethical consciousness they propose or prepare for. (1993: 123)

I concur with this insightful observation because, both ontologically and ethically, the depiction of the embodied intersubjective consciousness in *Age of Iron* is far more developed than in the previous novels. This progression is achieved through the protagonist's jettisoning of the disembodied binary logic of "either/or" and embracing of an embodied, post-binary logic, a kind of logic which Patricia Waugh (1992a: 163-164) would term of "both-and", or "and-or". One could argue (as I propose in this chapter) that, overall, Mrs Curren's conception of being intersubjective with her Others becomes far more fine-tuned than even that of the Magistrate's in the previous novel, a development which obviously mirrors Coetzee's own artistic and intellectual progression along the path of embodied intersubjectivity.

I have described the unsettling experiences that the Magistrate and Mrs Curren have as "seemingly inexplicable" because that is how a number of critics have responded to them. For instance, in a 1998 article, after quoting a passage in which Mrs Curren rebukes her maid Florence for calling Vercueil a rubbish person with the words: "There are no rubbish people. We are all people together" (47), Derek Attridge offers the following assessment of Mrs Curren's newfound view of life that touches upon her "seemingly inexplicable" experiences:

It must be emphasised . . . that the novel does not simply endorse Mrs Curren's liberal truisms, and she herself comes to question them forcefully during the course of the novel. But her platitude is the only verbal defence she has against the political rationality that dismisses some human beings as worthless, and which she feels an obligation — whose source remains obscure and inexplicable — to resist. It is in her actions towards Vercueil that she manifests a responsibility for the other that exceeds all instrumentalism, and the odd silence about her motivation . . . testifies again to the impossibility of accounting for such an ethical response in the language of liberal humanism she has at her disposal. We are left with an awareness that respect for and openness to the other, which implies a readiness for self-reinterpretation of the kind Mrs Curren goes through during the course of the novel, is a difficult, unprogrammable, but absolutely necessary part of the refashioning of a society. (1998: 208)

What is clear from Attridge's assessment is that Mrs Curren's new disposition has no precedent in a strictly liberal ideology (and Attwell makes a similar point in the passage quoted above). Its

sources and motivation, as he puts it, are “obscure” and, he adds, “inexplicable”. But he does indicate that there is a kind of “self-reinterpretation” going on in Mrs Curren’s life, which, though “unprogrammable”, is nevertheless seen to be absolutely necessary if we are to “refashion[] . . . a society.” By 2005, Attridge has come to call these experiences “irruptions of otherness into the self” (xii). Similarly, Mike Marais (2009: 124) describes them as an invasion by the other to whom the self then becomes “host”. In an earlier article, Marais (1998: 233-237) suggests that such irruptions of otherness constitute “intersubjectivity”, and he identifies, following Mrs Curren, “love” as both their source and goal. Both these critics agree on the need for the Subject to undergo these experiences to effect a transformation of his or her subjectivity. As must be clear by now, in my study, I follow up on all these pointers by attempting to account for the seemingly “inexplicable and obscure sources” of this “love”, “mutual election” or “irruptions of otherness into the self”, and, indeed, the “intersubjectivity”, that critics such as Marais think Coetzee is positing in his writings.

In addition to the views expressed by the above critics, my approach also enjoys the support of David Attwell (1993: 123) who, as I have already noted, hints at Coetzee’s proposal of “a specific sort of ethical consciousness” in his fiction, an observation which by 2006 he has come to associate with what in my study I have termed an “embodied consciousness”. As I have already indicated, Attwell (2006: 37-38) points out, with reference to *Disgrace* (1999a), that, for Coetzee, a re-configuration of our consciousness in relation to the body may be a prerequisite to our forging of post-binary/Cartesian ontologies: “[T]he conditions of possibility for the development of a more redemptive consciousness might well be ontological before they are social; that is, they may be related to a new consciousness and valorizations of being itself”. By the time of the publication of *The Lives of Animals* (1999b), this orientation in Coetzee’s writing has become far more explicit, especially with Elizabeth Costello’s direct rejection of the Cartesian ontology of “*cogito ergo sum*” in favour of “embodiedness”, and her related rejection, in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003: 80), of the limits that the neo-Cartesian Thomas Nagel places on the sympathetic imagination. With the benefit of hindsight, and paying due attention to the debate on the nature of consciousness and how it relates to issues of identity construction and discrimination, one could say that Coetzee has been gesturing toward this form of consciousness since *Dusklands* (1974).

In *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren’s awakening to an intersubjective consciousness starts quite early. For example, in talking about her encounter with the squatter, Vercueil, and in writing about it

to her daughter — especially after realising that she cannot get rid of him — Mrs Curren outlines her emerging subjectivity as follows:

Six pages already and all about a man you have never met and never will. Why do I write about him? Because he is and is not I. Because in the look he gives me I see myself in a way that can be written When I write about him I write about myself. When I write about his dog I write about myself; when I write about the house I write about myself. Man, house, dog: no matter what the word, through it I stretch out a hand to you. In another world I would not need words. I would appear on your doorstep. 'I have come for a visit,' I would say, and that would be the end of words. But in this world, in this time, I must reach out to you in words. 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 Words out of my body, drops of myself, for her to unpack in her own time, to take in, to suck, to absorb. (9)

As in the extrospective and introspective experiences of the Magistrate in his encounter with the waterbuck in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, Mrs Curren awakens to intimations of intersubjectivity with her Others, through her transforming encounter with Vercueil. In her description of this unsettling experience to her daughter in the passage quoted above, she outlines both its outward and inward movements: “[I]n the look he gives me I see myself in a way that can be written. . . . When I write about him I write about myself” (9). The movement here described is from the outside (Vercueil’s gaze) to the inside (into herself) and, through this interchange, this character comes to see herself in a new way, that is, as an intersubjective being rather than an autonomous one. “Vercueil is not only out there; in some form he is also in my subjectivity and I am in his too”, Mrs Curren seems to be saying. Such a conception of subjectivity points to her recognition of her double loss of what she previously mistakenly conceived of as her autonomy. Crucially, just before making this statement, she has also said that Vercueil, “is and is not I” (9), both acknowledging her intersubjectivity with him and respecting his otherness. After this encounter with Vercueil, Mrs Curren begins to acknowledge her intersubjectivity with all her other Others. However, while it is undeniable that Vercueil enables Mrs Curren to achieve the primary ontological leap of awakening to intersubjectivity, the extent of his further contribution to her subjectivity beyond this basic, ontological “capital”, is debatable, as will be demonstrated later in this chapter.

According to Mrs Curren’s own diagnosis, what has caused her cancer is the “shame” of living a life under apartheid, a system of social organisation that engenders a deformed and stunted ontology (145). While J.M. Coetzee was still writing *Age of Iron*, he won the Jerusalem Prize for the contribution of his writing (especially his novel *Life & Times of Michael K*) contribute to the subject of freedom. In a manner similar to Mrs Curren’s critique of the binary logic of “either-

or”, the author used the Jerusalem prize acceptance ceremony to explore the ontological effects of apartheid’s “either-or” logic on the South African population across the racial divides. At a critical point in the address he notes that

The deformed and stunted relations between human beings that were created under colonialism and exacerbated under what is loosely called apartheid have their psychic representation in a deformed and stunted inner life. All expressions of that inner life, no matter how intense, no matter how pierced with exultation or despair, suffer from the same stuntedness and deformity. (Coetzee, 1992: 98)

For the most part, the relations that obtain in *Age of Iron* reflect precisely the stuntedness and deformity of being to which Coetzee alludes in his speech. After noting that Mrs Curren traces the source of her illness and “ugliness” to living in a state whose ideology fosters the occurrence of just such phenomena, Mike Marais (2009: 111) observes that this character’s encounter with Vercueil may somehow or other “save her by enabling her to ‘rise above the times’ rather than ‘die in the state she is in’, ‘in a state of ugliness’”. And in a discussion of the effect that the text may have on its readers, Marais (2009: 124) explains how this salvation is supposed to come about, namely by “expos[ing] the reader to what is beyond the same and thereby saving him or her from claustrophobic self-entrapment”. Indeed, it is only through exposure to that which is beyond the same that the Subject expands his or her ontological horizon, as Mrs Curren comes to discover. As I shall argue in this chapter, this expansion comes about in the form of her acknowledgement of Vercueil, and those he represents, in her ontology. A previous denial of, or blindness to, these Others has caused all the “ugliness” or stuntedness of being on both sides of the racial divide and the consequent vengeful struggle going on around her, manifesting itself as civil strife, and within her, as a cancer. The new ontology being offered by Coetzee in this novel as a corrective measure to ontological stuntedness is arguably an embodied and intersubjective one. Gradually rejecting her former Cartesian ontology (a process this discussion explores closely), Mrs Curren comes truly to understand, first and foremost, what it means to conceive of the Self as fundamentally embodied. Further, she comes to conceive of the Other-in-the-Self, and the Self-in-the-Other, while at the same time respecting the otherness of the Other.

Mrs Curren’s Cancer and the Elizabeth Kubler-Ross Model

As already hinted at, Mrs Curren’s awakening to a new embodied and intersubjective consciousness unfolds against the background of both the troubled South African socio-political milieu and Vercueil’s sudden appearance at her doorstep, and her personal crisis and struggle with the shock, denial, anger, bargaining and “acceptance” of her terminal illness. With

regard to her personal crisis, one is here reminded of a study entitled *On Dying and Death* (1969), by the psychologist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, which explores the five stages that most people faced with certain death, or great loss, undergo after learning of their predicament. Indeed, all the stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance that Kubler-Ross puts forward are experienced by Mrs Curren in Coetzee's narrative. A brief outline of these stages will help me chart her progress in my discussion.

Kubler-Ross explains that during the "denial stage" (which is the first stage), the person feels that the shocking event cannot be happening to him or her. But, then, as she adds, this feeling is often replaced with a heightened awareness of situations and individuals that will be left behind after death (42). Mrs Curren's decision to write a letter to her daughter, at this point in her life, indicates just such a stage of denial; she wants to live on, but through her daughter. As she says, "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 toward her, may I live in you" (131). Although not a matter of the ontology of consciousness, this desire is an instance of biological ontology between Mrs Curren and her daughter. However, the writing of the letter, or authorship in general, is itself an instance of "intellectual parentage", which is an aspect of the ontology of consciousness.

According to Kubler-Ross (1969: 51), the "anger stage" involves the victim looking for someone to blame, as well as envying those who show signs of energy and life. As I shall show, Mrs Curren is variously angry with her doctor, Vercueil, her cats, the politics of her nation and, ultimately, her body which she believes has betrayed her (12-13). We also see her envying her maid Florence, who seems vivacious and happy with her children (40). Kubler-Ross (1969: 82) maintains that after anger comes the "bargaining stage", which involves a negotiation with whoever the individual believes gives life (God, usually) for an extension of his or her life in exchange for a changed lifestyle (82). In this regard, Mrs Curren pleads that she wants to see many more seasons, especially summer, so that she can savour their various offerings (55). Kubler-Ross's "depression stage" (1969: 85-86) involves awareness by the individual that what is happening to him or her is both real and that there is not much he or she can do to change it, which brings feelings of entrapment, helplessness and gloom. The final stage, that of "acceptance", involves the individual coming to terms with his or her predicament and taking positive steps to live out the remainder of his or her life (Kubler-Ross 1969: 112). These stages, though, are not always linear, they may form a cycle, such that some individuals may go through them back and forth to the very end of their lives. This last observation holds true for

Mrs Curren: throughout the novel, she repeatedly swings from one stage to another. A similar process is mirrored in her reaching out to her Others, which is not only gradual but also fraught with ambivalence. My discussion of this novel seeks to explore how these two processes intersect.

The novel opens with Mrs Curren's happening upon a tramp in a cardboard shack in her alley (3-4). She is clearly annoyed to find him there. Initially, she describes the tramp in general terms as "[O]ne of the derelicts who hang around the parking lots on Mill Street, cadging money from shoppers, drinking under the overpass, eating out of refuse cans . . ." (3-4). Over the next few paragraphs, she unflatteringly ascribes to him animal qualities. For example, he has skin that is peeling like a snake's (9), and teeth that are "cariou fangs" (5). A little later, she complainingly calls him as a "scavenger" (5). With reference to his scavenging habits, she compares him to a "carrion bird" (5). In due course, though, the tramp begins to gain his individuality and specificity and, along with these, some value. As Mrs Curren pays closer attention to Vercueil, she begins to recognise him as one of the tramps she has previously "seen" but whom she has not "perceived" until his irruption into her world (3-4).

This "seeing" but not "perceiving" points to the blindness that Coetzee attributes to the Self who discriminates against the Other. It will be remembered that, in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, this is imaged by the dark glasses worn by Colonel Joll. Coetzee's more conscious characters blame what I have called ontological blindness on a combination of ideology and personal choice. In *Age of Iron*, the state machinery, propagating a hegemonic ideology of apartheid through a combination of censorship and disinformation, has blinded Mrs Curren and the colonising group she belongs to by inculcating in them a false consciousness — as she herself rightly observes (39). Across Coetzee's oeuvre, those of his characters who transcend hegemony through awakening to a new subjectivity do so as a result of a personal or collective crisis. In the case of Mrs Curren, it is her encounter with a tramp, which coincides with the confirmation of the news of her terminal cancer, that cures her of ontological oversight. The coincidence is simply too much for her and she begins to read something deeper into it. Having encountered this particular derelict, and at this particular time, she begins to undergo a gradual transformation of her ontological conception in relation to him: "For a while I stood staring down on him, staring and smelling. A visitor, visiting himself on me, on this of all days.

. . . This was the day when I had the news from Dr. Syfret. The news was not good, but it was mine, for me, mine only, not to be refused” (4). This statement, although it reads affirmatively, does not mean that Mrs Curren has immediately accepted her condition. Later, we hear her say that she is filled with dread when she thinks about her impending death (26-27). She also admits that when she reads the papers, she skips over any words that might point towards her illness (39). Just as Mrs Curren is finding it difficult to accept the news of her terminal illness, so too is she finding it difficult to accept the tramp in her alley. She is in shock and denial about both events.

With regard to her illness, as I have already hinted at, throughout this novel, Mrs Curren swings from shock and anger, through denial and bargaining, to acceptance. For instance, very early in the text, although she has spoken about accepting the news from the time it was broken to her, we find her railing against her cancerous body, which she feels has betrayed her. This happens while she is feeding her cats who are behaving strangely and refusing to eat the food she sets before them. Mrs Curren gets angry with the apprehensive cats, shouts at them and then reflects on the incident:

‘I am sick to death of feeding you!’ In my voice there was a new, mad edge; and hearing it, I exulted. Enough of being nice to people, enough of being nice to cats! ‘Go to hell!’ I screamed again, at the top of my voice. Their claws scabbled on the linoleum as they fled.

Who cares? When I am in a mood like this I am capable of putting a hand on the breadboard and chopping it off without a second thought. What do I care for this body that has betrayed me? I look at my hand and see only a tool, a hook, a thing for gripping other things. And these legs, these clumsy, ugly stilts: why should I have to carry them with me everywhere? Why should I take them to bed with me night after night and pack them in under the sheets, and pack the arms in too, higher up near the face, and lie there sleepless amid the clutter? The abdomen too, with its gurglings, and the heart beating, beating: why? What have they to do with me? (12-13)

It is clear that Mrs Curren is angry with her fate and, through Cartesian self-deprecation, hopes to come to terms with it by creating a distance between what she conceives of as her Self and her body — an attempt that eventually fails. We have seen this tactic being employed in *Dusklands*, by Eugene Dawn, who seeks to control his body by deprecating and ignoring it, but with a similar lack of success. I concur with Derek Attridge (1998: 207) that, as a former classics lecturer, Mrs Curren represents Western scholarship epitomised by Cartesian ontology. At this stage, this ontology is the only resource available to her for coming to terms with her predicament. But in time, Mrs Curren, like Eugene Dawn before her, finds that such attempts

at Cartesian escapism are all futile, and so decides to try to come to terms with her body and, through it, with her fate.

There is something deeply ironic about Mrs Curren's predicament here. One would expect that coming to terms with death should be a very easy thing for one with a Cartesian heritage; after all, the mind, the more important part of the Cartesian dichotomy, is supposed to outlive the dissolution of the body. The problem, of course, is that, although Descartes (1980: 4) set out to prove exactly this point, as he outlines in the dedication to his *Meditations*, this cannot be proved to be the case in any definitive sense by Cartesians. As such, Mrs Curren's Cartesian heritage is not equal to the un-ignorable task at hand, that is, coming to terms with her all too evident mutability. Instead, it is through acknowledging the indivisible nature of her embodied consciousness that she eventually achieves a sense of ontological integrity and in the process comes to terms with the mutability of her embodied being. Her embodiedness, she realises, is firmly grounded in the physical universe, with the earth marking the starting point of its situatedness. Thus, shortly after her denunciation of her body, she begins to attempt to conceive of herself as an integral, embodied being:

We sicken before we die so that we will be weaned from our body. The milk that nourished us grows thin and sour; turning away from the breast, we begin to be restless for a separate life. Yet this first life, this life on earth, on the body of the earth — will there, can there ever be a better? Despite all the glooms and despairs and rages, I have not let go of my love of it. (13)

Mrs Curren realises that she is not only her body but that she is also *in* the world and *of* it. Yet, despite at times seeming to accept her fate, she is still very much in shock and denial. When she reflects on an image of prisoners standing on the brink of a trench into which their bodies will tumble, it is evident that she has entered the "bargaining stage": "They plead with the firing squad, they weep, they joke, they offer bribes." (26). Similarly, she pleads for more time so that she will be able to enjoy a few more things such as summer:

The rains began early this year. This is the fourth month of rain. . . . My clothes have a bitter, mouldy smell. How I long, just once more, to put on crisp underwear smelling of the sun! Let me be granted just one more summer-afternoon walk down the Avenue amid the nut-brown bodies of children on their way from school, laughing, giggling. . . . And if that is not to be, let there still be, to the last, gratitude, unbounded, heartfelt gratitude, for having been granted a spell in this world of wonders. (55)

As before, the last part of this passage points towards acceptance, but this attitude does not last long. These cycles of shock, denial, anger, bargaining and acceptance in relation to her illness

correlate with her move, starting with Vercueil, towards accepting her Others and configuring these Others in her ontology.

Mrs Curren's Other Post-Cartesian Awakenings

As I have noted above, although Mrs Curren is learning to overcome her Cartesian entrapment so as better to come to terms with her cancerous body and, through it, her Others, her progress in this respect is quite gradual and subject to reversal. From time to time, we find her continuing to exhibit Cartesian tendencies even as she is trying to transcend that ontology. For instance, starved of marital and filial companionship (due to the death of her husband and the self-exile of her daughter), and ostracised by her fellow white citizens (because of her advanced years and a general individualism prevalent among them), she envies her housemaid, Florence, who occasionally goes to visit her people in Guguletu Township. Mrs Curren comments on this as follows to her long absent daughter: "A curious expression: to have people. Do I have people? Are you my people? I think not. Perhaps only Florence qualifies to have people" (11). Again, much later, she sees Florence sleeping soundly with her three children and, envying her, thinks to herself, "Once I had everything, I thought. Now you have everything and I have nothing" (40).

According to Kubler-Ross (1969: 51-52), envying another is a sign of the precarious nature of the Subject's conception of his or her own being and, in terminally ill people, it manifests itself during the "anger stage" of the death cycle. In the case of Mrs Curren, the source of this envy is two-fold. First, someone "having people" is curious to her since she has not only been without family but also been steeped in her society's rugged individualism and alienation, both of which have been engendered by the Cartesian ontology of separateness and opposition. For Florence's people, as Mrs Curren observes, subjectivity is not simply a case of "I think, therefore I am", but, as John Mbiti (1975: 108-109) puts it, intersubjective in nature: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am".¹⁰² Secondly, and quite in keeping with the Kubler-Ross model, Mrs Curren, being angry with her own fate, responds with envy (and, possibly, annoyance too) to any sign of apparent happiness in others. But this envy and anger dissipate once she comes to terms with her body and, after having gained a new form of embodied consciousness, achieves intersubjectivity with her Others (who then all become "Mrs

¹⁰² However, the official and the personal do not always match — Florence's people may have an inclusive ontology, but Florence herself does not seem to share this ontology, as becomes apparent in her calling Vercueil (and, later, his woman) a "rubbish person" who should be got rid of (47 and 59).

Curren's people"). It is this new conception of her subjectivity that enables her to acknowledge and reach out to Vercueil, Bheki, John, and a host of her other Others.

However, as I have suggested, leaving behind her former ontology costs Mrs Curren some effort. At times she feels betrayed by her body and, like Eugene Dawn, rails against it. But, as I have noted she finds that it is impossible to escape her body (because she is her body), or her impending death, and so works at reconciling herself to these two. Mrs Curren's longing to be at one with her body — to be her body — and with her environment emerges in a story about her childhood that she tells to Vercueil. The story is about her family's yearly journey from Uniondale in the Eastern Cape to Plettenburg Bay, at the mouth of the Piesangs River. In telling this story, she mentions that, although she may wish that she were able to desire to retrace this yearly trip, she has lost the will to do so:

It is there that I come from; it is there that I begin. . . . If it were practically possible, I would suggest that we drive to the Eastern Cape. . . . Leave maps behind, drive north and east by the sun, I will recognise it when we come to it, the stopping place, the place of the navel, the place where I join the world. . . . But the truth is, with or without maps, I can no longer find the place. Why? Because a certain desire has gone from me. (120-121)

The story Mrs Curren tells at this point alludes to the behaviour of animals such as salmon and turtles that make yearly treks to the places where they were born to breed. However, with regard to human subjectivity, I should immediately dismiss any parallel between the intentionality of consciousness of these creatures and the various myths of human autochthony. As I observe in my introductory chapter with regard to the largely hypothetical reducibility of the contents of our consciousnesses, autochthony is "mythical" in the sense that, while we may talk of the originating circumstances of concepts, these, being mediated, are only "contingent" and not "absolute" origins. Further, if we grant that being, as quantum physics proposes, is an indivisible plenum rather than strictly atomic and divisible (according to theorists such as Freya Matthews [1991] to whom I referred in my introductory chapter), the origins could, in fact, be everywhere.

Rather, Mrs Curren's inability to trace the place of her navel is a result of her no longer consciously desiring to continue valuing it, as she says in the last part of the above passage. Due to her no longer valuing her "origins" (because she is learning "to let go"), Mrs Curren has lost that consciously acknowledged intentionality of her consciousness's attachment to her "navel place", an attachment that, in conscious terms, she developed with the place from her family's yearly journeys to it rather than from the moment that she was born there per se. She no longer

wishes to refresh the ontological demands of her conscious intentionality that leads to being attached to a specific place largely because, as she is approaching her death and “departure” from the earth, she is learning to let go of both her birthplace and, even more crucially, of her body-self as a specifically constituted consciousness. Approaching the stage that Kubler-Ross calls “acceptance”, she now readies herself to become integral with the earth through dissolution. She comments as follows in this regard: “Letting go of myself, letting go of you, letting go of a house still alive with memories: a hard task, but I am learning” (130).

The effort described here constitutes a significant progression in Mrs Curren’s Kubler-Ross trajectory because she, earlier, at the peak of her denial, exclaims to Vercueil: “Hunger, I thought: it is a hunger of the eyes that I feel, such hunger that I am loath to even blink. These seas, these mountains: I want to burn them upon my sight so deeply that, no matter where I go, they will always be before me. I am hungry with love of this world . . .” (18). The hunger Mrs Curren expresses here is ontologically very different from the devouring eye of Jacobus Coetzee who is intent on imposing his will on the land in order to bring it under the control of his imperialistic gaze. What we have here, instead, is a Subject’s wish for attachment to, and acknowledgement of, the Other; a desire to have the horizon of the ontology of her consciousness expanded.

However, Mrs Curren awakens to this conscious connection with the land — that is, the sense of being *in* the world and *of* it — only after having received news of her cancer and thus shortly before she leaves it.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, by the time she dies, Mrs Curren has come to love both the land and its native inhabitants, thereby fulfilling Coetzee’s wish in his “Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech” (1992: 97). Among other things, Coetzee here bemoans the lack of love between white South Africans and the other races with whom they co-inhabit the land. The white people’s “love”, he argues, is “directed only towards the land, that is, toward what is least likely to respond to love: mountains and deserts, birds and animals and flowers”. It is Mrs Curren’s conception of herself as an embodied being with an embodied consciousness that eventually allows her to achieve ontological integrity, acknowledging her Others (including the land), and conceiving of herself as being not just contiguous, but “inter-subjective” and coterminous, with them.

¹⁰³ Coetzee (1988a: 88) makes a similar observation in *White Writing*, in his analysis of the work of C.M.van den Heever and others, in whose writings the Subject usually regains his or her conscious connection with the land at the point at which he or she is in danger of losing it.

The Solution of Vercueil

I have already indicated that Mrs Curren is shocked and angry with both the news of her cancer and with the tramp's presence in her alley. What initially seems to trouble her is that the tramp's degenerate state seems to mirror her physical deterioration due to the cancer, and that his supposedly vulture-like disposition (see 3 and 5) confirms her prognosis of her impending death. She thus angrily shouts at Vercueil as follows: "What are you doing here?" I demanded, hearing the irritation in my voice, not checking it. "You can't stay, you must go" (4). However, as I have noted, there is no going back after an encounter between a Subject and an Other. So, for instance, Mrs Curren finds that, as with her terminal cancer, she cannot simply wish the tramp away. This fact dawns on her when, after having been chased away, the tramp brazenly returns in the evening, together with a small dog (6). At this stage we also suspect that Mrs Curren is in denial or ignorant about the true condition of tramp life. She describes tramps as people "who go bare and feel no cold, who sleep outdoors and do not sicken" (5). Nothing can be further from the reality of tramp life than this casual assessment of it. Yet her encounter with Vercueil, though ambivalent, turns out to be fortuitous for her. Lonely as she is, she not only badly needs someone to talk to about her illness, but also through him to awaken to a new consciousness and thereby meet the demands that her new medical status has placed on her. Metaphorically speaking, through this new consciousness, she will understand the ontological sources of her cancer and thereby arrive at its cure. That is, if cancer is like being afflicted with schizophrenic self-division, the cure lies, as far as possible, in living a life with an indivisible and un-warring consciousness that takes into account one's Others as integral parts of one's being. Analogously, since cancer is an aberration in which the body attacks itself, the solution to the civil strife that is tearing apart the body of South African society, and manifesting itself as an age of iron, lies in an ontology of reconciliation and in the integration of the warring sides.

Faced with the prospect of death, and before she is moved to like Vercueil, Mrs Curren turns to her absent daughter for comfort:

With what slow steps did I enter this empty house, from which every echo has faded.
... How I longed for you to be here, to hold me, comfort me! I begin to understand
the true meaning of the embrace. We embrace to be embraced. We embrace our
children to be enfolded in the arms of the future, to pass ourselves on beyond death.
... (5)

It is obvious that, in turning to her daughter, Mrs Curren is looking for the assurance that the comfort zone of the Same or the Self provides — after all, her daughter has already become a

part of her ontology both biologically and consciousness-wise. But this move turns out to be stunting; it amounts to some sort of “ontological inbreeding”, since it is only through encounters with new Others that the Self expands its horizon of being. As I note above, Mrs Curren’s current ontological horizon has made her being turn in upon itself, hence her cancer (both literal and figurative). She thus critically needs to expand this horizon by turning to her other Others if she is to meet the new challenges that her terminal illness has thrown at her.

However, the relationship between Vercueil and Mrs Curren seems fraught with misunderstanding, miscognition and, consequently, misrepresentation. In the end, it merely fulfils the most basic of ontological functions, namely that of impressing upon the Subject (in this case, Mrs Curren) the need for him or her to acknowledge his or her indebtedness to all his or her Others. Nevertheless, this basic ontological function is important in the subject’s acknowledgement of his or her intersubjectivity with his or her Others. Since it is through Vercueil that Mrs Curren awakens to intersubjectivity, he becomes, metaphorically speaking, her saving “angel”. However, when we realise that someone else (such as a different tramp) could just as easily have fulfilled this function, his contribution to the process of her awakening to a new ontology becomes insignificant indeed. Below I attempt critically and textually to support this assessment in my analysis of Vercueil as a vagrant. For the time being, for reasons of the structure of the argument, I will let Vercueil enjoy the accolade of being a possible saving or guardian angel to Mrs Curren.

The “Othering” of Vercueil: Distancing and Misrepresentation

The tension between Mrs Curren and Vercueil arises due to the former unintentionally othering the latter. I need to reiterate, rather broadly, a point I make in my introductory chapter, namely that the process of othering involves at least two phenomena that can be deployed jointly or separately. These phenomena are distancing/elision and misrepresentation. Distancing works by the Subject conceiving of himself or herself as autonomous and separate from the Other. Given this separation, the Subject must compete with the Other and/or annihilate him or her. Misrepresentation involves the Subject misreading the Other and relating with him or her on the basis of such misreading. In the particular case of Mrs Curren’s relationship with Vercueil, misrepresentation is the central phenomenon at play. The cure for misrepresentation, as previously indicated, is that the Subject not only truthfully acknowledges his or her indebtedness to and intersubjectivity with his or her Others, but also respect the otherness of those Others. By imposing her standards and view of life on the tramp, Mrs

Curren disregards his otherness — and she does so at no small cost to her own being because in one instance she narrowly escapes being spat on (8). Also, earlier, without asking him about his gustatory preferences, Mrs Curren offers Vercueil a sandwich — not quite his fare — which he tosses away as soon as he is out of her sight (7). On a number of occasions, Mrs Curren offers Vercueil various tasks to keep him busy and to try to teach him how to earn the assistance he gets from her, but to no avail. Some of these tasks, such as gardening, are actually unsuitable for him given that he is disabled (11). Moreover, she feels that he should have a bank account with money in it (19-20). While Mrs Curren regards these gifts, suggestions and musings as “acts of charity”, Vercueil dislikes them because of what he views as her patronising attitude towards him. However, she does not understand that she patronises him and so, exasperated, makes the following observation about the workings of charity in South Africa:

‘You told me,’ I said, ‘that I should turn this house into a boarding house for students. Well, there are better things I could do with it. I could turn it into a haven for beggars. I could run a soup kitchen and a dormitory. But I don’t. Why not? Because the spirit of charity has perished in this country. Because those who accept charity despise it, while those who give give with a despairing heart. What is the point of charity when it does not go from heart to heart? What do you think charity is? Soup? Money? *Charity*: from the Latin word for the heart. It is as hard to receive as to give. It takes as much effort. I wish you would learn that. I wish you would learn something instead of just lying around. (22)

For Mrs Curren, the act of charity should not be divorced from its onto-linguistic sources in its link with the heart (in Latin), and she avers that any such severance disfigures the act and renders it chimerical.¹⁰⁴ The socio-political conditions in South Africa, which Mrs Curren says have made her and everyone else, including Mr Thabane, look ugly (103), do exactly that: they

¹⁰⁴ It is a false etymology, of course, because, as she herself notes, charity has to do with “care” rather than “heart” (22). However, because of the traditional association of caring with the heart, she believes she is entitled to establish such an onto-linguistic connection. Something sustained may need to be said about Coetzee’s views on language as deployed in this novel. Coetzee’s use of language in this novel has been commented on by a number of critics among whom are John Higgins (1993), Benita Parry (1991) and Muriel Hornby (2001). These critics observe at least two trends of language use in this novel, namely the “literal and stable” one, on the one hand, and a highly “unstable” one, on the other hand. As for the first usage, Parry (1991: 10) notes that “[t]his is a novel in which signifiers are both given a life of their own and a great responsibility in specifying a particular here and now”. In the latter case, words are seen to be very unstable relative to what they designate. Mrs Curren’s meditation on anagrams and foreign words, shows not so much the instability of language as the fact of the fluidity of signs and differences in systems of signification, and that when two different systems are juxtaposed, or if words are repeated without taking into account their referents (that is, out of their pragmatic context), even a familiar system might strike one as unfamiliar. As I posit in this study, and in agreement with these critics, if consciousness is a physical phenomenon, it should follow that, although signs may be conventional, they could never be arbitrary. They should necessarily have co-extensive originating networks of circumstances, contingent and mediated though these may be in themselves.

make South Africans give to one another a disfigured charity which is both difficult to give and to receive. Mike Marais (2009: 97-98) explores at length Coetzee's depiction of the disfiguring effect of apartheid in the novel's allusion to the magical acts of transfiguration by Circe in Homer's *Odyssey*. This disfigurement includes the stuntedness and deformity that Coetzee mentions in his "Jerusalem Prize Acceptance Speech".

There is a further problem that has resulted from the disfiguring socio-political context in which Mrs Curren and Vercueil find themselves. What Mrs Curren fails to understand is that one can reasonably conjecture that Vercueil, broken by the vicissitudes of life in a socio-political environment that devalues him, is living the life of a vagrant. In his mind, the system is too powerful to fight and the only option open to him is to parasitize it as best he can; hence his vagrancy — indeed, the children Bheki and John suspect as much about him (45-46). Subsisting on his meagre monthly disability grant, Vercueil seems quite content with his lot, even when he has to borrow money for his alcohol (86).

Interestingly, for the most part, Vercueil does not regard Mrs Curren's help as charity; he takes her for granted arguing that no one deserves anything (21), thereby subscribing to a form of economic "commonwealth". He reduces Mrs Curren's acts of charity to the very basic level of ontological indebtedness: in a racially polarised society, the system that has benefited her kind has in turn impoverished him and his kind. Vercueil's explanation of the vagrancy to which he and others have succumbed therefore proceeds in terms of a basic sociological model of cause and effect.

Be that as it may, as I note in the section on Self-Other ethics in my introductory chapter, an intersubjective conception of one's relations with one's Others has its dangers, especially if one of the Subjects in the relationship does not respect the otherness of his or her Other; or if his or her appraisal of his or her ontological indebtedness to the Other is skewed. I have mentioned that Vercueil feels entitled to some of Mrs Curren's largesse, and perhaps, to an extent, he is, but he blows this entitlement way out of proportion. There are also instances of an exaggerated sense of entitlement on the part of the colonised in this novel. For example, Bheki unilaterally invites over his friend, John, to Mrs Curren's property and, when queried about this, he and John mockingly ask her: "Must we have a pass to come in here?" (47). And the two then proceed to break into her garage where they put up for the night. Mrs Curren rightly feels taken advantage of, violated actually. And so she wonders: "Can't they ask me

before they do something like that? (52). This hyperbolic sense of entitlement is also apparent in Mrs Curren's visit to Guguletu, in the course of which one of Bheki's friends, without her consent, decides to use her car in order to find Bheki to which decision Mrs Curren replies: "I am not letting anyone have my car" (97). Apart from indicating entitlement, such events suggest that Mrs Curren's Others are eager to make of her a scapegoat for all the crimes that the colonialists have committed in the colony, a position she possibly finds absurd.

However, Mrs Curren is ontologically generous towards these presumptuous children as emerges when the police raid her premises, apparently looking for Bheki and his friend, and she defends the boys against what she regards as a greater evil (53). Her generosity shows again when she visits John, who has been hospitalised after an accident that has been caused by the police, and even considers laying a charge against them on his behalf (85). We need to bear in mind that Mrs Curren engages in all these activities at great risk to her person. The level of her courage can properly be assessed when compared to Florence's cowardice and indifference, which are disguised as prudence. Although she is immediately responsible for the boys, Florence shies away from her obligation towards her son's friend because she does not want to be involved with the police (65). All the above acts of courage and generosity Mrs Curren exhibits notwithstanding the impudence of the two boys. Most importantly, she even recognises her ontological indebtedness to John, *despite* herself, that is, despite her conscious dislike of him and his rejection of her (136-137).

Mrs Curren's acknowledgement of her attachment to John is based on at least two principles. To begin with, we need to note that she does not like him from the start because she believes he is a bad influence on Bheki. For reasons best known to herself — perhaps because she has known him from a very young age — her ontological attachment to Bheki is enduring and when he is killed by the police, she mourns him as if he were her own child (109). The same cannot be said for her attachment to John. Nevertheless, as I point out in my introductory chapter, by coming into her ontological circle, John, like any other entity that comes into a Subject's ontological circle, renders her indebted to him simply by having become a part of her being. She does not have to like him to acknowledge this indebtedness: as a Subject, it is incumbent on her to do so as part of her responsibility for her Others. Moreover, Mrs Curren comes to realise that she must not only acknowledge but also love John "despite [her]self" (136), and she thereafter surmises that this kind of love can only spring from what she terms a "cruciform

logic”, the self-sacrificing logic of the cross: “Cruciform logic, which takes me where I do not want to go! But would I let myself be nailed upon it if I truly were not willing?” (137).

In my introduction I note that Coetzee explores the deep Christian theme of unmerited suffering as a counter to the contestatory relations that characterise discrimination and domination. My contention is that the appeal to a cruciform logic at this point in the novel forms Coetzee’s highest ethical view of Self-Other relations. In the relationship between Mrs Curren and John, we have a case of loving the Other both as *and* despite oneself, that is, generously. While Mrs Curren admits that she is responsible for John, one could say that she cares for him selflessly, that is, in a self-sacrificing way. Further, as I point out above, Mrs Curren is now aware of her former ontological blindness towards the colonised Others and feels duty-bound to take their side, if only to protect them from the greater evil of Apartheid. She now knows that being is not a question of either-or, but one of both-and. For these two reasons, she knows she is obliged to “love” John, even if she does so despite herself.

However, Mrs Curren is more aware of such ontological interdependence than her Others — including Vercueil — seem to be. Understandably so, given that, due to her membership of the colonising group, she has hitherto been more likely to discriminate against them than they against her. But, in time, Vercueil and those he represents also need to understand this mutuality, otherwise they will become exploitative of her; they will become the new colonisers. Among other issues, this warning, namely that there is a danger of the former colonised becoming the colonisers, is echoed in J.M Coetzee’s first recognisably post-apartheid novel *Disgrace* (1999a), to a discussion of which I turn in the next chapter. But it is a possibility that is already gestured toward in the present novel by Bheki, John, Mr Thabane and others who exhibit a binary logic of either-or, win or lose.

Intersubjectivity and Mrs Curren’s Fuzzy Logic of both-and

As I point out above, one of the most important lessons Mrs Curren could be said to learn from her awakening to an embodied and intersubjective self-consciousness is that being is not rigidly binaric; it is not either-or, but both-and. And so, while it is true that the relationship between Mrs Curren and Vercueil is characterised by ambivalence, given a choice between tramps such as Vercueil and iron children such as Bheki, John and their revolutionary friends, Mrs Curren prefers the former. This preference is largely because she has noticed how mistaken the activists are in their self-righteousness and the un[self]-critical way in which they

approach their struggle for change. The young revolutionaries are binaric and exclusivist in attitude; theirs is a contestatory thinking of either-or, not a reconciliatory, post-binaric and inclusive one of both-and (144-145). They have constructed a clear Manichean opposition between black and white in which black stands for the oppressed good and white stands for the evil oppressor. So absolute is their binaric thinking that they do not even make an exception for those like Mrs Curren and the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* who refuse to participate in the project of colonisation.

Bheki's friend, John, best exemplifies this binaric outlook. When he is badly injured in an accident caused by the police, Mrs Curren reaches out to him first by preventing him from bleeding to death (60-63). And after he is hospitalised, she goes to pay him a visit. But when she soothingly touches his hand, John recoils, rejecting her on account of her being white: "I touched the boy's free hand. . . . It was not a clasp, not a long touch; it was the merest brush, the merest lingering of my fingertips on the back of his hand. But I felt him stiffen, felt an angry electric recoil. . . . For your mother, who is not here, I said within myself" (79). The warlike youth in *Age of Iron* have adopted a Hegelian position of contestation, to the detriment of "the colonisers who refuse" such as Mrs Curren. To the comrades, the struggle is a lopsided all-or-nothing affair but Mrs Curren disputes such binaric views of conflict among groups of people. So, for instance, she responds as follows to John's question on the whereabouts of Bheki:

"Bheki is in the ground. . . . He is in a box in a hole with earth heaped on top of him. He is never going to leave that hole. Never, never, never. . . . You say it is time to fight" "You say it is time to win or lose. Let me tell you something about that *win or lose*. Let me tell you something about that *or*" (144-145, emphasis original).

She realises that she is being classified together with all the other whites on account of her race, even though she does not share its exclusivist ideology. Although she does not excuse this binaric tendency on both sides of the racial divide, she understands its roots and as such outlines her own viewpoint regarding the times:

Be slow to judge.

The words of a woman, therefore negligible; of an old woman, therefore doubly negligible; but above all of a white. . . . I, a white. When I think of the whites, what do I see? I see a herd of sheep (not a flock: a herd) milling around on a dusty plain under the baking sun. I hear a drumming of hooves, a confusion of sound that resolves itself, when the era grows attuned, into the same bleating call in a thousand different inflections: "I!" "I!" "I!" And, cruising among them, bumping them aside with their bristling flanks, lumbering, saw-toothed, red-eyed, the savage, unreconstructed old boars grunting "Death!" "Death!" Though it does me no good,

I flinch from the white touch as much as he does; would even flinch from the old white woman who pats his hand if she were not I. (79-80)

Mrs Curren likens her fellow whites to Cartesian or Leibnizian sheep. As monads, each of them is closed off from the others and, often, as is to be expected, they compete against each other. In this regard, earlier, she observes that while they strategise against the blacks, the white rulers also scheme against one another (28-9).

In response to the kind of binary logic that is displayed by Bheki, John and their comrades, Mrs Curren posits what Patricia Waugh (1992a: 163-64) has called the logic of “both/and”, or the logic of “and-or”. And so, in the quest for a truly humane and post-binarcic society in all aspects of life, Mrs Curren wishes an exception were made for the likes of her, especially now that she has transcended her former ideology-induced binarcic mind. In this regard, she says the following to John:

“If you had been in my Thucydides class,” I went on, “you might have learned something about what can happen to our humanity in time of war”
“Thucydides wrote of people who made rules and followed them. Going by rule they killed entire classes of enemies without exception. Most of those who died felt, I am sure, that a terrible mistake was being made, that, whatever the rule was, it could not be meant for them “I!” — that was their last word as their throats were cut. A word of protest: I, the exception. “Were they exceptions? The truth is, given time to speak, we would all claim to be exceptions. For each of us there is a case to be made. We all deserve the benefit of the doubt.
“But there are times when there is no time for all that close listening, all those exceptions, all that mercy. And that is a great pity, the greatest pity. That is what you could have learned from Thucydides” (80-81)

Just as the Magistrate bemoans the fact that he finds himself living under the law rather than under justice — in a world of the second-best — so too does Mrs Curren find herself condemned and excluded even before she has been heard. She likens the situation to a Kafkaesque trial in which you are given only two answers: yes and no: “It’s like being on trial for your life and being allowed only two words, Yes and No. Whenever you take a breath to speak out, you are warned by the judges: ‘Yes or No: no speeches.’ ‘Yes’ you say. Yet all the time you feel other words stirring inside you like life in the womb . . .” (145). Here, too, there are no exceptions to be made by the comrades. Just as they look at themselves collectively as a herd, they also look at others in a similar way.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ But Coetzee knows that absolutes of any kind are suspect. When he returns to this topic in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), he has his protagonist present two different petitions (consecutively) to enter the gate into the after-life. Irritated by their lack of making allowances for someone changing his or her mind, and their being unaware that being is in a perpetual flux, and so she would be well within her rights to change her statement as per her being at a specific time, Costello answers them that she is both the same Costello and not the same: “Yes. No, emphatically no. Yes and no. Both” (Coetzee, 2003: 221).

Earlier, Mrs Curren, totally appalled by the conduct of Bheki, John and their friends and their skewed and narrow understanding of comradeship, recalls a story Florence once told her of a woman that these children had set on fire, because they suspected her of having collaborated with the enemy. When the woman cried for help, the children only laughed and threw more petrol on her (49). Later, Mrs Curren mentions that similar examples of comradeship may be found in other societies in other times, and that wherever it occurred it had disastrous consequences for the society in question. She cites examples to Mr. Thabane and Florence who uncritically support the rebellious youth: “Mr Thabane, let me make one thing clear to you. I am not trying to prescribe to this boy [John] or to anyone else what he should do with his life But as for this killing, this bloodletting in the name of *comradeship*, I detest it with all my heart and soul. I think it is barbarous” (149, emphasis original). In keeping with his binaric orientation, Mr. Thabane laughs her off by remarking: “I don’t think you understand very much about comradeship” (150), to which Mrs Curren replies:

I fear I know comradeship all too well. The Germans had comradeship, and the Japanese, and the Spartans. Shaka’s impis too, I am sure. Comradeship is nothing but a mystique of death, of killing and dying, masquerading as what you call a bond. . . . I have no sympathy with this comradeship. You are wrong . . . to be taken in by it and, worse, to encourage it in children. It is just another of those icy, exclusive, death-driven male constructions. That is my opinion. (150)¹⁰⁶

It is because of his lack of absolutism and binaric thinking that Mrs Curren prefers Vercueil to John and Bheki. She compares Vercueil’s forgiving spirit and willingness to make allowances to the unforgiving young comrades who do not drink: “Their hands clean, their fingernails clean. The new puritans, holding to the rule, holding up the rule. Abhorring alcohol, which softens the rule, dissolves iron. Suspicious of all that is idle, yielding, roundabout. Suspicious of devious discourse (82). In the passage above, Mrs Curren associates this kind of discourse with women, and, by contrast, sees aggressive and discriminating binary logic as a product of the male psyche. The irony here is that, by attributing this psyche to males only, Mrs Curren uses a binary opposition to criticise binary logic. Vercueil, on the other hand, even finds it in him to play with Florence’s two daughters, much to Mrs Curren’s surprise and amusement (38). Not so with the young comrades, who, according to Mrs Curren, despise laughter and play (125).

¹⁰⁶ Christine Bimberg (2005/2006: 66-68) explores the nexus between and perversion of procreation, childhood and old age in *Age of Iron*. See also Paola Splendore (2003: 150-151), who argues a similar point in her exploration of *In the Heart of the Country*, *Life & Times of Michael K*, *Age of Iron* and *The Master of Petersburg*. Splendore (2003: 151) further points out that Coetzee’s ultimate goal seems to be more ambitious because, “[his] emphasis on the idea of parents expresses, on a more symbolical level, the need to accept one’s responsibilities towards the other, to behave towards the other, any other, as family”.

Only on the point of death, when it dawns on him that his participation in the struggle is not child's play after all does Bheki become a child again (125). At least that is what Mrs Curren surmises.

Mrs Curren's Ontological Miscalculations

Ironically, it is in her interpersonal relations with Vercueil that Mrs Curren's miscalculations could be said to be most apparent. While Mrs Curren has learnt a lot from her experiences after receiving the news of her terminal cancer, and after her encounter with Vercueil, she has also made some mistakes, largely due to her overzealousness in embracing her newfound ontology. This zeal is driven largely by her desperation at her illness. From the time that she accepts that she cannot be rid of Vercueil, Mrs Curren desires to know who he really is. The question, of course, is whether or not she succeeds in doing so by the end of the narrative.

Clearly, Vercueil is an irruption into Mrs Curren's life; she neither expected nor invited him, but, being un-ignorable, like brute reality, she has no choice but do her best to configure him in her being. As she observes when Vercueil asks her why she needs him, she did not choose him: "I didn't choose you, but you are the one who is here, and that will have to do. You arrived. It's like having a child. You can't choose the child. It just arrives" (71). As is the case with some (if not most) encounters, Mrs Curren's early opinion of Vercueil is less than promising. There is no real hope at this stage of the two ever taking to each other. Her initial assessment of him is that he is "... more trouble than he is worth." She then adds "But I did not choose him. He chose me" (12). However, as I note in my introduction each concept, or group of concepts, is assigned a value at any stage of its existence. Accordingly, Mrs Curren re-evaluates Vercueil's worth from time to time, revising upwards her estimation of his worth in the process. As time passes, Vercueil increasingly gains in importance until towards the end of the novel Mrs Curren concludes that they have chosen each other, that theirs has been "a mutual election" (196). She hopes that Vercueil may be an angel sent to be with her on the last leg of her earthly journey:

The day I first saw you behind the garage was the day I had the bad news about myself, about my case. It was too much of a coincidence. I wondered whether you were not, if you will excuse the word, an angel come to show me the way. Of course you were not, are not, cannot be – I see that. But that is only half the story, isn't it? We half perceive but we also half-create. (168)

Earlier, she remembers an Abrahamic story by Tolstoy in which an angel takes up residence with a shoemaker who looks after him without realising that he is an angel, and then asks:

“What chance is there, if I take a walk down to Mill Street, of finding my own angel to bring home and succour? None I think” (14). Gradually, though, it dawns on her that a tramp like Vercueil could be the only angel she has, and, by extension, that the tramps on the parking lots on Mill Street are the only angels the privileged residents of the suburbs on this street have.

There are indications here that, although Mrs Curren would like to believe that Vercueil is an angel sent to show her the way, her trust may be misplaced. Later, because of her observation of his limited imagination, she even wonders if it is the dog instead that was sent to her and not Vercueil himself: “The dog circled him, came to me, and drifted off again, restless. Is it possible that the dog is the one sent, and not he?” (193). Indeed, as the range of Coetzee’s imagination expands, a dog becomes exactly just such an ontological angel to David Lurie (just as he becomes the dogs’ *psychopomp*) in *Disgrace* (1999a). And, in *The Lives of Animals* (1999b) and *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), all the animals also come to play this role. As I will argue in due course, the fact that Mrs Curren sees him as an angel tells us more about the extent to which she creates what she perceives than about Vercueil himself. During an interview with Attwell, Coetzee (1992: 340) himself intimates as much regarding the possibility that it is Mrs Curren’s own fabrication that Vercueil is her herald of death.

At various points, however, it does seem as if Mrs Curren’s thesis of “mutual election” holds. So, for instance, Vercueil, in an allusion to the role of the angel in transporting the dying to the realm of the dead, on two occasions, literally carries Mrs Curren to her house. The first of these occasions is when she collapses in the street dizzied by her cancer medication (10), and the second is when he “ferries” her home after the ambulance departs with John’s corpse. On the latter occasion, he also saves her from the street children who are trying to pick gold teeth from her mouth (160-161). These are the only instances in the novel, it seems to me, which involve reciprocal gestures between Vercueil and Mrs Curren. For the most part, Vercueil is a recipient of ontological debt and generosity rather than a giver of it. Moreover, these acts may not be without calculation on Vercueil’s part: one suspects that he engages in them for his own convenience. After all, he is dependent on Mrs Curren’s charity and wants to prolong it for as long as possible since he does not know whether or not he will inherit her property after her death.

Furthermore, as I have noted elsewhere, because Mrs Curren closely links her conception of Vercueil to that of her daughter, the boundaries between filial ontological imperatives and

those of an embodied intersubjective consciousness sometimes blur in this novel. They slide back and forth and occasionally merge with each other. A case in point is Mrs Curren's following revealing observation which links her daughter to Vercueil and, interestingly, his dog:

Why do I give this man food? For the same reason I would feed his dog (stolen, I am sure) if it came begging. For the same reason I gave you my breast. To be full enough to give and to give from one's fullness. What deeper urge is there? Out of their withered bodies even the old try to squeeze one last drop. A stubborn will to give, to nourish. Shrewd was death's aim when he chose my breast for his first shaft. (7-8)

This formulation fuses the two ontological trajectories to which I have referred. Citing Thangam Ravindranathan's aforementioned observation that Mrs Curren comes to view Vercueil as her surrogate child, Mike Marais (2009: 121) points out how closely Vercueil is linked in this text to Mrs Curren's absent daughter: "[T]he letter is inspired not simply by Vercueil's otherness but by the alterity of its addressee. As it happens, Mrs Curren's daughter and Vercueil are closely aligned throughout the novel". Also, in due course, Mrs Curren's attachment to Vercueil takes on emotional, even sexual, and intellectual dimensions. This is apparent in the scene in which Mrs Curren, having offered Vercueil bread, observes him slice it and then reflects as follows:

Holding the loaf of bread with his bad hand, he cut a slice, buttered it thickly, cut cheese. His fingernails filthy. Who knows what else he had been touching. And this is the one to whom I speak my heart, whom I trust with last things. Why this crooked path to you?
My mind like a pool, which his finger enters and stirs. Without that finger, stillness, stagnation.
A way of indirection. By indirection I find direction out. A crab's walk. His dirty fingernail entering me. (82)

On an intellectual level, it is Vercueil who imparts content to Mrs Curren's otherwise empty, numbed and stagnant forms of her consciousness. She seems to realise that without her Others such as Vercueil, her consciousness would be like Kant's *forms* without *content*; she would be zombie-like and illusory. In fact, there are times when Mrs Curren wants to be spectral but she eventually realises the futility of such a stance. One such occasion is when, as they are on their suicide drive and Mrs Curren is afraid of killing herself, she wishes for a suspension of all consciousness and allow herself to be led on by Vercueil who seems to have more resolve regarding the matter than she does (118). Also, as she suffers from spells of denial, Mrs Curren finds her befuddlement from her cancer medication sometimes welcome as these zombie-like states offer her the escape from disease and the political reality of Apartheid that she so much longs for. In this regard, Johan Geertsema (1997: 94) aptly observes that there are a number of

instances in the novel when Mrs Curren's medication enables her to experience a state of stupor which helps her to cope with her spells of denial: "The mollificans of alcohol and pills that dissolves iron is necessary to effect what Ryan Malan calls, in a somewhat different context, the 'lobotomy' and 'blindness' needed to cope with the intrusion of that which is properly unspeakable, namely history . . .". There is, however, also a sexual innuendo in the cited passage: as Mike Marais (2009: 115) points out, what we have here is "the usual confluence in Coetzee's writing of sexual activity and inspiration".

However, no matter how long Vercueil and Mrs Curren have known each other, there is not much conscious reciprocity of being between them. Why is this the case? In order to answer this question, I must disagree with some aspects of Derek Attridge's (2005) assessment of the relationship between these two characters. According to him, the relationship between the two moves easily from denial to acceptance, which process he takes to be a genuine yardstick for "trusting the Other":

One of the most extraordinary qualities of Mrs Curren's response to Vercueil is that, although it transgresses so many of her values, it is achieved without great struggle; the code of 'proper behaviour' rapidly loses its relevance. The man is allowed to stay in the backyard, brought coffee the next morning (which he spits out at her feet when she begins to lecture at him), invited to sleep in the house, and eventually encouraged to join her in her bed. (It is her readers — including, one imagines, her daughter — who must struggle to comprehend and sympathise with her growing closeness to and dependence upon the dirty, foul-smelling, alcoholic at the same time that she is cutting herself off from all 'normal' sources of help.) Her early condemnation of him gives way to a willingness to learn from him, and to learn from the fact of his utter difference from her. (2005: 101)

Attridge sees in all this the "quintessence" of what it means "to trust the Other" (98), but is this what transpires at the deeper levels of this narrative? Perhaps out of generosity towards Mrs Curren, Attridge seems to gloss over some important trouble-spots in the relationship between her and Vercueil. To begin with, Mrs Curren's progression on her road towards acknowledging the Other, as I have noted, is fraught with many difficulties, compounded by the fact that she simultaneously has to come to terms with her impending death from cancer and make sense of the political violence around her. Contra Attridge, her development in this regard is not achieved without a great struggle. On the surface, it seems smooth enough for us to overlook the great struggles of consciousness that Mrs Curren wrestles with at various critical points in the narrative.

Also, Attridge's adumbration of the conditions for trusting the Other seems to amount to a call for the self to trust not the Other but the *otherness* of the Other. I am not sure that this is possible: after all, the otherness of the Other cannot be trusted because it is, by definition, ungraspable. Contrary to Attridge's definition of trust as "a relation to the future that is based on no rational grounds" (98), I believe that trust is a relation to the past which is then, by ontological illusion, projected into or cast as the future. What needs to be borne in mind is that the grounds for trust lie in the positive outcome of past encounter(s) and so create in the one trusting the belief (not an entirely irrational one at that, being partially deductive and partially inductive) that future futures will be like past futures. But, as I observe later in the discussion, Vercueil is a vagrant and, his reaching out to Mrs Curren seems not based on principle or intersubjective ontological considerations, but on his personal convenience and is therefore untrustworthy.

Instead of the kind of trust of which Attridge speaks, what may be at issue in Mrs Curren's relationship with Vercueil is a form of delusion born of desperation. Because of her desperation to come to terms with her condition, and in a bid to make up for her past ontological blindness to her indebtedness to the Other, Mrs Curren makes serious errors of judgement and ends up trusting one who is not deserving of her trust. She deliberately ignores a warning from her neighbour from the flats across the road who correctly describes Vercueil as a vagrant (24) (a point I discuss more fully later) and so she ends up trusting one who may have no notion of genuine reciprocity or mutual responsibility. Her trust in Vercueil may therefore be said to be misplaced and motivated by desperation rather than a proper ontological assessment — any wonder then that he encourages her to immolate herself (115-116) and, eventually, supposedly even "kills" her? (184-185)¹⁰⁷

Perhaps the real contribution Vercueil makes to Mrs Curren's ethical development is to show her that even seemingly insignificant beings assist in the making of a Subject's consciousness and so should also be taken into account when the Subject says "I". And, in this regard, John, Bheki, Vercueil's dog, the chickens on the farm where Florence's husband works, the house,

¹⁰⁷ Attridge (2005: 102) hints at this possible reading of the relationship between Mrs Curren and Vercueil, interpreting it as "a sign of the psychological effect of approaching death, which deprives conventional mores of their relevance and encourages a certain 'allegorical' reading of reality". I suspect that if Attridge had followed up more consistently on this line of argument he could have come up with a reading not too dissimilar to the one I am advancing in this study (that of Mrs Curren's ontological misreading) because most of the evidence regarding the relationship between Mrs Curren and Vercueil in the text seems to point in that direction. In fact, in his 1998 essay, Attridge notes the difficulties attendant on the relationship between Mrs Curren and Vercueil and it is surprising that by 2005 he has glossed over this observation.

etc. all serve this function in the novel. Deep down, Mrs Curren herself believes as much. In her letter to her daughter she says the following in this regard: “When I write about him I write about myself; when I write about his dog I write about myself; when I write about the house I write about myself. Man, house, dog: no matter what the word, through it I stretch out a hand to you” (9).¹⁰⁸ But as to what happens beyond this initial acknowledgement of ontological indebtedness to one’s Others, is a different matter. But what could explain Vercueil’s seemingly non-reciprocal relation with Mrs Curren?

Vercueil’s Vagrancy

In the early stages of the narrative, we are presented with a scene in which Mrs Curren plays classical music for Vercueil, and wonders if the music has struck a chord in him and if, through its cords of sound, their two hearts have also been tied together (24). As she is still musing on this, a woman from the flats across the way calls and warns her of the presence of a vagrant on her property (24). The vagrant Mrs Curren’s neighbour is referring to is Vercueil and Mrs Curren’s answer to her is “He is not a vagrant He is a man who works for me” (24). Because she has taken offence at Vercueil (whom she is learning to love), being called a vagrant, she, soon after this call, decides on not taking calls anymore, preferring instead to focus solely on Vercueil. Now it is quite obvious that the caller arrives at the conclusion that Vercueil is a vagrant via stereotype rather than through assessing him as an individual in his own right – technically speaking, not every tramp, or person who resembles one, is also a vagrant. Yet, looked at from a certain angle, the woman’s assessment could very well be correct regarding who Vercueil seems to be.

I have noted above that, despite his seemingly principle-driven spurning of charity, Vercueil might be a vagrant. This is an aspect of his outlook that deserves closer scrutiny if we are to understand his role and place in the novel as one unlikely to earn Mrs Curren’s trust and as embodying Coetzee’s warning about the possible dangers of an uncritical yearning and fight for post-coloniality.¹⁰⁹ An analysis of who Vercueil might be will be of help in this regard. In this

¹⁰⁸ I disagree with readings of ethical responsibility towards the Other that suggest that such responsibility is without calculation (see Attridge 2005: 103). I think that it is only the initial moment of the encounter that cannot be calculated in advance; it just happens. But what happens thereafter is subject to calculation, else how is it that Mrs Curren re-evaluates her opinions about her Others as the narrative progresses? Indeed, Attridge (2005: 110-111) contradicts himself, or so it seems to me, when later he points to this very process of constant “re-appraisal and self-redefinition” in ethical engagements.

¹⁰⁹ Among other issues, in this novel Coetzee tackles the dynamics of embodiedness and embodied consciousness in the fight against colonialism. In these dynamics the contestatory and binaric approach by Bheki and his comrades is questioned, as is Mrs Curren’s (as a coloniser who comes to refuse) uncritical support for Vercueil (as one belonging to the colonised).

task I will turn to Raymond Williams' analysis of human outlooks in his book titled *The Long Revolution* (1971).

Chapter three of Raymond Williams' book is an incisive study of how individuals stand in relation to their societies. In it Williams delineates six ways of existing in society for an individual: Member, Subject, Servant, [self-] Exile, Rebel, and Vagrant.

According to Williams, the category of member signifies

[A]n individual's positive identification with the society in which [he or she] lives. The member of a society feels himself to belong to it, in an essential way: its values are his values, its purposes his purposes to such an extent that he is proud to describe himself in its terms. . . . If change is necessary, he will contribute to its discussion and coming into effect, for he is confident of the values, attitudes and institutions of the society, accepts the ways in which its life is conducted, and sees even conflicts and tensions within the society as soluble by reference to these fundamental ways and values, in such a manner that the essential unity of the society will be preserved. (1971: 102-3)

The Subject and Servant, on the other hand, do not identify with the society in which they find themselves. They remain in a society because the Subject is forced to (the Subject position being akin to slavery), while the Servant remains in it due to the comfort of the "illusion of choice" that society accords him or [her] as a partner: that is, he can choose who to work for. But when the Servant's deepest feelings and sense of allegiance are called upon, he [or she] finds himself or herself a stranger who does not ultimately own the products of his or her labour (1971: 105-6). The Rebel does not positively identify with his or her society: he or she is at explicit variance with it but in rebelling against one social form he seeks to establish another for society at large (1971: 106-7). Williams contrasts the position of Rebel to that of the Reformer or the critic, the latter "whose sincere desire is [only] to change this or that aspect of the general way of life" (1971: 107). The Exile, or self-Exile, is "as absolute as the rebel in rejecting the way of life of his society, but instead of fighting it, he goes away. Often he is like the Subject in that, unless he conforms, he will be destroyed or will be unable to maintain his life. But he is unlike the Subject in that he has managed to escape, or has been allowed to get away" (1971: 107). Finally, we come to the Vagrant, who, according to Williams,

[S]tays in his society, though he finds its purposes meaningless and its values irrelevant. There is nothing in particular that the vagrant wants to happen, his maximum demand is that he should be left alone. . . . [H]e finds little meaning in himself as in his society. . . . [In the Vagrant's view] a man does what he likes, but does not fight for change; serves any master, for immediate convenience, or leaves any service, again as convenience and not principle dictates. The one thing the

vagrant is certain of is that all other people who are not vagrants are fools, killing themselves for meaningless meanings, pretending to meanings whereas the only thing that matters is oneself: not even a meaningful self, but simply an organism, as such, keeping going. (1971: 109-110)

The image we come away with from William's analysis of a Vagrant is of an individual who lives entirely for the moment. While Mrs Curren's daughter is the self-exile in Coetzee's novel, Vercueil's outlook closely fits with Raymond Williams's description of the Vagrant. Commenting on Vercueil's character, Derek Attridge (2005: 97) says that, "he lives his life without commitments, without reference to the future (and with references to the past that hardly have the ring of truth)". Indeed, there seems nothing in particular that Vercueil wants to happen to his society. In her wish to make him live a purposeful life, Mrs Curren is similar to Bheki and John who try to force Vercueil to give up his vagrant life, his liquor, and join in the struggle for what they regard as a new South Africa (45). Yet, most likely, Vercueil, in keeping with his vagrant outlook, thinks that Bheki, John and their friends are "fools, killing themselves for meaningless meanings". Of course, it would not be honest to say that Bheki's and John's struggle is for meaningless meanings; rather it is their strategy and attitudes towards it that are questionable.¹¹⁰

Because of his vagrant outlook, Vercueil would show no consciousness of being inter-subjective with his Others. While he plays with the children (as I have indicated), this would not constitute a conscious sense of being ontologically indebted to them or to anyone else for that matter. His ontological compulsions seem to remain at the unconscious level. Mrs Curren's overall view, one arrived at rather too late, is of him as a liminal creature, as one "who cannot swim [and] does not yet know how to fly" (197). Nevertheless, this is not to say that Vercueil's life is simply a vegetative one; as with Raymond Williams's definition of the vagrant, such individuals can be quite calculating, with a keen eye on personal convenience. Attridge (2005: 97), too, observes that, "We should not be too quick to assume, however, that [Vercueil] is some sort of innocent primitive or noble savage, ignorant of the basic ties of human community; seeing him through Mrs Curren's eyes alone, we have no way of knowing what ingredients of calculation or cynicism are at work in him. . . ." It is this line of argument that I

¹¹⁰ Vercueil's ontological orientation is in some way similar to Michael K's in *Life & Times of Michael K* (1983). Like Vercueil, Michael K, too, avoids any form of socio-political engagement because he does not want to be drawn into other people's history and be reduced to a term in it. The major difference between them, however, is that at least K has a defined political stance, and it is that he wants to be apolitical, and so, although a "vagrant" in his own way, he is one with some elements of the rebel or "the internal exile" and, in that regard, he is different from Vercueil.

want to build on. Indeed, the novel suggests that there may be something sinister to Vercueil's strategy, a point to which I return in the conclusion to this chapter.

In his relationship with Mrs Curren, Vercueil's vagrant behaviour manifests itself clearly on at least two occasions. The first of these is when Mrs Curren asks him to deliver the letter she is writing to her daughter. Although she has assisted him, the novel holds out the possibility that Vercueil may have no lasting loyalty towards her. It may be that he does not believe in such "meaningless virtues" as loyalty and so cannot promise anything (32). Only after noticing her disappointment at his reluctance does he make some kind of promise to post the letter (33). Very significantly, though, the novel provides no assurance that he will keep his promise. The second instance in which Vercueil's vagrant behaviour manifests itself is during Mrs Curren's plans for self-immolation. In contemplating suicide, Mrs Curren wants to register her disappointment with the socio-political situation in South Africa. Vercueil, without any regard to the merits or demerits of such a step on her part, offers to assist her. Upon closer scrutiny, though, Mrs Curren realises how ineffectual such gestures can be. She is content to oppose oppression in her own private way, although unnoticed by the larger external world.

Despite Vercueil's shortfalls, Mrs Curren's overall assessment of the situation, which is questionable, is that her relationship with Vercueil is premised on reciprocity: since they both need each other, their ontological selves have become intertwined. In this regard, she reflects as follows: "I have fallen and he has caught me. It is not he who fell under my care when he arrived, I now understand, nor I who fell under his: we fell under each other . . . mutual election" (196). Nevertheless, Mrs Curren suspects that she may be mistaken, a suspicion that is entertained shortly before she reaches her unfounded assessment of mutuality with Vercueil: that is, when she wonders, as I have already observed, if it is not his dog rather than he that has been sent to her (193). Arguably, Vercueil does not seem to have a conscious conception of being intersubjective with Mrs Curren. The greatest irony that the novel finds itself caught up in then becomes that, despite Mrs Curren preferring malleable tramps such as Vercueil to the calcified position of Bheki and his comrades, these all share one trait, namely they have a limited imaginative capacity.

Finally, then, Vercueil may figure not so much as Mrs Curren's angel (guardian angel or any such benevolent angel) as her betrayer. It may very well be that his final embrace of her, and which "kills" her, alludes, or is comparable, to Judas's betrayal of Christ with an embrace and a

kiss. In fact the novel invites this interpretation. It will be recalled that in the early stages of her relationship with Vercueil Mrs Curren dismisses the idea that he is an angel. As she reappraises him she arrives at the following conclusion which, though still tentative, she now suspects may have held true all along: “Not an angel, certainly. An insect, rather, emerging from behind the baseboards when the house is in darkness to forage for crumbs” (14).

If Vercueil is an angel, at all, then he may qualify as an angel of death, and an implacable one at that. According to the tradition of beliefs about the angel of death, there are at least two types of such angels:

In some cases the [angel of death] is able to actually cause the victim’s death leading to tales that he can be bribed, tricked or outwitted in order to retain life. . . . Other beliefs hold that the spectre of death is only a psychopomp, serving to sever the last ties between the soul and the body and to guide the deceased to the next world without having any control over the fact of the victim’s death.
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_\(personification\)#in_Judaism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_(personification)#in_Judaism) 25/10/10

Since the text holds out the possibility that Vercueil causes Mrs Curren’s death, he would in that case belong to the first of these types — this despite Mrs Curren’s generous treatment of him.¹¹¹ In Mrs Curren’s double loss of autonomy with respect to her encounter with Vercueil, he seems to configure her in his consciousness as someone exploitable and seems prepared to exploit her. Vercueil’s outlook seems to be associated with his very name which, as a number of critics have translated it, is Afrikaans for “to cheat” or “to hide” (see, for instance, Head, 1997: 140 and Huggan, 1996: 202). By supposedly “killing” her himself, he ends up betraying Mrs Curren’s trust. Graham Huggan, for one, notes that there seems to be something sinister about Vercueil:

The implication [of the name Vercueil] is that [he] is more than just unreliable: he is a covert agent of destruction, a fully fledged version of the embryonic cells inside Mrs Curren’s body The product of a malevolent Age of Iron in which guest is no longer at one with host, Vercueil slyly preys on his ailing companion: he is like the grub which, once hatched, will destroy the body it feeds off. (1996: 2002-2003)

Huggan seems to have decided on Vercueil’s malevolence in absolute terms. However, she goes on to observe, that, in a sense, because they have been implicated in each other since Mrs Curren got the news of her cancer, and her reliance on Vercueil for companionship for the

¹¹¹ Could Mrs Curren’s exaggerated charity towards Vercueil also perhaps be read as part of her bargaining in the “denial stage” of the Kubler-Ross model?

period that she writes this letter as she awaits death, the two eventually become interchangeable as host and parasite.

As I note elsewhere, in *Age of Iron* Coetzee, among other things, argues for the place of embodiedness and embodied consciousness in the fight against colonialism. In his postulations, these dynamics the contestatory and binaric approach by Bheki and his comrades is questioned, just as the uncritical support of Mrs Curren, the reluctant coloniser, for Vercueil, one of the colonised, is questioned by the novel's indeterminacy, its open-endedness. From the above discussion of the novel, what, is Coetzee saying about the Subject's relationship with his or her Others and how does this relate to colonial domination and the quest for post-coloniality? Is Coetzee utterly cynical about the outcome of such relationships or is he perhaps simply urging caution? There seems to be in the novel a questioning of both a binaric approach to Self/Other relations, on the one hand, and the easy trust of the Other by the Self, on the other hand. Politically, the fear by all well-meaning people the world over had been that in a post-Apartheid South Africa relations between the former colonisers and the former colonised might not turn out as "amicably" as they have. If we grant that Mrs Curren's cancer metaphorises the dying phase of the Apartheid state, then we see in her coming to terms with her own death the difficulties that those who upheld the cancer of Apartheid had to go through before they gave up their disfiguring ideology, that is, the shock, the denial and the anger that it was being challenged, the bargaining that we see in *Waiting for the Barbarians* when the Magistrate wishes for a prelapsarian era in which mistakes of Empire have not yet been made in the hope that they could now be corrected, and the acceptance, through reconciliation, of *Age of Iron*. In this vein, in *The Mind of South Africa: The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, Allister Sparks (1990) incisively charts the course of events that both gave rise to Apartheid and those that surrounded its eventual demise in a discussion that resonates with various aspects of Coetzee's novel as I have outlined above.

As I have indicated, Mrs Curren calls Bheki and his binaric-minded comrades "the new puritans" as they have no respect for their parents and are careless with their own lives. She tells Florence that the young people start out being careless of their own lives and end up being careless with everyone else's (48). Mrs Curren is worried that if this is the type of leadership the nation that is waiting to be born will have, then God should spare the nation of them (45). What is crucial to note is that, although Mrs Curren awakens to an awareness of intersubjectivity with her Others, this awareness is neither consciously reciprocated nor shown

to be a widespread phenomenon among the people she lives in an age of iron — Alan Paton’s ominous thesis and warning in *Cry The Beloved Country*, which Coetzee (1992: 97) quotes in his Jerusalem Prize Speech, in which a black character says that he has only one fear, namely that “when they [whites] are turned to loving, . . . we will find we [blacks] are turned to hating”, has resonances here. And this is where the lesson from the tragic relationship between Mrs Curren and Vercueil crystallises: Mrs Curren now loves Vercueil who might be said to secretly despise her and eventually works out an elaborate scheme that culminates into her murder by him. Tomasz Dominik Kamuzela, quoting D.J. Taylor, argues similarly about the possible lesson Coetzee may be gesturing toward here:

[Vercueil] seems to symbolise the possible coming of domination of the poor, underprivileged and the blacks, a radical change in the master-servant pattern in post-colonial, post-apartheid South Africa. And what is significant is that he is not presented as the vulnerable Friday in *Foe*, as it is he who is going to survive Mrs Curren whose death may symbolise the coming end of colonial white liberalism. (1991: 168)

Historically, events have turned out to be more kind than was feared, especially with the emphasis on the tone of reconciliation that was adopted in the process of decolonisation and in the years after the first truly democratic elections of 1994. Interestingly, some of the motivating factors for the adoption of this stance was the new government’s and, especially the TRC’s, appeal to the *ubuntu* ontology in which intersubjectivity and reconciliation are central. But, as I also note elsewhere, some elements of the “either-or” mentality (which is premised on the same Cartesian dichotomous Subjectivity that resulted into colonial domination) have surely been retained in the post-age-of-iron era. However, because social change is a process rather than an event, like Mrs Curren and the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* before her, one can only keep searching and hoping for the best. The next time we come across a similar proposition and the guarded “hope” it holds out, is when it is articulated by David Lurie and Lucy in Coetzee’s first post-apartheid novel *Disgrace* (1999), to a discussion of which I now turn. Among other things, in this novel, Coetzee allows his imagination to expand further, decisively adding animals to the list of a Subject’s Others who need acknowledging and whose otherness would have to be respected if we are to achieve a truly democratic and inclusive society.

Chapter Five

Disgrace: The Sympathetic Imagination and Acknowledgement of the Animal Other

My love, sings Teresa, swelling out the fat English monosyllable love, wallowing in love; a cat on a roof, howling; complex proteins swirling in the blood, distending the sexual organs, making the palms sweat and voice thicken as the soul hurls its longings to the skies. That is what Soraya and the others were for: to suck the complex proteins out of his blood like snake-venom, leaving him clear-headed and dry. (Coetzee, 1999a: 185, emphasis original)

They walk along an irrigation furrow. Lucy's bare toes grip the red earth, leaving clear prints. A solid woman, embedded in her new life. Good! If this is to be what he leaves behind — this daughter, this woman — then he does not have to be ashamed. (Coetzee, 1999a: 62)

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians [the sheep], he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him. He stands before them, under the sun, waiting for the buzz in his mind to settle, waiting for a sign. (Coetzee, 1999a: 126)

As I observe in the previous chapter, among other things, in *Disgrace*, Coetzee, still doggedly pursuing his thesis of the centrality of the body and an attendant embodied consciousness, allows his imagination to expand further. In the present novel, he decisively adds animals to the list of a Subject's Others who need acknowledging and whose otherness would have to be respected if we are to achieve a truly democratic and inclusive society.

The present chapter proceeds in four main stages: in the first stage I provide an overview of what, from my critical angle, I think are the issues that motivated the writing of this novel. Among these are the ubiquitous violence of post-Apartheid society and how this violence, especially in its intrusive nature, is seen by Coetzee as a reflection of a lack of respect for the otherness of the Other at various levels and forms of existence (which include animals, the former colonisers and the formerly colonised Others and women). This lack of respect for the Other is also seen in this novel's staging of the disappearance of the private sphere as a result of the intrusive, censorious and overbearing nature of the society depicted in the novel. I discuss this aspect of the text in the second part of my chapter, which focuses on David Lurie's relationship with Melanie Isaacs. My contention

is that this relationship sets the grounds for the subsequent transformation that Lurie undergoes with respect to his relationship with animals. In the third section of the chapter I explore Lurie's fundamentally changing relationship with animals proper. In the fourth, and last, part, I discuss the gender and subjectivity issues that underpin Lurie's relationship with his daughter Lucy, on the one hand, and the latter's transforming relationship with the land and her compatriots, on the other hand.

In a discussion of this novel, David Attwell outlines two aspects of the ethical turn in this writer's work. He says the following about Coetzee's ethics and ontology:

There are two features of the ethical turn in *Disgrace* The first is that an ethical consciousness . . . arises from an imaginative act of circumvention, a circumventing of a corrupt history Before we speak of this solution being spiritual, or more accurately, metaphysical, however, we need to mention the second feature of what I am referring to as Coetzee's ethical turn. This is the emphasis on ontology or being — again, ontology shorn of system, and therefore inimical to philosophy — a consciousness of what it means to be alive, sharing the precariousness of creation's biological energy. (2002: 339-340)

In the main, I agree with Attwell's assessment above, especially his view of Coetzee's emphasis on the primacy of ontology or being. However, it may not be entirely correct to claim that this is ontology shorn of system and inimical to philosophy. As I have pointed out before, it is true that Coetzee himself may be wary of making forays into, and staging contests with, traditional philosophy (see Coetzee, 1992: 248). Yet any persistent (if not consistent) mode of thought, even the most tentative one, is a "philosophy" in its own right. In his famous defence of his kind of writing, Coetzee (1988b: 5) has described it as "an other mode of thinking". True to this description, there are patterns to his thought processes that are discernible enough to constitute a coherent "system" of sorts, open-ended though it is.¹¹²

In fact, Coetzee's writings do not even fall into the category of non-logical stream of consciousness; there is a base he returns to after the various intellectual forays he makes. He himself has talked about the un-ignorableness of the body as that base (1992: 248). So, let us say that there is a philosophy of sorts that informs Coetzee's writings. And, as I have demonstrated in my introductory chapter, not all mainstream philosophy is inimical

¹¹² In any case, a system does not have to be "total" or "closed" since, as I have noted in my introductory chapter, the concepts comprising any system are themselves open-ended integers such that to be "total" or "closed" in the absolute, rather than contingent, sense would in itself be an indication of what are called spurious concepts.

to a conception of subjectivity that is grounded in the body. The physicalist strain within the philosophy of mind actually conceives of consciousness as an embodied phenomenon. It is from this base that I have launched my own study of the embodied consciousness attendant on the Subject's conception of himself or herself as a body. The orientation in *Disgrace* is no different except that, through this novel, Coetzee takes his ontological and ethical concerns a step forward in his respect for, and inclusion — within human consciousness — of the animal Other. It is this further development in Coetzee's writing that I explore in this chapter.

| **The Human Subject and the Animal Other: An Overview**

As I note in the previous chapter, the progression in Coetzee's characters' conception of the Self comes to include an acknowledgement of, and respect for, the non-human Other, namely animals. Of course, we have already been prepared for this concern for the animal Other as early as *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), in the encounter between the Magistrate and the waterbuck, and, again, in *Age of Iron*, in Mrs Curren's visit to Florence's husband's workplace, during which she is shocked by the kind of work he does: that is, slaughtering chickens on a farm that she variously calls "the factory" and "the enterprise" (1990: 41-44), thereby underlining the instrumentalist logic that underpins its very existence. My argument is that Coetzee returns to (and develops) this subject in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

The need for the inclusion of animals in Coetzee's literary and imaginative progression is not without justifiable motivation. Lucy observes in *Disgrace* that animals do not feature in the priorities of the new South Africa (73). According to the narrative, it would appear that in post-Apartheid South Africa animals have become the new subaltern Other and are othered even by the very people who were previously discriminated against, and who themselves therefore know what it means to suffer oppression. Indeed, in a country still struggling with the effects of Apartheid, it is always tempting to read this neglect of animals through the prism of an Apartheid past, as do Thomas Bonnici (2001), Lucy Graham (2002a) and Chris Danta (2007). Nevertheless, it is obviously difficult to determine the extent to which this state of affairs is to be blamed on the Apartheid dispensation.

After exploring the mental, social, and economic shifts that characterise post-Apartheid South Africa, and mentioning the dashed economic expectations of blacks, and the disorientation of whites at their loss of political power, Bonnici tries to explain why the three black robbers-cum-rapists in *Disgrace* shoot the dogs that Lucy keeps in her kennels. He argues that, for these characters, the dogs, by proxy, have become another way of wreaking vengeance against whites for the indignities of the Apartheid past: “The dog with the hole in its throat still bares its bloody teeth — contemptible yet exhilarating, probably in a country where dogs are bred to snarl at the mere smell of a black man” (2001: 110). Graham (2002: 8) makes a similar point with regard to the killing of the dogs, while Danta (2007: 732) believes that for a people struggling to work out a new post-Apartheid identity, the dogs, or animals in general, have become the true scapegoats of the modern South African polis. In the context of *Disgrace*, these observations may very well explain the violence against the dogs perpetrated by the black criminals. However, what is important to note is that discrimination against animals is not peculiar to post-Apartheid South Africa; it is a worldwide problem, except perhaps in those societies, such as Hindu ones, that believe in the transmigration of souls. But even in such societies, respect accorded animals is not for them in their own right, but for their role as carriers of human souls. In other words, animals are respected because they are potential “human beings”.

Appropriately, Lucy and David Lurie (and, later, Elizabeth Costello) trace the prevalence of discrimination against animals by humans back to the Middle Ages by, for example, looking at the views of the Church Fathers, such as Thomas Aquinas. According to *Elizabeth Costello* (2003: 67), Aquinas argued that the being of both God and the universe is the same and comprises reason. However, animals, who supposedly lack reason, follow the rules of the universe blindly: while they exist in it, they are not part of its being. This kind of thinking about animals was re-affirmed from the 17th Century onwards by Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes, who argued that an animal does not have a soul and is like a machine. He went on to say that, if one beats an animal, its cry is like the noise made by a wagon that has been involved in a crash. Descartes, then, is seen to have given a seal of approval to what some animal rights activists regard, albeit narrowly, as a millennia-old religious (especially Judeo-Christian) prejudice against animals.

In commenting on the subaltern status of animals in contemporary society, Randy Malamud insightfully observes as follows:

The relationship between people and non-human animals is codified in social culture as hierarchical and fundamentally impermeable: we are in here, they are out there. People are alienated from animals, with only token points of connection that are so heavily constricted and artificial as to hinder any significant *experiential* association across the divide Animals are vehicles, burdened with the anthropocentrically symbolic projections of our own minds. We engage animals in a fashion that keeps them distinct from us, as we define ourselves against them. One could hardly imagine an orientation less amenable to harmonious and ethical coexistence with animals.

Animals as we envision them from our side of the border, are largely constructs — mad dogs, dumb bunnies, busy bees, raging bulls — that service an array of cultural and imaginative needs. Such figurative appropriation is not the smoking gun in our imperious exploitation of animals; it is merely one indicator of our subliminal convictions that animals are marginal and malleable. Idiom demarcates cultural difference at the border between human and non-human.

When people do attempt to cross this borderline between ‘culture’ and ‘nature’ in order to broach animals, we tend to do so at our own pleasure, and without interrogating the implications of these borders. If we are interested in animals, we are inclined to bring them into our world rather than meeting them on their own terms and in their own territory. Indeed, we assert that they have no ‘terms’ — no a priori claim to an ethos or a logos, no rights, no property, no soul (2003: 3-4, my emphasis)

With regard to the Enlightenment’s culpability, Malamud (2003: 3) maintains that Jean Baudrillard relates the rise of humanist civilisation to the inhumane treatment of animals: “Animals were only demoted to the status of inhumanity as reason and humanism progressed”. Furthermore, Malamud (2003: 4) notes that Alan Bleakley, after arguing that the more civilised the society, the worse are its attitudes towards animals, cites Sigmund Freud’s description, in *Civilisation and its Discontents*, of a civilised state as one in which “wild and dangerous animals have been exterminated”. Malamud (2003: 4) himself then contends that, in contemporary society, it is economic imperatives that drive humanity’s bad treatment of animals, including their objectification and absolute othering.

It is in the context of this debate that Coetzee, in *Disgrace*, tackles the subject of human-animal relations and stages the possibility of encountering animals “in their own territory” and “on their own terms”. Of course, in this novel he does much more than simply moot the possibility of meeting animals on their own terms: he also approaches the question of human-animal relations from the nature of consciousness, and in a way that accords with the three fundamentals identified in my study, namely consciousness’ embodiedness, its mediatedness and its intentionality. Coetzee expands on the un-

ignorable being-there-ness of the body — which erodes the distinction between animal or human — in its physical constitution, its rhythms, needs, and mutual impingement on, and implication in, the other bodies that it encounters, and how these come to figure in the constitution of the Subject's own consciousness, its Self. What seems to be important at this stage in Coetzee's writing career is his explicit broaching of the possibility of the sympathetic imagination (in countering the Cartesian rational subjectivity and its attendant Self/Other divide), especially as it relates to human-animal subjectivities. I have noted how he introduces this form of imagination as early as *Waiting for the Barbarians* and develops the theme in *Age of Iron*. In *Disgrace*, embodiedness and the sympathetic imagination feature even more prominently. My discussion of this novel focuses on human-to-human and human-to-animal relationships. As in the previous novels, the undeniable ontological fact of the body's unignorable-being-there-ness is still a *leitmotif* even in the present novel.

The discussion that follows will alternate between two positions, namely the acknowledgement of a Subject's embodiedness and all that goes with being a body, and, secondly, an exploration of the Subject's nascent awareness of the Self in the Other, and of the Other in the Self. Respect for the otherness of the Other, on the other hand, is largely couched in the form of Lurie's relationship with his daughter Lucy. My discussion of this relationship will aim at highlighting how a Self could disrespect the otherness of the Other and how, in such circumstances, the Other could assert its Selfhood and its otherness.

In my introductory chapter, I noted that an awareness of the self's intersubjective constitution does not come cheaply. With regard to *Disgrace*, at least two uncomfortable factors precipitate a gradual change in David Lurie. Firstly, there is personal scandal and disgrace attached to his name due to his management of his sexuality, or, rather, due to the disjuncture between the way in which he manages it and the way in which his intrusive and overbearing society requires him to manage it. Secondly, there is a collective crisis on the political front. The collapse of Apartheid was followed by a wave of crime and retributive violence. This is the context in which Coetzee sets *Disgrace*. At the centre of the novel, he places what appears to be the racially motivated vengeful attack and rape of Lurie's daughter, Lucy, by three black young men. Along with his personal disgrace

and the extreme animal suffering he witnesses in Salem and its precincts, this incident triggers a fundamental change in Lurie's conception of Selfhood and Otherness.

In the context of the post-Apartheid socio-political milieu in which *Disgrace* is set, there are many practices that are regarded as disrespectful of the otherness of the Other. Among these are what Lurie regards as redistributive communitarianism, robberies and rapes — such as the attack on Lurie and Lucy, and the ransacking of Lurie's flat in Cape Town while he is away in Salem. Such violence characterises what Grant Farred (2002b) has termed “Mundanacity” in an essay entitled “The Mundanacity of Violence”. In the said essay Farred states that the term designates “the quotidian everywhere-ness of violence”, and “the process by which the un-relentingness of post-apartheid violence renders attacks on the individual body and the national psyche as nothing more than mundane, ordinary experience.” “Mundanacity”, he goes on to suggest, is post-apartheid violence normalised, incorporated into the South African psyche as an everyday, routine possibility because it takes place with such great frequency and speed (2002b: 354).

Farred (2002b: 353) attributes this phenomenon to the loss of the high levels of morality that had sustained the struggle against Apartheid since, as Lurie puts it in *Disgrace* (4), those activists who at that time were “clerics of ethics” have now become clerks or political functionaries and ideologues. Farred also blames this mundanacity of violence and crime on the fact that people like Lurie seem to normalise it by claiming that “it happens every day, every hour, every minute and in every corner of the country [and that he and Lucy] should be grateful they are alive because it could have been worse” (98). For Farred then, the definition of disgrace is the situation Lurie, Lucy, Bev Shaw and the black male rapists find themselves in. It is that state that comes into being when it has long ceased to matter that rape, theft, and murder (potentially) occur with mundanacity. Finally, it is the state in which “no account of violence has any moral purchase on the nation's body politic” (2002b: 361).¹¹³

¹¹³ In South Africa, even today, tension, violence, xenophobia and general disrespect for Others are almost everywhere palpable. In some cases these phenomena fit into the patterns associated with “the psychopathology of oppression” in which the oppressed and invalidated person, to validate himself or herself, will prey on someone weaker than himself or herself to vent their frustrations on — the classical paradigm of “white man hitting black man, and black man hitting his black wife, and the black wife hitting their child, and the child hitting the cat”, applies here. The recent xenophobic attacks on Africans from other countries (who in this case are in a vulnerable position because of their perceived outside status) seem to point towards a certain sense of powerlessness that some sections of the local black South Africans feel about their still subaltern socio-economic status and government failure to address areas such

Louise Bethlehem (2003: 168) attributes the state of affairs described by Farred above to the residual effects of the morbid symptoms from the Apartheid stage of the Gramscian interregnum in which things were still fluid; the old was dying out but there was no clear alternative system envisaged to replace it with. In other words, aspects of this interregnum state have persisted beyond liberation. Although Farred seems to think that the moral rot in the society in question has set in after the fall of Apartheid, from what Mrs Curren observes in *Age of Iron*, not everyone in the anti-Apartheid struggle could be said to have been a cleric of ethics, certainly not the binaric-minded comrades such as Bheki and John who, in a phenomenon called “necklacing”, set people alight and responded to their pleas for mercy by pouring more petrol on them. Those are the new puritans Mrs Curren was sceptical about and who have carried the violence over and are infecting others with it. As Isidore Diala, (2002: 52-53) has noted, indeed, as far back as 1990, Nadine Gordimer envisaged the possibility of post-Apartheid instability by predicting that apartheid would leave violence in its wake long after liberation – violence that would not simply disappear as a result of legal victories alone and which, in its early stages, could not merely be attributed to black rule.

The Rights of Desire and the Subject’s Lack of Autonomy

In *Disgrace*, as I have already noted, the constitution of the Self and its relationship with its Others is a complex process that involves the considerations of the body’s “isness” and the intentionality and mutual implication of its consciousness in other bodies. Like Eugene Dawn, the Magistrate, and Mrs Curren, David Lurie discovers that the body can nevertheless be quite unpredictable and insistent in asserting its presence, especially in its pain, sexual rhythms and demands, and dispositions such as love and desire.

Preliminarily, with regard to the body and sex, society is fully cognizant of the impossibility of ignoring the sexual body, hence the various parameters that it has put in place to control and contain it. Through the person of David Lurie, Coetzee explores the complex interplay between the reality of an individual’s bodily needs and the cultural demands of society regarding human sexuality. At various levels, *Disgrace* tackles the classical nature-versus-culture struggle which is also at the centre of debates on what is

as inculcating a spirit of vision, hard work, creativity and self-reliance among black South Africans that would ameliorate the situation.

meant by civilisation itself — Randy Malamud’s aforementioned reference to Freud’s definition of civilisation as “a state in which all the wild animals have been exterminated”, has its correlate in Enlightenment’s suppression of the body to advance the vagaries of a supposedly disembodied mind.

Initially, we are told that David Lurie, who is fifty-two years old, and twice divorced at the time we first meet him, thinks that he has the problem of sex under control. Part of this management of his sexual needs involves consorting with a prostitute named Soraya for ninety minutes every Thursday (1). In a sense, at this stage, Lurie is subscribing to society’s demands that sex and sexuality be kept within certain prescribed and strictly policed parameters. Of course, although tolerated, consorting with prostitutes could not be said to be part of mainstream society’s sexual norms. We note, therefore, that, from society’s point of view, Lurie is a rebel from the outset. But this externally enforced “self-control” is put to the test in various ways until Lurie, seemingly in reaction to its strictures, simply relinquishes control altogether and becomes a servant of Eros — quite literally. In the process, what is exposed is the faultlines of society’s parameters which, taken to certain extremes, become absurd and even violate the otherness of the Other. A case in point in this novel is the injunction against inter-generational sex which I shall discuss at greater length below. By extension, and in retrospect, Apartheid’s equally arbitrary ban of interracial sexual liaisons also comes under scrutiny here.

In this vein, indeed, *Disgrace* is a novel of conflicted reversals and of levelling. First, in its emphasis on Lurie’s sexuality, the novel may be read as questioning Descartes’s dismissal of the body. Second is the colonial or governance reversal following the fall of Apartheid. And, then, there is the levelling of formerly steep filial and gender gradients as it manifests in the relationship between David Lurie and his daughter, Lucy. Indeed, in terms of sexuality, Lurie alternates between prurience and licentiousness. In a sense, Lurie’s character combines aspects of Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*, on the one hand, and those of the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, on the other. In giving free rein to his sexuality, Lurie, though himself Cartesian-like, is the opposite of Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee of *Dusklands* (1974) who suppress their sexuality. Instead, he mirrors the Magistrate’s sexual licence.

Like his Cartesian forebears, Lurie has not always been comfortable with his body — particularly with its ageing. When it dawns on him that he has lost his charm and now has to pursue women, where formerly they pursued him (7), he even considers castrating himself:

At what age, he wonders, did Origen castrate himself? Not the most graceful of solutions, but then ageing is not a graceful business . . . preparing to die Severing, tying off: with local anaesthetic and a steady hand and a modicum of phlegm one might even do it oneself, out of a textbook. A man on a chair snipping away at himself: an ugly sight, but no more ugly, from a certain point of view, than the same man exercising himself on the body of a woman (9)

That Lurie should consider this course of action comes as no surprise. In the early stages of the narrative, he lives a conflicted life that oscillates between a received Cartesianism and his unconscious pull to depart from it; a departure that is largely driven by the irrepressible demands of his body. It is no surprise, then, that he even considers castrating himself as a Cartesian would — Descartes’s own supposition in the Sixth Meditation is that one would still remain whole even if one were to amputate one’s leg (see Descartes, 1980: 81). I need to point out, parenthetically, that Lurie’s sexual behaviour at this stage still occurs within the parameters of a Cartesian ontology: using money as a weapon, he imposes himself on the women he consorts with just as the Cartesian disembodied mind is supposed to impose itself on the body. Closely mirroring Dawn’s views on sex, Lurie describes his encounters with prostitutes as snake-like, “rather abstract, rather dry” (3). It is only after he meets Melanie Isaacs that this orientation in his sexuality, and in his being, begins to change. This is a debate to which I return later in the discussion.

With regard to Self/Other relations, David Lurie’s received Cartesianism predictably extends to his conception of his Self. Initially, he cares nothing for animals and thinks that animal rights activists are a strange sect, like a form of Christianity. In fact, he even maintains that humans should treat animals well out of generosity rather than fear of retribution or guilt (74). At this stage, he still seems quite comfortable with his quasi-Cartesian outlook. Indeed, early in the narrative, he thinks that he is too old to change anything: “His temperament is not going to change; he is too old for that. His temperament is fixed, set” (2). But Lurie is also all too aware of the dangers of rigidity and complacency, and so, a little later, he warns himself as follows: “He lives within his income, within his temperament, within his emotional means. Is he happy? By most

measurements, yes, he believes he is. However, he has not forgotten the last chorus of Oedipus: call no man happy until he is dead” (2). And, true enough, as the story of his life develops, we see this character reluctantly begin to change his temperament. Ultimately, he jettisons Cartesianism altogether and embraces what approximates an embodied, inter-subjective, post-Cartesian ontology.

It is Lurie’s transforming, or what he calls “enriching” (56), experience with Melanie Isaacs that enables the eventual metamorphosis of his conception of being. As I have already indicated, it is after his encounter with Melanie that his sexuality loses its Cartesian dimension of domination and commodification. So transformed is he by the experience that he stops consorting with prostitutes and even begins to flesh out a theory of love and sexual desire. But, before we look at that aspect, it is very critical that we analyse the relationship between Lurie and Melanie without the usual pre-conceptions about what we think relations between lecturers and their students, or between men and women, should be — such pre-conceptions had better be left at the doorstep. We will need to perform what the phenomenologists call an “epoché” or “bracketing” or “suspension of judgement”, so as to better treat each case on its merits and demerits, especially as the novel presents it. And Coetzee is not someone who simply takes convention at its face value and endorses its tenets; he is known to invariably critique it.

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¹¹⁴ Preliminarily, I must point out that I have a strong suspicion that, with regard to the Lurie-Melanie affair, Coetzee is trying to question the rightness of outdated rules against relationships between university students (not primary or high school students) and their lecturers, and also rules against inter-generational and inter-racial relationships. In my reading on the matter I have come across at least two schools of thought regarding the relationship between David Lurie and Melanie Isaacs. One school argues that the relationship constitutes sexual harassment and is improper while the other says it is not improper. After careful consideration of the matter as it is presented in this novel, I have decided to go along with the second school of thought. To start with, Lurie is well within his rights to look for another marriage partner after his second divorce. Also Melanie is not an impressionable freshman to be easily exploited by him — as Lurie himself points out, she is twenty years old and, being in third year, she is expected to have developed a critical enough mind of her own. When Coetzee presents Lurie as questioning himself and his motives in the course of the narrative as regards his relationship with Melanie, it should not be understood as self-disapproval (or self-ironising) on his part; rather, in a novel that invokes an “individual versus society” struggle, Lurie, living ahead of his time, is at a point of breaking new ground in the moral compass of his society in this matter and any radical change can be disquieting, as Kevin O’Neill (2009), quoting Ian Hacking, correctly observes, hence the ambivalence. The self-questioning and echoing of the traditional views on this matter that Lurie seems to be engaging in could be read as the intrusion of an overbearing superego into his resistant ego. This should explain why after the affair is out, all the ambivalence disappears and Lurie can now stake a claim to his *avant garde* view of life on the matter in question. Melanie’s own initial dithering could be similarly read. And, by the way, from about ten years ago, relationships between students and their lecturers are no longer regarded as inappropriate and illegal at the university where I work, so I have that experience too to back me on this and I believe that Coetzee is possibly arguing for a similar paradigm shift that my university has undergone.

Embodiment versus Platonic Archetypes

When Lurie invites Melanie to his flat, he begins to work out what could loosely be called his “theory” of Eros. The crux of the theory is that female beauty is not autonomous and the more widely it is shared, the better (16). In support of his argument, he quotes the following line from one of Shakespeare’s sonnets: “from fairest creatures we desire increase” (16) to prop up this theory. The theory also encompasses what he calls the rights of desire and the nature of true love.

At this stage in the narrative, Lurie’s intersubjectivity in his relations with his Others is as yet only unconsciously felt. He is sexually excited by Melanie but does not understand the phenomenon, suspecting only that while she does not own her beauty, he does not own himself either; he is simply in the grip of something beyond his conscious control and comprehension (18). What is here described exemplifies a notion that I adumbrate in my introductory chapter, that is, the Subject’s double lack of ontological autonomy, in terms of which, during the encounter, two Subjects become implicated in each other, for better or for worse.

Still trying to make sense of his awakening to erotic love, Lurie attributes his sexual attraction to Melanie to the god Eros, thereby, in Freudian terms, sublimating and displacing his own bodily processes or rhythms. Later Lurie notes that this phenomenon involves both the workings of the hormones (what he calls complex proteins, 185) and how their action is both excited *by* the Other (Melanie’s beauty, for instance, 16) and move the rest of the body *towards* other bodies (as desirable entities/qualities such as Melanie and her beauty). Coetzee seems to be demonstrating here that if an encounter with another Subject, through desire, can move one to be drawn towards that Subject, almost against one’s conscious will, then the notion of the autonomous Subject is thrown into question. This loss of autonomy through desire is a phenomenon that, like any encounter, just happens, often against the Subject’s own restrictive Self, the ego, or, indeed, as in the case of David Lurie, against the superego in the shape of society’s sometimes unreasonable demands of sexual propriety.

But before he arrives at this assessment of the workings of love and desire, Lurie, baffled by the profound, almost sublime, experience of his love for Melanie, turns to the Romantics, especially William Wordsworth, to marry the supposedly disembodied or

Platonic idea of love with the all too embodied feelings which accompany that idea. Overwhelmed by what he feels for Melanie, he wonders if pure (that is, Platonic) love before experience, is possible after all. He seems to be asking himself whether he was perhaps romantically connected to Melanie before he had even met her, and whether or not the supposedly *a priori* idea of love may be equated with the actuality of love.

In this regard, in a lecture to his third-year class, with Melanie in attendance, Lurie finds appropriate the centuries-old debate on the relationship between ideas and reality that was initiated by Plato and Aristotle: that is, do ideas exist prior to experience and does experience then only confirm their *a priori* existence? Or do ideas arise from experience and subsist in it, being, therefore, inextricably and unmediatedly tied to it? Idealism advances the *a priori* existence of ideas, while Realism argues for their *a posteriori*, unmediated existence. Of course, since Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (1929) to which I have previously referred in my first chapter, we have come to accept that neither position is true, and instead that consciousness partly receives and partly creates ideas or reality. Not surprisingly, then, Lurie comes to conceive of believable love as neither Platonic nor merely unmediatedly physical:

The great archetypes of the mind, pure ideas, find themselves usurped by mere sense images.

‘Yet we cannot live our daily lives in the realm of pure ideas, cocooned from sense-experience. The question is not, How can we keep the imagination pure, protected from the onslaughts of reality? The question has to be, Can we find a way for the two to co-exist? . . . As sense organs reach the limit of their powers, their light begins to go out. Yet at the moment of expiry that light leaps up one last time like a candle-flame, giving us a glimpse of the invisible.

Wordsworth seems to be feeling his way toward a balance: not the pure idea, wreathed in clouds, nor the visual image burned on the retina, overwhelming and disappointing us with its matter-of-fact clarity, but the sense image, kept as fleeting as possible, as a means toward stirring or activating the idea that lies more deeply buried in the soil of memory ‘Like being in love,’ he says. ‘If you were blind you would hardly have fallen in love in the first place. But now do you truly wish to see the beloved in the cold clarity of visual apparatus? It may be in your better interest to throw a veil over the gaze, so as to keep her alive in her archetypal, goddess-like form. (22)

As already noted, while we may question the *a priori* Kantian categories, it may be conceded, nevertheless, that the ability to conceptualise is innate to the operations of consciousness, owing to the brute fact of its embodiedness, its givenness. The “glimpse of the invisible” noted by Lurie does not refer to that which is not physical; the invisible is invisible only because it is the Other in all its radical otherness. This radical otherness

obtains because aspects of the Other become part of the Self only as representations and not as the Other-in-himself/herself/itself.

Aware of the intrusive and overbearing society he lives in, though, Lurie perceives that, by marrying the innate potentiality of, or capacity for, love and its manifestation in his relationship with Melanie, he has precipitated his own undoing, his fall. As such, addressing himself in the last part of his theory, Lurie would have preferred to have had love in its primal state, unprocessed love, before the gaze. In other words, Lurie wishes he had not met Melanie in the first place because then neither himself nor Melanie would come to grief. But, in conceding that the idea of love and the beloved cannot be separated, and therefore that there is no avoiding the inevitable social repercussions of their liaison, Lurie confirms my earlier observation that the encounter is often neither willed nor avoidable. As an irruption, it simply happens, and one has the duty to work through its consequences.

Besides wishing that his relationship with Melanie had remained merely at the level of the “archetype”, a possibility he has already discounted, Lurie comments as follows on the unavoidable nature of his social disgrace: “A week ago she was just another pretty face in the class. Now she is a presence in his life, a breathing presence” (23). Consciousness can become consciousness only if there is an encounter with its Other. The encounter is similar to the moment of perception without which consciousness would remain inert. In its effect on the Subject it may be likened to Vercueil’s dirty finger stirring Mrs Curren’s previously unformed consciousness. Just as Mrs Curren is enriched by her encounter with Vercueil, so too is Lurie by his encounter with Melanie. Thus, after the inquiry into his sexual liaison with her, he, having reconciled himself to his socially enforced disgrace, and, quite past caring by now, says as much (56).

Nature, Culture and Self-Other Ethics

I have already mentioned that Lurie, as his theory of love takes shape, invokes the rights of desire and the role of hormones (89 and 185). He thus progresses from a Freudian state of displacement (when he attributes desire to the god Eros) to a final acknowledgement of the phenomenon in all its embodiedness. I have also previously noted that the society in which he lives does not subscribe to his theory of sexuality and that this sets him on a collision course with it. Of course, without some form of restraint,

Lurie's views of desire and sex would lead to chaos if subscribed by all, since we would act on our desires without being mindful of context or possible consequences. Precisely because of this, society, as the superego, intervenes to maintain some form of "order", which we then come to know as culture, morality or civilisation.

This intervention by culture is not always against nature, though, as we see in the case of the cultural injunction against incest and its biological consequences. I need to note at this point that, although by the model in this study ethics should not be imposed on the Subject, this does not mean that Self-Other ethics is some form of positivism or narrow empiricism. By this I mean that the Self-Other Subject does not have to personally experience first-hand everything that is supposed to guide his or her ethical conduct; the experiences and ontology of his or her Others is of considerable importance, too, given that the Subject's own ontology is an intersubjective, compound one, and not a *sui generis*, autonomous one. As I mention in my introductory chapter, a Subject's Others too can bring pressure to bear on the him or her to remind him or her of his or her possible oversights. For example, with regard to society policing incest, notice that at some point, Lurie, conceiving of himself as a servant of Eros, admires his daughter's ample breasts, an act that could lead to sexual desire which, if acted upon, would result in incest (59).¹¹⁵

However, more often than not, culture does sometimes get overzealous and oversteps its bounds — as Lurie and Melanie come to discover. The cultural reason given for the ban on intergenerational sex is that old men's seed does not quicken and so it would lead to the demise of society if old men married young women (52-53, 190 and 193-194). How biologically sound this argument is remains questionable — humans (especially males) have been known to be able to procreate even late into their lives. Such an argument is similar to the unfounded fears of miscegenation or interracial sexual liaisons that were falsely believed to result in unproductive offspring by the managers of a racialised imperialism. Furthermore, as I have already indicated, the assumption that sexual

¹¹⁵ The cultural injunction against incest could be said to be a good example of how ethics should arise from demonstrable ontological imperatives of being that characterise Self-Other ethics rather than the other way round whereby arbitrary or spurious cultural prescriptions are imposed on the Subject, contrary to his or her ontological being. For example, the grounds for society's ban against inter-generational sex as is the case in this novel, are spurious. The ban rests on the mistaken assumption that sex is strictly for procreation and that everyone must, or desires to, have children (190). In fact, a post-Cartesian theorist such as Bruno Latour (1993) in *We Have Never Been Modern*, objects to the distinction between nature and culture preferring to look at them as one and the same thing — principally as nature. Such a view underlines the importance of culture following after nature and not nature being subjected to (spurious) culture.

relations between males and females are solely for the propagation of the species is a shallow and misconceived one. The assumption does not even proceed from observable natural phenomena since nature itself sometimes makes it impossible for some people to procreate.

Decisively, Lurie's main contention is that his love for Melanie is a purely natural phenomenon and censuring it is going against nature, against *Juris Naturale*. And he thus vouches for the rights of desire. In his argument in defence of the rights of desire, or the natural demands of the body, Lurie offers the example of a dog he once observed in Kenilworth and says the following about this dog:

It was a male. Whenever there was a bitch in the vicinity, it would get excited and unmanageable, and with Pavlovian regularity the owners would beat it. This went on until the poor dog didn't know what to do. At the smell of a bitch it would chase around the garden with its ears flat and its tail between its legs, whining, trying to hide. (89)

Lurie's point is that the dog was being conditioned to behave contrary to its nature, to reject itself, and that this led to a stultification of its being. It internalised the conditioned behaviour which became its new false consciousness or spurious culture. This, in effect, is a case of culture against nature.

Aware of the irrepressible demands of his body, Lurie thus upholds the rights of desire. As brute reality, desire is something innate to the living body and punishing its manifestation amounts to a denial of that reality. Similarly, like what happens to the dog in Kenilworth, in Lurie's case, the demand that he deny his desire for Melanie comes from society, externally enforced, and against his nature. In this vein, although I think he is too pessimistic in his grim assessment of the future of race relations in *Disgrace*,¹¹⁶ Michael Kochin, in support of Lurie, offers a cogent reading of his relationship with Melanie Isaacs. He correctly observes, for example, that what happens in *Disgrace* is the discovery Lurie makes that "the old prohibition on racial miscegenation [has just as arbitrarily been] replaced with a new prohibition on intergenerational sex" (2004: 4). Jane Poyner (2000: 194), too, points out that Lurie's trial is "reminiscent of the abhorrent Immorality Act of 1949" and notes that "Not only will the University 'try' him under its

¹¹⁶ In her analysis of *Disgrace*, looking at the options and prospects this novel tables both for South Africa and any other situations of conflict such as Israel with which she compares it, Hanna Hever (2002) sketches the non-Messianic trajectory that socio-political transitions almost always entail and urges the need for restraint and a good dose of realism in our assessments of the outcomes as they unfold.

Code of Conduct, but Ryan, Melanie's boyfriend, warns [him] to 'stay with his own kind'".

The injunction that Lurie should stay with his own kind, age-wise, has its correlate in the demand by Apartheid's Immorality Act of 1949 that different races "stay with their own kind". However, Lurie feels that he has little control over what is happening to him, and he thus, appropriately, attributes it to what he calls "the rights of desire": "My case rests on the rights of desire," he says. 'On the god who makes even the small birds quiver'" (89). As I note above, sexual attraction thus questions the Subject's autonomy. Much later, Lurie links this hormonal-erotic experience to Byron and his mistress Teresa, especially the latter's longing for her dead lover:

My love, sings Teresa, swelling out the fat English monosyllable love, wallowing in love; a cat on a roof, howling; complex proteins swirling in the blood, distending the sexual organs, making the palms sweat and voice thicken as the soul hurls its longings to the skies. That is what Soraya and the others were for: to suck the complex proteins out of his blood like snake-venom, leaving him clear-headed and dry. (185)

Hinting at the universality of desire to most forms of animal being. The passage likens Teresa to a cat on the roof with sex hormones swirling in its blood. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy (1979) comments similarly on the passion-consumed maids at Talbothays farm, who are sexually pining for a young man called Angel as "victims of an emotion thrust on them by cruel Nature's Law"(chapter 23), a statement that points to the brute nature of the body's sexual rhythms and demands.

Now, even if we grant that by acting upon their natural desires Lurie and Melanie may have erred (and this is not to say that they did err), why does society seem to step in in such an overbearing manner? In an article entitled "Sexuality and Culture," John Bonnell observes, among other things, the discordance between nature and culture in most societies, including contemporary ones that, as enlightened, are supposed to conduct themselves better. With regard to the case of Lurie and Melanie, Bonnell finds the degree of punishment meted out to them totally unwarranted:

[I]t does not follow that the pursuit of every discordant desire justifies society's censure, society's incommensurate punishment. The dignity of an individual, including the right to make non-lethal mistakes, ought to be fostered, not squelched. For who in society is fit to pass contrary judgement? Surely not the petty, vindictive, and cold (Elaine Winter! – remarkable among them) colleagues who wish to cut

Lurie to their coward's size, or to harry him from the community. In any case, Melanie is twenty, 'Of age. Old enough to know her own mind.' Making allowances for the fact that she, like most fifty-year olds, does not yet have a mind of her own to know, the hyperbolic statement is true enough. At least a sane society must allow twenty-year olds to make their own way. Even with mistakes, or because of them, it's the best path to 'a mind of one's own.' But that requires trust, trust of twenty-year olds and of life itself. The suppression of such trust leads to the sort of society now burgeoning, a society labouring to restore women to the Victorian condition of feckless childhood. A generation of faux 'liberation' is culminating in a restoration of Reverend Bowdler's vision: admit no female more than fourteen. (2001: 96-97)

As Bonnell notes in the above passage, eventually Lurie is indeed forced from the community since he, rightly so, refuses to go along with his society's conservative code of sexual conduct. This is why, when Lucy remarks that Lurie has become a scapegoat, he himself, post-religious as ever, prefers to call his eviction an instance of puritanical censorship or purging (91).

In Lurie's suspicion, the accusation of sexual harassment that Melanie levels against him is the result of pressure from her boyfriend and parents. If this is so, it follows that the complaint is grounded in an outdated, censorious conception of lecturer-student relations, and also in society's injunction against intergenerational relationships. Indeed, at a later point in the novel, Lurie reflects as follows in this regard:

The marriage of Cronus and Harmony: unnatural. That was what the trial was set up to punish, once all the fine words were stripped away. On trial for his way of life. For unnatural acts; for broadcasting old seed, seed that does not quicken, *contra naturam*. If the old men hog the young women, what will be the future of the species? That, at bottom, was the case for the prosecution. (190)

Melanie's jealous boyfriend, Ryan, afraid of losing Melanie to the more "experienced" Lurie, also adopts the crutch of social convention to fend off his rival.

Ryan's uncritical resort to culture shows when Lurie, still love-smitten for Melanie, and after visiting her parents to explain himself, follows Melanie back in Cape Town to watch her perform in a play (193). But when Ryan finds out that Lurie is in the audience, he gets down to work to drive him away, first by shooting pellets at him and then following him out of the theatre to threaten and taunt him:

'Didn't you learn your lesson?'
'What lesson?'
'Stay with your own kind.'
Your own kind: who is this boy to tell him who his kind are? What does he know of the force that drives the utmost of strangers into each other's arms, making them

kin, kind, beyond all prudence? . . . The seed of generation, driven to perfect itself, driving deep into the woman's body, driving to bring the future into being. Drive, driven.
Ryan is speaking. 'Let her alone, man! Melanie will spit in your eye if she sees you. . . . Find yourself another life, Prof. Believe me'. (194)

That Melanie would spit in Lurie's eye, as Ryan claims she would, is doubtful because, although the generation gap is being deployed to thwart the relationship between them, of all the women Lurie consorts with in the novel, it is only Melanie for whom he feels what could be called "genuine" love. Although Melanie could not be said to have fully returned this love by the time the scandal breaks (which is not to say that, in time, she could not have done so), she has clearly become a consenting sexual partner; she seems prepared to exploit this relationship for her own academic advancement purposes. Proof of Melanie's consent can be seen on a number of occasions. For example, while at first she may have been taken by surprise by Lurie's advances, when he later comes to her flat unannounced, she helps him undress her by raising her arms and then her hips (25). The only objection she has to this sexual encounter is that her cousin Pauline may find out (25).

Some critics such as Lucy Graham (2002b), Elleke Boehmer (2006), Rosemary Jolly (2006) and Grant Farred (2002a) are of the opinion that the relationship between Lurie and Melanie amounts to rape and sexual violation of the latter by the former. As I have already hinted at above, I do not quite share this viewpoint for the following reasons: Relationships between men and women do not only rely on open verbal assent and consent; there tend to be non-verbal cues as well which, when you throw social and cultural factors in the mix, render things quite complex. Similarly, who can tell what Lurie's and Melanie's unspoken code is in this relationship? For example, as I note above, during one sexual encounter, Melanie helps Lurie undress her (25). Later, she even shows up at Lurie's flat of her own accord and stays through the night and the following day (36). Further, Lurie describes the following scene in which Melanie is definitely an active participant in the sexual encounter between them:

He makes love to her one more time, on the bed in his daughter's room. It is good, as good as the first time; he is beginning to learn the way her body moves. She is quick, and greedy for experience. . . . One moment stands out in recollection, when she hooks a leg behind his buttocks to draw him in closer: as the tendon of her inner thigh tightens against him, he feels a surge of joy and desire. Who knows, he thinks: there might, despite all, be a future. (29)

It would be very surprising if a scene like this could be read as the rape of Melanie by Lurie. And even more crucially, as Lurie appropriately describes her, Melanie is of age and old enough to make her own mind (45). With the entrenchment of democracy and human rights, the individual (and that includes Melanie) has the freedom of decision and choice. And, true enough, Melanie is not an impressionable freshman (or freshwoman?); in all fairness, she is a third-year student who, at that level of study, is expected to have developed a critical and independent mind of her own to know how to manage her own life; she is capable of assent, consent and dissent. As such, we can infer that the voice that at one point describes the sexual acts between them as “undesirable to the core”, for example, or that which describes Lurie as a viper and predator, could not be from Lurie’s ego; rather it can only possibly be the voice of the society as superego intruding upon Lurie’s id and ego which characterises the ambivalence and indeterminacy of his voice. And, as I note elsewhere, such ambivalence disappears once Lurie has reconciled himself to his socially enforced disgrace.

Furthermore, extreme conditions often result into extreme reactions and so, in a novel that also invites readings about the tussle among the id, ego and superego, Lurie’s references to the Kenilworth dog points towards his desire to borrow a leaf from animal spontaneity if only to free himself from the oppressive, socially enforced strictures on relationships that goes by the name of “civilisation”. As I will observe later, Lurie reacts with similar excess when his love for Melanie has effectively been thwarted by imagining himself in various compensatory situations, including imagining himself, Melanie and the latter’s younger sister in bed together, an imaginary three-some experience he believes would be fit for a king (164). That Lurie believes Melanie and her sister and himself in bed together would be an experience fit for a king can only be seen as a return of what a censorious society, as the superego, in a quasi-Pavlovian bid, is trying to repress; and, as we know from psychoanalysis, the repressed can return with a vengeance, that is, with an excess, hence the obvious overdrive in Lurie’s imagination here.

Lurie does need some censuring though. After all, overpowered and blinded by love in its early stages, and under pressure from Melanie’s over-expectations to meet his side of the bargain — since he is having sex with her, she expects special academic favours (“fringe benefits”) from him — he tampers with the attendance register and manufactures

a grade for her to protect her from academic failure. It is on this point that Lurie may be found to have fallen short ethically.¹¹⁷

An inquiry is set up to establish the facts of the case because, as one member of the committee, Dr. Farodia Rasool, avers, “The wider community is entitled to know . . . what it is specifically that Professor Lurie acknowledges and therefore what it is that he is being censured for” (50). Further, rather than leave room for the possibility of Lurie’s genuine love for Melanie, Rassool advances a stereotypical reading of the relationship by misinterpreting Lurie’s interest in Melanie simply as part of the long history of the exploitation of non-whites by whites (53). Lurie finds all this not only puritanical but also highly intrusive, a violation of his and Melanie’s otherness. He thus argues for the separation of the public and private. In a way that is reminiscent of Mrs Curren when the police raid her house and read her diaries, Lurie similarly bemoans the disappearance of the private (91). It needs noting that what is negated by the inquiry in its rationalist and stereotypical pursuit of unequivocal fact is precisely that dimension of his relationship with Melanie that involves possible reciprocal desire and even love.

Several aspects of the way the inquiry is handled violate Lurie’s otherness. While the case is supposed to be confidential, this is not respected at all, and through the rumour-mill, Lurie is judged guilty before the facts of the case have even been established: “The gossip-mill . . . turning day and night, grinding reputations. The community of the righteous, holding their sessions in corners, over the telephone, behind closed doors. Gleeful whispers. *Schadenfreude*. First the sentence, then the trial” (42). Even one of his ex-wives, Rosalind, has heard about the scandal and she seems to use the opportunity to settle old scores with him by mocking him (43). It is Rosalind who mentions a rumour that Melanie had tried to commit suicide following her affair with Lurie (45). But this remains a rumour and Lurie himself doubts its veracity. In any case, who can divine the

¹¹⁷ But even in this Lurie is not as foolish and guilty of moral turpitude as he may at first appear to be. When Melanie begins to miss classes, and misses even a test, Lurie suspects that she is getting caught up in something and so reminds her of her academic responsibilities. Even the grade he puts on the report sheet is marked “provisional” by him (26) because he is hoping to impress on her the need to sit for the test she had missed. Lurie is possibly wittingly exploiting standard academic procedure to save the situation here. Those in the academy know that it is standard practice that if a student has a missing grade, basing on your assessment of his or her capabilities, as a lecturer you can give him or her a provisional grade pending full investigation of the case of the missing grade. And the grade Lurie gives is that of a vacillator, “neither good nor bad” (11 and 26) because, in his assessment, that is how he rates her. So, in giving the provisional grade to Melanie, Lurie is probably counting on the possibility of her eventually honouring her academic responsibilities, but that does not happen until the scandal catches up with him.

intentions of an ex-wife? But even if the rumour were to be true, who can tell what may have driven Melanie to such a desperate act: was it because of the relationship or because of the pressure from an intrusive society?

It is possibly to put Rosalind in her rightful place that Lurie expresses to her his innocence and his genuine love for Melanie, and he complains about the intrusive actions of society (44-45). As for his love for Melanie, Lurie confesses as much to her father when he says: "It was that kind of flame that your daughter kindled in me. Not hot enough to burn me, bur real, real fire" (166). In Lurie's view at least, as Michael Kochin (2004: 6) observes, there is something in his relationship with Melanie that he has not found in his previous relationships with women, and which has now been stifled by society: "Melanie, Lurie tells her father, Mr Isaacs, was, in a way, his last real spark, his last effort to get something beyond the managed business of sex with whores or the squat, neckless, Bev Shaw". In all fairness to him, it is understandable, therefore, that Lurie does not like the unwarranted and excessive intervention of the public into his private affairs.

The inquiry is not only intrusive, thereby violating Lurie's otherness, but it also threatens to infantilise him by exploiting what the commissioners regard as his vulnerable position — now that, due to this university's outdated moral code, he stands to lose his job. These attempts are fiercely resisted by Lurie. For example, he angrily rejects Aram Hakim's rather patronising suggestion that he sleeps over the charges levelled against him and come up with a more convincing answer to them later. To this suggestion, he retorts: "Don't tell me what to do, I'm not a child" (41). Also, the tribunal, and the people at large, want to turn the inquiry into a religious hearing, demanding confessions and acknowledgement of guilt from Lurie, attempts which, again, he resists. Such demands clearly amount to the violation of, or disrespect for, the otherness of the post-religious Subject and Lurie dismisses them as follows: "Confessions, apologies: why this thirst for abasement? A hush falls. They circle around him like hunters who have cornered a strange beast and do not know how to finish it off Repentance is neither here nor there. Repentance belongs to another world, to another universe of discourse" (56-58). Evidently, Lurie dislikes the self-righteous and judgemental religious undertones of a process that should be cool, balanced, and secular.

In a conversation with Lucy on the inquiry, he spells out what he thinks about such demands for public displays of supposed guilt:

It reminds me too much of Mao's China. Recantation, self-criticism, public apology. I'm old-fashioned, I would prefer simply to be put against a wall and shot. Have done with it These are puritanical times. Private life is public business. Prudence is respectable, prudence and sentiment. They wanted a spectacle: breast beating, remorse, tears if possible. A TV show, in fact. I wouldn't oblige." (66)

Mark Sanders (2002: 370), who sympathises with Lurie's refusal to apologise to the commission, argues that what Lurie objects to is "the confusion between the legal requirement of perpetrators to make a full disclosure and the unlegislated moral pressure to express remorse, make repentance, and even ask forgiveness of victims". Where Melanie is concerned, Lurie can only make a full disclosure but not express remorse because, in his terms at least, he has done nothing wrong:- his attraction to Melanie was natural and, as I have shown, develops into something other than mere lust (29), and the sex is largely consensual. As such, to force him to express remorse would be like forcing him to go against his nature (like the dog to which he refers [89]). This is something he will not allow the commission to do to him, nor is he prepared to inflict it on himself.

It is due to the hostility of the environment in which he finds himself, and his resistance to the inappropriately moralistic nature of the commission, that Lurie resigns from his position at the university and thereafter visits his daughter in Salem. The public humiliation, and the subsequent retreat from cosmopolitan Cape Town to provincial Salem, adds momentum to Lurie's change of temperament from a largely autonomous Cartesian Subject to an intersubjective, post-Cartesian one. In a sense, what happens to Lurie while in retreat in Salem continues a process that started with his awakening to genuine love and intersubjectivity in his involvement with Melanie.

Lurie's Definitive Post-Cartesian *Volte Face*: Consciousness's Embodiedness and Embeddedness

It is during his visit to Lucy that Lurie's reasonably conscious conception of his embodiedness and embodied intersubjectivity deepens. This is first signalled by his

description of Lucy upon his arrival there: “For a moment he does not recognise her Her hips and breasts are now . . . ample. Comfortably barefoot, she comes to greet him, holding her arms wide, embracing him, kissing him on the cheek” (59). From this time on, Lurie describes Lucy in terms that show her to be an “embodied” or “full-bodied” being, who is solidly “embedded” in the rural Eastern Cape environment, that is, at one with this particular patch of the earth and the elements. While Lucy is showing him around the farm, Lurie comments as follows: “They walk along an irrigation furrow. Lucy’s bare toes grip the red earth, leaving clear prints. A solid woman, embedded in her new life. Good! If this is to be what he leaves behind — this daughter, this woman — then he does not have to be ashamed” (62). According to Lurie’s perception, Lucy is not only a “solid” woman, she is also shown to be both *in* the world and *of* it. In terms of physical appearance, the solidity of Lucy contrasts starkly with the ethereal Magda, the alienated and unattractive spinster stuck with her diary in *In the Heart of the Country*. And in terms of rootedness, Lucy would confound what Johan Geerstema (2006: 109-110) notes to be Dan Roodt’s view (discussed in the second chapter) of the settlers (and Afrikaners, in particular) as “an in-between people, in the land, but not of it”.

In the form of Lucy, the novel seems to suggest, the once alienated settlers have finally arrived; that is, they have at last found some “rootedness”. Indeed, Lucy is a new type of settler. Just as she has abandoned the cosmopolitan city of Cape Town which has been her home and that of her parents’ and found for herself a niche on a smallholding in Salem, in the Eastern Cape, so, too, must all other settlers begin to view their location in the present, rather than the metropolis of Europe, as home. They must view Africa as a place in which to form a culture that will be in keeping with the environment and open to other cultural communities in the region. From this new vantage point, together with their native compatriots, they should seek to contribute towards a global culture themselves.¹¹⁸ In the words of the Caribbean poet Grace Nichols, one would say that *this place* called South Africa, where the settlers now “hang their knickers”, that’s their

¹¹⁸ Coetzee’s novel, of course, plays on the settlers’ drive to turn the colony into a mirror of the metropolis, which engenders oppressive and discriminatory relations with the natives. By setting themselves apart from the natives, they seek to maintain a veneer of the civilisation of the home country, instead of creating one that will sit well with the prevailing social, cultural and environmental demands of the colony. The result is that the colonists develop for themselves an illusory or “inauthentic” ontology (an ontology of alienation and of the alienated) rather than one that responds to their lived or existential experiences in the colonies. And, often, the academy of the colony tends to be in the forefront in engendering such alienation because, due to the cultural cringe, whatever new ideas that come out of the metropolis, even those of doubtful cogency, are eagerly, and even over-zealously, adopted in the academy of the colony and labelled *avant garde*.

home.¹¹⁹ However, as Coetzee seems to be suggesting in this novel, it is apparent that this embeddedness, this rootedness has to be earned. Fundamental transformation is required; sacrifices will have to be made, some even calling for the unmerited suffering of a cruciform logic. The events that soon unfold prove this last to be true for Lurie and Lucy.

For Lurie, as the narrative progresses, the conception of the body's embodiedness and its embeddedness in its surroundings (exemplified by Lucy's being), comes to signify the embodiedness of consciousness itself and is directly linked to his newfound intersubjective relations with animals. But, unlike the relatively rapid intra-species ontological development that he undergoes from sexual predator to a point at which he gains intimations of his intersubjectivity with Melanie Isaacs, Lurie's awakening to his inter-species intersubjectivity with the animal Other happens by degrees, slowly, and is fraught with inconsistency and contradiction. In this regard, in an essay entitled "The Dispossession of David Lurie", which collapses Coetzee and his character Lurie, Kevin O'Neill discusses some of the inconsistencies that accompany Lurie's development of a new ontology. To account for such O'Neill quotes Ian Hacking who justifies conflicted shifts in perspective by arguing that:

[T]hings aren't always consistent when one is working out one's views. Imagine that Coetzee feels the force of almost all the ideas and emotions that his characters express. He is working and living at the edge of our moral possibilities about animals. Much is fluid, changing, being created. One positively ought to hold incompatible opinions as one works and lives one's way through to their resolution. (2009: 215-216)

When Lurie arrives on Lucy's smallholding he finds that she keeps dogs in her boarding kennels for people who, for various reasons, cannot look after them anymore. But Lurie's contact with these animals does not immediately translate into a fully

¹¹⁹ As I note in the previous chapter, there is always a transitoriness to what one may call home, though, such that rootedness, as such, is a myth. This observation lends credence to the popular saying that "people don't have roots, they have feet." Home maybe where your heart is but it is also everywhere you have been to because the fact of the matter is that we never really leave the places we emigrate from. Besides our being ontologically indebted to the places we have been at the level of consciousness, often we leave bits and pieces of ourselves there too, and with our DNA signature on them: the umbilical cords and afterbirths, fingernails and toenails that we cut, dead cells that we shed as we shower or scratch, the hair we shave off the various parts of our bodies, the mucus, semen and vaginal fluids we secrete while in those places, etc. As such, ultimately, home seems to be everywhere one has been to although one can consciously choose a specific location and call it home. For the period that one chooses to be in a specific place, one has to sink whatever roots one can in that place, at that material time.

acknowledged sense of his intersubjectivity with them. In fact, as I have already noted, the prevalence of Lurie's Cartesian view of animals at this stage in the novel is evident in his dismissal of animal rights activists, describing their lifestyle as a sort of religion: "I . . . find it hard to whip up an interest in the subject. It's admirable what you do . . . but to me animal-welfare people are a bit like Christians of a certain kind. Everyone is so cheerful . . . that after a while you itch to go off and do some raping and pillaging. Or to kick a cat" (73). Lurie has described the age he lives in as post-religious (4) and so anything that seems to border on, or approximate, religion can only be an object of his scorn. A little later, he again asserts that kindness to animals should be motivated by generosity rather than ontological obligation (74).¹²⁰ In time, though, Lurie's position changes from the patronising simple generosity that he urges above, to an acknowledgement of the mutuality of his ontological being with animals as fellow embodied beings in their own right, primarily, as well as the intersubjective embodied consciousness that he shares with them.

In the early stages of this ontological journey Lurie notes that Petrus, who takes care of the dogs in the kennels, calls himself the "dog-man: "You look after the dogs," he says to break the silence. "I look after the dogs and I work in the garden. Yes.' Petrus gives a broad smile. 'I am the gardener and the dog-man.' He reflects for a moment. 'The dog-man', he repeats, savouring the phrase" (64). At this stage this "dog-man" talk is couched in literal, professional terms, and Petrus, too, means it in that sense. Not that Petrus likes being the dog-man, but he knows that soon he will no longer be one, having recently just bought part of the farm from Lucy with a government grant through the land resettlement programme for previously disadvantaged blacks. But in an interesting reversal of roles, it is Lurie who, later in the novel becomes the "dog-man", both literally and ontologically. As I shall show, Lurie, besides being a *psychopomp*, consciously becomes, or rather acknowledges, being the "dog-man" in the post-binary, intersubjective, ontological sense of the concept too.

¹²⁰ Lucy, on the other hand, is dedicated to the Animal Welfare movement for reasons of personal salvation. This is signalled in her reference to belief in the transmigration of souls found in some Eastern religions (74). In practical terms, however, she complains about how, in post-Apartheid South Africa, animals do not count for much: "There is no funding any longer. On the list of the nation's priorities, animals come nowhere. . . . They are part of the furniture, part of the alarm system. They do us the honour of treating us like gods, and we respond by treating them like things" (73 and 78). As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, in an official post-imperial age, animals have become the new minority, the new "thingified" Other, ill-treated even by those who formerly experienced oppression themselves who, now in power, are severely limiting funding for animal welfare.

Nevertheless, as previously noted, this transformation in Lurie's subjectivity does not happen by conscious choice, and is a tortured and lengthy one. To begin with, it is at Lucy's behest that Lurie finally agrees to help out at the animal clinic run by Bev Shaw. And it is again in response to Lucy's urging that he unexpectedly takes his first tentative steps towards becoming an ontological "dog-man". Initially, Lucy suggests that he helps with feeding the dogs in her boarding kennels, giving Petrus a hand, as it were. Reluctantly, Lurie accepts the task but attaches clear ontological conditions to his consent: "Alright, I'll do it. But only as long as I don't have to become a better person. I am not prepared to be reformed. I want to go on being myself. I'll do it on that basis" (77). However, it is while he is carrying out these tasks that he begins to have an inkling of his oneness with the animal Other. Initially, the loneliness of one of the dogs called Katy (who has offspring that she has become estranged from) strikes a chord with his own self-imposed exile from Cape Town and Melanie: "For some reason he enters the old dog's cage, tickles her behind the ears. 'Abandoned, are we?' he murmurs. He stretches out beside her on the bare concrete. Above is the pale blue sky. His limbs relax" (78). This act suggests an incipient consciousness of the subconsciously felt irruption of the animal Other into Lurie's previously otherwise "autonomous Self", the intimations of which, as I have already noted, begin with his encounter with Melanie.

However, just as he is initially ambivalent about whether he is doing the right thing in having a relationship with Melanie, Lurie, upon coming to "himself", finds the experience with Katy disquieting, and so, to reassure his unsettled being, resorts to the familiar position he has held hitherto by citing Aquinas and Descartes's argument that animals do not have proper souls (78). Lurie's reaction here may be explained in terms of the newness that accompanies the moment of the encounter: on such occasions, the newness of the situation can be too threatening that the Subject resorts to the familiar crutches of habit and convention to try and contain the dread. In "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee", it will be remembered, the protagonist, faced with vast expanses of space on the veldt, finds the experience disquieting. Accustomed as he is to being in control, he experiences a breakdown of being when he fails to contain this seemingly boundless space. Since the land's otherness eludes his control, he experiences this overwhelming feeling not as an instance of the Kantian sublime, but as angst and ennui. In the present case, too, from time to time Lurie returns to the familiar discourse of

discrimination against animals in order to cope with his unsettling sense of his incipient intersubjectivity with them. Ultimately, though, he fails to locate and contain this experience within this discourse.¹²¹

It follows, then, that Lurie, despite his recidivism, is changing; that his conception of ontological selfhood is being transformed. The sheer undeniability of the extreme animal suffering he witnesses first-hand at Bev Shaw's clinic provides further momentum to this process. In the following passage, the reader witnesses one instance of the suffering that Lurie witnesses. It tells of an injured goat brought by an old woman for treatment or, rather, castration: "The goat, a full grown, buck, can barely walk. One half of its scrotum, yellow and purple, is swollen like a balloon; the other half is a mass of caked blood and dirt. He has been savaged by dogs, the old woman says" (82). As I have noted in my analyses of his other novels, Coetzee sometimes presents his readers with naturalistic-cum-realistic descriptions of suffering that gesture toward the un-ignorable existence of a brute reality that is independent of the Subject's vested interests. The intended aim seems to be to shock readers into a new, embodied awareness of being; to argue that brute reality is not just a construct and a fancy of the autonomous Cartesian Subject and, therefore, subject to Cartesian doubt.

Lurie's further awakening continues with his bonding with Petrus's slaughter sheep. After Petrus tethers the sheep in an area where there is no grazing, Lurie responds to their plight by taking them to a place where there is some (123). His subsequent reflection on Petrus's neglectful attitude invokes, with conscious irony on his part, the Cartesian view of animals as a justification for their instrumentalist treatment by human beings: "Sheep do not own themselves, do not own their lives. They exist to be used, every last ounce of them . . . except perhaps the gall bladder, which no one will eat. Descartes should have

¹²¹ Another instance of this resort to the familiar comes after Lurie has been disfigured by the robbers-cum-rapists, who pour methylyated spirits on him and set him alight. Lurie's response to the trauma of having been attacked by Lucy's rapists is as follows: "Just an after-effect, he tells himself, an after-effect of the invasion. In a while the organism will repair itself, and I, the ghost within it, will be my old self again. But the truth, he knows, is otherwise." (107-108). Like Eugene Dawn and Mrs Curren before him, it is easy to notice here how Lurie, too, is trying to dissociate himself from himself, splitting what he narrowly regards as his disembodied mind from his un-ignorably painful body. He goes back to his conception of himself as a Cartesian autonomous Subject, with what he calls the "I" merely encased in a body — reminiscent of J.J. Smart's "Ghost in a Machine" analogy that I cited in my introductory chapter. In this kind of ontological conception, when the body is in trouble, the supposedly immaterial "I" can conveniently ignore it, so he supposes. But Lurie fails to delude himself when he feels the pain come down on him without letting up and so he despairs because of the failure of the disassociation or, more properly, the failure of the Cartesian "I" to control its body.

thought of that, the soul, suspended in the dark, bitter gall, hiding” (124). This statement refers to Descartes’ attempt to resolve the conundrum concomitant on the dualism of mind and body: that is, while the two appear to be different, in a sense diametrically opposed, they nevertheless seem to interact. Descartes famously attributed this interaction to the pineal gland.¹²²

What initially moves Lurie to transfer the sheep to pasture is their doleful bleating which is to him, “objectively”, a sign of extreme discomfort (123). He even considers buying the sheep from Petrus to alleviate their distress, but decides against doing so because he thinks that such an action will not accomplish much (126). This scene is reminiscent of the one in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, in which the Magistrate is unsettled by the crying baby (1982: 21). From my discussion of this scene in the third chapter of this thesis, it will be recalled that, once the crying stops, the Magistrate is moved to ascertain what has happened, and is profoundly disturbed to find that the baby has died. Like Lurie, who considers buying the sheep but does not do so, the Magistrate, appalled by the treatment of the Barbarians, considers resigning his position, but does not do so because he feels that he will simply be replaced and that the injustices will therefore continue. Similarly, in *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren changes her mind about immolating herself in protest against state oppression of blacks in the townships. Coetzee’s point seems to be that small symbolic acts and outward shows cannot make much difference in contexts of oppression and suffering. What is needed, instead, is a fundamental, internal shift in our ontological conception of Self-Other relations. For Coetzee, contrary to the Cartesian supposedly disembodied *cogito*, the body, in and of itself, must become a site of a new form of consciousness — an embodied consciousness. As I have noted elsewhere, my observation in this study, and perhaps also that of David Attwell (2006: 37-38), is that, for Coetzee, the acknowledgement of the body goes beyond our realisation that we are embodied and our Others are also embodied beings, subject to the similar feelings and vulnerabilities; but that we are, in an embodied way, also intersubjective with them and as

¹²² Descartes found that, while all parts of the brain are duplicated in both hemispheres, they share the pineal gland. Accordingly, he assumed that it must be the point at which mind and body meet, and through which the mind gives instructions to the body. To maintain the dichotomy, though, he emphasised that this was without reciprocal action by the body on the mind. In the passage above, in place of the pineal gland, Lurie proposes the gall bladder, as it is the only part of the animal that is not consumed. For him, this is due not to the fact that gall is poisonous to humans, but because they are afraid of the animal soul hiding in the gland, a deliberate conjecture that overturns the Cartesian tradition of denying souls to the animal Other.

such ethically bound with them in an ontologically imperative, if not altogether compelling, way.

From being moved by the bleating of the sheep, Lurie consciously begins to feel attached to the animal Other, although he cannot as yet explain the sources or workings of this attachment:

A bond seems to have come into existence between himself and the two Persians [the sheep], he does not know how. The bond is not one of affection. It is not even a bond with these two in particular, whom he could not pick out from a mob in a field. Nevertheless, suddenly and without reason, their lot has become important to him. He stands before them, under the sun, waiting for the buzz in his mind to settle, waiting for a sign. (126)

First and foremost, I need to note that if an unconscious bond of consciousness develops between Lurie and the sheep, one can only conclude that, according to J.M. Coetzee, the Other is not wholly or radically external to the Self — otherwise there would be no bond involving consciousness *between* them since such a bond would necessarily involve something existing across two Subjects. By the same token, the Other is also not wholly within the Self since aspects of that Other become a part of the Self only as a representation. This is why, in *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren, talking about her others, can say of Vercueil that “[h]e is and is not I” (1998: 9). Finally, the Other does not depend on the Self for its existence; it is a brute reality, a given — a point that Elizabeth Costello makes with her example of the indifferent frogs of Dulgannon in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003).

Significantly, Lurie, in his encounter with the sheep, denies that he is bonding with these two individual sheep in particular, and adds that he would not be able to pick them out in a herd (126). Of course, it is these two sheep that he is bonding with, at this material time, but he is simply in denial about such a possibility because it is too unsettling for one who has previously subscribed to a Cartesian view on the difference between mind and body, human and animal. In Cartesian parlance, by intimating that there is a co-extensive bond between himself and the sheep, across the species, Lurie understands that he would be accused of committing what is called a “category error” because it is anathema within Cartesianism to mix categories of being. As a rule, Cartesianism delineates clear-cut and, often, dichotomous boundaries among beings. As is the case in his relationship with Melanie, he has to protect himself from a reality to which he has

hitherto been consciously or unconsciously blind by rationalising his experience in Platonic terms, that is, by presuming that he may have had the idea of the sheep before his encounter with the actual sheep. Like Mrs Curren and the tramps on Mill Street whom she saw but never “perceived” until her encounter with Vercueil, Lurie has “seen” sheep before but has never perceived them prior to this moment of awakening. Soon, though, the sheep’s individuality asserts itself and he confesses that their lot has become important to him. This, of course, is why he unties the sheep and takes them to a spot where they can graze. Evidently, he does so because he responds to their specificity as embodied beings rather than to a Platonic idea of sheep.

I should add that a similar ontological process is discernible in Lurie’s attachment to dogs. At first, he sees several dogs in Lucy’s kennels and then he is drawn to one in particular, the aforementioned Katy. Once individuated in his ontological conception, he feels a solid ontological mutual implication and intersubjectivity with particular animals. In all these processes, however, we see at work what Lucy Graham (2002a: 4), talking of Coetzee’s recent writing up to the time of *Disgrace*, and following Theodor Adorno’s (1974) injunction on a reconceived, post-Cartesian task of thought, describes as “a vision of the world *in the absence of grace*, where the only possibility for ethical action may be through non-violent *‘felt contact’* with fellow creatures” (second italics mine).

Significantly, Lurie remembers how Bev Shaw “communicates” with the animals that are brought to the animal welfare clinic: “How does she get it right, this communion with animals? Some trick he does not have. One has to be a certain kind of person, perhaps, with fewer complications”(126). Since we are aware of Lurie’s belief in embodiedness, especially as it manifests itself in his views on Lucy’s physical appearance, and on the workings of the human body and its sexual rhythms, we have some sense of what happens during these Self-Other encounters. Interestingly, the bond between Lurie and the sheep intimated here is not even one of affection per se; like most encounters, it develops despite the Subject’s conscious Self. In *Age of Iron*, for example, we are presented with a similar scenario in the relationship between Mrs Curren and the “unlovable”, Vercueil and John; she comes to realise that she has to love them *despite* herself.

Lurie is clearly unsettled by his encounter with the sheep, as emerges when he considers declining the invitation to Petrus's party at which the two sheep will be served up for dinner. On a conscious level, though, he is not fully aware of the fundamental transformation he is undergoing and, as we have seen, he still seeks refuge in his long-held views about animals in order to come to terms with their fate. Crucially, however, it is possible to discern in Lurie some form of nascent awareness of the change he is undergoing when he tells Lucy that, while he still does not believe "that animals have properly individual lives", he is nonetheless "disturbed" by the treatment of the two Persians (126-127). Clearly, Lurie is becoming aware of a fundamental ontological shift, an irruption of otherness into his Self. This ontological change is also apparent from the fact that the initially gradual shift Lurie's generalised view of animals to more specific, conscious, intersubjective ontological relations with them becomes increasingly pronounced as the novel proceeds. So, for instance, while still helping out at the Animal Welfare clinic, he comes to focus on a specific dog:

Of the dogs in the holding pen, there is one he has come to feel a particular fondness for. It is a young male with a withered left hindquarter which it drags behind it. Whether it was born like that he does not know. No visitor has shown an interest in adopting it. Its period of grace is almost over; soon it will have to submit to the needle. (215)

Out of respect for the otherness of this dog, Lurie even refrains from giving it a name because doing so would reduce it to a term in his story. He wants to preserve its otherness and have a "direct", pre-verbal or post-verbal, relationship with it: "It is not his in any sense; he has been careful not to give it a name (though Bev Shaw refers to it as *Drieprout*); nevertheless, he is *sensible* of a generous affection streaming out *toward* him from the dog. Arbitrarily, unconditionally, *he has been adopted*; the dog would die for him, he knows" (215, emphasis mine). We have here, again, a classic example of the Self becoming ontologically aware of the Other in the constitution of his/her subjectivity, and of his/her Self in the constitution of the Other. Lurie feels the dog's affection *toward* him and also conceives that he has been adopted *by* it; that it would die for him. Evidently, Lurie's attachment to the Other has moved from a vague, generalised form, to a personalised and particular one.¹²³

¹²³ If Lurie would paid closer attention to this dog, he might eventually come up with a name that does not reduce it to a term in his story but one that has a genuine ontological and respectful connection between

By this stage, Lurie has become not just the literal dog-man that Petrus considered himself to have been (a role the latter quickly casts off as soon as he comes into some independent means); but rather, *a la* Deleuze and Guattari (1993), a “dog-man” consciousness-wise that transcends the binary opposition between human and animal. As Travis Mason so insightfully observes, Lurie undergoes an ontological transformation of which he is cognisant:

While dog-man is a reference to one of Petrus’s roles on the farm, it syntactically introduces the possibility of David becoming, literally, a dog-man, someone with characteristics of a dog and a human. The term also recalls Mrs Curren’s reaction to Vercueil staring back at her once, ‘yellow-eyed, defiant. Dog-man!’ she thinks (56). Whatever canine characteristics Coetzee’s characters might possess, or seem to possess, it remains important that they represent an instance of crossing the species boundary; by becoming dog-men, these characters are not necessarily any less human, but they seem to possess the capacity for understanding — call it a sympathetic imagination — that reaches beyond the mere human. (2006: 136-137)

Later, Mason (2006: 138) adds the following caveat: “If the transgression of a species boundary is too radical a reading . . . the pronominal shiftiness in this passage [describing David as a dog-man] can still be read within a political context as a challenge to a particular type of person’s — white, male, human — ownership of voice”. In my view, though, Lurie, given his felt contact” (*a la* Adorno) with animals, literally becomes an ontological “dog-man” in terms of the processes of his consciousness.¹²⁴

himself and it. Furthermore, the dog is fascinated by the sound of Lucy’s Banjo. Lurie bought the Banjo for Lucy on the streets of Kwa Mashu, a township outside Durban, and he has suddenly decided to use it in his composition of the Teresa-Byron opera that he has been working on for some time now. It is gratifying to note that existents that were once regarded as insignificant to Lurie (such as the dog and the banjo) suddenly assume a new significance, heightening and enriching his awareness of being/life and enabling him, in existentialist terms, to begin to “exist” rather than just “live” as he was wont to do before. It needs noting that Existentialism distinguishes between “existing” and “living”. Living is what all beings that are alive do, while existing is the being’s awareness of the conditions or state of its own being. Lurie comes to exist at the point when he acknowledges his ontological indebtedness to his Others and his mutual implication with them.

¹²⁴ Geoffrey Baker (2004: 44) also notes that humans are compared to animals and animals to humans in this novel. But he thinks that this is a very bad strategy and condemns it because, for him, “when the degree of alterity to which the animal kingdom lays claim is degraded by constant comparison to the human world, the overall punch and power of human sympathy toward the lives of animal others is weakened”. This argument simply pays lip-service to animal subjectivity and the possibility of humans being ontologically intersubjective with them. How constantly pairing humans and animals would lead to the weakening of human sympathy towards animals is not explained. Would it not, in fact, strengthen such sympathy instead?

Instead of reading them symbolically, I maintain that Lurie's experiences with his animal others posit the possibility of a post-Cartesian subjectivity founded on an embodied ontology. Mason himself earnestly expresses the hope, towards the end of his article, that texts such as *Disgrace* and *The Lives of Animals* "participate in a project the post-colonial-Eco critic Graham Huggan identifies as 'imagining alternative futures in which our current ways of looking at ourselves and our relation to the world might be creatively transformed'" (143).¹²⁵

Any attempt to trace Lurie's development of an embodied ontological consciousness would not be complete without considering the pivotal and controversial scene in which he "gives up" the dog to be euthanized by Bev Shaw. His understanding is that he is doing this generously, for the dog's sake. But it is not clear whether the dog itself is comfortable with being euthanized — has Lurie asked its opinion on this? To all appearances, the dog would probably prefer to listen to Lucy's banjo, and radiate its affection towards Lurie for the rest of its life. It seems, then, that Lurie has othered the dog, just as he has spent most of his life othering all his Others. There is thus an *aporia* or a double-bind here.

In this regard, Geoffrey Baker's following, searching question is germane to my discussion: what is one to think of a sympathy, of a love, whose resolution is a merciful murder, whose gift is death? Coetzee refuses to deliver into his reader's hands and heart a single-minded, unproblematical strategy for social betterment" (2004: 43). Baker here rehearses Derrida's argument in *The Gift of Death*, namely that privileged humans, by not doing much to help those in need, are giving them the gift of death, in the same way that Abraham was willing to give his son Isaac this gift by sacrificing him to God, an act which, for Derrida, is too atrocious for anyone even to contemplate (1996: 57-81). This is not to say that Coetzee is obliged to provide an unproblematical solution to this and other problems that he raises in his novel — as Baker seemingly requires of him. Yet to those who do not believe in the ethicality of euthanasia, the novel's ending obviously compromises the sympathies they were developing towards Lurie.

¹²⁵ In Coetzee's work, the thematisation of such a transformation is also apparent in *Diary of a Bad Year* (2007: 59), where he gestures toward what a unified "embodied experience" would seem like in the absence of traditional conceptions of human language. A dog in pain, he writes, conceives of itself not as *I have pain* or *I am in pain*, but as *I am pain*. Similarly, a bird with a broken wing, failing to launch into flight, does not say to itself *I have a broken wing*; but simply thinks *I cannot*. One can imagine Lurie moving from thinking that he has pain when his assailants pour methylated spirits on him and set him alight, to saying *I am pain*; from saying *I have a body*, to saying *I am a body*; from saying *I have a dog or a sheep*, to *I am a dog-man, I am a sheep-man*, and so on and so forth.

Lucy's Otherness and Ontological Selflessness

Lurie's newfound conception of his being, and his giving up of the dog he has bonded with, coincides with his eventual letting go of his compulsion to try and control Lucy, his daughter. Lucy's struggle to gain her independence from her father begins with her moving away from her parents' home in the metropolis that is Cape Town, and its urban charm, to settle for a more rural and pastoral existence in Eastern Cape. But this sense of independence gains further momentum in the wake of her gang-rape. For reasons best known to herself, Lucy does not want to report the rape to the police, much to Lurie's disappointment. In fact, she tells him the following in this regard: "David, when people ask, would you mind keeping to your story, to what happened to you? You tell what happened to you, I tell what happened to me" (99). Clearly, Lucy is conscious of her own subjectivity – in effect, she is demanding that her otherness be respected. This awareness also emerges in the following very controversial decisions that she takes after her rape: choosing to continue living in the insecure house in which she was attacked (105), refusing to lay a charge against her attackers (112), and, after she finds out she has fallen pregnant, deciding to keep, rather than abort, the child (197-198). Eventually, she even elects to become Petrus's third "wife" in exchange for protection, and the assurance that she may continue living on the land she has come to identify with (204).

Some critics (see, for example, Elleke Boehmer [2003 and 2006]; Grant Farred [2002a] and Azila Reisenberger [2002]) have interpreted Lucy's actions as a continuation of the objectification of women. Reisenberger (2002: 110), for instance, launches a personal attack on Coetzee for perpetuating an old tradition of propagating women's subservience, by subscribing to the notion of the woman as "a thing to own, or territory that has to be marked". For her, Coetzee belongs to a long line of androcentric scribes that stretches from Old Testament times and includes what she thinks was the *laissez-faire* reaction of Jacob to the rape of his daughter Dinah and that of David to the rape of his daughter Tamar (2002: 114).

Farred's essay, on the other hand, starts on a positive note by considering the virtues of the border (in this case, the Eastern Cape as frontier), with its potential for hybridity and indeterminacy, but then shifts its focus to the border's negative aspects, that is, its lawlessness and recalcitrance, which account for the rape of Lucy (2002a: 19). He then interprets Lucy's reaction to her violation as complicity with this lawlessness and

therefore the resistance-to-change ethic of the border: “Lucy cannot speak her violation but she can bear manifest testimony to it: the future mixed-race child which the white lesbian mother will bear enunciates her recently violated past. But it is, more importantly, the most enduring symbol of her refusal to resist. Through the child her complicity is complete, her capacity for resistance totally eroded”. Readings of Lucy’s reaction such as Farred’s here perhaps do not help the discussion. One detects a note that seems to suggest that it is the mixed-race nature of the child, and Lucy’s lesbianism, more than anything else, that Farred takes issue with here. Lucy’s other possible motives are totally ignored in favour of an arguably racist, binaric and homophobic reading of her reaction.

Georgina Horrel (2002: np), who also provides a reading of the novel that is inflected in the binaric terms of gender and race, argues that “it is on the body of Lucy that the terms of white South Africans’ future ‘remembering’ are ultimately sketched”. What Horrel comments on and yet plays down as an afterthought, is that Lurie is himself burned during the attack. But, also, outside of the novel (and this is a point Lurie gestures toward in what Farred has called “the mundanacity of violence and crime” in South Africa [2002b:354]), it must be admitted that, while some of the violence in South Africa is racially motivated, most of it is not since black on black violence is even more prevalent; blacks fall victim to crime of all sorts as well, including rape, physical assault and even murder. As I note below, true, it is difficult to understand Lucy’s decisions in the wake of her rape. But what all these critics tend to overlook is that Lucy becomes a subject at the very point that she *chooses* to make decisions that defy everyone else’s (including Lurie’s) expectations. As I note elsewhere (see Mfunne, 2009), to be able to exercise freedom of choice, no matter how “foolish” the choice one makes may seem, is a fundamental marker of agency and, with it, of subjecthood. By insisting on wanting to know what exactly happened during the rape, and, subsequently, by trying to force Lucy to do what she does not wish to do, Lurie comes to resemble the Magistrate, whose invasive inquiries into the barbarian girl’s torture succeed only in othering her. What both Lucy and the barbarian girl require of their male counterparts in the two novels in question is that they respect their subjecthood, their otherness.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ It is quite strange that someone advocating such a radical ethics (as the one he shows Lucy espousing in this novel) could be charged with perpetuating racism in the same text. I think that Coetzee has been grossly misunderstood in the larger South African society beyond certain sectors of the academy — the only people on record who came to his defence in the wake of the allegations of racism contained in the ANC submission to the Human Rights Commission on Racism in the Media (2001) are David Attwell

The fact that she does not report the rape to the police does not necessarily make of Lucy a “silenced woman.” Had she been silenced, she would indeed have been objectified. The fact of the matter, though, is that she, for reasons best known to herself, chooses silence as a response to her predicament – she is therefore not a “silenced woman”, but a “silent woman”. In this regard, she asserts as follows, and with “finality”: “As far as I am concerned, what happened to me is a purely private matter. In another time, in another place it might be held to be a public matter. But in this place, at this time, it is not. It is my business, mine alone” (112).

Critics such as Benita Parry (1996), Mike Marais (1989c, 2001b and 2002) and others, have explored how silence can both be a sign of subjugation, on the one hand, and of resistance or self-assertion, on the other. Parry (1996: 44) quotes other critics such as Gayatri Spivak, Graham Huggan and Paola Splendore who share this view of the silence of Coetzee’s traditionally othered characters. Marais, especially, sees Coetzee’s characters as exemplifying a silence of resistance. For instance, in “The Hermeneutics of Empire”, he (1996: 73-ff) considers the empowering role of silence in Coetzee’s writing, and, later (2002: 33ff), does so with specific reference to Lucy herself. It should also be noted in the context of this debate on the role of silence in Coetzee’s fiction that it is simply not the case that every encounter between the Self and the Other results into the Hegelian Master/Slave struggle or Cartesian othering. For example, in “Digesting Michael K/*Michael K*” Marais (1989a: 179) observes, with reference to the character of Michael K, that the novel dramatises the possibility of escaping contestatory relations and entertains the possibility of establishing relations without dominance.¹²⁷

(2003) and Derek Attridge (2005). Surely for people who know where Coetzee has come from, and what he has stood for as he lays himself bare in the final interview with David Attwell in *Doubling the Point*, he should have been given the benefit of the doubt. But South African society remains polarised, and Coetzee has fitted into neither of the poles and that has caused untold trouble for him. When asked about whether he thought himself Afrikaner, Coetzee (1992: 342) found the label not quite sticking to him and so he proposed in its place a dream of a people’s pool of indiscernible ethnos: “What am I, then, in this ethnic-linguistic sense? I am one of many people in this country who have become detached from their ethnic roots, whether those roots were in Dutch South Africa or Indonesia or Britain or Greece or wherever, and have joined a pool of no recognizable *ethnos* whose language of exchange is English. These people are not, strictly speaking, “English South Africans”, since a large proportion of them — myself included — are not of British ancestry. They are merely South Africans (itself a mere name of convenience) whose native tongue, the tongue they have been born to, is English. And, as the pool has no discernible ethnos, so one day I hope it will have no predominant colour, as more ‘people of colour’ drift into it. A pool, I would hope then, in which differences wash away”.

¹²⁷ Marais makes numerous other references to the ethical efficacy of silence in Coetzee’s work (see, for example, Marais [2001b]; [1989c: 200]). Similarly, Devi Sarinjevie (2001: 9) sees Michael K’s relationship

In a similar vein, I will venture to argue that, in *Disgrace*, Lucy's silence in the aftermath of her rape, is one of self-assertion and non-contestation, rather than subjugation. One could say that, through Lucy Lurie, Coetzee stages his deep respect for the cruciform logic that he broaches in *Age of Iron* and in his interview with David Attwell (1992: 337). Her refusal to lay a charge against her violators and her decision to keep the child that results from her violation set the ground for breaking the contestatory relations that continue to characterise the society that Coetzee depicts in his writings. Through her response, Lucy transcends the contestatory relations upon which colonialism and gender domination are premised and she achieves this transcendence through a cruciform logic. As I have noted elsewhere, rape cannot be used as a means of exacting atonement for Apartheid. Despite the need for a redistribution of resources in the post-Apartheid period, white women cannot be part of the booty that is shared (Both Louise Bethlehem [2003: 180] and J.B. Wood [1999, qtd. by Marais, 2000b] make this point very clear). In bearing the unmerited punishment that is meted out to her, and through her selfless response to it, Lucy's approach exemplifies Coetzee's cruciform logic (1992: 337), which I explored in my introductory chapter.

As I also mention elsewhere, through her embeddedness in her environment (as is attested to by her refusal to relocate after her rape), Lucy, like Mrs Curren before her, develops an ontological connection to the land which changes her status as "settler", and points to a similar possibility in the "settler" community as a whole. However, as I have indicated, this changed status would have to derive from a new conception of subjectivity, a forfeiture of the Cartesian ontology of separateness and opposition, and the development of a sympathetic imagination, which would enable an intersubjective relationship with the land and all its inhabitants. In extreme cases, even an appeal to a cruciform logic might be required of the former settlers. In forgiving her rapists, Lucy is not only exhibiting a generosity of being here. Ever embedded in her environment, she does not believe that there is a one-size-fits-all solution to all situations, or that one can take a decision in a vacuum, out of context. Instead, the decision itself needs to be embedded in the environment of the specific circumstances in which it is taken. There is

with the land as being characterised by "equality and reciprocity with the earth and its fruits", thereby contrasting this relationship with that between K and his fellow humans, who invariably seek to reduce him to a term in their history.

a pragmatism to her stance, and a sense of imagination too, for it is taken at a particular historical juncture and in a particular social context. Only in a Nietzschean world does a wrong always demand a like response.¹²⁸

It is also in terms of Lucy's generosity and selflessness of being, and of the need to renegotiate contestatory relations¹²⁹ that have characterised South African society under colonialism, that Kim Middleton and Julie Townsend (2009: 128-135) read Lucy's response to her sexual assault. In fact, by the time we meet her, Lucy has already become a *muntu*, contrary to Lurie's expectations of a daughter raised by city intellectuals like himself and her mother (60-61). In this regard, although not approving of what happens to Lucy in this text, Georgina Horrell notes this character's radical departure from the domineering stance of imperialism:

Lucy is described in terms that initially inscribe her as a link to the colonial past of South Africa. She owns and cultivates land, leaving the print of her foot clearly on the soil. In addition, she is a woman who in many ways is well suited to 'settler' life: at once capable and nurturing, independent yet undeniably 'feminine' in her ability to create homely order Not only does Lucy appear to have ameliorated the aggressive thrust of old-style colonial advance, but the land which she bought with the assistance of her father is no longer owned in the original way: she shares it with Petrus, her 'co-proprietor.' It would indeed seem that 'history had learnt a lesson', that Lucy represents a new way for white people to live in Africa. . . . At this point she may be read as a sign of white hope, apparently secure in her position on the land, while yet undoing the grasping arrogance of the past (2002: 27)

Lucy wants to remain on the smallholding, whatever the cost, because, by way of a special type of intentionality, she conceives of herself as being attached to the land, even

¹²⁸ It is this understanding, this generosity and selflessness of being, which is a central tenet of the African philosophy of being called *ubuntu*, which, together with Christianity, also guided the operations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Ubuntu* means being human, in the sense of being cognizant of the attributes that characterise an interdependent and intersubjective ontology that make for a humane society. Similarly, one could say that Lucy has been humanised and in that sense is a *muntu* par-excellence. In this regard, it is also important to note that *ubuntu's* ontological basis is non-domineering and non-vengeful intersubjectivity.

¹²⁹ In an interview with David Attwell to which I have referred earlier, when asked if he would regard himself as an Afrikaner, Coetzee (1992: 342-343) is at pains to define who he is, at the same time he does not want to contest the labels put on him by others because "In my heart I am so sick of contestation — contestation and the spectacle of contestation". What he does admit to ultimately is his complicity in the crime of colonialism, remarking, wryly: "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". Coetzee's eschewal of contestation should explain the Cruciform logic that he applies to Lucy's unusually selfless response to her violation in this novel.

as she realises that she needs to make concessions to those formerly dispossessed. Accordingly, this character's decision adds substance to Gareth Cornwell's point that by focussing on Lucy's reaction as a victim "Coetzee appears to be dramatizing just how radical a transformation white South Africans may be required to undergo, as individuals and as society, to recover a measure of the 'grace' so conspicuously absent in their land" (2002: 314-318).

Margaret Van Der Waal also notes that this novel is about the formation of a new identity, especially by white South Africans, and that it thematises the need for re-evaluation of their Eurocentrism as a pre-requisite for amicable co-existence with the other races:

It (that is, Eurocentrism) forms the foundation of the cultural identity of most of the minority of inhabitants in South Africa that is mainly whites, living in the country today. After the political change of 1994, South Africa entered a new era where whites had to hand over political power to a democratically elected ANC government. The change of government not only necessitated the acceptance of the loss of political power, but also demanded a re-evaluation of the cultural identity of white South Africans. (2001: 5)¹³⁰

From the evidence of Cornwell's and Waal's readings, Lucy's actions are not without basis, as some critics are wont to allege. Indeed, they signify, in a specific way, the need for certain fundamental ontological changes among whites.

The question that arises at this point is, of course, how David Lurie ultimately responds to Lucy's assertion of her subjecthood in making the decisions that she does. When Lucy decides to give up her claim to ownership of her farm and to hand it over to Petrus, she explains her decision to Lurie as follows: "Yes, I agree, it is humiliating. But perhaps that is a good point to start from again. Perhaps that is what I must learn to accept. To start at ground level. With nothing. Not with nothing but. With nothing. No cards, no

¹³⁰ Van Der Waal, after noting a corresponding pan-African extremism on the part of some Africans that should be avoided, argues that "black and white South Africans have been too complicit with/in one another for a period of over 300 years to allow an either/or situation." She also cites this as a reason why, in the wake of her rape, Lucy refuses the option of leaving the country as suggested to her by Lurie.

weapons, no property, no rights, no dignity” (203). To this, Lurie replies with a question phrased as a statement: “Like a dog?” (203).

As in the case of the dog that Lurie gives up at the end of the novel, we are here caught up in a double-bind. Lurie’s reference to Lucy wanting to start afresh without “rights or dignity” as being like a dog is reminiscent of Randy Malamud’s argument that I started a discussion of this novel with (2003: 3-4). Lurie, the new student of intersubjective being with animals, should be the last one to describe dogs in these terms.¹³¹ Nevertheless, Lurie’s words do suggest his resigned acceptance of his daughter’s demands for subjecthood (218) — just as earlier in the novel he had to acknowledge the subjecthood of Soraya when she demanded that he desist from calling her at home (10)— just as the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* acknowledges the subjecthood to the barbarian girl at the point when she refuses to come back with him to the fort as he hands her over to her people (77-78).

What Lurie’s resignation intimates, however, is a recognition that Lucy is not speaking on behalf of anyone but herself, and therefore that he, and the readers of the novel, can only respect her otherness (in much the same way that he would have liked society to have acknowledged and respected his and Melanie’s otherness). It is this non-negotiable demand that one respect the otherness of the Other, and also acknowledge an ontological fellow-feeling and intersubjectivity with that Other (this time not simply through the sympathetic imagination, but, actually, the empathetic one), that form the subject of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), to a discussion of which I now turn.

¹³¹ Such lapses as we see in Lurie here can be explained. Coetzee creates in Lurie, as he did in the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, and Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron*, characters who are credible and true to life, as human-all-too-human. Just like the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1983), perhaps the greatest lesson Lurie learns from his experiences is that, since social prejudice tends to be deeply ingrained, it is a significant step just to have managed to cultivate an open mind, being open to being challenged and corrected, and develop an attitude of self-criticism.

Chapter Six

Elizabeth Costello: The Empathetic Imagination

“Without infinity we would have no mathematics But that does not mean that infinity exists. Infinity is just a construct, a human construct.” (Coetzee, 2003: 8)

Realism has never been comfortable with [free-floating] ideas. It could not be otherwise: realism is premised on the idea that ideas have no autonomous existence, can exist only in things. So when it needs to debate ideas . . . realism is driven to invent situations — walks in the countryside, conversations — in which characters give voice to contending ideas and thereby, in a certain sense, embody them. The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. In such debates ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are announced, and generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world (Coetzee, 2003: 9)

No, Kafka didn’t write about people picking their noses. But Kafka had time to wonder where and how his poor educated ape was going to find a mate. . . . Kafka’s ape is embedded in life. . . . His ape is embedded as we are embedded, you in me, I in you. (Coetzee, 2003: 32)

There are no bounds to the sympathetic imagination. (Coetzee, 2003: 80)

J.M. Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) is a pivotal text in the development of its author’s imaginative abilities. In terms of its intimations on the nature of an intersubjective imagination and the non-negotiable demand for the need to respect the otherness of the Other, all that came before this text could be said to have been tending towards it and most of what has come after it, so far, serves only as amplification on — or reiteration of — what is contained in it. Just as embodiedness and embeddedness had been important themes for Coetzee’s work that I have discussed so far, we see the same principles at work in this text also — the first three epigraphs above gesture towards this concern.

To signal this text’s recap orientation, the following is what its protagonist, Elizabeth Costello, says about her intentions for its publishing:

Now that it is over and done with, that life-time labour of writing, she is capable of casting a glance back over it that is cool enough, she believes, even cold enough, not to be deceived. Her books teach nothing, preach nothing; they merely spell out, as clearly as they can, how people lived in a certain time and place. More modestly put, they spell out how one person lived, one among billions, and whom she, to herself calls *she*, and whom others call *Elizabeth Costello*. (2003: 207-208)

And so, through a series of eight chapters, which Coetzee has called lessons, Elizabeth Costello highlights, recapitulates on, and, in some cases, even revises the author's major concerns up to the time of its publication.¹³²

In a sense, this text is both an apology (in the sense of being an *apologia* or defence) for, and a revision of, Coetzee's kind of writing, similar in spirit and orientation to what we find in the essay "The Novel Today". But it is also more than that, because in the Subject's ability to reach out to the Other, in this text Coetzee stretches his imagination several notches up when he posits, not just a sympathetic imagination as he does in *Disgrace*, but, more clearly, an empathetic one. For purposes of my discussion, I will discuss only a few of these lessons and show them to be "representative" of the major concerns of the collection as a whole.

Idealism, Realism and Embodied Subjectivity

The first lesson stages a contest between realism and idealism. I have discussed these two worldviews at various points in my study so far and as such I will not labour the point here. It will suffice if I note that in the present lesson, realism is compared to, and contrasted with, idealism but, in a Hegelian dialectic, both are ultimately transcended by something beyond them. The concern with Realism seems to tie in with Coetzee's distinction between history and art in his essay "The Novel Today" (1988b). The defence for the autonomy of art that Coetzee constructs in this essay is reminiscent of Aristotle's distinction between art and history, in terms of which, Aristotle says in *Poetics*, history deals with situations as they are, or have been, whereas art, through a conscious deployment of the imagination, deals with situations as they might be, or even ought to be.

Similarly, Coetzee observes that both the historian and the novelist deal with historical reality, but from different angles:

Speaking as a novelist, I would like to make some observations on the relation of novels and novel-writing to the time and the place in which we live. What is it that I and other writers are doing, I want to ask, when, as people making our own history or people living out the history of our time or people enmired in history, or people undergoing the nightmare of history, depending on how one sees it, we write these

¹³² Some critics, via conjecture or otherwise, tag Elizabeth Costello as J.M. Coetzee's persona, though not in a mimetic fashion (see, for example, Heyns 2002: 60; Dancygier 2010 and Dawn and Singer 2010). In a sense, then, this text could also be seen to serve as Coetzee's own reflection on his long writing career.

long prose works that we call novels? Are we trying to escape historical reality, or, on the contrary, are we engaging with historical reality in a particular way, a way that may require some explanation and some defence? . . . This new thing, this new genre, this 'novel' they have asked — is it a kind of history, a fictitious history, which while in one sense, 'truer' than what we usually call history because it deals with the underlying patterns of force at work in our private and public life, in contrast to straight or orthodox history, which unavoidably has to deal with mountains of events without detectable pattern, with brute contingency? (1988b: 80)

Much has been made, in literary-critical circles, of Coetzee's positing, later in the same essay, of a rivalry between history and art, and, especially, the autonomy that he grants to art in this rivalry. But what has not been given proper attention, and I think this is the misconception that Coetzee wishes to highlight in the lecture-narrative on realism in *Elizabeth Costello* so that his earlier famous essay receives a balanced reading — so that he is not saying that the writer ignores or escapes history. Rather, he says that “the writer deals with historical reality in a particular way” with the aim of transmuting mundane details of history and, by using the imagination, somehow transcend it (1988b: 80). Coetzee seems to be suggesting that it is necessary for writers to recognise the brute demands of history. However, he is indicating that they should not be bogged down by these demands, but rather, through the powers of the imagination, seek to rival, reinterpret and, thereby, transcend them — I have already discussed in my introductory chapter how the imagination achieves this sort of transcendence of contingent reality through the malleability and open-ended nature of concepts. At the same time, Coetzee, through Elizabeth Costello, demonstrates his implication in history through intertextually embedding his own writing in the historical matrix of his literary predecessors and thereby also accounts for and justifies his parasitizing the classics (Kafka, Beckett, Dostoevsky, Defoe, etc.).¹³³

Coetzee could be said to dramatise the interplay between the bruteness and constructedness of reality in the image of intertextuality or what is called “influence and anxiety of influence” (see Abrams, 1986: 213) that is, an individual's “embeddedness” in

¹³³ Through his broaching of inter-textuality, Coetzee acknowledges his intellectual debt to his literary precursors. That acknowledgement is given fuller attention in the final lesson titled “At the Gate” which tackles issues of repressive societies and how such societies view individuals, not as Subjects in their own right, but as cogs, entirely at the service of those societies, thereby disrespecting their otherness. By following Kafka this closely in the present lesson, Coetzee is very likely paying his ontological/intellectual debts to the former and his writings to which he has appealed at various stages of his writing career — I have noted this debt across my discussion of various novels of Coetzee's so far. He confesses as much in an interview with David Attwell when asked about the influence of past writers such as Kafka on his own writing: “You ask about the impact of Kafka on my fiction. I acknowledge it, and acknowledge it with what I hope is a proper humility. As a writer I am not worthy to loose the latchet of Kafka's shoe” (1992: 199).

a tradition, on the one hand, and his or her attempt at a situated — if not also a somewhat radical — departure from it. And so, against Costello’s initial stance of absolute literary uniqueness, or autochthony; of not wanting to have precursors (a position which is akin to autonomous Cartesian subjectivity, or Plato’s free-floating ideas), her son John argues that phenomena such as “inter-textuality” and “literary tradition” are a proof of inter-subjectivity and these rule out all pretensions to ontological autochthony or autonomy. Indeed, through this discussion that ranges from the debate on “tradition and the individual”, “inter-textuality” or “influence and anxiety of influence”, via Kafka’s Red Peter, and, eventually, to John’s argument that realist writing is mere “zoo-keeping”, J.M. Coetzee shows the two characters admit the untenability of either Idealism or Realism. The argument seems to be that, much as the individual is part of the plenum, he or she is also a node on it, not as a monad, but as an inter-penetrative node of sorts that I have already explored in my introductory chapter.¹³⁴

Coetzee’s own writing is, for the most part, of a Post-Modernist inclination. Among others, one only needs to look at the forked paths of “The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee” in *Dusklands*, the fragmented narrative of Magda in *In the Heart of the Country*, and the Magistrate’s musings on the different kinds of story-lines he would have adopted in telling his story about his life and times on the frontier in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. The telling of the story of this lesson is itself couched in metafictional terms — an arm of Post-Modernism. For instance, we observe that at various points (such as on pages 16, 17, 22, etc.) the narrator mentions the skips in the story and comments on the processes of its creation.

¹³⁴ In Coetzee’s case, his is more a stance of the Bloomean “anxiety of influence” of parody and distortion, rather than that of “copying”. M.H Abrams describes the Bloomean approach as follows:

The anxiety of influence is a phrase used by the influential . . . critic Harold Bloom to identify his radical revision of [the] standard theory that influence consists in a direct ‘borrowing’, or assimilation, of the materials and features found in earlier writers. Bloom’s own view is that influence inescapably involves a drastic distortion of the work of a predecessor, and he uses this concept of influence to deal with . . . reading as well as . . . writing. (1999: 213)

Coetzee does not simply borrow; rather, he tends to critique his predecessors. In her book-length study of Coetzee’s writing, for most of the introductory chapter, Teresa Dovey (1988: 9) explores the tendency of Coetzee’s texts to operate variously and invariably as “fiction-as-criticism” or “criticism-as-fiction”, while in the process acknowledging their indebtedness to earlier fiction but also exposing the gaps in, and interrogating, the distortions of colonial discourse. Indeed, throughout his writing, J.M. Coetzee has sought to revise and critique the earlier narratives that he parodies by exposing their constructedness and positionality.

I have already commented at length on what Patricia Waugh (1994) says about metafiction in the second chapter when I discuss Jacobus Coetzee's forked paths and so I will not labour the point here. It will suffice to note, as I do in the third chapter on the style of *Waiting for the Barbarians* that, although Postmodernism is his general orientation, Coetzee also makes a case for realism whenever he wants to emphasise the un-ignorable existence of being. He, in a sense, would like to protect himself and, by extension, his reader, from some of the excesses of Postmodernism and post-structuralism which, through the eternal dispersal and deferral, cannot seem to get a grip, however contingent, on anything. And so in this text, too, after asserting the place of Postmodernism in modern consciousness Coetzee, nevertheless, has Elizabeth Costello engage in an intellectual spat with her son over the nature and source of ideas or concepts that constitute our consciousnesses.¹³⁵

In an oblique reference to Kafka's existentialist and magical realist writing, with specific reference to this writer's short story titled "A Report on an Academy", Costello points out that Kafka tempered his Post-Modernism with a dose of Realism:

Kafka did not write about people picking their noses. But Kafka had time to wonder where and how his poor educated ape was going to find a mate. . . . Kafka's ape is embedded in life. . . . His ape is embedded as we are embedded. You in me, I in you. That ape is followed through to the end, whether or not there are traces left on the page. Kafka stays awake during the gaps when we are sleeping. That is where Kafka fits in. (32)¹³⁶

John, in turn, argues that if that is the kind of understanding of realism that Costello has, with its overtones of mimetism and verisimilitude, then it is mere zoo-keeping, not writing. To this, as a second stage of her defence, Costello pointedly replies:

What would you prefer? A zoo without keepers? Where animals fall into a trance when you stop looking at them? A zoo of ideas? A gorilla cage with the idea of a Gorilla in it, an elephant cage with the idea of elephants in it? Do you know how

¹³⁵ Unless I am reading them wrongly, it looks like an inexplicable stylistic/structural oversight on Coetzee's part to have these characters switch positions as they do in this text. Coetzee seems to have lost track of his own characters and ends up transposing their contest positions — with Costello increasingly adopting a Realist stance as the lesson progresses, while John adopts an Idealist one. Ultimately, though, these two positions are synthesised and thereby transcended. Coetzee can, at last, lay to rest the ghost that has been haunting him from the misunderstanding that some critics seem to have had of his famous essay in defence of the "autonomy" of art. Gareth Cornwell (2002: 312) too notes the lack of consistency in Costello's position in this lesson.

¹³⁶ Similar to the biological relationship between Elizabeth Curren and her absent daughter in *Age of Iron* (1990), and the ontology of consciousness relationship between Mrs Curren and Vercueil and all her Others, Costello's sense of mutual embeddedness between herself and her son here is also as biological as it is a question of an ontologically embodied consciousness.

many kilograms of solid waste an elephant drops in twenty-four hours? If you want a real elephant cage, with real elephants then you need a zoo-keeper to clean up after them. (32-33)

With the Cartesian disembodied Subject being at the centre of being, brute reality was dismissed; it could be dispensed with. Similarly, Plato's ideas existed outside of brute reality, now imprisoned by it and seeking to be freed once again to their *a priori*, free-floating state. But here Costello tries to emphasise the un-ignorableness of brute reality (independent even of the perceiving Subject) and that it is from this fabric of reality that all other reality is constructed by the Subject.

Although, after switching contest positions, John is now against realism, especially the type that seems Aristotelian in nature, he ultimately achieves a tempered form of realism in the end. As I have observed above, in this lesson John starts out largely as a realist and, then, in his rejection of Aristotelian realism, he becomes an idealist while his mother becomes a realist. However, certain events in the course of the story make John change his point of view somewhat, sufficiently enough to admit the validity of a tempered form of realism, one that is dialectical between the Subject and that Subject's encounter with brute reality.

The first of these events is his all too physical sexual attraction to Moebius's knee. This happens as the two are discussing Costello's just delivered lecture on realism. John's and Moebius's discussion serves as one of those post-lecture discussions that we come across at various points in this text, most notably in the lessons titled "The Humanities in Africa", "The Novel in Africa", "The Lives of Animals", and "The Problem of Evil" which are staged as public lectures. In the present case, John's idea of the imagination is a suspended one; he thinks the imagination, like Plato's ideas, is a free-floating faculty. And so when he talks to Moebius about his mother having been "a man" or "a dog", or of having ever thought her way into other existences (23), he does so from an *a priori* standpoint.

Yet, as I have elaborated in my introductory chapter, the faculty of the imagination (also variously known as inspiration or the muse) does not create its products *ex nihilo*; through the malleability of concepts, it reconfigures what has already been into something more than a sum of its parts. To imagine is to re-arrange already encountered realities but in a novel way. The artist has encountered all that she or he creates: his or her art gains its

uniqueness from factors such as the positionality (embodiedness and embededness) of his or her subjectivity and the length, breadth and depth of his or her ability to reconfigure what she or he has encountered and thereby transcending his or her lived reality, which is also known as history. This is what Aristotle meant by art being superior to history because art, by rearranging history, transcends history. And this too is a topic that Coetzee has pre-occupied himself with long before his spirited defence of the rivalry status of art in relation to history. As such, John's mother becomes "a man" or "a dog" only through the mediated intentionality of the embodied consciousness and not through what would be called a mere *a priori* flight of fancy.

And so, appropriately, when John sees Moebius's knee, this encounter arouses him sexually and makes him temporarily abandon his argument in defence of the free-floating imagination to settle for the imagination being triggered by the "attractive" knee. He notices that the knee is not an *a priori* flight of fancy of his imagination; it is un-ignorably there before him. This experience leaves him wondering as follows: "Does the mind by nature prefer sensations to ideas? The tangible to the abstract? Or is the folding of the woman's knee just a mnemonic, from which will unfold the rest of the night?" (24).¹³⁷

Another process through which John comes to pay due respect to Realism unfolds when, during the on-flight debate between him and his mother on the claims of Realism versus those of Idealism, he notices a fat woman who has been watching them. Like Kafka's ape in the story, this woman is always somewhere in the background during this debate constituting its "un-ignorable" backcloth. The fat woman is eating popcorn, and suddenly, John "thinks of the cud of mashed corn and saliva in her mouth and shudders. Where does it all end?"(33). In this instance, John opens up to Realism via Naturalism.

The climax of this process comes when he sees his exhausted, sleeping mother on the flight back to Australia. She sleeps with her mouth open and

[h]e can see up her nostrils, into her mouth, down the back of her throat. And what he cannot see he can imagine: the gullet, pink and ugly, contracting as it swallows, like a python, drawing things down to the pear-shaped belly-sac. He draws away,

¹³⁷ In the First Meditation, Descartes tried to advance the argument that the existence of external reality could be the effect of the Subject dreaming that he or she is seeing or experiencing something. Yet, even dreams, no matter how fanciful they may seem, are crafted, *a posteriori*, out of the fabric of some prior experience or experiences.

tightens his own belt, sits up, facing forward. No, he tells himself, that is not where I come from, that is not it. (34)

The un-ignorableness of this reality hits him so hard that he has to recoil from its bruteness. Take note, though, that, be that as it may, John does not adopt the Aristotelian version of Realism but a quasi-Kantian one because, as the narrator says, “*what he cannot see he can imagine*” (34, my emphasis). In other words, reality is partly given and partly made up.

Language, Literacy and a Pre-verbal, “Prelapsarian” Encounter

In the second lesson titled “The Novel in Africa”, we meet Elizabeth Costello on a lecture circuit aboard a cruise ship, the *SS Northern Lights* which is sailing from Christchurch, Australia, to Cape Town, South Africa. Besides the holidaymakers to whose service Costello has availed herself, also on this trip there is a Nigerian intellectual called Emmanuel Egudu — a real life figure — and a Russian balalaika orchestra comprising five men and five women.

One could say that there are at least two main issues being explored in this lesson. The first issue is the debate about the unreliability of language as a medium of human consciousness. This supposed unreliability of language is because of the presumed split between the sign and the referent (or the existent) to which the sign points. The second issue hints at the troubled human-animal relations over the ages, and more especially since the dawn of the Enlightenment. The irony here is that the Enlightenment, if it was indeed to qualify as Enlightenment, should have been more magnanimous towards all living beings but that is not the trajectory it took. As I have noted with Randy Malamud (2003: 3-4) in the previous chapter, Jean Baudrillard observed a positive correlation between civilisation and the worsening treatment of animals. Citing Sigmund Freud’s definition of Western civilisation as “a state when all the wild animals have been exterminated” (qtd. by Malamud, 2003: 4), one is not left wondering why this state of affairs came about.

With regard to the first issue, in the main, in this lesson Coetzee harps on modern man’s discomfort with language generally, and written language specifically, as a medium of consciousness. But Coetzee uses this discomfort with written language to bemoan the fact that he and his fellow African writers are not being read that much on the African

continent from where they are writing. The lesson then becomes a way of exploring the reasons behind this disconcerting literary state of affairs. One of the reasons proffered is the African's supposed unease with the written word, divorced as it is from its speaker. The whole writing and reading business seems alienating to the African, so the argument goes, because the African wants the "living presence" of the spoken word (50).

A sustained discussion of language *per se* lies outside the parameters of this study, as such I can only make parenthetical observations about it here. Some aspects of this debate have already been covered in my introductory chapter in my discussion of the relationship between words and concepts. It will suffice to note; here, that, because of Egudu's rather too traditional over-emphasis on the supposed authenticity and essentialism of orality (as opposed to the written), and the "genetic" claims of the first phases of Negritude, Costello feels compelled to resist these overblown and long discredited essentialist ontological assumptions about language and identity — and this she does with a lot of humour. For instance, even Amos Tutuola, with all his transliterations and outright linguistic barbarisms, is at one point offered as an example of how embodied, authentic African writing should be (46 -7).

Eventually, the criticism leads to even more humorous irony which centres on Egudu's supposed "base" desires. He is said to be on the cruise liner primarily for the money and the sex (53). And so, by way of innuendo, towards the end of the lesson, Egudu's extolling of the virtues of orality could be said to come to stand for (oral?) sex too, especially when Costello recollects how he made love to her in the past as an oral poet:

The voice. Her thoughts go back to Kuala Lumpur, when she was young, or nearly young, when she spent three nights in a row with Emmanuel Egudu, also young then. 'The oral poet,' she said to him teasingly. 'Show me what an oral poet can do.' And he laid her out, lay upon her, put his lips to her ears, opened them, breathed his breath into her, showed her. (58)

What could have attracted this irony on the part of Costello? After all, her author's linguistic sympathies seem to lie with the spoken, against the written, word as is evidenced in his response to a question on the subject during an interview with Avril Herber in which he vouches for the "authenticity" of the spoken word, especially one spoken during conversation:

For me the spoken word is the actual expression of the self, a revelation of the self. The spoken word, spoken in the sense that it is spoken to whomever one is in contact with, is communicative. Writing is something different. Writing is more like a procedure one undertakes, a game people play in private. (1979: 178)

Contra Derrida, who views all language whether written or spoken on the same plane of substitution, Coetzee does not view the two modes of linguistic expression as existing on exactly the same plane; he privileges speech as being primary. Furthermore, the rather evasive answer that Coetzee gives to Phillip Wood (1994: 189-194) in their correspondence, especially on the ending of Coetzee's novel, *Foe*, is even more radical. The answer is suggestive of Coetzee's view of words as not having a radically arbitrary relationship with their referents while he, again, insists on the primacy of the spoken word.

Nevertheless, as an answer to the question I pose above regarding Coetzee's satirising of Egudu's view of the oral versus the written, I need to note that, while I explore in J.M. Coetzee's writing the propensity towards the body and embodiedness, Coetzee would perhaps not want us to understand this in essentialist and unmediated terms, but as mediated embodiedness, even in its empathic imagination vein. It is for this reason that, following his intimations, I too have singled out mediatedness of consciousness as one of the central features of my theory. As such, Egudu's assumptions of the primordial and essential being of the African is made to look ridiculous — which it is.

But, just before the lesson comes to an end, Costello relates two events that make this lesson appropriately placed in the text, coming as it does just before the twin and pivotal lessons entitled "The Lives of Animals". These events have to do with the concern for the lives of animals or, more appropriately, the relationship between the human Subject or Self and the animal Other. The first of these events comes when the party reaches Macquire Island and Costello is reminded of its brutal nineteenth century penguin industry:

She has read about Macquire Island. In the nineteenth century it was the hub of the penguin industry. Hundreds of thousands of penguins were clubbed to death here and flung into cast iron steam boilers to be broken down into useful oil and useless residue. Or not clubbed to death, merely herded with sticks up a gangplank and over the edge into the seething cauldron. Yet their twentieth-century descendants seem to have learned nothing. Still they innocently swim out to welcome visitors; still they call out greetings to them as they approach the rookeries (Ho! Ho! they call, for all the world like gruff little gnomes), and allow them to approach close enough to touch them, to stroke their sleek breasts. (55)

A crime was committed against the penguins here and, in turn, in terms of the mutual implication attendant on a reciprocal ontology of consciousness as adumbrated in this study against their killers. The sheer numbers of penguins killed for their oil numbs the mind — a similar comparison is made in “The Lives of Animals” about killing Jews to make soap out of their fat (66 and 115). But it is the manner of their killing that is even more heinous and repugnant. These friendly penguins met their death either by being clubbed to death, or by being herded alive into a boiling cauldron. Yet, in spite of it all, the penguins are shown to be forever gullible or, better, forever generous, towards the human race; their descendants are said to bear no grudge against humans (55). In *Disgrace*, Lucy makes a similar point about dogs that treat humans like gods but are repaid with dishonour (78). The point Elizabeth Costello seems to be making through all this seems to be that humans owe these animal Others a huge ontological debt which they are largely unaware of, or are unwilling to acknowledge, and, as a result, they are less human, in conscious existential terms. Humans suffer a stuntedness and deformity of being in their relationship with animals and so, like the humans in *Age of Iron*, they are “ugly”. It is a point Costello makes in a more sustained manner in the twin lessons entitled “The Lives of Animals” which I discuss in the next section. J.M. Coetzee has made this same point regarding the imperialist Self’s relations with his colonised Others in the previous novels and now he has extended the argument to human-animal relations.

Fortunately for her, however, Costello has a redeeming moment on this island. This moment, which constitutes the second event, comes a short while after her encounter with the enigmatic penguins. As she takes a walk on the island, she comes across a mother albatross with her young. In this ---encounter she has a recuperative prelapsarian experience with the albatross and she writes:

The albatross regards her steadily and, so it seems to her, with amusement. Sticking out from beneath it is a smaller version of the same long beak. The fledgling is more hostile. It opens its beak, gives a long, soundless cry of warning.

So she and the two birds remain, inspecting each other: *Before the fall*, she thinks. *This is how it must have been before the fall. I could miss the boat, stay here. Ask God to take care of me.* (56, italics original)

There is a profoundly felt re-union of the human Self and the animal Other here, an experience that is at once prelapsarian and eschatological, from which any form of human language, whether oral or written, is excluded. Costello is keen to present this

experience as anterior to, or beyond, human language.¹³⁸ And, remarking to the female leader of the Russian orchestra who has just at that very moment happened upon her, Costello even makes it a point to respect the albatross's otherness by wondering what the albatrosses call themselves: "An albatross," she remarks to the woman, speaking softly. "That is the English word. I don't know what they call themselves" (56). In this regard, I noted, similarly, how Lurie refrains from giving his dog-friend a name out of respect for its Otherness, so that he does not reduce it to a term in his story, a position that shows Coetzee's continuing ambivalence regarding the language debate. This experience of communion of all being underlies the empathic relations that Costello wishes for as adumbrated in the next two lessons on the lives of animals, to a discussion of which I now turn.

The Lives of Animals and the Empathetic Imagination

The question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common — reason, self-consciousness, a soul — with other animals? . . . I return to the death camps. The particular horror of the camps . . . is not that despite a humanity shared with their victims, the killers treated them like lice. That is too abstract. The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else. They said, 'It is *they* in those cattle cars rattling past.' They did not say, 'How would it be if it were I in that cattle car?' They did not say, 'It is I who am in that car.' They said, 'It must be the dead who are being burned today, making the air stink and falling in ash on my cabbages.' They did not say, 'How would it be if I were burning?' They did not say, 'I am burning, I am falling in ash. (J.M. Coetzee, 2003: 79, emphasis original)

One could say that the two lessons entitled "The Lives of Animals" form the centrepiece of *Elizabeth Costello*. These two lecture-narratives first appeared in 1999 as an independent volume entitled *The Lives of Animals*, having previously been delivered as Tanner lectures at Princeton University by J.M. Coetzee himself in 1997. *The Lives of Animals* also contains critical responses to the lecture-narratives by Peter Singer, Wendy Doniger, Marjorie Garber and Barbara Smuts.

In these two lecture-narratives, Elizabeth Costello fleshes out the arguments that have been advanced over centuries on the (im)possibility of human community with animals. While the lecture-narratives deal with a wide range of issues I will limit myself to a discussion of those aspects that are germane to the trajectory of my thesis. Principally, as far as human-animal relations are concerned, the force of Costello's argument derives

¹³⁸ The hostile young albatross, however, hints at the not so paradisiacal nature of even this otherwise blissful encounter, an occurrence which could be said to point, symbolically, to the mediatedness of a Self-Other ontology.

from the analogy that Costello establishes between human treatment of animals and Nazi treatment of Jews during the Holocaust and, in the process, she develops an argument for a form of intersubjectivity that extends beyond altruism and sympathy, that is, empathy.

In her excellent analysis of *The Lives of Animals*, Cora Diamond seems to endorse the philosophy–art antinomy when she refers to “the inability of thought to encompass what it is attempting to reach” (2006: 6). While the implication, here, seems to be that poetry or art does manage to encompass that to which it aspires, this is, in fact, not the case. On these grounds, at least, there can be no division between philosophy and art. Furthermore, if we conceive of thought as embodied, then the distance between philosophy and poetry is abolished. Significantly, in her constant invocation of the image of Costello’s ape’s woundedness — which she links to Costello’s own hurt at what humans do to animals — Diamond posits the authority of the unignorable body.

A Doubting Thomas: A New Theory of the Sympathetic and Empathetic Imagination

In “The Philosophers and the Animals”, Elizabeth Costello gives an overview of the major religious and intellectual debates on the nature and place of the animal Other in the universe, and the relations that have obtained between humans and animals to date. In my previous chapter, I commented on the subaltern status of animals in relation to humans in the modern world. In the present lecture narrative it is precisely this issue that is at stake.

Costello’s views on human—animal relations are advanced in the context of a lecture delivered at Appleton University in Massachusetts (a fictional institution). The references to the philosophy of mind in this narrative bear out my contentions, earlier in this study, to the physicalist strain within this discipline. For example, Costello’s antagonist in the narrative is her daughter-in-law, Norma, who is a specialist in the philosophy of mind and appears to subscribe to a form of Cartesianism(61). Costello’s other adversary is the philosopher of mind, Thomas Nagel, who is also a neo-Cartesian. (Indeed, in a pun on Nagel’s first name, Michael Bell [2006: 177] describes this philosopher as a “doubting Thomas”.) Coetzee’s disagreement with Cartesianism, which, as I have established, is a *leitmotif* in all of his writings, is thus very much in evidence in this narrative.

As I noted in my introductory chapter, the differences between Nagel and his colleagues in the field are substantial rather than simply technical or positional. While physicalist philosophers of mind are agreed on the physical nature of the mind and the mediate nature of consciousness, non-physicalists continue the tradition of Cartesian dualism. Nagel agrees with the mediate nature of consciousness but disagrees with the physicalists on the possibility of the physical reducibility of consciousness.

Like Elizabeth Costello before him, Randy Malamud takes issue with the fact that Nagel rules out the possibility of cross-species understanding or intersubjectivity between humans and the animal Other. Nagel's rejection of this possibility widens the traditional Cartesian or Enlightenment's ontological chasm between these two modes of being. In a chapter entitled "A Bat out of Hell?", Malamud outlines and comments on Nagel's position as follows: 'What is it like to be a bat?' This was the title, and subject for deliberation, of a philosophical investigation that Thomas Nagel presented in 1974. 'I assume we all believe that bats have experience. After all, they are mammals, [T]he essence of the belief that bats have experience is that there is something that it is like to be a bat'. (7) Malamud then observes that Nagel does not only finally not resolve the question his essay poses but he even throws a challenge (the meeting of which he rules out in advance) to the effect that new concepts and theories will have to be developed if we are to explain what it is like to be a bat (7). Like Malamud, I have sought to develop, in this thesis, the concepts and theory that Nagel is asking for in his famous essay. In my view, it is possible to know "what it is *like* to be a bat". What may not be entirely possible, though, is to know what it is to be a bat.

Costello's [In]famous Analogy: The Empathetic Imagination Broached

As I have noted, Elizabeth Costello, immediately after stating her topic for the lecture, draws an analogy between the lives of animals in contemporary society and those of the Jews during the Holocaust:

Between 1942 and 1945 several million people were put to death in concentration camps of the Third Reich: at Treblinka alone more than a million and a half, perhaps as many as three million. These are numbers that numb the mind. We have only one death of our own; we can comprehend the deaths of others only one at a time. In the abstract we may be able to count to a million, but we cannot count to a million deaths. . . . "They went like sheep to the slaughter." "They died like animals." "The Nazi butchers killed them." Denunciation of the camps reverberates so fully with the language of the stockyard and slaughterhouse that it is barely necessary for me to

prepare the ground for the comparison I am about to make. The crime of the Third Reich, says the voice of accusation, was to treat people like animals. (64-65)

It is this “language of the stockyard” that Costello critiques in her lecture. What she is suggesting is that the language we use justifies our cruel treatment of animals. Indeed, Malamud (2003: 3-4) notes that, when we deal with animals, we do not do so on their terms, but on our own, that is, by subsuming them within metaphor and imagery. Like the Poles and Germans, who wilfully chose ignorance to protect themselves from the blinding effects of the truth of Jewish suffering around them, we, in contemporary society, are in denial about the appalling conditions in which animals live and die. Such denialism is apparent in our use of clever euphemisms that describe cow meat as beef, sheep meat as mutton, or pig meat as pork.

Before she draws this comparison, Costello states the consequences for the Subject of his or her indifference to his or her Others:

We — even in Australia — belong to a civilization deeply rooted in Greek and Judaeo-Christian religious thought. We may not, all of us, believe in pollution, we may not believe in sin, but we do believe in their psychic correlates. We accept without question that the psyche (or soul) touched with guilty knowledge cannot be well. We do not accept that people with crimes on their conscience can be healthy and happy. We look (or used to look) askance at Germans of a certain generation because they are, in a sense, polluted; in the very signs of their normality (their healthy appetites, their hearty laughter) we see proof of how deeply seated pollution is in them.

It was and is inconceivable that people *who did not know* (in that special sense) about the camps can be fully human. In our chosen metaphors, it was they and not their victims who were the beasts. By treating their fellow human beings, beings created in the image of God, like beasts, they had themselves become beasts. (65, emphasis original)

Costello compares the slaughter of animals in contemporary society to the extermination of Jews in the Holocaust in order to correct the anthropocentrism that enables indifference to animals (65). In tracing the justification for our cruel treatment of animals to religion and philosophy, Costello singles out Aquinas and Augustine, particularly the former’s view that the being of God is reason, and that reason and the universe are of the same being. She disagrees with the corollary of this argument, namely that, lacking reason, animals, unlike humans, follow the rules of the universe blindly, and are therefore part of it but not of its being. Clearly, Aquinas’s postulation is inconsistent: in ontological terms, an existent cannot be part of something and at the same time not be part of its being in some way.

Costello's main objection to this sort of theorising is based on her observation that reason, as understood by philosophers, and especially those of a binaric orientation, simply cannot be the being of the universe or that of God. Given that there is so much "unreason" in the universe, its being cannot be reason in any absolute sense. She thus "reasons" that reason is simply the being of human thought, and that is itself but one tendency in human thought (67). This last observation is especially crucial as it contests the purely ratiocinative subjectivity of Descartes and other philosophers of the Enlightenment, and posits, in its stead, a form of consciousness that encompasses the body in its entirety.

Instrumental Reason and Self-Other Ethics

Most of the unreason that Costello observes in the universe involves the drive towards what Charles Taylor (1989) has termed the instrumentalisation of being which can be found in various Cartesian or rationalist forms of discourse and praxis such as Pragmatism and Utilitarianism. In Pragmatism, the usefulness of an action is determined by whether it 'works or not', whereas in Utilitarianism the goal is for something to benefit a maximum number of beings (as a group, not as individuals in their own right *per se*), and, in the pursuit of this goal, the end justifies the means.

In her critique of both Pragmatism and Utilitarianism, Costello uses the example of an experiment by Wolfgang Köhler, of the Prussian Academy of Sciences. The experiment, which sought to determine the mental aptitude of apes, involved making a monkey called Sultan work out ways of reaching bananas that were progressively put further beyond its reach. Costello thinks that the form of reason promoted by the Enlightenment has become so debased that all it is used for is to satisfy our appetitive needs and that it therefore systematically disregards the reasonableness of the means for their satisfaction. Significantly, Sultan is progressively turned away from speculative reason, which is rich and versatile, towards instrumentalist reason which is narrow and dangerously utilitarian.

Costello seems to be suggesting that it is the twin application of Pragmatism and Utilitarianism that has led to the slaughter of animals purely for human convenience. In her discussion of the role and place of instrumental reason in this narrative, Rosemary Jolly arrives at a similar conclusion:

That . . . instrumental reason is highly prized by human animals is clear; that the human animals prize instrumental reason as an ethical activity in and of itself, without recourse to ethical assessment of the goals to which it is put, is the condition Coetzee challenges. He does so by pointing out that this act of instrumental reason is neither logical nor ethical and that its consequence is violence. (2006: 158)

Enlightenment's "thingification" of animals, has led, in an era of capitalism, to their absolute commodification. Utilitarianism turns beings into cogs who then come to exist merely at the service of the whole. The ethicalness of the means of attaining maximum benefit from this commodification process is usually not taken into account because, in Utilitarianism, as I have noted, the end justifies the means.

As a solution to this abuse of instrumental reason, and its deleterious effect on human-animal relations, Costello posits the empathetic imagination as a corrective measure. Her point of departure is Nagel's essay entitled "What Is it Like to be a Bat?" to which I have referred before. Costello argues that Nagel's position which, as I have noted, endorses and consolidates the Cartesian division between human and animals, is "tragically restrictive and restricted" (76). She detects the Cartesian overtones of Nagel's position, and, in her critique of it, takes issue with Descartes himself:

'Cogito ergo sum,' . . . [it] is a formula I have always been uncomfortable with. It implies that a living being that does not do what we call thinking is somehow second-class. To thinking, cogitation, I oppose fullness, embodiedness, the sensation of being — not a consciousness of yourself as a kind of ghostly reasoning machine thinking thoughts, but on the contrary the sensation — a heavily affective sensation — of being a body with limbs that have extension in space, of being alive to the world. This fullness contrasts starkly with Descartes' key state, which has an empty feel of a pea rattling around in a shell. (78)

Here, again, the body and the embodiedness of the consciousness are marshalled by Elizabeth Costello to counter the ontological doubts and schisms of a binaric, disembodied Cartesian subjectivity. Costello reasons that the mind cannot be separated from the body; indeed, that the mind itself is embodied and exists on a continuum with, and as, the body. This argument resists the Cartesian tendency to align the Other (such as women and the colonised Other) with the body, and thereby to divorce it from the mind and reason. Costello contends that it is possible that animals, and, by extension all Others, are intelligent, but that our prejudice against them renders us unaware of this possibility (68-9).

Further, in support of the possibility of an intra- and inter-species sympathetic imagination, Costello raises the possibility of a link, and one which I have made much more explicit in my study of Coetzee's works namely, that between ontology, epistemology and ethics. Ruminating on the possibility of imagining the death of the Other or of one's own, she intimates that, at a fundamental level, we are constituted by what we think:

For instants at a time . . . I know what it is like to be a corpse. . . . All of us have such moments The knowledge we have is not abstract — 'All human beings are mortal, I am a human being, therefore I am mortal'— but embodied. For a moment we *are* that knowledge. We live the impossible. We live beyond our death, look back on it yet look back only as a dead self can. . . . Now I ask myself: if we are capable of thinking our own death why on earth should we not be capable of thinking our way into the life of a bat? (77)

As opposed to the presumed abstract knowledge of the Cartesian Subject, Costello conceives of consciousness as being embodied and as simultaneously Self and Other-directed. According to Costello, consciousness, as embodied consciousness, is always relational; it involves the Self as constituting agent and is also *about* or directed *towards* the Other. I have argued along exactly these lines in this thesis. And in the passage above, by linking "knowing" to "being" and to the need for the Subject to own such knowledge, Costello also places epistemology, ontology and ethics on the same continuum, as inter-determining correlatives. Similarly, in my study, too, ontology, epistemology and ethics have been organically linked as inter-determining facets of being.

In addition to this linkage between epistemology, ontology and ethics, J.M. Coetzee, through Costello, strives for a form of intersubjectivity that transcends the sympathetic imagination. That is, he posits the possibility of an embodied, empathetic imagination. In this regard, this text develops, in significant ways, concerns already apparent in Coetzee's earlier writing. However, if I should trace Coetzee's intellectual and literary development, I would say that in this lesson, Coetzee's characters' conception of Self-Other relations has moved several notches up, a quantum leap not previously taken in any prior text. In this lesson, Coetzee proposes the embodied, empathetic imagination, attesting to the cogency of the central tenets of the theory guiding the present study in which the embodiedness of consciousness is linked to intentionality and to a Subject's double loss of autonomy.

It is again through Costello's analogy between the slaughter of animals and the Holocaust that Coetzee advances his case for the empathetic imagination. In a very critical section of her argument that needs quoting at length, Costello puts forward her case for the empathetic imagination as follows:

The question to ask should not be: Do we have something in common — reason, self-consciousness, a soul — with other animals? . . . I return to the death camps. The particular horror of the camps . . . is not that despite a humanity shared with their victims, the killers treated them like lice. That is too abstract. The horror is that the killers refused to think themselves into the place of their victims, as did everyone else. They said, 'It is *they* in those cattle cars rattling past.' They did not say, 'How would it be if it were I in that cattle car?' They did not say, 'It is I who am in that car.' They said, 'It must be the dead who are being burned today, making the air stink and falling in ash on my cabbages.' They did not say, 'How would it be if I were burning?' They did not say, 'I am burning, I am falling in ash.'

In other words, they closed their hearts. The heart is the seat of a faculty, sympathy, that allows us to share at times the being of another. Sympathy has everything to do with the Subject and little to do with the Object, the 'another', as we see at once when we think of the Object not as a bat (can I share the being of a bat) but as another human being. There are people who have the capacity to imagine themselves as someone else, there are people who have no such capacity (when the lack is extreme, we call them psychopaths), and there are people who have the capacity but choose not to exercise it. (79, emphasis original)

In this pivotal passage, Costello in fact moves from sympathy to empathy; from imagining "if it were I", to "it is I"; from imagining what it is like to be a bat, to "I am a bat". She does this in much the same way that David Lurie, in *Disgrace*, could be said to come to say "I am a dog-man" or "I am a sheep-man". A little later, Costello uses the process of creating fictional characters and the manner in which an author inhabits such creations, as an instance of empathetic intersubjectivity (80). This example establishes a link between this lesson and the next one on the poets and the animals, which focuses on the nature and workings of just such an empathetic imagination.¹³⁹

It is in the next lesson entitled "The Poets and the Animals" that Costello outlines what may putatively be considered her position on appropriate ethical relations between humans and animals. The question that arises at this point is: is Coetzee, through

¹³⁹ Costello persists in thinking that what she has just outlined in the passage quoted above is an example of the sympathetic imagination when in fact it is the empathetic imagination. Whose fault is this, Costello's or Coetzee's? If it is Coetzee's the question becomes: does Coetzee himself realise that he has just pushed the boundaries even further in his positing of intersubjectivity in this text? He may not. But if we look back over Coetzee's oeuvre, we notice that he began to broach this interplay between the sympathetic and empathetic imaginations from as far back as *Age of Iron*. For example, in the scene in which Mrs Curren imagines what may have happened to John, as he was being taken away by the police, she says "[S]omething went out from me to him. I ached to embrace him, to protect him' (152). And, later, mourning him after he has been shot dead by the police in her own house, she says "He [John] is with me or I am with him: him or the trace of him (175).

Costello, proposing another divisive criterion (namely, sentience), as grounds for ethics? If so, is there an inconsistency, even a contradiction, in his argumentation and negotiation of this “ethics-for-and-towards-animals” imbroglio? At some level, the positing of sentience as a new criterion is a position that would be difficult to uphold if one takes into account Coetzee’s total oeuvre. In *Disgrace*, for instance, David Lurie saves the honour of both the living and even that of the dead dogs, the latter who are no longer sentient. It is against this background that I will analyse the questions that some members of the audience put to Costello at the end of her lecture.

During question time after her lecture, a member of the audience identified only as someone sitting behind Norma puts the following questions to Costello:

What wasn’t clear to me . . . is what you are actually targeting. Are you saying we should close down the factory farms? Are you saying we should stop eating meat? Are you saying we should treat animals more humanely? Are you saying we should stop experiments with animals, even benign ones like Köhler’s? Can you clarify? Thank you. (81)

Costello is evasive in her “answer”. Arguing that she does not want to prescribe for anyone, she simply advises the questioner to “open your heart and listen to what your heart says” (82). It is a well-known fact that Coetzee eschews ethical prescriptions, and he does not want to make converts or disciples either, as he makes clear in his essay entitled “Meat Country” (1995: 43-44). The position he makes Costello adopt here resonates with my argument, in my introductory chapter, that the Self-Other Subject is his or her own measure of what is ethical and what is not. This sense of judgement, however, is not arbitrary, but rather informed by the Subject’s own sense of indebtedness to his or her Others, as well as his or her sense of generosity (if he or she should have any) or selflessness towards them: an embodied and embedded Self-Other ethics.

Another questioner, Wunderlich, points out that what differentiates humans from animals, and so justifies our appalling treatment of them, is the latter’s lack of shame, as evidenced by their copulating or relieving of themselves in public (85). Wunderlich’s argument is related to an observation by the next questioner, Dean Arendt, who argues that humans should not be ethical towards beings who know nothing about being moral themselves. It may be recalled that this is the argument that David Lurie advances in *Disgrace*. Costello’s reply, which again resonates with a point I make in my introductory chapter, is that we should be ethical towards such beings in the same way we are ethical

towards human children who also lack inhibition in public and cannot be said to be moral agents (89-90). Ultimately, she observes, all beings naturally protect their own kind (90). In this regard, as I argue in my introductory chapter, in their state of nature, all animals subscribe to a herd mentality and are, as conscious beings, largely pre-ethical with regard to their Others. In the same section I go on to contend that an ethical response to one's Others is concomitant with the development of a conscious intersubjective form of "self-consciousness".¹⁴⁰ It is also at this stage of inter-subjective self-consciousness that ritual is possible, as Wunderlich, observes with regard to the ancient Greeks:

The Greeks had a feeling there was something wrong in slaughter, but they thought that they could make up for that by ritualising it. They made a sacrificial offering, gave a percentage to the gods, hoping thereby to keep the rest. The same notion as the tithe. Ask for the blessing of the gods on the flesh you are about to eat, ask them to declare it clean (89)

I would like to link my comment on this passage to the one Costello makes about Dean Arendt's argument cited above — the one about why we should be ethical towards beings who know nothing of morality themselves, who, it seems to me, do not have a type of consciousness that we can recognise as self-consciousness. As I have hinted at above, Costello argues that the appeal to consciousness as a yardstick is just a smokescreen because at bottom all beings protect their own kind. Costello then asks: "What I mind is what tends to come next. They have no consciousness *therefore*. Therefore what? Therefore we are free to use them for our own ends?" (90, italics original). We are faced with yet another of those Coetzecan double-binds or aporias here. In what sense, one might ask?

In terms of the logic of Costello's argument, one ought to say no to vegetarianism too, and it follows that the Subject should simply starve to death. The question, then, is why sentience should serve as criterion for ethical behaviour. After all, using it as a criterion

¹⁴⁰ Costello posits that, at the root of it, each species protects its own (90). According to the postulates of this study, the reason any Subject will not prey on members of his/her/its own species is largely because of the close implication in one another's consciousness due to the constant ontological interchange between and among them, interchange which is both unconsciously and consciously acknowledged. The same protectiveness can be observed between a Subject and a being of another species but with whom the Subject has come to identify closely such as a pet or a totem. But, once the interchange is drastically reduced, and consciously unacknowledged, whether due to institutionalised discriminatory policies such as Apartheid, or due to individual psychosis, intra-species violence and, even cannibalism, are possible and they do occur.

through which to exclude some entities from the purview of ethical behaviour is ultimately just as problematic as using consciousness to this end. In terms of the logic of sentience, vegetarianism becomes ethically justifiable because vegetables are not sentient. We can eat vegetables, seeds, and fruits because they are not sentient. The problem, though, is that these beings are nevertheless alive until such time as we decide to make a meal out of them.

What is more, according to the postulates of my study, following Coetzee, all our Others, irrespective of their ontological status, contribute towards the beings that we are becoming in the flux of life and we are therefore ontologically indebted to them all. As such, sentience, it would seem, is an arbitrary criterion as well – one put in place by those who have decided on vegetarianism for their personal reasons. Significantly, in a desperate effort to win her audience over to her point of view, Elizabeth Costello appeals to her audience’s sense of the abject when, rephrasing Plutarch, she says: “You ask me why I refuse to eat flesh. I, for my part, am astonished that you can put in your mouth the corpse of a dead animal, astonished that you do not find it nasty to chew hacked flesh and swallow the juices of death wounds” (83). Directly afterwards, though, she draws attention to the polemical nature of this description by adding that Plutarch is a “conversation-stopper: it is the word *juices* that does it . . .” (83, emphasis original).¹⁴¹

In “Meat Country” Coetzee draws the following problematic distinction between plants as food and animals as food:

For plants [as a source of food] it is only taste but for flesh — there is a deep-seated resistance that has to be overcome, a resistance which is intimately related to taboo and the horror to which food taboos give expression. What is the nature of the horror? It has something to do with the *essential* distinction between plants and animals in our everyday understanding: *that animals are alive and plants are not*, that animals cannot or should not be eaten while alive, while plants can be eaten with impunity because they have never been, *in the full sense of the word*, alive. (1995: 50, my emphasis)

It is because he equates sentience with being “alive” that Coetzee is able to posit an essential difference between plants and animals. Is this not just sleight of hand, though? What does it mean to be alive? If, for instance, one were to define being alive in terms of

¹⁴¹ Coetzee’s recollections of his encounters with animals in his youth as contained in his memoir *Boyhood*, gives many pointers to most of the issues he raises in these two lessons and elsewhere. To this end, Richard Alan Northover (2009) has carried out a sustained analysis of the parallels that one can establish between *Boyhood* and *The Lives*.

being capable of cell division and multiplication, it would follow that both plants and animals are equally alive.

Perhaps, then, the appropriate response to the first of Elizabeth Costello's interlocutors, who wishes to know what exactly it is that she is saying, should be that we ought to be ethical to all our Others alike, regardless of whether they are animal or plant, because they are all integral beings in their own right. But further to that, as Other, they contribute towards the content of our consciousness and we are accordingly ontologically indebted to them. In the case of those Others who also possess consciousness, we forfeit our autonomy since we are implicated in their consciousness, just as they are implicated in ours. The issue at stake is not religious ritual, as Wunderlich, and later Costello, seem to suggest, but our ontology as Self-Other Subjects. As I have argued throughout this study, aspects of the Other become a part of the Self, who must therefore respect the Other and acknowledge its contribution to its own formation. It is psychically injurious, even a sort of self-death, to annihilate a being who is part of one's consciousness. For some people, it is religion that provides the "anaesthetic" to which I have referred as can be seen in those rituals, such as the tithe, first fruits, halal, saying grace before meals to which Wunderlich alludes above.

It is perhaps apposite to mention, here, that Chris Danta (2007: 735), after discussing Coetzee and Kafka's understanding of the notion of the scapegoat, and, in an allusion to the Derridean "gift of death", maintains that "each becoming-animal of the human is also a becoming-sacrificial animal and as such, a becoming-corpse. . . . He who gives death enters into death". In a related context, Grace Clement argues that guilt-mediating rituals that involve apologising to the animal that one kills, saying grace, and practices such as halal, are evidence that humans are in fact already naturally sympathetic towards animals. For her, the simple fact that an individual act of will is required for a body's suffering not to be noticed *as* suffering, means that noticing animal's suffering *as* suffering is unbearable to us; that we are in fact sympathetic to animal suffering"(2003: 137, emphasis original).

Ultimately, though, as Harold Fromm argues, life itself is "the original sin" in this whole matter:

The Real original sin would seem to be life itself, which continues through the exercises of slaughter and destruction. Anyone who has witnessed five lions tearing apart a living zebra on the Discovery channel of PBS can hardly be sentimental about the benignity of animals toward other animals, nor is there any way to stay alive without killing something else for sustenance. (2000: 342)

As I note above, simply because leaves or seeds do not writhe in pain as we eat them does not mean that they are biologically speaking, not alive before we prepare them as food. As Fromm observes, there is no way to stay alive without killing something else for sustenance. Ethically speaking, though, the Others that we kill for our sustenance deserve to be acknowledged.¹⁴²

The ethical demand to respect the Other whether dead or alive explains why, in *Disgrace*, Lurie respects both living and dead dogs. In this respect, he differs from Costello, who finds it possible to wear leather shoes and to carry a leather purse (89). Even if Costello, for argument's sake, had obtained these from animals that had died of old age, the fact remains, as *Disgrace* seems to suggest, that, one way or the other, the dead should be honoured.

Regarding the treatment of animals that are slaughtered for meat, Coetzee's persona in *Diary of a Bad Year*, decries the manner in which cattle are slaughtered in an abattoir in Port Said in Egypt: cattle, we are told "have their hind tendons slashed in order to make controlling them easier" and are "stabbed in the eye, and the knife embedded in the eye socket then being used to twist the head to present the throat to the butcher's knife" (2007: 64). Similarly, in "Meat Country", Coetzee (1995: 48) points out the degrading theatricality that accompanies the slaughter of some animals. For instance, he cites the practice at a Cantonese market where a buyer is allowed to "pick [. . .] out a goose and have its head chopped off before [his/her] eyes", the Riviera restaurant "where in their aerated tank the lobsters await the distinction of being selected for the cauldron" and the

¹⁴² For my part, when I look at the way life goes, for anything worthwhile to be achieved, or for it to come into being, there is always a call for sacrifice. And it is a truism that all of life seems to revolve around sacrifice without which we would all sink into the worst forms of degeneration. It is not only animals and plants that are being sacrificed; as humans we sacrifice aspects of our being in various ways too — all the time. And what is more, when I consider that at any moment of my life I myself might be called upon to risk even my very life in certain situations in which my empathetic imagination counsels such action — such as to rescue someone in a perilous situation — it means that even my own life is not entirely immune to being sacrificed, and so, what is so special about the lives of animals that they should be granted immunity against being sacrificed for their Others that are us? But, of course, it would be very disappointing to me in my possible afterlife if by sacrificing my life it were not duly acknowledged by those on whose behalf I sacrificed it and it is for this reason that "my heart" counsels me that I have a duty to acknowledge my ontological debt to my animal Others (who are also subjects in their own animal way) in whatever way I can — starting with treating them fairly and justly while they are still alive (not confine them to places in which they do not even have space to move); and treat them with the dignity they deserve, even in death.

Hong Kong establishments where “a live velvet monkey is brought to your table and trepanned so that you can spoon out its warm brains”. Such acts show a lack of imagination, both sympathetic and empathetic, and, in terms of my argument, are clearly injurious to the Subject’s own embodied ontology.

If we scrutinise the whole gamut of issues that Costello raises in her various lecture-narratives, it seems to be Coetzee’s view first and foremost that brute reality cannot be ignored in favour of a supposedly free-floating, self generating self-consciousness that imposes itself on the external world. Rather, brute reality must necessarily be engaged with at various levels and in various ways - even the phenomenon of language comes to be viewed in this light. Secondly, and this follows closely on the first view, that individuals, though embodied, constitute their consciousness mediatedly and from their perspective and that is what preserves their individuation, even as they doubly lose their autonomy in the process. From *Waiting for the Barbarians* onwards, Coetzee figures characters who realise their double loss of absolute autonomy when faced with the gaze of the Other (its un-ignorable being-there-ness), and thus begin conceiving of themselves as being configured in the Other’s consciousness. But, ultimately, these beings still subsist as properly individuated beings in their own right as well, hence the non-negotiable need to respect their otherness.

CONCLUSION

J.M. Coetzee's oeuvre — both fiction and critical — of at least eighteen books (at the time of writing) constitutes a worldview in its own right. There are some “loose ends” in this worldview, of course, but, just like conceptuality and subjectivity themselves, no system of thought is closed or total. As Ian Hacking (2009) has said of Coetzee's conceptual imbroglios, when one is still working out ideas things are not always settled. But this is what is happening all the time anyway; nothing is settled. Coetzee's character, Elizabeth Costello, aptly captures this reality during her second submission to the tribunal in the lesson “At the Gate” when, after noting that she has changed her statement, the panel asks which Costello is making a submission the second time around. Such changes are to be expected, precisely because subjectivity itself is protean, always in a state of flux and, accordingly, Coetzee deliberately eschews closed ends to most of his works. My own study of these works has espoused a similar outlook: a tentative and provisional hermeneutics.

However, there is a discernible trajectory to Coetzee's ontological development as I have explored it in my study. What has come up consistently, and this is something Coetzee (1992: 248) himself has stated as a standard in his works, is the “un-ignorable being-there-ness” of the body, in all its substrate qualities, as well as its states and dispositions. And from this standard can be postulated all the other attendant/corollary concerns, chief among which is the positing of an embodied and intersubjective consciousness. Although Coetzee has been gesturing towards this type of consciousness since the first publication, *Dusklands* (1974), it is given a more explicit exposition in his fictionalised 1997 Tanner Lectures, later published as *The Lives of Animals* (1999). If one works backwards from this publication, one notices that some of the theses stated in this book are in fact what Coetzee has been tending towards right from the beginning of his writing career.

Chief among Coetzee's theses is the intersubjectivity that arises from a Subject's conception of himself or herself as an embodied and “unified” consciousness. This consciousness is unified, paradoxically through a double loss of autonomy, through its indebtedness to its Others and through its implication in the subjectivities of its Others as integral, yet open-ended, consciousnesses. This sense of unity is opposed to the Cartesian formulation of subjectivity which drives a wedge between the mind and the

body within the Subject, and between one Subject and another who, because of the ensuing need for recognition and competition for resources, is necessarily posited as an Object from whom to separate and against whom to pit oneself. This is the point at which, in Coetzee's worldview, critiques of Descartes's ontology and Hegel's thesis of history coalesce, characterised as they both are by autonomous and contestatory Subjecthood.

While embodied intersubjectivity is gestured towards as a solution to this intra- and inter-consciousness split, of equal importance in Coetzee's oeuvre is the acknowledgement of, and respect for, the otherness of the Other. This acknowledgement and respect is in recognition of the dangers of a supposedly unmediated consciousness (such as that posited by phenomenology), which, conceiving of itself as unmediatedly intersubjective, would be as tyrannical as a split one. In both the Cartesian and Phenomenological cases, one Subject will try to impose himself or herself on his or her Others: in the Cartesian one because the Other is viewed to be wholly exterior to the Self and so always a potential rival in the struggle for resources; while in the Phenomenological one the Subject, in attempting to be intersubjective with the Other in an unmediated way, assumes a transparent ontology which, because of the mistakenness of the transparency thesis itself, obviously gets disconfirmed when he or she encounters the Other. Such a Subject, then, tries to force his or her own predetermined labels on the Other who, as Other, almost invariably, disconfirms him or her. In Coetzee's oeuvre, Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee best exemplify these two modes of subjectivity. However, this double possibility of ontological tyranny has been forestalled by Coetzee's view of intersubjectivity, on the one hand, but also his insistence on this intersubjectivity as a mediated affair, on the other hand.

Coetzee (1992: 251-52 and 282) makes the point about the mediated nature of consciousness most trenchantly in the essay on confession in which he presents the operations of consciousness as consisting in "double thought", with the mind constantly questioning the "originary" bases of its own assumptions. But, even if this doubling back is deemed to be the nature of consciousness, one thing is clear and it is that the endless scepticism cannot be sustained *ad infinitum* as that would land the Subject in the trap of an infinite regress. As such, we note that the body is once again posited as a counter to this potentially disabling/paralysing state of affairs. As David Attwell (1993, 2004 and

2006) has persistently observed, Coetzee's starting point is ontology which involves a valorisation of the body itself as a site of a new kind of subjectivity.

Accordingly, I have endeavoured, in my introductory chapter to work out a theory of embodied inter-subjectivity that could capture Coetzee's major concerns regarding the positing of such a conception of being, (especially as observed in the writer's positing of irruptions of otherness *into* the Subject which then gesture towards the possibility of intersubjectivity between a Subject and his or her Others). Against Coetzee's doubt that philosophy may not be as welcoming of such a subjectivity, I have actually drawn from the resources of a particular strain within the philosophy of mind, namely physicalism, which, contra Thomas Nagel (who set off this debate, and whose premises Coetzee rejects), actually and demonstrably, supports Coetzee's thesis of the primacy of the body and a consequent embodied consciousness.

Following cues from Coetzee's pronouncements, the theory underpinning my study has revolved around three key premises, namely consciousness's embodiedness, mediatedness and its intentionality. The first term affirms Coetzee's abiding belief in the un-ignorable being-there-ness of the body, in all its substrates, states and dispositions. In this I have also appealed to Grant Hamilton's (2005) study of the Stoic's "materialist" philosophy regarding the body, an understanding that fits in very well with the physicalists's philosophy of mind's understanding of the same but as applied to the physical nature of consciousness proper. Coetzee's resort to the body is a counter against at least two kinds of negations: the first is the Cartesian negation which he counters by positing an embodied consciousness as opposed to Descartes's disembodied and split mind/body dichotomy. Secondly, the positing of the body by Coetzee is meant to counter the view of subjectivity as purely a linguistic or textual construct by emphasising its un-ignorable being-there-ness, uncontainable by any system of signification, linguistic or otherwise.

The concept of mediation has been applied bearing in mind that consciousness's knowledge of itself, or of its Others, is not an immediate affair; it occurs in the form of representations rather than as things-in-themselves. In this view of consciousness, Kant's (1929: 27) postulations in the *Critique of Pure Reason* have been very useful, especially his distinction between the *phenomenal* and *noumenal* worlds. Kant's distinction points to the

difference between brute reality and constructed reality. Hypothetically speaking, the existence of brute reality allows for a partial, third-personal, reduction of consciousness. Indeed, most of us use this hypothesis in our dealings with those Others who cannot communicate their states to us through a shared human language, be they humans who are unable to speak or non-human animals. This understanding I have described as the difference between “type identity” (that is, what is it *like* to be such and such?) and “token identity” (that is, what is it *to be* such and such?). This distinction between the two conceptions of identity has been engaged in to properly contextualise the debate precipitated by Thomas Nagel’s rejection of even “type identity”, especially across the species boundaries.

The *phenomenal* world is reality as apprehended by the Subject and it is a world of constructs or representations. But behind the *phenomenal* world lies the world of things-in-themselves, the *noumenon*, to which the Subject has no access since he can apprehend the Other only mediately. The *noumenon* has been referred to as the otherness of the Other. And, following Mike Marais, Rosemary Jolly and Derek Attridge, I have worked out the kinds of conceptions of the Other and Otherness that I have appealed to in my study, namely the Other as a specific, embodied Other who should be assumed to exist in his or her right, even without or before an encounter with any Subject whatsoever, as should have been posited by Jolly (1996 and 2006); and then the otherness, “the over and above”, that obtains after signification has taken place to which Marais (1997 and 2009), following Blanchot, alludes; and the produced otherness alluded to by Attridge (2005) in the sense that the process of signification itself produces otherness in the form of representations which obviously come into being due to the Subject’s process of apprehension. All these understandings of otherness and of the Other are valid, each in its own right.

The third constitutive element of the theory has been that of the intentionality of consciousness — that consciousness is always *about* something; it is not *sui generis* as Descartes proposed, but that it exists in a state of ontological indebtedness to its Others as regards to its content. And, since following Coetzee, I am dealing with an embodied consciousness, intentionality has proved useful in more than one respect.

First and foremost, intentionality has been quite pivotal in enabling me to postulate the double loss of autonomy of the Subject, as well as to explain the phenomenon of imagination in general, and the sympathetic and empathetic imaginations, specifically. The double loss of autonomy, as I have explained in my study, comes about due to at least two factors: firstly, since consciousness is ontologically indebted to external sources for its content (through the encounter), it cannot claim to be autonomous — it needs its Others even just to come into being. Mrs Curren exemplifies this when she talks about how Vercueil is like a finger stirring the stagnant pool of her mind. But, also, since the Subject comes into contact with his or her Others, some of whom are equally conscious, those Others also become indebted to the first Subject but configure him or her from their own perspective and conduct themselves towards the first Subject based on this configuration, a process over which the first Subject has no control, really. This phenomenon constitutes the first Subject's second loss of autonomy. And all ethical conduct is based on the Subject's double loss of autonomy which is not a small matter since all conceivable relations between and amongst Subjects depend on it.

There are redeeming factors associated with these relations of ontological indebtedness, though, ranging from generosity and selflessness, including the ultimate selflessness of what Coetzee calls a “cruciform logic” that robs contestation and strict indebtedness of their sting. In Coetzee's work we first see a cruciform logic applied by Mrs Curren in her relations with Bheki and, especially, John. Mrs Curren's relationship with Vercueil is a different matter, it is calculating on both sides except that Mrs Curren miscalculates her ontological responsibilities towards the cunning Vercueil. I think that the situation that obtains between these two characters carries a certain warning from Coetzee about the post-colony as I have discussed in the concluding sections of the chapter on *Age of Iron*, a matter that I will return to later.

Secondly, intentionality, as applied to an embodied consciousness, explains the experience of what Derek Attridge (2005: iv) has termed the “irruptions of otherness” *into* the Subject's unsuspecting self. This is an experience through which the Subject awakens to his or her loss of autonomy through ontological indebtedness and through being implicated in the Other's subjectivity. By extension, then, the phenomenon of intentionality therefore also demonstrates an ontological link between and among Subjects, as well as between Subjects and all other existents, including those that do not

possess consciousness. Consciousness, being an embodied, physical phenomenon, and coming into being through ontological indebtedness, this link is not one of mere contiguity; rather it is one of co-extensiveness, of a Subject being coterminous with his or her Others in embodied, albeit mediated, physical terms. The conception of consciousness's co-extensiveness with its Others is crucial in countering the supposed apartness and oppositional relations engendered by Cartesian ontology. But this link is a mediated one and this is what protects whatever individuality of being that each Subject is still entitled to, that is, the Subject's otherness. This otherness militates against the kind of oppressive monism of Baruch Spinoza or against a conception of being as a seamless plenum without nodes. However, this otherness of the Other should not be confused with the entrapping monadic consciousness of Leibniz, either, because the consciousness I am dealing with in this study is intersubjective — of course, with appropriate qualification of what is meant by intersubjectivity.

The argument of my study is that the said irruptions of otherness are going on all the time but only those who have awakened to an embodied intersubjective conception of their subjectivity can have any conscious awareness of them. Notice here that, in my study, I have divided states of consciousness into at least three, namely a state of “consciousness of” in which the Subject views the Other as existing entirely outside itself — all conscious beings initially belong at this level. And then I posit two other types of “self-consciousness”, a Cartesian consciousness in which, like in the first state, the Other is entirely external to the self and against which this self pits itself. The contents of this type of self-consciousness are deemed to be had, or arrived at, *ex nihilo* since the consciousness itself is conceived of as being *sui generis*. Thirdly, a liberating type of “intersubjective self-consciousness” in which the Subject comes to realise his or her ontological indebtedness to, and hence intersubjectivity with, his or her Others consequent and concomitant on his or her double loss of autonomy as already stated.

J.M. Coetzee incisively demonstrates the vagaries and futility of the second type of self-consciousness in *Dusklands* (1974), his first publication, which also serves both as a kind of diagnosis of the imperial mind and his literary “manifesto”. Through the character of Eugene Dawn, Coetzee explores the nature and effects of the Cartesian split consciousness that pits a supposedly disembodied mind against the body within the Subject, and which, consequently, also pits one Subject against other Subjects. This

struggle is accompanied by a corresponding Hegelianism, a fundamentally phenomenological conception of subjectivity in which the goal of consciousness is to come to understand itself and Others transparently, a trajectory which Hegel had associated with the march of history. This march of history proceeds through contestatory relations between two Subjects who must determine who becomes the Master and who becomes the Slave. This conception is captured in Hegel's famous dialectic of the Master and Slave consciousness in his *The Phenomenology of Mind or Spirit* (1807). The *telos* of History then becomes one of self-consciousness comprehending itself leading to a kind of worldview satirised by Voltaire in *Candide* (1759). A fictional satirical exposé of a theodicy, the thesis of *Candide* is that this is the best of all possible worlds and everything in it is a necessary evil. Similar accounts of the march of history have been explored by scholars such as Francis Fukuyama (1992) who in *The End of History and The Last Man* identifies democracy as the end towards which history has been tending and, with its supposed attainment in Western democracies, there can be no other stage of historical import beyond it. With the constant references to his ascending "meta-historical consciousness", Dawn is shown to subscribe to such teleological and millenarian views of history but which instead of ushering in an envisaged utopia, ultimately only produce a dystopic vision for him. The dystopia of Dawn's split personality manifests itself most clearly in his report whose honest conclusion, in an off-guard postscript, points to a split self seeking to be re-united.

Indeed, that "fault" — interpreted both as a fault-line (or a split) and a wrong — seems to lie in his inherited ontology which he can trace to one of his seventeenth-century ancestors, Jacobus Coetzee, a representative figure of the Enlightenment project and its imperial manifestation. Through the character of Jacobus Coetzee, J.M. Coetzee explores another danger of Cartesian dualism, namely that of solipsism. Because Jacobus Coetzee is obsessed with ethnic difference and apartness (he looks for difference and opposition in everything) — saying of himself that he is in the world but not of it (86) — he ends up withdrawing into himself.

The punitive raid against the Namaquas that Jacobus Coetzee conducts proves to be a barbaric and savage orgy of bloodletting in which not even children are spared — in fact, the first person Jacobus Coetzee kills during the early dawn attack is a young girl whom, with grim irony, he fantasises he could have enjoyed having sex with. But it is the

lingering death of his former servant Plaatje, the one he hated most for his open defiance, which haunts him terribly. At some level, therefore, one could say that even Jacobus Coetzee remotely, if only unconsciously, experiences intersubjectivity with his Others, a connection he has lived all his life denying. He may just have had his redeeming moment in feeling for the dying Plaatje but it is a moment which he does not seize. Instead, he characteristically interprets his massacre of the Namaqua in religious and historical terms. Religion-wise, he convinces himself that the Nama may have committed some kind of sin against God for them to suffer such retribution at his hands. And history-wise he simply views himself as a tool in the hands of history thereby disavowing his agency in the commission of his barbarities — he is simply part of the Hegelian ascending meta-historical consciousness. These are rationalisations that he engages in after the fact and so they could be seen as simply a way of containing his unconscious but nevertheless deep sense of ontological neglect.

It is both Jacobus Coetzee's quasi-Cartesian solipsism and his fatalist Hegelianism that he infects his great-great-grandchild Eugene Dawn with. It is a nightmare of a recalcitrant and fatal ontological blindness that we find Dawn trying to wake up from at the end of the "Vietnam Project" part of the novel. Coetzee's own graphic depictions of violence in this text and those in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) seem to haunt him. This leads to his own rule against such portrayals in the lesson "The Problem of Evil" in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), in which he accuses the writer Paul West of violating the otherness of those who were executed after a failed assassination attempt against Germany's Adolf Hitler as portrayed in the latter's *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg*.

Like *Dusklands*, though not next in line in terms of the chronology of J.M. Coetzee's oeuvre, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is pre-occupied with the mind of imperialism. The major difference with the former novel, though, is that we are here presented with at least one character, simply called the Magistrate, who comes to see through Empire's disinformation and censorship and decides, in his own way, to rebel against the colonial establishment. However, the Magistrate's road towards his awakening to an embodied intersubjectivity is fraught with ambivalence. Of course, by the time we meet him he is already well disposed towards achieving a reciprocal and intersubjective ontology with the natives. He it is who, while welcoming members of The Third Bureau to his district, nevertheless points out the blindness of Colonel Joll. This is imaged in the latter's

constant wearing of the dark shades. As such, the Magistrate sets himself in an ambivalent kind of opposition to Joll and what the latter represents. His position is ambivalent because, in the early stages, when Joll commits his barbarities he can only stand at a distance, advising the old man and young boy who happen to be Joll's first suspects, to endure the torture as best they can. Instinctively, the Magistrate feels torture is wrong and an utterly unreliable method of arriving at the truth, a suspicion which he communicates to Joll in private.

Compounding the situation between the Magistrate and Colonel Joll is the irony — which is not lost on the Magistrate — that Colonel Joll is a practising “Cartesian” who believes in the dissociation of the body from the mind. While to Joll the mind is the seat of truth, he hopes to arrive at this truth through the bodies of the prisoners. In Cartesian ontology the truth about the Subject can only move, diode-like, from the mind to the body and not in reverse. As such, the Magistrate correctly suspects that, for people who subscribe to such a dichotomous conception of being, the truth being sought is an already predetermined one, a truth of confirmation, akin to the labels of stereotype that Jacobus Coetzee brings with him to the Namaquas. At one level Joll can stand scenes of torture because he can dissociate his Cartesian mind from his body, but at another level, because he believes he has to impose himself on his Others in a Cartesian-cum-Hegelian game of power and control that we saw obtaining between Eugene Dawn and his superior, Coetzee. Since he does not take any concrete steps to prevent the tortures of the “barbarians”, the Magistrate may be seen as being an accomplice to torture. But when he sees that the very first torture session ends in the old man's murder, and the boy's deep scarring, his doubts about the motives and practices of Empire deepen. And it is through the strategy of deepening the Magistrate's crisis and bewilderment, that Coetzee brings home the point about an intersubjective self-consciousness that does not come cheaply, a strategy that we encounter in most of Coetzee's novels.

The explanation for the Magistrate's inexplicable existential bewilderment comes from an unexpected source and it involves not a human being, but an animal. While he is keeping the barbarian girl, the Magistrate goes on one of his usual hunting-for-leisure excursions, except that this time things turn out differently. Relating his experience to the barbarian girl, the Magistrate points to intimations of his awakening to an intersubjective experience with the waterbuck, resulting in his inability to kill it. The narration of the

events in this episode points to the Magistrate looking into his own inner being after the gaze of the waterbuck, an experience whose extrospective and introspective trajectories gesture towards a recognition of intersubjectivity with, and an acknowledgement of, the otherness of the Other which he subsequently comes to respect. At this point the Magistrate acknowledges his double loss of autonomy that is attendant on the Self's encounter with its Others and notes how never before had he been conscious of not living his life totally on his own terms (42-43). This recognition of intersubjectivity provides the Magistrate with a basis from which he can stage his refusal to participate in the barbarities of Empire because he begins to sense the Others' presence within his subjectivity and the implication of his in theirs. Through the experiences generated from the Magistrate's encounters with his Others, Coetzee is already by this stage intimating at the possibility of the sympathetic and empathetic imagination between Subjects, a possibility he makes even more explicit in *Age of Iron*.

In *Age of Iron*, Coetzee fleshes out the thesis of an embodied intersubjectivity through the character of Mrs Curren. Coetzee stages Mrs Curren's personal predicament (as someone diagnosed with terminal cancer and the consequent troubles she comes to have with her own body whose supposed betrayal of her she keenly feels), and her hitherto unacknowledged ontological indebtedness towards her racial Others, against a background of the socio-political upheaval occasioned, she believes, by this very unacknowledgement of an ontological debt.

The link between Mrs Curren's cancerous condition and the death throes of apartheid has been noted by a number of critics thereby imparting a reciprocal symbolic significance to the two phenomena. It is a link whose relevance I share. But, further to this, what my study has sought to do is to explore the link between the two and the trajectory of Mrs Curren's personal awakening to an intersubjective ontological awareness within the context of a dying socio-political milieu. I have done this through attempting to explain the irruptions of her Others into her being and her subsequent positing of two types of redemptive logics, namely a post-binary logic of "both-and", rather than that of "either-or" and, most important, her broaching of a generous and selfless "cruciform logic". The argument in my study of *Age of Iron* is that Coetzee's positing of these two kinds of logic marks a significant step in the ontological and ethical development in his writing career.

There are some concerns raised in *Age of Iron* that are carried over to *Disgrace*. We see, for instance, Coetzee's continuing interest in the animal Other as a Subject deserving of ethical consideration. I have already noted Coetzee's concern for the animal Other in *Waiting for the Barbarians* where it is the waterbuck that he uses as the turning point in the Magistrate's new conception of his intersubjectivity. Also noted is the Magistrate's concern, during a rainstorm, for wild animals who have no extra protection against the elements but have to turn their backs and endure it all (168). Two examples will suffice for an illustration of this continuing concern for animals carried over from *Age of Iron*. Early in her encounter with Vercueil, Mrs Curren describes him as a "dog-man". And Vercueil's close association with his small dog in time gives prominence to the dog itself as well which at one point even leads Mrs Curren to wonder, after being disappointed with Vercueil's un-decipherability and seeming lack of imagination, if it was not the dog instead who had been sent to her as her angel of death and not Vercueil (193). Although the cunning Vercueil is seen carrying out his allotted task as an angel of death, largely encouraged by and taking advantage of Mrs Curren's own mistaken conception of him, in *Disgrace* it is indeed dogs that enable David Lurie to attain the salvation that he longs for in his state of disgrace. But also I have noted Mrs Curren's discomfort with what is being done to the chickens on the farm where Florence's husband works. Rather than call it a farm, she calls it "the enterprise" (44) to alert us to the instrumental logic that underpins its operations. These concerns also foreshadow the issues that Coetzee is going to raise in *Elizabeth Costello* (2003) in which a fully-fledged hypothesis of the empathetic imagination is also gestured towards in a bolder manner.

As I have just intimated above, in *Disgrace* Coetzee doubles back on a number of concerns that he has already raised in some of his previous publications. To start with, David Lurie shares some traits with Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*, and with those of the Magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In a sense he is a blend of these, at once wanting to acknowledge his bodily needs like the Magistrate yet finding no pleasure in the acknowledgement because of his enforced inhibitions (as happens to Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee). For example, I have observed that before he encounters Melanie Isaacs, Lurie's view of sex is programmatic and mechanistic. He describes his sex with Soraya as "rather dry, rather abstract" (3). Much as he longs for reciprocity, he treats the women he makes love to merely as objects. But upon encountering Melanie, he

awakens to something which is different enough even to move him to construct an *ero*-aesthetic theory of beauty, desire and sexual attraction. In his encounter with Melanie, Lurie embarks on a journey towards reconciliation with his body through a gradual jettisoning of a Cartesian heritage.

Through his *ero*-aesthetic theory, Lurie seeks to explain how the Subject, by being smitten with desire, which is aroused by another body, and getting directed towards it, is robbed of his or her supposed autonomy. From this initial realisation of his loss of autonomy with respect to the Other, it is only a matter of time before Lurie can acknowledge his intersubjectivity with all his Others. This is the central role that Melanie plays in Lurie's progress on his road towards an awakening of intimations of intersubjectivity with his Others, including his hitherto absolute Others, namely animals.

It is in his relations with neglected animals, however, that Lurie's Cartesian ontology comes to show most clearly. It is also through his close encounters with them — intersubjectively — that he unlearns that ontology to embrace a new one that is respectful towards all others. Of course, like the Magistrate, Lurie is already well disposed to a reception of something new. His acknowledgement of the sexual demands of his body (rather than denying them), his subsequent admiration for his daughter's full-bodiedness and her embeddedness in the land (62) etc., are all pointers in this direction. Lucy's embodiedness strikes a chord with Lurie's own valorisation of his body and its dispositions as well as his coming to sympathise with animals. In other words, Lurie's awakening to intersubjectivity with animals stems from his acknowledgement of his own un-ignorable embodiedness.

Also through her embeddedness in her environment, Lucy echoes Mrs Curren's late realisation of her ontological connection to the land and Lucy's message here is probably that "the settlers have arrived" and, they are ready, for as long as they please, to call this place home at last: they now conceive of themselves as being *in* this part of the world and are *of* it. But, as I have also noted, it would no longer have to be exclusively on their terms, being the Subjects equipped with a new conception of their subjectivity. And it is through Lucy Lurie that Coetzee stages his deep respect for the cruciform logic that he broaches in *Age of Iron* and in his interview with David Attwell (1992: 337). In Coetzee's view, the new terms for settlerism would include a combination of jettisoning of a

Cartesian ontology and the development of a sympathetic imagination. In extreme cases, even an appeal to the endurance of unmerited suffering, that is associated with a cruciform logic, might be required of them. Lucy's refusals to lay a charge against her violators and her decision to keep the pregnancy that results from her violation (both decisions reflective of a cruciform logic), set the ground for breaking the contestatory relations that continue to characterise the societies that Coetzee sketches in his writings.

In *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), a publication that I have termed Coetzee's literary *magnum opus* and apologia, the writer accords us a panoramic or "goatseye" view of his writing career, showcasing all the issues discussed in the previous novels. But, in this text, Coetzee does more than just give us a summary of his writing for, in addition to the sympathetic imagination, he takes things a few notches up and posits the "empathetic imagination" as the highest form of intersubjectivity. And what is more, his broaching of an embodied consciousness is even more pronounced and explicit in this text. It is by working from this text backwards to his earlier fiction that I could trace this development and that approach has enabled me to come up with the kind of study that I have carried out here.

As I have already noted, in this text, Coetzee recapitulates on what has gone before in his writing career and the lessons presented cover a wide range of issues from realism and idealism (a subject closely related to debates between structuralism and post-Structuralism and the latter's manifestations in post-Modernism), to human-animal relations. In raising the Realism versus Idealism debate, Coetzee's intention here seems to be to stick to that middle ground that we have seen him favour when it comes to representations of reality in his writings, which are neither wholly realistic nor wholly anti-realistic either. In this regard, I have noted that Coetzee (1992: 27) himself ruefully comments on his struggles between the promises and shortfalls of both illusionism and anti-illusionism. In the same lesson, Coetzee also uses the examples of inter-textuality as a manifestation of intersubjectivity but also to pay tribute to those authors who have given him the opportunity to sustain his writing career either by following after them (Cavafy, Kafka, Dostoevsky, Beckett), or by parodying them (Daniel Defoe, Jacobus Coetzee and others). Coetzee returns to this acknowledgement of his indebtedness to Kafka, especially, in the final lesson titled "At The Gate", which is a revised — but thinly veiled and abridged — version of Kafka's *The Trial*.

Two lessons form the centrepiece of this publication namely “The Philosophers and The Animals” and “The Poets and the Animals” and these two are collected under the rubric “The Lives of Animals.” “The Lives of Animals” was a lecture given by Coetzee as part of the Tanner Lecture series at Princeton University in 1997, and published as a standalone book titled *The Lives of Animals* in 1999. Only later was it subsumed in the *Elizabeth Costello* series of lessons. The same can be said of several other lessons that we find in this publication which had previously been published elsewhere. As several critics have noted regarding the two lecture-narratives that comprise “The Lives of Animals”, the division between philosophy and art is a spurious one, principally because of its glossing of all philosophy into a monolith (I have also noted, in this regard, that not all poets are post or anti-Cartesian either). Coetzee does not dismiss reason or thinking altogether. We have noted how in his defence of his mode of writing he calls art “an other mode of thinking” (1988b: 5). I have, therefore, endeavoured in my study to reconcile the two forms of scholarship by tapping into those strains of philosophy that are in sympathy with the world of art. In fact, there is even a whole branch of philosophy called “Aesthetics” dedicated to the appreciation of art some of whose strains mix “reason” with affect.

What is most striking about Coetzee’s presentation of “The Lives of Animals” is his progression from the sympathetic imagination to an empathetic imagination. He does this in the section where, after likening what is happening to animals today to what happened to the Jews during the Holocaust, Costello says the crime of those who watched from the sidelines was that they did not think themselves in the place of the Other (79). The overall import of these two lessons is to enlarge our imagination with regard to our animal Others.

Of course there is a danger in these lessons of proposing an ethics that results in a “commonwealth of sentients”, which then excludes non-sentients. And Costello’s polemics of people taking into their mouths “pieces of corpses bought with money”, and swallowing “juices of death wounds” threatens to score points in a cheap way. But both dangers are forestalled by Coetzee. The first one is prevented through a character such as David Lurie who is ethical not only towards live animals, but also towards dead ones, those that are no longer sentient. The second danger is obviated by Costello’s eschewing a prescriptive ethics and ultimately counselling her audience to look into their hearts and

listen to what their hearts are saying — I have noted that she is wearing leather shoes and carrying a leather purse herself (89). What it all comes down to, therefore, is for each Subject to work out his or her own ethical stance on the issue. Costello makes an important observation about how all living beings are predisposed to protect their own (90), but argues that this predisposition should in no way be the sole criterion for ethics because it can only lead to an ethics of the similar, a stance which would not be very different from a commonwealth of the sentient. According to the postulates of my study, that would mean existing merely at the level of “consciousness of”. Those who may not look like us do not by that standard fall outside our ethical ambit because the questions Coetzee seems to be asking in his writings are: who are these “us”? In other words, what, ontologically speaking, constitutes what we call “us”?

The answer to these questions lies in examining the constitutive elements of the Subject’s consciousness on which personal and group identities are based. My study has proposed a non-prescriptive ethics which, through the phenomenon of the intentionality of consciousness, involves acknowledging the Other’s contribution towards the Subject’s ontology, and the realisation of the Subject’s implication in the Other’s ontology. And this proposition is based on Coetzee’s positing of embodiedness and an attendant embodied consciousness, as cardinal ontological facts, as well as the sympathetic and empathetic imagination that arise from these conceptions of being. These phenomena, coupled with the post-binary and cruciform logics that Coetzee broaches, are what, in my view, constitute Coetzeean ethics.

To reiterate the point, in my study I have argued that J.M. Coetzee, from *In The Heart of The Country* (1977) onwards, by degrees, incrementally tests and crosses the boundaries between subjectivities. And by the time we get to *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), by positing an empathetic imagination as he has done, he reaches, perhaps the epitome of his theorising along that trajectory. And it is the valorisation of the body and an embodied consciousness that enable him to achieve such an ethical feat. To Coetzee, ethics are not just something abstract, rather, in the words of Attwell (1992: 3), they are something “felt on the bone”. And, as the theory underpinning my study argues, both the sympathetic and empathetic imaginations have their sources in the double loss of autonomy that an embodied Self-Other Subject comes to recognise about his embodied existential status. In the sympathetic imagination, the Subject feels for the Other aspects of whose being

are conceived to have become integral with his or her own consciousness. In the empathetic imagination, on the other hand, the Subject recognises aspects of his or her own being implicated in the other's Subjectivity and so he or she can literally conceive of himself in the Other's place, and this is perhaps the highest form of intersubjectivity imaginable.

But Coetzee has a warning regarding this kind of intersubjectivity and this warning is signposted in the postscript in the state of affairs between Lady Chandos's husband, Phillip, and his Others, in a state beyond language. There is a danger of positing a kind of oppressive, unmediated monism like that advocated by Baruch Spinoza here according to which being is associated with consciousness which according to Spinoza is monistic in nature and one, characteristically identifying such a consciousness with God (see A.K. Rogers, 1932: 268). Coetzee would argue, first and foremost, that even though embodied consciousness is a mediated affair, and he would also insist on the individuality and otherness of one's every Other (including the seemingly insignificant Other such as the small frogs of the Dulgannon river whom the panel of judges in the lesson "At the Gate" have not yet encountered). This respect for otherness counters the purely positivistic and constructivist view of being as that advocated by an empirical philosopher such as George Berkeley in his maxim "to be is to be perceived" which, as I have pointed out, reduces the Other to an epistemic representation when, in fact, *to be* is, first and foremost, ontological, simply *to be*. It is also meant to counter those ecological views of being that reduce and subordinate the individual to the system as well as the critical modes that reduce individuals to mere allegorical symbols. At the same time, through the staging of the sympathetic and empathetic imaginations, Coetzee warns against the Leibnizian postulation of monadic existence that underpins the solipsism of characters like Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee in *Dusklands*. If I were to sum up what I think is Coetzee's vision of life, that is how I would put it.

Following Coetzee's intimations of intersubjectivity through irruptions of otherness, what I see as my contribution to studies on this author's work through this study, is the link I have established between the physicalist strain within the philosophy of mind and a modified Kantian "metaphysics", especially Immanuel Kant's conception of concepts as comprising *form* and *content*. I have deployed this conception in demonstrating the Subject's ontological indebtedness to external sources of the content part of

consciousness. And, through the phenomenon of intentionality, and Kant's (1929: 27) observation that we cannot have appearances without something that appears, I have linked the Subject to the sources of his or her content and thereby also demonstrated that the Subject is not eternally separated or alienated from those sources. Instead, the Subject is not simply contiguous but coterminous and co-extensive, albeit in a mediated way, with the external sources of the content part of his or her consciousness. Thus, while accepting the thesis of the Other's radical otherness, I modify the thesis of the Other's radical exteriority — (of course I have avoided adopting “the categories” as being the nature of form as proposed by Kant preferring rather to view form merely as consciousness' condition of possibility and that it is embodied).

Such a conception of subjectivity disproves the Cartesian autonomy of the Subject at the same time that it counters the Subject's supposed alienation from himself or herself and from his or her Others, who include both those that possess consciousness and those that do not. In other words, the Subject does not produce the contents of his or her consciousness in a *sui generis* and *ex nihilo* fashion, and his or her ontological indebtedness to the Other constitutes his or her first loss of autonomy. As for those Others that do possess consciousness, the Subject is implicated in their consciousness and this second loss of autonomy counters the near solipsistic Nagelian neo-Cartesianism both in intra-species and inter-species intersubjectivity. It is my view that this double loss of autonomy accounts for the sympathetic and empathetic imagination that we see in Coetzee's fiction and which also accounts for the gripping curiosity that Coetzee's writing arouses in its readers and critics.

As I point out at the end of my introductory chapter, if I were asked to sum up what I think Coetzee drives at, ultimately, I will identify two trajectories, one ontological and another, related to and deriving from it, ethical. Ontologically speaking, Coetzee's empathetic imagination constitutes the epitome of his worldview, while ethically speaking, beyond the ethics of mutual ontological indebtedness and implication, it is the selflessness that characterises a cruciform logic that defines his ethics. Ultimately, then, ontologically speaking, the Coetzeean literary project could be described as one of embodying and grounding the supposedly autonomous, solipsistic and free-floating Cartesian Subject by alerting it, first and foremost, to its embodiedness and, further to that, pointing out its ontological indebtedness to its Others and its implication in the

Others's consciousnesses and so prevent it from continuing with its imperialist and ecological barbarities. However, ethically speaking, beyond the reciprocal ethics that arise from mutual ontological indebtedness and implication, it is the selflessness that characterises a cruciform logic that is the epitome of Coetzeean ethics.

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