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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Jan Charles Haluska entitled "Master and Slave in the First Four Novels of J.M. Coetzee." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

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MASTER AND SLAVE IN THE FIRST FOUR NOVELS OF J.M. COETZEE

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctor of Philosophy

Degree

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Jan Charles Haluska

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ABSTRACT

The first four novels of J. M. Coetzee are often judged by how well they seem to represent current conditions in South Africa. But they can be regarded more objectively as pieces of surreal, or reflexive, fiction, which turn from everyday reality to a mythic world of masters and slaves who often conform to Oedipal or Biblical patterns.

Dusklands ties Eugene Dawn, an American intellectual, to the Oedipal myth in one novella, while its other novella links Jacobus Coetzee, an eighteenth-century Afrikaner explorer, to the Canaan myth of Israel's dominating the Promised Land. Symbolically, both characters cross the twilit boundary between the sun of masterhood and the darkness of slavery.

In the Heart of the Country presents the protagonist, Magda, as an Oedipal hero[ine] who constructs reflexive fictions as an escape from the dreary reality of life on a South African desert farm. She cannot elude the basic pattern of master/slave relationships, even in those daydreams. Moreover, when she returns to reality, the bleakness itself remains master.

Waiting for the Barbarians is set in a surreal world bestrided by a dying empire, one of whose magistrates finds himself seeking a third, ethical position apart from the strictly-defined roles of masterhood and slavery. His failure to do so nevertheless represents a triumph of the striving human spirit.

In Life and Times of Michael K a slavelike title character's

experience in South Africa follows a naturalistic downward spiral. Metaphorically, he lives as a slave-animal in a mythic Caanan, where any attempted escape from the master-slave dichotomy is futile, leading to privation, and perhaps to death.

Although Foe, Coetzee's recent fifth novel, is beyond the scope of this dissertation, we notice that it also centers on the master/slave theme. A reflexive retelling of Robinson Crusoe, it uses Cruso and Friday as master and slave respectively, with the impossible third position represented by Susan Barton, a character missing from the original. Coetzee's novels thus have a broader scope than present-day concerns in South Africa, and therefore may qualify as classics.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"In Dusklands the modern novel arrives in South Africa for the first time"; such was Jonathan Crewe's reaction to the appearance of J. M. Coetzee as a novelist in 1974 (90). Three other books have followed in turn: In the Heart of the Country (1977), winning the CNA Literary Award; Waiting for the Barbarians (1980), which received the CNA Literary Award, the James Tait Black Memorial Prize, and the Geoffrey Faber Award; and Life and Times of Michael K (1983), awarded both the CNA Literary Award and Britain's most valuable literary award, the Booker McConnell Prize. His latest novel, Foe (1986), winner of the Jerusalem prize, will be considered briefly in the conclusion of this study.

Coetzee, born in Cape Town on February 9, 1940, of Afrikaner/ Anglo parents, grew up speaking both Afrikaans and English within his family. This gave him the easy familiarity with both languages apparent in his tight English prose which features a slight Dutch flavor at times. His cross-cultural background roots him widely in South African tradition, which at the same time increases his novels' strong feeling of authenticity; for instance, Jacobus Coetzee, an eighteenth-century ancestor, and the Karoo Desert, where the family lived during much of Coetzee's early life, both appear tellingly, if fictively, in his books. After taking undergraduate degrees in literature and mathematics, Coetzee worked as a computer programmer in England until 1965, then entered a graduate English program at the

University of Texas at Austin, finishing his Ph.D. with a dissertation on Samuel Beckett's prose style in 1969. Following two years as assistant professor of English at the State University of New York, Coetzee returned to South Africa. He began lecturing at the University of Cape Town in 1972, and was promoted to professor of general literature in 1984. Having brought two novellas-in-progress back from the United States, he published them together under the title Dusklands. That novel and the others that followed, along with a number of journal articles, have established Coetzee's reputation as scholar, critic, and author well beyond the borders of South Africa (Current Biography 18-19).

All the novels have met a varied reception, however, ranging from such enthusiasm as Nadine Gordimer's comment that "J. M. Coetzee [is] a writer with an imagination that soars like a lark and sees from up there like an eagle" (3), to unfavorable observations from others like Michael Vaughan, who finds that Coetzee's fiction "can say next to nothing, and certainly nothing reliable, about experiences outside the modality of its own racial-historical dialectic" (128).

Perhaps Robert Post expresses most clearly the reason for critical disagreement on Coetzee's writing.

> Unlike Paton, Gordimer, and Fugard, who are relatively unambiguous and straightforward in their writing and who usually speak directly to contemporary problems of their country, Coetzee's narratives [sic] are inclined to be less straightforward, more ambiguous, and, at least on the surface, not to be about the South Africa of today. (67)

Despite such objections, Coetzee's novels can be seen as consistent attempts to illumine the basic condition of masterhood/slavery which

stands behind a great deal of human misery, of which apartheid is but the most recent infamous instance.

However, in an atmosphere rife with direct representation of an unjust political and social system, a reader's expectations may blind him/her to a novel's use of nonrealistic techniques. For instance, a reviewer comments that Coetzee's third novel, Waiting for the Barbarians, represents a retreat from the realism of his second, In the Heart of the Country: "Now Coetzee seems to have backed away from harsh reality and taken refuge in allegory" (De Villars 19). Waiting for the Barbarians can indeed be read allegorically, but in truth, each of Coetzee's first four novels approaches "reality" with extreme subjectivity, and although In the Heart of the Country is undeniably harsh, it is a hothouse of fantasy rather than a realistic portrayal.

A similar misunderstanding leads other commentators to accuse Coetzee of overworking the standard observations about apartheid. For example, a critic wonders whether "anything would have been lost if the dimension of interracial sex had been excluded" from In the Heart of the Country, since that feature is so commonplace in South African novels (Parker 14). As we will see in Chapter III, the sexual theme in Coetzee's second novel goes far beyond interracial taboos--it enters into the girl's basic relationship with her world, including her father, a messenger boy, the servants, and some imagined deities. It includes strongly Oedipal overtones at times. To have allowed a color line to partition this sexuality would have weakened the thematic fabric of the novel.

Coetzee's Novels in a Master/Slave Context

Clayton Hamilton has said, "The whole question of the morality or immorality of a work of fiction is a question merely of its truth or falsity" (9). The misreadings we have illustrated above seem to accuse Coetzee's works of a kind of falsity in having "backed away" from telling the truth openly, and in having hidden behind "allegory" and sexual triteness instead of attacking South African social conditions in a freshly realistic mode. But if one could establish that these novels aim at presenting a universal context for human masterhood and slavery, rather than merely exposing current injustices in a particular country, then Coetzee's subjective approach might be clearer and more defensible. A unified thematic reading of those novels would clarify their relationship to the world at large, and to the concept, beyond the simple policy of apartheid, of masterhood and slavery in general.

One such reading is already in existence. Teresa Dovey's dissertation, "The Lacanian Subject in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee," takes the position that Coetzee's first four novels represent a successful attempt "to subvert the Master/Slave relationship between text and reader" through "self-deconstructive allegories" (Abstract). As valid as this approach may be, however, it leaves open the question of other contexts for Coetzee's use of the master/slave theme.

Actually, no term smaller than "postmodern" defines Coetzee's narrative range. Perhaps the most accurate general description would

involve three critical terms modified to a greater or lesser degree: fabulation, naturalism, and reflexiveness. That such a mix could exist harmoniously is a tribute to Coetzee's skill as an author.

Coetzee's Novels as Fabulations

Perhaps most obviously, these novels can be read as "fabulations," a term used by Robert Scholes for literature that "tends away from direct representation of the surface of reality but returns toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy" (3). In other words, such works may disengage the reader from firm perceptions of time and place in order to bring him/her into a closer relationship with the timeless and universal as a bridge to her/his own world again. What Scholes says of Jorge Luis Borges may be equally applied to some critical readings of Coetzee: "I submit that we have missed the reality of Borges because we have misunderstood his view of reality and of the relationship between words and the world" (9). Each of Coetzee's novels can certainly be called an "ethically controlled fantasy," by which, as with Borges, "we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come" (Scholes 13).

Coetzee's first four novels--even the ostensibly realistic Life and Times of Michael K--can be seen as fabulations whose imagined terrain is the world of masters and slaves whatever their ostensible settings may be. On the way we will notice how the novels emphasize their fabulative nature by deliberate breaks with reality. Scholes notes such techniques in Lawrence Durrell's novel Alexandria Quartet

as serving "to blur the line between the real and the artificial in order to make it harder for the reader to begin applying his disbelief, even if he refuses to suspend it" (33). Coetzee's novels work similarly to establish the landscape of the master/slave world firmly in the reader's mind.

Coetzee's Novels and Myth

At the same time we will see how Coetzee builds his fabulations themselves on a foundation of myth. The process begins with Dusklands, whose two parts rest thematically on the myths of Oedipus and of Caanan, the Biblical Promised Land, respectively. Both of these myths are presences in the other books to a greater or lesser extent.

The Oedipus myth involves images of fathers and sons at war--the former asserting domination and the latter bent on revolution. After Dusklands' Eugene Dawn applies it to America's relationship to the Vietnamese, the myth surfaces variously in the other three novels.

The Caanan myth seems even better suited to return Coetzee's reader "toward actual human life," in Scholes' words, since it is an important part of the cultural consciousness of white South Africa. Historian Marianne Cornevin writes that "the idea that the Afrikaners are God's chosen people . . . is still commonly voiced," with the assurance of those whose "right of ownership over the land is inalienable, because it [sic] is the 'promised' land of God" (Cornevin 33). Thus to many white South Africans the blacks are the equivalent of Philistines over whom the whites have the God-given duty to rule.

Like Oedipal sons, however, the Philistines of the Bible fight hard, and sometimes gain the mastery (Judges 13:1).

These two myths both rest on a kind of master/slave dichotomy, which the novels establish mythically in its own right. Northrop Frye tells us how "In the solar cycle of the day . . . there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative" (15). All of Coetzee's first four novels make at least passing reference to such a "solar cycle." Beginning with Dusklands, this dissertation will show that the sun represents organized masterhood advancing inexorably into the shadows at the horizon. At the same time, Waiting for the Barbarians clearly pictures the imperial decline through vivid sun/shadow imagery. The other two novels make fewer symbolic references to the myth, but "the solar cycle" is in the background for them also, as we shall see.

This sunlit master/slave world lends itself to the brooding image of the coming twilight. Dovey notes:

> In Coetzee's novels the Master/Slave dialectic functions at levels of varying complexity and abstraction: it serves to articulate the actual dynamic of racial domination represented in the novels, a dynamic in which the position of mastery held by the Whites is a hollow mastery. . . . (17)

In Dusklands' "The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee" the hollowness of that mastery is shown as based on a core of historical lies. In the Heart of the Country involves fictive madness which, though it is escape, still exacts a crippling cost. Waiting for the Barbarians posits an empire in its death throes, and Life and Times of Michael K takes place in a South Africa whose social structure is crumbling. This sense of doom may remind us of naturalism; indeed, there are

affinities between that genre and Coetzee's work.

Coetzee as Naturalistic Novelist

In a sense, these books can be read as direct descendents of what Zola termed "experimental" novels, but with a validity unapproached by earlier naturalistic writings. To understand how this may be, we need to review briefly, remembering that Zola explains his concept thus:

> The observer in [the novelist's mental personality] gives the facts as he has observed them, suggests the point of departure, displays the solid earth on which his characters are to tread and the phenomena to develop. Then the experimentalist appears and introduces an experiment, that is to say, sets his characters going in a certain story so as to show that the succession of facts will be such as the requirements of the determinism of the phenomena under examination call for. (8)

As to the precise nature of that "point of departure," Coetzee himself writes:

> Zola's overriding thesis is that degeneracy . . . is not an affliction of individuals . . . [but that] society itself is an organism, and the degeneracy of individuals is in fact a symptom of the sickness of the whole body. (Blood 45)

Thus he concludes that, given the tautological idea of survival of the fittest, "why should one not foresee and even look forward to the triumph of the barbarian rather than the reign of universal light?" (Blood 47). Coetzee's first four novels can all be interpreted as an outworking of that question in one manner or another.

Of course, as Clayton Hamilton, among others, told us years ago, "The 'naturalistic' writers are deceived in thinking that they represent life as it really is" (51-52). Mr. Hamilton hints, quite rightly, that Zola and the others were confused over the difference between deduction and induction.

Controlled experiments are inductive; one forms a hypothesis, then looks for empirical data to confirm it. Conversely, Zola's "experimentalists" are forced to proceed deductively, since they allow the hypothesis (the "facts," in his term) to govern the result as a major premise controls a syllogism. For example, since Jack London has postulated a universe in which Martin Eden cannot win, the character is merely a doomed minor premise, and not the subject of an "experiment" at all. We may expose the weakness in naturalism by testing its hypothesis inductively, as Mr. Hamilton does: "If their [the naturalists'] thesis were true, the human race would have dwindled to extinction long ago" (51). But if a naturalistic novelist were to recognize the inescapably deductive nature of his writing, he might decide to use an inductively-validated major premise as his starting point. He might decide to use only generalizations verified by their acceptance in multiple ages and a variety of cultures. If so, he might turn to honored myths for his starting point. Both the Canaan Myth and the myth of Oedipus have stood this test of time, and both can be read as presenting a bipolar world of masters and slaves, whether in the guise of Israelite/Philistine warfare or in the struggles of successive fathers and sons.

At this point someone may follow Mr. Hamilton's line of attack to object that all sons do not kill all fathers, and that most Judeo/Christians resist the idea that heathens are legitimate targets of exploitation. But the myths themselves have power as fictions, even ignoring Freud and South African history; they have a ring of truth

that does not lose its tone, century after century. They exercise some form of influence in our mental interiors if nowhere else.

This puts myths at the center of what Graff calls "the general crisis of modern thought, which pursues a desperate quest for meaning in experience while skeptically unable to accept the validity of any meaning proposed" (224-225). We accept the power of myths, along with other fictions, despite their ultimate invalidity.

Thus an experimental novel in the late 20th century need not be "realistic" at all. On the contrary it could move ostentatiously over a fictive landscape under the control of one or more myths as major premises. Zola notwithstanding, the experimental writer today can abandon the "solid earth on which his characters are to tread" in favor of solid myth from which they can be suspended.

Coetzee himself seems very receptive to the idea of mixing an updated naturalism with a tragic myth such as that of Oedipus, which he identifies as a "religious tragedy" (Man's Fate 17). He writes, "What religious tragedy and naturalistic tragedy have in common is the evocation of pity and terror" (Man's Fate 17). Identifying Paton's Cry, the Beloved Country as tragic/naturalistic, Coetzee states that in it "The gods are secularized as the pitiless justice of the law" (Man's Fate 17). For Coetzee, on the other hand, the "gods" are the inexorable laws governing the world of masters and slaves under the two great myths we have already mentioned.

This mythic elevation is the point of differentiation between Coetzee's novels and novels such as Paton's. One critic notes that his use of "other than realist fiction techniques" places him apart

from the "coherent tradition of the realistic novel in South Africa" (Gray 136). In each of his novels the reader is lifted free by a variety of methods. Sometimes the narrator retells an episode in various contradictory ways, as with In the Heart of the Country; other techniques confuse the composition of place or time to the point of vertigo, as in Dusklands. A character might be picturable with painful clarity in one detail, yet remain impossibly obscure in others, a feature of Life and Times of Michael K. All this amounts to a back-handed, and effective, affirmation of the fictive as sole substance, and a simultaneous denial of its substantiality.

Coetzee's Novels as Reflexive

Such a dual attitude toward fiction leads directly into viewing these novels as being "reflexive," to use Michael Boyd's term. Boyd explains that "what distinguishes reflexive storytellers from others is their sustained effort to make us aware of the nonexistence of their fictive world outside of language" (71), and adds that "The reflexive novelist will use nonnovelistic material, space-time dislocations, collage, alternative endings, and parody to remind the reader that a novel is something made" (29). Coetzee does, in fact, use all these features in his novels. Boyd continues:

> Insofar as reflexive novelists write about the various relationships between real and fictional worlds, they find both positions interesting and representative of different ways of looking at literature and life. But insofar as they reject the assumptions of realism, they tend to write novels that are highly language-conscious yet skeptical of the power of language to create a reality. (30)

An interviewer's question and Coetzee's reply are interesting in

this connection:

> A final question on your books. Some have found it incongruous, or implausible should I say, that a frontiersman of the 18th century like Jacobus Coetzee should be delivering such complex, essentially modern meditations on exploration, the myth of the gun etcetera, and perhaps more so that a colonial spinster like Magda should speak in a form and tone that is so obviously a product of a modern urban consciousness. How would you reply to such a criticism?
>
> I would reply to a criticism like that by saying that (a) Jacobus Coetzee is not an 18th century frontiersman and (b) Magda is not a colonial spinster.
>
> Who are they then?
>
> I . . . figures in books [ellipses in the original]. (Watson 24).

In three out of four of Coetzee's novels, the protagonists themselves narrate. In effect, Eugene Dawn, Jacobus Coetzee, Magda, and the magistrate create their own reality through language. Michael K is approached from the omniscient position, but in a way very close to first-person narration, with the text concentrating exclusively on Michael's perceptions and actions in two of the book's three sections. The middle section is told from the first-person point of view by a doctor who redefines Michael fictively.

Put another way, Coetzee's works seem to belong on the left side of F. K. Stanzel's "typological circle," centering on the narrating and experiencing I, the "I of the interior monologue," and the "he/she > I," never crossing to the right side of the first person/third person boundary (xvi). This concentration on the character's perspective closes off the possibility of an objective stance, an omniscient commentary which would shape the reader's ideas for him/her, and open the way toward the "total subjectivity" which Robbe-

Grillet advocates:

> It is God alone who can claim to be objective. While in our books, on the contrary, it is a man who sees, who feels, who imagines, a man located in space and time, conditioned by his passions, a man like you and me. And the book reports nothing but his experience, limited and uncertain as it is. It is a man here, now, who is his own narrator, finally. (139)

Although Boyd asserts that such characters "are mere surrogates for the author," created in order to "draw attention to" that author (30), the generalization does not apply to Coetzee. His technique throws dramatic emphasis on the character as narrator, not on the author who hides playfully in the background. For instance, when Magda tries various fictive experiments, they are her experiments--Coetzee's face is well masked behind them. She herself is the ostensible creator of the reflexivity in the novel, while the author produces the overall novelistic experiment of mythic application in a larger, more indirect way.

Coetzee and the "Communicative Approach"

Nevertheless, as a writer living in the turmoil of South Africa, Coetzee has made his humanistic concerns clear through his fiction. He says:

> I still tend to see the South African situation as only one manifestation of a wider historical situation to do with colonialism, late colonialism, and neo-colonialism.
> And it was this that you were stressing in Dusklands.
> It certainly was, yes. (Watson 23).

This desire to stress an idea coupled with Coetzee's dislocative narrative invite his novels to be viewed from one more related critical perspective. Theo D'Haen terms it "the communicative approach" (127). D'Haen finds "a trend in post-modern fiction

striving for defamiliarization and alienation effects in narrative" in order to "undermine the illusionist conventions that focus a reader's attention upon a novel's fictional realm, and return the reader to his own reality" (127). In effect, such a novel gives its reader a new pattern of thought, then forces him/her back to her/his own world in order to apply it. Such writings "are active in the world in that they directly influence their reader's views and attitudes, and potentially his future actions" (D'Haen 127). Coetzee's novels can have that effect, as in the case of one critic who attests to a "radical ideological turning" following her reading of Waiting for the Barbarians (Du Plessis 87). Novels whose dislocative techniques have that impact, says D'Haen, are to be seen "as acts (on the part of the author) and experiences (for their readers) and therefore not as structural parallels to the world, but as functional elements in the world" (127).

All of these four ways of looking at Coetzee's novels are valid. Whether we choose to see these books as fabulations based on mythic structures, as naturalistic novels using myth for major premises, as reflexive narratives drawing attention to their own fictive realities, as communications aimed at uprooting the reader out of his/her comfortably familiar world, or as a combination of the above, we are drawn to at least one point of agreement: each perspective affirms that Coetzee engages the reader and shows him/her a mythic country of masters and slaves whose landscape has profound implications for the "real" world.

Therefore this dissertation will avoid adopting any of those critical stances too narrowly. Instead we will concentrate primarily on characterization and symbolism, seeing important dislocative techniques as puzzles whose solutions result in thematic vividness and greater reader sensitivity to mythic truths within the context of a world of masters and slaves.

CHAPTER II

DUSKLANDS

Few overt links exist between the two novellas comprising J. M. Coetzee's Dusklands. These novellas, The Vietnam Project and The Narrative of Jacobius Coetzee, involve widely different locations, separate periods of history, and protagonists unlike each other in most respects. Additionally, "The genre adopted in Dusklands is a complex one in which anthropology and history, documentary and fictional writing intermingle" (Dovey 66). All this contributes to a very reflexive effect as "we are brought back to our own divided condition as readers . . ." (Dovey 146). Nevertheless, as one critic tells us, "They are identical, not in character or experience, but in the mode of consciousness by which they perceive their world" (Vaughan 123). That world is essentially naturalistic, consisting of only two kinds of people: masters and slaves. Both move within a framework of myth envisioned and enforced by the masters who turn a blind eye to the human realities thus obscured. The slaves for their part see those realities clearly enough, but are impotent. Thus human potential is stunted through distorted vision on one hand and voicelessness on the other; moreover, any person who changes roles from slave to master or vice versa invites self-destruction in a world "where every human encounter . . . is a test of power" (Glendinning 45A). This chapter will consider those themes, taking each novella in turn.

The Vietnam Project is itself split into three parts. Beginning

and ending in narration by protagonist Eugene Dawn, it includes a middle section excerpting the introduction to his think-tank report for the Department of Defense. The primary unifying factors are that Dawn writes all three parts, and that all have thematic roots in the master-slave dichotomy.

Vagueness of setting underscores the fabulative nature of the novella. The Vietnam Project's first two thirds contain only one clue as to where Mr. Dawn resides--a mention of his visiting the Harry S. Truman Library daily (5-6). According to the American Library Directory, only Independence, Missouri has such a place. Why a think-tank should be located there rather than in Washington, D.C. or at least in a city with a prestigious university is never explained. Later, when Dawn flees to the California town of Dalton or Heston--he is not sure which--we may suspect Coetzee of whimsey in placing the madman in the Loco Motel (35). The issue goes deeper, however: neither location exists at all.[1]

A possible explanation for this ambiguity involves seeing the story as set more in a world of symbol than in space-time. Dawn's journey is, in a sense, from Independence to Loco. He seems to have had a fairly normal life until starting work on The Vietnam Project, but since then, according to his wife's view, his "human sympathies have been coarsened . . ." and he has "become addicted to violent and

---

[1] The Rand McNally Commercial Atlas and Marketing Guide, which claims to "list every populated place in the U. S." carries a record of neither town. A Daulton (note spelling) CA is some 300 miles from Coetzee's site. perverse fantasies" (9). The end is madness in that appropriately named motel.

The first part of the narrative exposes Dawn's ambivalence in a world consisting of but two types of people: masters and slaves. Although Dawn's role is ambivalent, his basic identity is slavelike, expressible also in the related pattern of his childlike subservience. Indeed, the first sentence of the novella carries a feeling of powerlessness faintly echoing the birth-moment of being named and launched willy-nilly: "My name is Eugene Dawn. I cannot help that. Here goes" (1). A few lines down the same page he reinforces the slave and child image simultaneously: "Here I am under the thumb of a manager, a type before whom my first instinct is to crawl." A moment later Dawn adds a touch of childish yearning: "I need peace and love and order for my work. I need coddling" (1).

Dawn's slavelike manner clearly did begin in childhood. He recalls, "I was always a clever child, a good child, and a clever child." He adds, "I was seen and not heard" (5). This last sentence is significant, for it establishes Dawn's duties as a slave/child--to be "seen" only in the sense of being shown off (children and servants are traditionally dressed more for family appearances than for self-expression) and to be silently unobtrusive. "I am bad at confrontations," he says. "My first impulse is to give in, to embrace my antagonist and concede all in the hope that he will love me" (1-2). This impulse from his heart has its practical side nevertheless. Love is the great hope of both slaves and children, their only protection from the whims of those empowered over them.

Despite his slavishness, however, Dawn has another side which we

also glimpse early: "Fortunately I despise my impulses" (2). A bit later he adds "I have just been biding my time" (9). Slaves traditionally carry the seeds of revolt in their minds, but the only other role to play in Dawn's world is that of master.

Dawn's yearnings for masterhood also began early, stemming from the growth of his mind. "I was a bookish child," he recalls, "I grew out of books" (30). His favorite genre was (and is) the encyclopedia, which taught him to value order, that first requirement of all masters, but his idea of order is as completely unmixed with living emotion as his slavelike side is saturated with it. An example is his conviction that the best way to classify people is alphabetically. More to the point, he is skilled in growing crystals, a process he found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, although any living thing he has ever tried to raise has "rotted" (30). His master-side's compulsion to approach life in terms of inert order blinds him to the needs of all things incapable of "obeying . . . dead crystal life-force" (30). He therefore approaches the world as if it were crystaline. He gives unwitting support to his wife's already-quoted worry over his declining "human sympathies" by admitting to "living a crystal life nowadays," adding that "Exorbitant formations flower in my head, that sealed, airless world" (30). Not surprisingly, he meets human situations with crystaline rigidity.

A sign of the increasing dominance of Dawn's head over his heart appears in his determination to assert rigid mastery over his family, believing that "all concessions are mistakes" (2). The evident moral blindness of the statement seems to dovetail with his recollection of

its ultimate wellspring: "It was on the Encyclopedia Britannica [sic], 1939 edition, that I lost my eyesight" (30).

In the second section we see the division of Dawn's personality beween his heart on one hand and a blind masterly head on the other. His Department of Defense project highlights this duality by giving him insights into both masterhood and slavery, but does not close the gap between these incompatible sides. "People who doubt themselves have no core," he says, adding, "I must pull myself together" (2).

He is unlikely to do so, since the military clients require that he speak from the rigidly ordered viewpoint of a master with the stammering tongue of a slave. His superior, Coetzee (more on the significance of this name later) explains that the report Dawn has drafted needs more slavish "self-effacing persuasion" (4). Dawn, knowing that he does not control his own personality enough to be called a master, reminds himself almost despairingly that "Power speaks only to power" (3). Dawn's own attitude toward Coetzee reflects that of the slave regarding his master: "I fear him and despise his blindness" (1).

In order to complete the job, Dawn attempts to use what is perhaps the only human link between both sides of the master/slave dichotomy: myth. On one hand, a myth may be seen as a geometric, almost crystaline pattern underlying many stories, just as a certain geometric shape may be common to many kinds of leaves. Alternately, myth gives voice to the otherwise mute inner self, as did Oedipus the King some 2,500 years before Freud, and provides a measure of safety

in the telling. Nadine Gordimer calls myth "a psychologically defensive and protective device" (Heywood, 105). Dawn can use both the voice and the protection. In any case, he uses this approach to allow expression to both the master and the slave in his own thinking.

His thesis is that the United States can achieve psychological dominance over the Vietnamese only by operating within the structure of one of the great myths of all time. He chooses the Oedipal pattern of sons and their mother, seen as the people and land of Vietnam, in rebellion against an absolutist father, the United States. He explains that "The father is authority, infallibility, ubiquity. He does not persuade, he commands" (21). As counterpoise, "The earth-mother hides her sons in her bosom, safe from the thunderbolts of the father . . ." (25). As long as that condition exists, "The scheming of mother and sons is . . . endless" (26). From there Dawn's mind follows crystaline logic until he realizes the only sure path to victory: make war on the earth-mother herself. "Our future belongs not to the earth but to the stars. Let us show the enemy that he stands naked on a dying landscape" (29).

Of course, Dawn's outlook here is that of the master-class, with all of their characteristic blindness. Although his propaganda might be more effective than the Army's heretofore, his thinking does not reflect the clarity of heart-vision. He can support the idea of destroying the country in order to save it because for him the crystaline logic of the myth blots out all other considerations, just as a man might come to argue that a leaf is really no more than a purely geometric shape. At the same time he is not insensitive to the crying of his slave-self. "Do not think it does not

pain me to make this report," he says, adding, "On the other hand, do not underestimate my exultation" (29). This ambivalence itself is painful to him. Following an enthusiastic description of carpet bombing he repeats his earlier cry: "I have to pull myself together" (29).

Dawn's photo collection is an obvious attempt to do that. One print shows a former college linebacker in his soldier's uniform having sex with a Vietnamese girl child, a second pictures two Special Forces troopers with severed enemy heads, a third features one Vietcong prisoner staring out from a cell. Through these photos Dawn seems to be attempting to work through his feelings of guilt over participation in the war, for he has refused to visit Vietnam personally. He would rather not look at these scenes either, but at least they offer a chance to keep his distance: "I close my eyes and pass my fingertips over the cool, odorless surface of the print. Evenings are quiet here in the suburbs" (16). His slave-side seems to demand that he look, while his master-self seems equally determined to approach the scenes with other than sight. Once again we see the pain of an internal power struggle.

If Dawn's master-side takes the persona of Oedipal father, his slave-self speaks most clearly through the report's second myth, presented from an Oedipal son's viewpoint. Reflecting the slave's sharp eyesight, this myth is strikingly visual: "The Vietnam report has been composed facing east into the rising sun and in a mood of poignant regret (<u>piondre</u>, to pierce) that I am rooted in the evening-lands" (6). Dawn's obviously symbolic name arises from this myth.

Although rooted behind in night, the dawn itself faces an eastern future, and exists only in the ephemeral moments before actual sunrise. The sun, as traditionally godlike ruler of the earth, is a fitting symbol for the omnipotent father/master whom Dawn reports as advancing from just over the horizon, while he himself seems bound in the twilight of ambivalence as an obedient, orderly son awaiting the full glare of dominion, while yet cherishing shadowy rebellion in his heart. This is not a comfortable or a long-term position. The light he faces is the growing certainty of an imperial future, warning him that any sympathy with those "who have taken up arms" proceeds from "the dark self" which "strives toward humiliation and turmoil," and promising to fulfill the yearning of "the bright self toward obedience and order" (27).

We need not belabor the Oedipal connotations which link the two myths. For our purpose it is enough to notice that this second vision comes from the perspective of one who lives within a duskland of light and shadow, dreading alike the blaze of noontide dominance and the subversion of midnight. It also gives a metaphoric structure to the vision differences between masters and slaves. Masters are forever peering suspiciously into shadows where, by definition, their light does not pierce. The slave, on the other hand, sees too much. Whether his eye fixes on the sun or retreats deeper into shadow, light approaches the slave relentlessly. His stammer before a master is a corollary to the old paradox: how does one describe "red" to a man blind from birth?

Here we should pause to correct one of the few pieces of

criticism on Dusklands. Roger Owen's otherwise excellent review says that "the dusklands of the title are those 'evening lands' where the sun has set--in other words, the 'West.'" That is directly contrary to the symbolism of this passage. Rather, the colonizers arise from the east to the shadowy western wilderness itself. As long as the imperial sun remains low, patches of dark rebellion will remain to mar the advancing order. Nevertheless that advance is a relentless sunrise, soon to end all darkness. Crewe agrees with that reading in his review, saying that the dusklands are "'voids' into which the Western consciousness . . . explodes. . ." (92-93). Although Dawn seems here to disregard current "decline of the West" theories, he does foreshadow the results of his own doomed rebellion later on.

To sum up then, Dawn's introduction to "Project New Life for Vietnam" can be seen as the attempt by a slave with masterful hopes to articulate his vision to the dark-eyed military men. It begins by calling attention to the blindness of current propaganda efforts, and notes that the slave's voice is muted: "in Vietnam all verbal responses are untrustworthy" (23). Then it suggests myth as exploitable common ground between master and slave.

Although Dawn's slave-self is offering to enlighten the masters, he must also be fundamentally inarticulate as far as they are concerned. His supervisor has labeled him so, but Dawn gives ample evidence on his own toward the end of the report's introduction. There ironically, he begins by boasting of his communicative prowess. "Now I bring . . . meaning to light in that blinding moment of

ascending meta-historical consciousness in which we begin to shape our own myths" (26). Anyone familiar with the matter-of-fact language of military reports can imagine how inappropriate such an outburst will appear to a general behind a desk. Then in an apparent attempt to "shape such a myth around himself and perhaps therefore win a soldier's sympathy, Dawn pictures his struggles at communication in mythically military terms: "Staggering in my bleeding armor . . . erect, alone on the plain, beset" (27). Apparently seeing the hopelessness of that metaphor also, and shortly afterwards he ends the report's introduction with a slavish plea for his superiors to see past his broken voice to his vision. "But I see things. . . . What I say is in pieces. I am sorry." (29).

Dawn does see things, even though he has refused to visit the country he advises on, and in terms of the thematic structure of the novella that makes perfect sense. A slave himself, he reports that his central source of insight about Vietnam is "introspection." He says, "Vietnam, like everything else, is inside me . . ." (14). This idea paves the way for the novella to focus on Dawn's family and personal problems once again.

Dawn himself embodies a war between mastery and slavehood. Even his mastery over his own body is contested. He comments that "my will is concentrated on subduing spasms in the various parts of my body" (5). Symbolizing this need to grip himself, his hands clench involuntarily until he corrects them. Then his feet curl. A psychologist might say that Dawn's subconscious plays the role of slave here, trying to send inarticulate distress signals to his

conscious mind. Dawn's master-self is blind to this, treating the situation on the level of simple rebellion and regretting the "indiscipline of my body" (5). A master not in control is, of course, a slave in some sense, and Dawn acts the part. He is "hunched and shifty" before his supervisor, adding, "I cannot help these eyes" (2). The fact that he cannot seem to meet the gaze of a superior clearly symbolizes that no sharing of vision--and thus no real communication--will take place between them.

Dawn's relationship with his wife Marilyn follows a master/slave pattern with an undercurrent of rebellion seen largely in terms of the Vietnam War. In place of bombardment he speaks of stimulating her sexually with a mechanical device (elsewhere he refers to a detonating shell's "orgasm of explosion" [29]), typically failing to see her misery in the process. "She cries when I do it," he says, "but I know that she loves it. People are all the same" (10). The U. S. military make the same basic mistake regarding Vietnam, according to Dawn. Believing that "people are all the same," American propaganda efforts attempt to speak to the Western mind's "doubting, secret self," and so "to embody the ghost inside the villager" (20). But the villager does not have that kind of mind. As Dawn explains, "there has never been a ghost there" (20). Apparently only masters or would-be masters are so haunted.

Another spectre for Dawn is the growing suspicion that Marilyn cuckolds him, perhaps on Wednesdays when she comes home from therapy, "smiles, and brushes off my caresses" (11). It is interesting to note

that such supposedly rebellious times prompt her to give "a candid return for my candid gaze" (12) unlike Dawn's own shifty look before Coetzee. Ironically, he finds such a "candid" gaze in one of twenty-four pictures he hoards as he writes his report. A Vietnamese prisoner stares out, half his face in light, half in shadow, as though he, like Marilyn, were moving from obedience to rebellion. Dawn longs to caress the prisoner also. "The man in the tiger cage flashes a black eye at me. I stretch out my hand" (34). Both instances show that Dawn is uncomfortable with the master's lack of human contact, but only when the lack of contact involves a rebellious slave, that is, one who shows signs of incipient masterhood. Dawn notices that Wednesdays "are the days when I need Marilyn most" (11).

In the novella's third section, Dawn's striving to attain the position of undisputed master reaches the point of action as he kidnaps Martin, his own son, thus answering his wife's supposed rebellion and at the same time capturing as it were his own private slave. This seeming identity as actual master surprises him. "I marvel at myself. I have done a deed" (35).

But Dawn's masterhood will be ephemeral, even as the dawn-myth has predicted. He is not a particularly competent master; almost immediately the cracks in his competence begin to show. After a long and strenuous walk for example, he feeds Martin a "hearty" supper of flapjacks, ice cream, and orange juice. A bit later the cracks widen as he confesses, "I am going to have to come to terms with the laundry," then rigs a makeshift clothesline which he must hide from the maid before the clothes have dried, resulting in a moldy smell

(37-38). But Dawn retains his masterhood ruthlessly. Martin reacts to this kind of life by asking when they are going home. "When he is too loud I shut him up in the bathroom," says Dawn, matter-of-factly (38). He theorizes that "Children will not grow up if they are treated like children," and condemns Marilyn's "coddling" the boy (35). Ironically, Dawn's slave-self wants this "coddling" very much, as we have seen, another indication of the distance between the sides of his personality.

Dawn has told himself that his slavelike wife will never dare to interfere with his kidnapping of the boy, but we may remember that Marilyn's "candid return" of his gaze speaks of an incipient change into masterhood.

This proves true when she and three policemen appear one night. Nevertheless, he remains blind where she is concerned, hardly recognizing her as she stands outside the door, although his instinctive reaction to the uniforms is subservience: "Nothing would please me more than to please this heavy man" he says of one officer (40). After an empty conversation the "moonlight pours in" as the door opens; then "The light is on, much too bright for people used to the dark. . ." (41). Dawn, in his madness, has tried to set up a tiny independent sunrise, but these figures of authority and sanity are brighter, the real masters coming to claim what has never been more than a duskland after all. The flashing metal of the uniforms reinforces their imperial role, and Dawn's last act of attempted masterhood also involves a piece of metal--a fruit knife which he

buries in the chest of his son. Most ironically he plays the role of master well enough not to see the knife or to comprehend the talk of these people who invade his territory.

At this point Dawn shows his blind autism in a remark concerning his wife, who is screaming at the sight of her stabbed little boy. "She need not worry. I am all right" (42). This is madness, of course, but it travels two roads at the same time. One critic points out that in this scene Dawn's "unconscious identification between his own child and the child he once was is complete" (Gillmer 111). The victimized slave-child whom we met on the first page of the novella has come full circle, re-entering his childhood as both parent/master and helpless victim. His childish self-absorbtion is also typical of the blindness we have been led to expect from a master, or even a would-be master. His concentration has been on himself, from first to last.

Dawn's blindness during that climactic scene holds the key to all masters in the novella, whose invasion of the dusklands carries no vision along with it. The military masters are failing in Vietnam and do not see why. Dawn, in the role of slave hired to tell them, cannot write so as to make them see. "Keep this in mind," says Dawn's superior, Coetzee, "if you say that they don't know their jobs (which is probably true), that they don't understand what they are doing (which is certainly true), then they have no choice but to throw you out the window" (4). Why do they not have the choice of learning? For the same reason that Dawn cannot learn in that motel room--they are in the midst of action which moves faster than their competence,

and their instinctive reaction must be equally self-centered. They would throw a helpless subordinate "out the window" and he stabs his son. These are kindred acts.

However, an advantage of being a slave is that one is not responsible for events. He finds expiation in denying his brief attempt at mastery: "It was not the real I who stabbed Martin" (44). He adds, "Most of the trouble in my life has been caused by women, and Marilyn was certainly my worst mistake" (44).

He embraces his slavelike side, careful not to "forget that I am a patient, for whom it is presumptuous to take too active a part in the diagnosis of his condition" (47). Rather he is content to follow "after the good blind doctors," an amiable, inarticulate slave with high hopes that the masters will cure him (47). He says, "I am no trouble. I am a model of friendly co-operation" (45).

They could make him well enough to rejoin society partially restored, and that may be his greatest worry. He is under no illusions as to the fighting spirit of his masterly side, realizing that his guilty associations with American masterhood in Vietnam will renew his internal war once he has left the security of the hospital. His photographs are gone, but he has no doubt that the images will haunt him again. "While I am behind these walls with my doctors at hand I am strong as a fortress and they know they cannot penetrate me. They are waiting till I leave. . ." (48).

Dawn's narrative does end with a brief, teasing look at a new set of mythical possibilities. The last paragraph speaks of his actual

parents for the first time, with his mother as a vampire, while his father is "away being a soldier" (49). The hope involves this family's identification, not with the Oedipal myth, but with the alternate tradition of Orestes, a war-hero's son whose loyalty to his butchered father and obedience to the gods cause him to execute his mother. Significantly, the gods clear Orestes of blood-guilt, because he is merely the last heir to the fruits of crime. The final line of The Vietnam Project ties in appropriately with this possibility, for Dawn's "hopes of finding whose fault I am" (49) can help recall the chain of victimization which encircles each generation of Orestes' House of Atreus. Might Dawn find in this new myth an integration between his twin compulsions to obey innocently and to impose order ruthlessly? Perhaps, but Marilyn may be the only mother figure for Dawn-Orestes to execute. Is Coetzee giving us the seed of a new, even more bitter episode wrapped ironically in Dawn's hopes?

We have noticed already that Dawn's experience is a microcosm of the mythic master/slave pattern which informs the world. Dawn, his supervisor Coetzee, the generals, Marilyn, the doctors, the police, Vietnam: all illus- trate that dichotomy. The Oedipal myth reinforces the ambivalence of such a world, since all fathers are also sons.

This is finally a fated, naturalistic picture. As a character so split in himself, Dawn is not one of the "fittest" who are best able to survive, and madness is inevitable. The same equation applies to the divided society he represents. His descent into madness illustrates the downward spiral of a myth-ridden world where

individual and collective life goes on in a duskland of power struggles and mutual destruction.

Before considering The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee we need to deal with the odd fact that Dusklands includes four fictional characters named Coetzee who take part in one story or the other. Dawn's superior in the first novella is named Coetzee, and the second story includes narrator Jacobus Coetzee along with his descendants, editor-commentator S. J. Coetzee, and his son, translator J. M. Coetzee. Dusklands is an experimental novel, as its author admits (Rhedin 9); even so, why would a writer cause characters with his last name to proliferate in his fiction?

Perhaps Dawn's superior is named Coetzee in The Vietnam Project in order to give the protagonist two links with reality: the first is a specific reader in whom to confide as a reason for writing at all. In that story, Coetzee seems to be Dawn's confessor. "I get the odd impression, going over your essay," he says, "that it is written for my eyes" (4). Certainly the narratives at the beginning and end are irrelevant to the report itself for military purposes. Dawn acknowledges that readily: "Tear this off, Coetzee, it is a postscript, it goes to you, listen to me" (30).

But a confessor might have any name. Calling him Coetzee provides a second benefit as well: an oblique answer to the implied question of how the narrative has come to be published. Coetzee has apparently released it as though it were a work of fiction. Thus we have what seems to be a reflexive novelist's deliberate attempt to

confuse the reader's suspension of disbelief. J. M. Coetzee, author of fiction, seems interested here in casting his readers adrift from the standard shoreline between fiction and fact into fabulation, perhaps in an attempt to have the reader share obliquely in Dawn's surreal world. Dusklands is interwoven with perceptual uncertainty, and by taking a half-step into this novella Coetzee seems intent on carrying that uncertainty directly into the reader's experience.

The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee is even more vividly reflexive, pretending to be an authentic history representing an experience lived by a forbear of the editor and his son, the translator. The preface is complete with translator's acknowledgements, the editor's "Afterword" seems to be a transcribed university lecture, a copy of Jacobus's supposed deposition forms an appendix, and the endnotes are realistic. Moreover at least one part of the novella touches reality. In 1760 a Jacobus Coetzee did take an exploratory journey across the Great River to hunt elephants as the book's Appendix alleges (Encyclopedia, 118). However, everything beyond that bare fact is fictitious, including the characters J. M. Coetzee, translater, and his editor father, Dr. S. J. Coetzee (Penner interview). This produces a kind of fictive puzzle behind a mask of veracity.

Admittedly, readers who value a clear understanding of how the author intends to be believed might find such literary games annoying, and critics have generally either ignored this aspect of Dusklands or have dismissed it with such terms as "spoofery" (Owen 30). Coetzee himself abandoned the technique for a more openly fictional space/time disunion in subsequent novels. Nevertheless, if the author's purpose

is to demonstrate how an accepted historical account might be stripped of its fictive trappings through publication of the explorer's private memoir, the technique works well, as we shall see.

This study will treat the second novella as wholly fictitious, avoiding confusion by referring to the narrator/protagonist as "Jacobus," while reserving the name "Coetzee" for the author alone. Any mention of the fictional editor or translator will use "S. J." and "J. M." respectively.

The book is divisible into five sections, three of which involve the Jacobus' cyclical journey from master to slave and back to master once more. The other two purport to be a translator's commentary and a deposition in support of the Narrative itself. As before, we will take them in order.

The Narrative of Jacobus Coetzee begins by contrasting so strikingly with the story preceeding it that we might well call its protagonist a foil for Eugene Dawn. Habitually a man of action rather than of thought, Jacobus Coetzee is ruthlessly decisive--the archetypal master figure of history which Dawn spends most of his time wishing to become. Yet at the root he is Dawn's near kin, as we shall see.

Jacobus begins his narration immediately with the question of masters and slaves, in this case the Afrikaners of the 18th century and the Hottentot race whom they are subduing. His sense of masterhood is disturbed at the apparent leveling of relations between the two groups due to intermarriage and the demands of the pastoral

life on some of the whites: "Everywhere differences grow smaller as they come up and we go down," he says (57).

Yet Jacobus finds comfort in the one demarcation line he sees between the two groups. "We are Christians, a folk with a destiny. They become Christians too, but their Christianity is an empty word" (57). He goes on to explain that the Hottentots will "gladly sing your hymns if it means they can spend the rest of Sunday stuffing themselves on your food. For the afterlife they have no feeling at all" (57). But is Jacobus any different? He never shows any concern for the Kingdom of Heaven either. Rather, his conduct and his remarks show a positive disregard for the actual teachings of Jesus--even those most commonly recognized--throughout the book. Overall his Christianity seems as empty as that of the Hottentots whom he denigrates. What really differentiates them is that he spearheads an earthly empire. As far as Christianity is concerned, Jacobus concentrates on his own kind of Sunday meal whose main course is a myth capable of undergirding his imperial dignity, his slaves, and his revenge.

Recalling that Coetzee has Eugene Dawn orient himself largely by a Greek mythic pattern, we should not be surprised to find Jacobus gripping a Hebrew one. The basic story is easy to identify. His preoccupation with the idea that Christians are "a folk with a destiny" leads inexorably to the ancient story of Israel's subduing the Promised Land of Canaan by a combination of miracle, massacre and enslavement. We will refer to this ancient pattern as the Canaan myth. Jacobus seems to believe that his people's "destiny" is to

follow the same scenario, which will cast Afrikaners and Hottentots in the roles of Hebrews and Canaanites, masters and slaves, respectively.

Having thus identified himself with ancient Israel's destined masterhood over other nations, Jacobus begins with an account entitled "Journey beyond the Great River," as if to invite our comparison with the Hebrews' passage over Jordan to Canaan. Moreover, as a mythic Jehovah leading His people through Sinai, Jacobus shepherds his own little flock, providing manna and dealing out discipline by turns:

> It was I who planned each day's march and scouted out the road. It was I who conserved the strength of the oxen so that they should give of their best when the going was hard. It was I who saw that every man had food. It was I who, when the men began to murmur on those last terrible days before we reached the Great River, restored order with a firm but fair hand. They saw me as their father. They would have died without me. (64)

To sum up then, we have seen that Jacobus lives amid a world of masters and slaves as does Eugene Dawn. Despite the fact that the Afrikaner's mythic basis is Biblical while Dawn's is Greek, the givens of both worlds include the view that those two roles are permanent. One may attempt to change his or her status, but as Jacobus makes clear, Christianized Hottentots cannot cross over into actual masterhood any more than Jacobus himself can become a slave in the long run. Moreover, like Eugene Dawn, neither can transcend into freedom. One critic sees these characters' role-entrapment as weakness in their writer: "Coetzee thus casts himself in the role of a diagnostician of the malady of Western culture who is unable to propose any cure for this malady" (Vaughan 134). But surely the first step in correcting a malady is in its diagnosis. If Coetzee's theme

reflects truth--if master and slave roles are endemic to the basic myths of western civilization--then the sooner we recognize the fact, the earlier we can begin seriously seeking to correct them or to substitute other myths, either by discovery or invention according to one's taste.

Meanwhile, Jacobus' words above subtly contain echoes of myths we recognized in the first novella. That the "tame" Hottentots see Jacobus as a father should be enough to foreshadow their Oedipal rebellion later on. Moreover, when Jacobus encounters the advance party of free Hottentots on a plain beyond the river, we are told of "two little bands of men under a sun only a few degrees above the horizon, and the mountains blue behind us" (64). The symbolism of this scene is instantly recognizable after our study of The Vietnam Project. Here again is a duskland facing the dawn of empire, with destined slaves emerging from the shadowy terrain to meet their fated conquerer for the first time. Accordingly, the sun has just risen.

Since these wild Hottentots are not yet slaves, they bear themselves "with an assurance pleasing to the eye" (64). Jacobus knows, however, that this open self-confidence will not survive the transition into the Canaan myth. As soon as the Hottentot puts on "Christian clothes," "he begins to cringe, his shoulders bend, his eyes shift. . ." (65). That could serve as a description of Eugene Dawn. Jacobus puts special emphasis on the lack of communication between the slave and his master, a theme repeated in Coetzee's later novels: "No longer can you get a truthful answer to a simple question, his only study is how to placate you, and that means little

more than telling you what he thinks you want to hear" (65).

At the same time the Hottentots have far better perception than their future conquerers, having been aware of the approaching wagon for some time without the explorers' realizing it. "I inferred that they had heard of our coming, by what means I did not know," says Jacobus (64). But this makes no impression on the Afrikaner, who reports confidently that the natives are "secure in their delusion, we in our strength" (65). The Hottentots' belief that they are a match for their visitors is not all delusion, and the Afrikaner's feeling of security is certainly unfounded, yet what each does not know about the other forms a momentary twilit space where all may meet with the assurance of equals. "So we could look at each other like men, for the last time," says Jacobus (65).

Ironically, Jacobus is the first to show signs of "delusion," and, entirely in line with his character as a master, it is a wilful delusion.

Here we should remember Nadine Gordimer's earlier-quoted comment that myth is a "psychologically defensive and protective device" (Heywood 105). One does not daydream "tranquilly," as Jacobus says he does, when riding forward from five servants toward twenty armed members of an alien race, guns against spears notwithstanding. At such a time the adventurer goes instinctively on full alert, especially one who has told us earlier that he prefers hunting Bushmen at odds of two to one in his favor. The flight of fancy that follows can only be a kind of retreat into the Canaan myth that he has wrapped

around his ego. Obviously, Jacobus is wondering nervously what will happen next, and he attempts to divine the answers by fantasizing several versions of the myth's standard hero-meets-natives story, narrated in a kind of shorthand resembling chapter headings by Sir Henry Rider-Haggard. One such tale will serve as an example:

> the order to follow, the inner debate, the cowardly blow, amnesia, the dark hut . . . bound hands, uneasy sleep, dawn, the sacrificial gathering, the wizard, the contest of magic, the celestial almanac, darkness at noon, victory. . . . (66)

In at least one of these plots the hero dies gloriously, but all contrast so starkly with what actually occurs to Jacobus as to make the myth's absurdity obvious by the end of the book.

The Afrikaner's delusion begins to unravel almost immediately as the Hottentots move slyly around him toward the wagonload of trade items, while he and their head man converse. Unlike the stern savages of the storybooks, these people do not lust for white blood, but for presents. He rides after them, whip raised. "Nimbly they fell back and regrouped with sparkling eyes. Was I dealing with adults? I wondered" (67). All the same, his commitment to the myth remains very serious: "I was prepared to yield my life to spare myself the farce of my wagon and oxen commandeered . . . while I chased behind rending the air with impotent threats" (68). The "folk with a destiny" may be loved, feared, hated, worshipped, or slaughtered; however, ridiculing them is the one unforgivable act, as Eugene Dawn has explained in terms of the Oedipal myth. "The blow that wins the war is . . . a humiliating blow that renders him [the father] sterile. . ." (26). Jacobus is not "dealing with adults" at all, but with Oedipal sons.

Jacobus has promised gifts, and now the Hottentots begin a singsong of shouting for them. Jacobus watches most of his "tame" Hottentot servants join in or grin mischieveously. Only Klawer, the oldest, remains grimly loyal as he sits on the wagon awaiting orders. "I beckoned. He jumped down and began to push his way toward me holding his gun before him like the staff of Moses" (68). In the Book of Exodus the Red Sea splits in two before the prophet; here the natives part amiably then close behind, emphasizing Jacobus' loss of dignity by mimicking Klawer's gait and whooping with laughter.

In the scuffle that follows, Jacobus manages to get the wagon moving and most of the extra oxen away with it. Then he rides around between the retreating wagon and the Hottentots like Jehovah's fiery cloud moving behind the fleeing Israelites to block the onrushing Egyptian army. He makes a speech whose "irony" and "moralism" are "quite alien to the Hottentot sensibility," and, mystified, they say nothing in return (70). Jacobus does not mind much, for voiceless slaves are the rule. He flatters himself with one more fantasy: "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" (70-71). (Coetzee may have intended a subtle pun just here, for both Jacobus and Jehovah thunder from their mounts: Jacobus from his horse and Jehovah from Sinai.) This wishful megalomania, which Coetzee undergirds ironically with Old Testament allusions, should remind us also of an ancient Greek mythic formula: after <u>hubris</u> comes <u>nemesis</u>.

The master looks westward past his mount at the slaves-to-be who squint silently at him and the rising sun together. He sees future

worshippers of his power, his God-given destiny to be a god. They see a man talking strangely from a horse. Who is the more unseeing? The pattern of masterly blindness and slavelike inarticulateness is visible too in their derisive song a moment before: "Step into my snare, wild goose, put your long neck into my snare. . ." (68-69). Jacobus really is a goose, and the snare will tighten on him presently. When we realize that this message is wrapped in a tiny myth which they make no attempt to rephrase in the language of "self-effacing persuasion," we may see that they have a great deal in common with Eugene Dawn, including a brief time of mastery ended by an invasion.

The second part of the narrative seems to begin here. Before Jacobus comprehends the implications of the Hottentots' actions, they begin to weave him into a trap.

After a short but humiliating visit to the village during which the Hottentots continue stealing from the wagon as they receive him courteously, Jacobus determines to leave them. First however, he visits the dying chief in the stinking gloom of a hut, and hardly notices the drink they give him to sip. This, however, is the snare that will sicken him. Outside once more, he has to goad his "tame" Hottentot servants into leaving, blind to the possibility that they might be strongly attracted to the freedom which their "wild" brethren enjoy. "They lacked all will, they were born slaves," he says. A half-naked woman adds to the general ridicule by performing a lascivious dance. Enraged at this final indignity he fires a warning

shot and starts off in one direction as she screams away in the other. This feels more like escape than victory, and it certainly does not square with the Canaan myth. Fittingly, Jacobus and his servants leave as the sun begins descending, and travel into the dusk.

Next morning comes another kind of dawn, as Jacobus awakens "shivering and light-headed" with dysentery (74). Unable to ride, he lies in the wagon feeling "great peace" as he watches "the calm sun" brighten the wagon's canvas top. Nevertheless the revolution has begun with the sunrise; he himself is in the shade and his servants are in physical control of their progress, while about thirty of the little people are following patiently. The symbolism involved with this turn of events is plain. This is the Hottentots' dawn, which puts Jacobus into shadow. The drink that has sickened him came from the darkness. That night the wagon halts, and after some talk outside he feels himself lifted from the wagon. The hope of Canaan is strong in Jacobus' head however, and he prays "to my long-absent God to bring back the sun" (76).

At first glance "long absent" seems to refer simply to a God Who walked the earth 2,000 years ago and has been "absent" since, but another implication applies more directly. A man who plays God cannot connect with a deity Whose First Commandment reserves all worship to Himself. Thus although Jacobus claims a Christian heritage to justify his "destiny" as a master, at the same time he breaks the well-known first rule on which a share in that heritage rests. He has been living a lie. In praying for the first time, he acknowledges by implication that he is not God after all, and Jehovah is able to

rejoin him on the basis of that admission.

Because of our understanding of the sun-myth symbolism in Dusklands, we can readily see why that first prayer to "bring back the sun" is not answered. Jacobus is asking for a return of the thing that made him feel most Godlike; the Jehovah of the Bible cannot be much interested in giving that. His next prayer, for "oblivion," is granted via delirium in which he descends into a "profound chill of such depth that sensation in my hands and legs perished" (76). Remembering that Hades can be cold, as in Dante's Inferno, we may find here hints of Christ's crucifixion along with the received concept of His descent into Hell. As if to reinforce this feeling, Coetzee sprinkles the passage with lines which obliquely recall Christ's words: "Let the dead clean the dead" ["let the dead bury their dead." Matt. 8:22]; "I began to think of death by thirst," ["I thirst," John 19:28]; and 'I am dying,' I said, (three) good Dutch words. . ." ["It is finished," John 19:30]. The celebrated desertion of the disciples is paralleled by "My own men inexplicably gone. . ." (76). As Christ took a last sip of vinegar, so Jacobus receives "water, but bitterly tinctured and smelling of onion" (77).

If the Afrikaner is a Christ-figure in his delirium then, for whose salvation is he suffering? Apparently his own. He drifts, "meditating upon my life as a tamer of the wild" (77). These thoughts take him to matter-of-fact humility, where he has never been before. He arrives at the "alien certainties of sun and stone," and must "stand off" until such time as he will not "flinch" before them (77).

These "certainties" are "alien" because they have no kinship with the Canaan myth he has followed since time out of mind. Logically then, that myth needs either discarding or correction. Either might avert the coming massacre of Hottentots.

He considers the first option by wondering whether myths are anything more than fiction. "How then, asked the stone [sic], can the hammer-wielder who seeks to penetrate the heart of the universe be sure that there exist any interiors?" (78). This paradox disturbs him and he goes directly to the opposite possibility: that the whole experience with the Hottentots has itself been a dream and the myth a reality. If that were true, "I the Dreamer" might be "sole inhabitant" of the universe. (78). But that line of reasoning produces a non sequitur: mythical Canaan without Canaanites to dominate, a world of Master without slaves--no master at all, and thus without any recognizable selfhood at all under any myth we have seen.

The "long-absent" God to whom he prayed has answered graciously by a vision-clearing delirium, giving Jacobus two ways of discarding his myth. (A third possibility, that of changing it into something resembling actual Christianity, never occurs to him.) But he cannot bear to discard the myth and his earlier decision to "stand off" is reaffirmed as he leaves his speculation to enjoy an extravagant "exposition of my career as tamer of the wild" (78). This vision includes the heady claim, "I am all that I see" (79). Jacobus will neither correct nor discard his myth although his meditation has reduced it to the absurd. Instead he rejects the God who gave the vision, and all ties with anything remotely Christian: "The gun is our

mediator with the world, and therefore our savior" (79).

We should remember that Jacobus began his narrative by claiming the difference between masters and slaves to hinge on the Christian faith, without being able to give positive evidence of that faith. Faced with the truth that his own ego is the real deity which he worships with self-serving piety backed by firepower, he states the case frankly. "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" (80). The savage is free until he reaches the space dominated by the master's guns. At that point, "invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life" (80-81). The Hottentots keep him out of their space in a hut on the opposite shore of a little river from their camp. When he crosses over it to demand food, Plaatje, one of his former slaves, forces him to go away by displaying a knife and reminding him that "Master lives over there on the other side of the water. . ." (88). Of course the reference connects equally with the Afrikaners' gun-won land beyond the Great River, but Plaatje tells the same truth that Jacobus did earlier; masters are tied to specific spaces. Jacobus stalks off to the sound of "giggles and whoops" from ribald comments at his expense. "Plaatje," he says of the threatening Hottentot, "was pushing it too far" (88). After all it is the ego, not its "mediator" gun, that is at the root of a master's territorial imperative. To see this clearly we should remember Eugene Dawn's statement that the humiliating blow, delivered with a snicker, is deadliest against the master. A

fanatical death-thrust is less painful:

> I would have acceded to dying of fevers, wasted in body but on fire to the end with omnipotent fantasies. I might even have consented to die at the sacrificial stake . . . climaxing in a formal disembowelling, I might, yes, I might have enjoyed it. . . . (82)

If the death helps inflate the ego, nothing else matters. However, instead of a "formal disembowelling," Jacobus gets ridicule and a boil on his left buttock. Here the God of his own ego seems to be giving him a martyrdom which faintly resembles Job's. Jacobus determines to leave with Klawer, his one faithful servant, but as he lances the boil in preparation for the march, the village children come to taunt. He explodes like the boil did, gnaws a child's ear off, and is sent away with Klawer and a knife, but without his goods.

Here we should notice carefully the attitude of the "savage" Hottentots toward one who is so obviously in their power. In a sense he is their slave; even though they do not put him to work they use him for comic relief and steal his possessions as blithely as a master takes his slaves' freedom. But that is all. With no exposure to Judeo-Christianity they have developed no affinity for the Canaan myth, including the old Mosaic law commanding "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth" (Exod. 21:24). We need only imagine the fate of a Hottentot slave who had bitten off the ear of a white Afrikaner's child to see a profound contrast. The Hottentots take no punitive action whatever, confining themselves to asserting his guilt or madness in attacking the child, adding, "You are not sick any more. You must go" (91).

We can see here the outlines of a mythic framework for their

primitive masterhood. It is a convoluted reading of Christ's parable of The Good Samaritan who cares for the hurts of an enemy Hebrew fallen "among thieves" (Luke 10:30-37). Ironically, the thieves in this version of the myth are the Hottentots themselves, but that does not negate their binding up the wounds of an adversary. Coetzee himself has elsewhere given a hint that the Hottentots may have a strong kinship with unfallen innocence. He notes in a tone of disbelief that actual 18th-century explorers did not even consider "The idea that the Hottentot [might have been] Adam . . ." (Anthropology 91). The Hottentots' innocence of Judeo-Christianity has denied them the Canaan myth, but has allowed another which seems much more humane, even though Jacobus is blind to it.

Yet that myth blinds them also in their moment of mastery. They recognize that Jacobus is "mad" and dangerous, but do not see the long-term threat he poses and the consequent necessity of killing him. This is not surprising. The Samaritan-myth ends with the Hebrew's being cared for. Like Dawn's military clients, the Hottentots need a new myth in order to succeed against a foreign mindset, and their failure to find that myth dooms their mastery. Instead they send him away, closing the second part of the narrative, and opening the way for Jacobus' reassertion of his masterhood.

Of course Jacobus' master-myth has come apart as well through his experience with the Hottentots. Moreover, his earlier distinction between Afrikaners and Bushmen has blurred into meaninglessness. In the beginning he has described the Bushmen's mutilating herds

belonging to those they have grudges against, adding that "the only way to treat them is like beasts" (58). But now he has mutilated a child against whose people he has a grudge. He makes himself a bow and arrow with the knife the Hottentots allow him for the journey, and we may recall his earlier words: "Savages do not have guns. That is the effective meaning of savagery" (80). He makes this connection quite overt by admitting that he and Klawer are "living Bushman lives" (93). Jacobus' Canaan myth has been peeled away in successive layers until he fulfills his own definition of "savage," but this does not end his desire for mastery. On the contrary, he glories in his new role, asserting that he knows "more about savagery" than the Hottentots (98).

Jacobus' metaphor for all this involves a beetle which he calls "a true creature of Zeno" in that it accepts the pulling off of its legs without a struggle in order to save its life (96). Likewise he pictures himself as having "hidden myself away, abandoning mile after mile of defenses" in his experience with the Hottentots (96). The chief of these abandoned defenses is the Canaan myth. In one sense Joan Gillmer is quite right in saying that Jacobus "survives in the form of a diminished selfhood," since he is no longer "sustained by a sense of Christian destiny" (Daymond 109). Jacobus intimates as much, calling himself a "thin figment of my earlier fat self" (99). In another sense, however, Jacobus' "selfhood" is not "diminished" at all, but unmasked. He has already admitted his expertise in savagery; now he puts that admission into clear perspective by rejecting the idea that his trek home is a task set for him by the Hottentots. He

prefers the framework of a "game or contest" which he plays "against an indifferent universe" (98). Klawer's death, to be considered a bit later, allows him to play alone.

The real prize in a competitive game is mastery, which Jacobus has cherished or coveted throughout the narrative. However "diminished" his personality becomes, it can never reduce lower than his lust for power; the stress that wore away the Canaan myth merely polishes the master at Jacobus' core, as evidenced by his choosing the universe, indifferent or not, as his adversary. For someone with godlike aspirations, what mere human is a worthy opponent--or for that matter a fitting love object? As if in the persona of Sky God, Jacobus declares his love for the whole earth and its inhabitants together by attempting to copulate with the ground. At the same time he is drunk on self-love: "My feet rubbed together in ecstasy, my thighs lay together like lovers, my arms embraced my chest" (96). Oddly enough the assurance of his favored place in the Canaan myth seems to reemerge as he asks "God, God, God, why do you love me so?" Significantly, God does not answer. One might ask why Jacobus should seek the failed myth again by acknowledging a superior deity. The answer must lie in Jacobus' human need of some controlling framework over him: "I must beware. In a life without rules I could explode to the four corners of the universe" (99). On the other hand we should notice that the Canaan myth now seems to embrace only Jacobus himself as the Chosen, for in the game against the universe he is alone, with all other humans as aliens and enemies. On arriving back at his own

country, he kills and mutilates a peaceful herd of cattle as savagely as a Bushman, after first shooting "a neat arrow in the thigh of the herder" (99). Of course this will provoke revenge "visited on the unfortunate heads of the Bushmen" (99). Thus Jacobus makes successful war on all sides, at least indirectly, and this ruthless demonstration of mastery brings him "once more to a man's stature" (99). By inference it brings him to something more, for in his joy at being home he performs a sacrifice traditionally associated with the worship of Jehovah: "Like God in a whirlwind I fell upon a lamb, an innocent . . . and slit his throat" (100). He takes the liver, his favorite cut. Eugene Dawn has made a similar comment about the Vietnamese: "We cut their flesh open, we reached into their dying bodies, tearing out their livers, hoping to be washed in their blood. . ." (18). Combining these two passages we have a reference to the old hymn which asks, "Are You Washed In The Blood Of The Lamb?", a reference to Christ. The Vietnamese are a kind of Christ-sacrifice then, as are the Hottentots from whom Jacobus exacts his revenge. The Canaan-myth operates in both novellas then, demanding a holy communion steeped in blood of lesser creatures, to authenticate itself. This seems to follow the Nietzschean doctrine that a master "may act toward beings of a lower rank, towards all that is foreign, just as seems good to one, or 'as the heart desires'" (Beyond Good and Evil 229).[2]

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[2] One could easily find similarities between Dusklands and the writings of Nietzsche. As hinted above, Beyond Good and Evil defines Jacobus' general attitude as a master, and The Genealogy of Morals has some bearing on the speechlessness of slaves. Nevertheless we cannot assert that the world of Dusklands is

"We descended on their camp at dawn," begins the second portion with its matter-of-fact detailing of Jacobus' vengeance (100). The word "descended" seems doubly evocative here, for even though Jacobus has regained his masterly place, he has done so by reprehensible means, such as the abandonment of Klawer, and his return to the village is even more vile. He has the settlement razed, instructing the soldiers to do what they please with the Hottentots. Then he delivers a self-satisfied sermon to four doomed former servants: "As explorer of the wilderness I have always thought myself an evangelist and endeavoured to bring the heathen the gospel of the sparrow, which falls, but falls with design." He concludes, "Have faith, be comforted, like the sparrow you are not forgotten" (101). The ironic message below this homily is that Jacobus, godlike once more, has not forgotten them. This is the same kind of autism which induced Dawn to knife his son, then to discount his wife's screaming since "I am all right" (42). It also proves the (101). assertion made by the Hottentots as they sent him away: "You are mad. . . . (91).

This madness is a direct result of the power of the Canaan myth to send its adherents into a naturalistic spiral downward, just as the Oedipus myth has done for Dawn. We can thus see echoes of the

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essentially Nietzschean with an overlay of Greek and Hebrew myth. Nietzsche's sympathies rest largely with the masters, while he repudiates both Judaism and Christianity as being despicably slavelike. By contrast, Coetzee's Jews are the masters' mythic forbears and real Christianity is benign by implication--a possible solution which Jacobus rejects almost before giving it consideration. Thus, despite points of convergence, Nietzsche's outlook and the themes in Dusklands are finally at odds.

experimental novel here, reflecting the power of forces shaping the world to debase human experience.

During this sickening invocation of the Canaan myth, most of the four maintain silence. One of them is Plaatje, who sees the situation clearly enough to realize that a slave's words will be futile. "Plaatje looked at me, he knew he was dead, he did not bother to plead" (101). We may remember that Christ, too, said nothing before his judges. Another former servant, Adonis, weeps and shouts, trying to "crawl to me," but the disgusted wild Hottentots beat him. Jacobus' dream of Godhood is virtually complete as he realizes that "here and everywhere else on this continent there would be no resistance to my power and no limit to its projection" His reaction is flat despair for the kind of madness he has cautioned himself over before. He also recognizes, symbolically at least, that this exercise in mastery will ultimately benefit no one. "The sun was high, he recalls, "and no one was warmed" (101).

The next scenes contain an interesting contrast. We see the four executions over which Jacobus presides in vivid and almost grotesque detail, while the other violence in the village is largely glossed over. True, we have a clear description of the shooting down of a young girl as the troops approach; it is a clean, instant death and no blood or grotesqueness is involved. We are told blandly of screams that reach Jacobus' ears from half a mile away, "thin, boring, one after another" (103). This detachment may remind us of Dawn's description of his little boy's scream. Joan Gillmer notices that

"the rape of a child is reported with a numb matter-of-factness and a clumsy circumlocution which emphasize the speaker's failure to respond or intervene" (Daymond 109). Is this unresponsiveness believable?

We should remember that throughout the novella Jacobus only names Hottentots with Afrikaner names, and that we are not sensitive to things we have no words for. Unnamed, these people are simply Hottentots. Their humanity ceased for Jacobus just after the moment already alluded to, when parties "looked at each other like men, for the last time" (65). Since that first meeting the Hottentots now are definable only as a negation, expressed in the "ditty" Jacobus sings on the trek back to his farm:

> Hottentot, Hottentot
> I am not a Hottentot. (95)

As a mere something which Jacobus is not, the Hottentot group can receive little or no human attention.

At the same time this need to keep reaffirming his distinctness from the Hottentots may signal that the currents of human sympathy still move in Jacobus. This would give him a certain kinship with Eugene Dawn, who does not want to visit Vietnam, but who hoards pictures of Vietnamese victims which he will see "in hell" (48). Certainly Jacobus is sharing a horrid picture with us. Gillmer connects this child-molestation scene with Dawn's photograph showing an American soldier copulating with a Vietnamese youngster.

That "no one" is "warmed" by the high sun of empire is most painfully evident in the fate of children throughout Dusklands. The American soldier shows his nature as "father" by a kind of incest,

Dawn stabs his son in a last convulsive assertion of masterhood, Jacobus mutilates the Hottentot child out of frustration over the knife-wielding Plaatje whom he dare not fight, and the South African soldier is "doing things" to the girl-child as part of Jacobus' vengeance. Such attacks against the defenseless young represent for Gillmer a "blighting of human and personal potentiality" (Daymond 110). Again we may remember Dawn's disappointing attempts to grow anything but his crystals. The imperial sun is cold, nurturing nothing human in a world composed exclusively of masters and slaves.

It nurtures guilt however. His blood lust sated, Jacobus begins to meditate on what he has done, and suddenly it becomes terribly important for him to justify or atone for his actions. He cradles the dying Plaatje, who is now free from the possibility of threat, because "I did not want to lose his respect" (105). Plaatje's answer is eloquent: a last sneeze which sprays a mess of blood, water, and flesh over the Afrikaner.

In a supreme irony, Jacobus now becomes a slave himself. His master from now on will be guilt, and the last few lines of the Narrative are as panic-stricken, abject, and futile as those of Adonis earlier. He begins by meditating, "May I not have killed something of inestimable value?" (106).

He answers by asserting that the Hottentots had no value at all next to his godlike intellect: "They died the day I cast them out of my head" (106).

Then as if realizing the poverty of that last statement, he adds, "All are guilty, without exception. I include the Hottentots" (106).

The obvious question is whether one guilty man has a right to kill another; he avoids it by using the Canaan myth in asserting that these deaths are God-ordained, that he has been Jehovah's obedient sword all along: "God's judgement is just, irreprehensible, and incomprehensible" (106). But God has had little to say to him, and Jacobus has shut his eyes to what light there has been. Clearly he is not following God's orders in any sense whatever.

He reacts immediately by remembering the common sermon idea that "mercy pays no heed to merit" (106), recalling the doctrine of salvation's being available through Christ despite a sinner's past wrongdoing (Rom 3:23-24). That Jacobus seems to find no comfort there is perfectly logical; he has said that the gun, not Christ is his mediator. At last he slips into simple excuse making. "I am a tool in the hands of history," he says (106). This recalls his plea of guiltlessness in confronting the enraged Hottentots whose child he mutilated, and their reply, "Of course it was your fault!" (91). The end of his speculation is a kind of fearful certainty which he puts into the form of a whimper: "Will I suffer?" (106).

Perhaps, but first he will remember the Zeno beetle and retreat deep into himself, away from the "beckoning finger" of his own guilt. Since that accusation is so starkly true, elegant fictions offer his only escape. He has played this game before. In describing the loss of Klawer early in the trek back, he first tells a version in which the faithful slave is washed away while recrossing the Great River as the explorer watches helplessly and therefore without guilt.

Immediately he begins the story again, this time in a different version which the reader may feel is closer to the truth because of its detail. In this second tale, both men gain the far shore safely, but the cold and wet sicken Klawer because he refuses to warm himself through exercise. He worsens until he can go no farther. In a moment of high melodrama, Klawer insists on being left behind. Jacobus calls this "a noble moment, worthy of record" (95). Yes, but did it ever take place?

Our suspicions may arise from Jacobus' recorded answer, which seems oddly out of tune with the equally noble reaction to such a slave's assertion. A sense of noblesse oblige should induce the master to argue that he can carry the other man. Instead he argues impatiently for the opposite course. "Klawer," I said, "we must be realistic. Both of us could die here. Whereas if I go on alone as fast as I can, and come back by horse. . ." (95). That kind of reply hints that the old man's comment might have been less self-sacrificing than first appears.

Another even subtler clue appears melodramatically in the first version: "him whose voice I had never in all my days heard raised. . ." (94). Since this account seems improbable overall, might the assertion not be taken as circumstantial evidence that the truth is exactly the reverse? Might it not reflect the final, despairing outburst of a sick old man who has left all to follow the master deserting him? Earlier Jacobus has condemned such action in haughty terms: "For [the Bushmen] are not like us . . . when you cannot keep up the the troop they put down a little food and water and abandon you

to the animals" (59). Since Klawer has been led to expect other treatment from his master, the tears Jacobus reports seeing in the old slave's eyes as they part are probably all too real. Jacobus claims wet eyes of his own, but the apparent sincerity of his emotion is undercut by his reaction afterward. "I was alone. I had no Klawer to record. I exulted. . ." (95). Jacobus' real freedom is that without any witness to "record" he is at liberty to remake history.

Thus we may draw the conclusion that both accounts are significantly fictionalized, though the second is probably closer to the truth. The reason for the fiction seems obvious: if a man is willing to kill and maim others in order to gain respect, would he not be capable of lying for the same end? But perhaps the reason is not so apparent as it seems. After all, what man intending to sweeten the bitter truth of his adventure leaves two conflicting accounts for his readers? Before answering this question, however, we must compare the last two sections--S. J.'s lecture and the Deposition--with The Narrative itself. Let us begin by asking why the Narrative is so different from the earlier-written official Deposition of Jacobus Coetzee (1760).

The greatest difference comes in Jacobus' account of his reception by the Hottentots. The deposition claims that they were hostile at first, but acted "more peaceably" when told of Coetzee's intentions as backed by "His Honour the Governor" and a "demonstration of his weapons" (124). He claims to have passed through their territory unmolested each way. In fact, only two difficulties seem to

have marred the journey in this version; he was able to shoot "no more than" two elephants and his servants all ran away. What are we to make of such a disparity?

Actually Coetzee has given his readers ample clues as to the answer. We may begin with the fact that the military expedition which carries out Jacobus' revenge is actually going in search of the Damroquas, a light-skinned, long-haired, and linen-clothed tribe whom Jacobus mentions as a rumor in his deposition (124). S. J.'s lecture tells us arcanely that this expedition found nothing: "we have smiled indulgently at the credulous hunter who reported . . . the fable of long-haired men . . . which led to the dispatch of Hendrik Hop's fruitless expedition. . ." (108).

But we know that the hunter was not credulous, for his Narrative mentions no "Damroquas" at all. He has made up the story in order to get a troop of soldiers for his planned revenge on the village, and has been obliged to swear out a deposition attesting that story. We may conjecture that after a "fruitless" trip through the northland he has guided the soldiers back via the village for the ostensible purpose of punishing his runaway servants and those who harbor them. Nor need we agree with S. J.'s explaining the sketchiness of the deposition by calling it a "hasty precis" written by a "hack" with the "impatience of a bureaucrat" (108). The scholar notes Jacobus' frequent visits to the capitol, and the "trust" engendered by his reputation among the government people (111). Is it so uncommon for a friend in the civil service to guide an outraged solid citizen in bending the law for justice's sake? S. J. himself says of Afrikaners

that "We believe in justice but have never taken kindly to laws" (109). Might a friendly clerk not have helped Jacobus to craft the Deposition with just enough detail to make it credible, yet not so much that the resulting expedition would find evidence that cast doubt on its overall truthfulness? The claim of only two elephants effectively removes the question of the whereabouts of multiple tusks or the money for them. The rocky mountain might be any of dozens in a desert wilderness. The picture of a long-necked animal rather like a camel (but not quite) and evidenced by a nondescript pelt is actually rather vague. By identifying this animal as the giraffe, later generations have had to ignore the hump which Jacobus mentions specifically, and the fact that the giraffe is a swift runner, not "slow and cumbersome of gait," as Jacobus swears (125). The possibility that Jacobus has simply invented elephants, mountain, and camel-like animal would not occur to a true believer in Afrikaner history, but others might find it far more likely than not.

If the Deposition really is a fabrication to hoodwink the government into authorizing what is effectively a punitive raid, then the most effective part of it may also be the most cynical, for Jacobus seems at times to have picked his language and details with the Canaan myth clearly in mind. The instant humbling of the natives through mention of the Governor and the showing of weapons is an obvious cliche derived from that myth, but a more subtle and compelling touch is the mysterious northern tribe itself. Surely the discovery of one more Black tribe would excite no interest in

exploration, but a group of "eloquent" lighter-skinned people, (semitic perhaps?) with long hair and linen garments, might almost compel investigation (125). Moreover if these people keep servants who rebel and flee to a Hottentot village, might this not identify the tribe as masters in their own right and thus men to look on as equals or rivals? In plain words, how would Afrikaners steeped in the Canaan myth respond to the tantalizing possibility of finding another "folk with a destiny," possibly a fabled lost tribe of Israel, away to the north? Such bait seems almost impossible to refuse, and so it proves to be.

The next question is even more profound psychologically. How would the man who told those lies respond to his guilt once the bloodlust in him had cooled? In that case might he not write his Narrative as a kind of confession to be unsealed in after years? In that case the two stories of Klawer's death would have been intended as a broad hint at the fictional potential inherent in a tale without witnesses. This would also explain the early cryptic comment that the Hottentot land is one "where everything, I was to find, was possible" (66). Not only does that land make possible his journey from mastery to slavehood and back, it also allows him perfect freedom to fabricate the historical outcome in any way he chooses--a freedom he flaunts in his double account of Klawer's death. The Canaan myth is his aegis which both transports him at will and hides him absolutely through clever fictions.

Earlier Jacobus has seen the danger in the presence of the wild Hottentots who "threaten to have a history in which I shall be a term"

(86). But since only masters posess "destiny," so they alone can have a history. Jacobus has already observed comfortably that "The Hottentot is locked into the present. He does not care where he comes from or where he is going" (57-58).

In his lecture, S. J. gives an indirect assurance that the slaves are voiceless, and so cannot contradict Jacobus' version of history. "The Hottentot language has perished. . ." (115). A pathetic echo remains, but only of the Hottentot style of saying "yes." "'Drive them to the north camp.' 'To the north camp, my master'" (115). Slaves can be defined as people reduced to the single option of saying "yes" to all utterances from their masters, and these slaves have only an alien language in which to say it. In a poignant example of masterly blindness, S. J. reports this fact and still gives his readers the charming picture of master and slave aging together as friends: "the two old men that they become stopping in the bright sunlight to exchange a cackled reminiscence" (115). Only the blindness of a master, abetted by the enforced silence of the slave, could allow such a picture.

Moreover, the Canaan myth has retained its force right up to the present day, as evidenced by S. J.'s lecture. In Flaubert's words quoted at the front of the Narrative, "What is important is the philosophy of history." One possible philosophy of history is the Canaan myth of a God-ordained sunrise wherein a destined race of masters imposes sweet order on destined slaves. S. J. espouses it wholeheartedly by asserting that "There is a principle of stability in

history which refines from all conflicts those conformations likeliest to endure. The quiet farmhouse on the slopes, the quiet huts in the hollow, the starlit sky" (115). Yet this vision of a peaceful landscape where master and slave may rest under a benign heaven is not the blaze of noontide imperialism, but its sleepy aftermath; it is a dusklands scene carrying a barbed message. For the master-myth has an twilit ending whose very tranquility invites the thought of a new sunrise, a new imperial advance. Now the latter-day Afrikaner is as naturalistically "locked into the present" as is the Hottentot.

Actually the first faint beams of the new sunrise might be on the horizon already, for the historical principles of the Canaan myth are apparently under attack. S. J. claims coldly that the Narrative "offers the evidence of history to correct certain of the anti-heroic distortions that have been creeping into our conception of the great age of exploration. . ." (108). As if in token of the myth's exalted place in South Africa's historical perspective, S. J. calls the Narrative a "work of piety" (108). Of course that is exactly the right expression, for the Canaan myth gives its favored few the serene knowledge that they are inheritors of a divine plan of mastery. Their ancestors' part in bringing light and order to a primitive duskland is justification for sainthood then, just as any serious attempt at debunking their story amounts to sacrilege.

This makes S. J. a kind of priest in his guardianship of relics and traditions of the Canaan myth against heresy. (Is it coincidence that his initials are those which also identify the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, reputedly the most scholarly and devoted order within the

Roman Catholic Church, who fought so sternly against the Reformation?) As such he approaches the Narrative with the same eye of faith which a true believer might bring to a holy text, seeing it as basically supporting received doctrine, even though it may contain difficult passages.

In the same way that an educated Christian might recognize some disturbingly brutal moments in the Bible while still insisting that its basic doctrine is peace, so S. J. can admit that "The tribes of the interior sold their herds and flocks for trash. This is the truth" (110). Immediately, however, he shows that this was all for the best: "It was a necessary loss of innocence." He concludes, "The herder had evolved one sad step further toward citizenship of the world" (110). This sounds like missionary activity of sorts, the moreso since it depends on a belief in the utter depravity of the Canaanites in their native condition. He expresses thankfulness "that in the intercourse of European and Hottentot the exercise of cultural influence was wholly by the former upon the latter" (113). Of course this ignores the Hottentots' natural affinity toward the Good Samaritan myth, but we must remember that as a master, S. J. is necessarily blind to truths about proto-slaves. He is equally shortsighted when regarding Jacobus himself, calling the explorer "a humble man who did not play God" (111). We have seen a far different picture. Coetzee himself has emphasized that Jacobus has grasped "the territory and freedom in which to become God" (Watson interview 23).

If the Narrative is actually a kind of confession, the fact that

it has been brought to light is trebly ironic. The man who has heard the confession is, fittingly enough, a kind of priest. S. J. scants his duty of silence (he is no slave after all) and publishes it as an answer to "anti-heroic distortions," as we have noted. He regards the document as "a work of piety," showing evidence of sainthood under the Canaan myth (108).

More ironic is the fact that, if the work really is confession, it dovetails neatly with a familiar genre which includes the Confessions of St. Augustine. A final twist appears in Coetzee's own evaluation of the psychological value of such confessional works. He writes, "In Augustine's story, the theft of the pears is the transgression, but what calls to be confessed is something that lies behind the theft, a truth about himself that he does not yet know" (Confession 194). Both Dawn's and Jacobus' narratives are confessional in the sense of a writing that aims at leading toward the author's self-discovery, and neither understands himself or his motivation as yet. Dawn meditates on "whose fault I am" (49), and Jacobus reports that he has "other things to think about" besides the simple questions of his birth and death (107). Oddly enough, Jacobus has become as locked into the contemplative present as are the Hottentots he condemned earlier. This concentration by each protagonist on the question of his own motivation carries at least a germ of possibility that Vaughan's reading of this book is overly harsh. After all both characters seem deadly serious in seeking the truth about themselves, and in their reflexive setting they also seem to seek it for their author and reader as well.

As we have seen, it is a truth with naturalistic roots. Any human warmth is unlikely to join master and slave in the world of Dusklands despite the fantasies of priests devoted to the Canaan myth and tortured confessions of the principals; such a message applies not only to the characters in these novellas, but reflexively to their author and readers as well. Even though all parties may wish for human companionship sincerely (Klawer and Jacobus do seem to share a tearful moment as the latter walks freely away), the power of the myth-dazzled master creates a wall of terror through which the voice of the slave can never penetrate. Whether we see it in Dawn's knifing his son by reflex or in Jacobus's casually raping a village, the inescapable conclusion of this book is that master and slave, like the lion and the lamb, have yet little enough likelihood of lying down together in peace.

CHAPTER III

IN THE HEART OF THE COUNTRY

Perhaps the most straightforward reading of Coetzee's second novel, In the Heart of the Country, is to see it as a reflexive expansion of Jacobus' statement from Dusklands that for a master, anything is "possible." Like him, Magda lives in the lonely South African outback, and she presents the idea as forthrightly: "Life in the desert teaches nothing if not that all things are permissible" (39). As Jacobus creates fictions designed to alter historical facts which contradict the Canaan myth of mastery, so Magda fantasizes in order to overturn her physical and psychological isolation--what one critic calls "the excluded self" (Gillmer 119). Unlike Jacobus, however, Magda's principal role is that of slave. Her stance is rebellious, aiming to break down the wall which Jacobus' fictions have erected. As Rowland Smith observes, "the power struggle between master and slave is always at issue" in this novel (201).

In an odd way Magda herself is a fictive explorer, tracking in three stages the master/slave wall that bisects her world. She first traces her slavelike relationship with her father, then continues outward via her own servants, and ends with a dizzying vision of the universal and inexplicable. There one is forced to the conclusion that although "all things are permissible" for ostensible masters, freedom for anyone comes down to very little in the end. Dovey finds that Magda herself "is a prisoner of her monologue, trapped by her own declaration of independance" (180). This empty freedom can be thought

of as a cavity is echoed in Magda's own words: "I move through the world . . . as a hole" (41). We will trace this movement through the three stages of Magda's exploration outward from emptiness to emptiness.

The story begins by concentrating on Magda's relationship to her father. He returns to the farm with her new stepmother in such a way that we may notice the book's fictive nature from the very beginning. Drawing the carriage is a horse with an ostrich-plume waving on its forehead," which becomes "two plumed donkeys, that is also possible" (1). Magda seems to explain her uncertainty a moment later by saying that she was actually in her room at the time, "not watching" (1). Thus it is plausible that she is unsure of her father's choice of animals for the trip. Nevertheless, we shortly see her peeking at the arriving couple through "a chink in the curtain" (9).

Such contradictions serve immediate notice of the book's reflexive character--that we are dealing with something other than objective reality. As we learn later, the father has not yet actually returned; we are seeing the girl's daydream as to how he might. Such fantasies are not unusual, except that Magda seems to be writing them down. As one critic notes: "the numbering [of sections in the novel] gives the possible impression of a diary . . ." (Roberts 21). Late in the book, "voices" accuse her "of turning my life into a fiction . . . as though I were reading myself like a book, and found the book dull, and put it aside and began to make myself up instead" (128). This would place the girl in the not-unprecedented position of concocting

adventures for her diary to enliven a stiflingly dull routine. Magda is not simply a typical lonely farmgirl, however. As the book progresses we see her oppressed by pathological loathings and fears.

We may gain insights into her emotional state through what she says of her mother, and of birth and babyhood. Early in the narrative she gives several oblique clues as to how she regards her own infancy. She begins innocuously, speaking of her mother: "I must have been very young when she died, perhaps only a newborn babe" (2). Although she immediately questions the validity of some parts of the story ("but were there bicycles in those days?" [2]), the idea of the mother's death in childbirth recurs later: "The woman must have died trying to give birth to a third child," she says after imagining photographs which show a younger brother (38). But there apparently has been no third child, nor even a second--only Magda. Setting these two statements side by side to cancel out the fictive camouflage, we are left with the picture of a lonely girl whose birth killed her mother. Magda expresses her guilt feelings though fictions containing real loathing for her own birth and others. "I would have been far happier . . . born in a parcel of eggs . . ." she says (39). This outlook causes her to envision her own motherhood as a "calamity" resulting in a "thin and sallow" child, who "would weep without cease" (10). We might expect Magda to displace her self-loathing by finding a scapegoat, and she does, blaming the mother's death on enslavement to the father's sexual demands, his "detested, relentless pleasure" (38). Nevertheless, a moment later she comes as near to a confession as vague wording can, though she couples it with the idea of expiation

through punishment, or at least of equality of guilt between them. "Was I the one who killed the life in him, as he kills the life in me?" (39)

The father/daughter relationship is obviously damaged. Despite all this, however, she is terrified of losing his love. Since atonement commonly involves giving back what one stole, perhaps Magda's greatest hope of psychological freedom lies in taking her mother's place completely. But remembering that incest has been a celebrated source of guilt in Western literature from Oedipus Rex forward, we can see that this avenue holds no possibility of escape for Magda. Therefore, another message from her "voices" seems to fit her situation aptly: "Anyone born in slavery is born for slavery" (134).

From birth, then, Magda has been a slave to guilt. This fact alone raises the level of the novel's concern over the master-slave issue away from the racial and political concerns which lie on its surface.

The thought of her father's abandoning her for a stepmother is torturous. Almost as if to enhance the pain in this fantasy, Magda adds touches of realism which establish the imagined stepmother's personality--sensual openness in direct contrast to the girl's rigid privacy. "The new wife is a lazy big-boned voluptuous feline woman with a wide slow-smiling mouth," she writes. "She sticks out her long red tongue and licks the sweet mutton-fat from her lips. 'Ah, I like that!' she says and smiles and rolls her eyes, I watch her mouth

mesmerized" (1).

A great deal of the foregoing carries echoes of three naturalistic tenets which Coetzee himself emphasizes: "a belief in heredity as the basis of history; a division of men into powerful unreflecting barbarian types who 'make' history, and weak, intellectual, civilized types who do not . . . and a pessimistic vision of the ultimate triumph of the barbarian" (Blood 47). As her father's daughter, Magda feels herself "born for slavery," and she certainly sees him as an insensitive barbarian in contrast to herself. Again, her identity as an "intellectual, civilized type" who makes fictions rather than history is contrasted to the picture of the "feline" stepmother triumphing with barbarian sensuality. Magda seems as much trapped by her naturalistic preconceptions as by anything we really know at this point about her family.

Magda reacts to the picture of her stepmother with more scapegoating. "Who is behind my oppression? You and you, I say, crouching in the cinders, stabbing my finger at father and stepmother" (4). She then moves these visions from the fireplace to the moonlit master bedroom where she stands, hatchet in hand, taking comfort in the thought that "All kinds of people have done this before me" (11). One normally thinks of grisly murder as separating the criminal from the rest of the human race, especially if the victim is a parent, but perhaps we may gauge the depth of Magda's enslavement to guilt by the fact that she accepts the Lizzie Bordens of the world as her peers. She has referred to her mother's death as "a hideous storm of terror" (38). Now, she portrays this murder in a way that confesses her

ability to have caused the last one. The victims' movements are described in minute detail, even including their incredible struggles after wounds which should have killed them instantly. She describes matter-of-factly her need to "hack with distaste at these hands, these arms until I have a free moment to draw a sheet over all this shuddering and pound it into quiet" (11). She imagines the rest of the event with the same coolness: how to dispose of the bodies, clean up the blood, and face the servants. Too, this places her, at least fictively, in the naturalistic category of barbarians who make history--masters.

At that point Magda returns to reality, admitting that the fictive experiment has failed. Slaughter, whether in the form of a confession or a rebellion against naturalistic enslavement is no solution; "For the day will come," she says, "when I must have another human being, must hear another voice, even if it speaks only abuse" (16). Nor does she really expect release through her fictions. "This monologue of the self is a maze of words out of which I shall not find my way until someone else gives me a lead" (16). Her sense of alienation seems rooted in the self-loathing noted earlier. Even in her fictions she never weaves the typical fantasy of a handsome young man riding up to the front porch for a cool drink of water and the beginning of sweet romance. Instead she notes that her groom would probably be a naturalistic barbarian, "greedier than most, stupider, uglier . . . whom I would vow to slave for a little harder than another woman . . . (42). Of course, such an outlook could result in

rejection by others as well. One of her speculations includes other children who "stuffed caterpillars down the back of my bottlegreen smock to punish me for my sour face and my hatred of games," and "determined nevermore to communicate with me" (47). This sort of reception by her peers would also help explain her apparent despair over finding a suitor. Rather she chooses to concentrate on the one man she has already. "Enthralled by my need to be needed, I circle [my father] like a moon" (5).

Her father is a kind of mystery, complex and at least partially hidden behind the fictions Magda weaves. At first he seems a typically hardheaded Afrikaner farmer, a master on his land, whom others indeed must orbit. An example is the scene between him and Hendrik, the sixteen-year-old migrant looking for work. The father sits stolidly at his ease while the prospective servant stands dustily before him, hat in hand, saying "Yes my baas. Thank you, my baas" (20). Yet even for this securely masterful man, a counterbalancing picture emerges. He is at least as enslaved to the isolation of the desert than the farm hand is to him.

Magda's fiction of the stepmother's coming has roots in an actual event, itself a foreshadowing of the second stage of fictive exploration she will pursue later--her relationship with the servants. It was Hendrik the black farmhand, not her father, who "brought home his new bride across the flats in the donkey-cart" six months before (17). Both Magda and her father watched the arrival. From 600 yards away, he glimpsed "through his heavy field glasses the red kerchief . . . [and] the slender body of Hendrik's Anna" (25). This event

apparently sparks the father's determination to get a wife of his own, but he fails. Magda records a second picture of her father's return, this time with a straightforwardness that makes it immediately believable; for instance, it includes no such fictive playfulness as the earlier switching of horses and donkeys. The man simply arrives alone. We catch only a glimpse of his desperation, but the picture is sufficient. "Disgruntled, saddle-sore," he drops into a front-room chair (16-17). Perhaps his intended wife has refused to come to a wilderness, or it may be that no woman was interested in him. Certainly the scarcity of people in the veldt has limited his choice of prospective brides. Still, all possible excuses--isolation, the lack of enough dowry perhaps, become meaningless beside the servant's having overcome those problems. Magda lies awake hearing her father's crying: "It is from his bedroom that the cries have been coming, higher and angrier and sorrier than ever since Hendrik brought back his girl . . . " (25). This is not a picture of mastery.

Ironically, her father's despair gives Magda a spark of hope. "The old days are not gone after all. He has not brought home a new wife, I am still his daughter . . ." (15). She makes a small, timid overture as he sits in the parlor contemplating his failure, but her gesture goes unheeded because, as she says, he sees her as merely "a tool to bring the house to order, to regiment the servants" (41). She says, "I light a lamp for him, but he waves me away" (17). A slave may light a lamp, but not initiate a conversation.

Of course, both people are enslaved together. Each is a failed

suitor, dominated by wilderness both within and outside of themselves. Therefore Magda hopes that they might at least meet on the common ground of their slavery, and lays the blame for their separation on her father's habitually assuming the role of master. As we have seen, the reasons are far more complex beneath the surface.

Magda has already demonstrated that slaves have at least one outlet for their yearnings--they can create rebellious fictions in their heads. As the creators of fictive worlds, they can become masters in their own right. Magda has already recognized that her turning inward simply exchanges one kind of trap for another, but she sees the fact even more clearly now. "Inside my head the walls are glassy, I see only reflections of myself, drab and surly, staring back at myself" (38). The outward world is like the inner one also, as Magda chooses to spend long hours at a mirror "inherited from my long-lost mother," and thus she is at least tenuously linked to human warmth (21). The image which gazes back, "the woman who in a certain sense is me, will dwindle and expire here in the heart of the country unless she has at least a thin porridge of event to live on" (23). Faced with a need for absolution but without the warmth of others who can grant it, Magda must learn to survive by self-created fictions. Such "porridge" will be thin enough.

The father, too, seeks to solve his problem by asserting a fiction--that a master is free to do what he likes. Acting on his feelings, he "finds Klein-Anna, sweeping or polishing or whatever, and stands over her, watching, saying nothing" (32).

As to precisely what happens next, Magda can only guess, but

guessing is what she does best. She makes up three scenes in which her father begins to seduce Klein-Anna with candy, or a coin. Then we are back in the kitchen, seeing her father's discomfort as he apparently prepares himself for the consummation: "He pecks at his food. . . . His voice, when he speaks to me, is gruff with defiance and shame" (33).

Magda's father, then, seems to have confronted his own sense of isolation by taking his masterly role to its logical conclusion. Instead of adjusting his thinking to include a warm relationship with his daughter on equal terms, he has chosen to satisfy himself with the body of his servant's wife. This decision not to change his attitude is a natural extension of masterly prerogative. Others adjust to the master, even in matters of basic human decency. Thus his situation parallels that of Jacobus, as Magda herself expresses: "Life in the desert teaches nothing if not that all things are permissible" (39).

But they are only permissible through fiction. Reality remains inviolate, and the result for the father is a "defiance and shame" reminiscent of Magda's. Like a man adrift on the ocean, he is perfectly free to drink brine while calling it fresh water, but this will simply compound his thirst. In the same way, his action isolates him from the rest of humanity even more. Magda retreats into fantasy, Anna and Jacob depart, and Hendrik and Klein-Anna are not far behind, as we shall see later. Magda sums up by saying that "My father creates absence. Wherever he goes he leaves absence behind him." (37).

Now Magda comes to a conclusion which reflects a major theme in the book: the master is paradoxically dependent on the slave for both resistance and submission. Speaking of herself and the servants together, she says, "The truth is that he needs our opposition, or several oppositions, to hold the girl away from him, to confirm his desire for her, as much as he needs our opposition to be powerless against that desire" (34). Human society demands that taboos be observed, while the principle of absolute mastery demands that they be dissolved. To win in one area is to forfeit the other. This places the master/father in a trap of ambivalence--in which to win is also to lose. If he gets what he thinks he wants, the absence of everyone else but Klein-Anna, he "will be maddened by the vacuous freedom of it" (34). We have seen Jacobus utter a similar sentiment after abandoning Klawer: "In a life without rules I could explode to the four corners of the universe" (Dusklands, 99). Since all human contact involves some rules, their complete absence is only possible in utter isolation. Again, to win this victory is to lose.

Thus the acknowledged slave's most ironically vengeful countermove is to allow the master exactly what he demands. Noting that "the real game lies between the two of us," Magda obeys her father's unspoken order and retires to her bedroom with an apparently real migraine headache for which she takes no medicine (34). She stays in her room for several days.

Other servants also seem to obey the master's will that they be gone. Hendrik is assigned a task far away while the father visits the servant's house. Old Anna and Jacob, two other servants, quit and

move away. Although the narrator gives us three different fictions to explain their departure, clearly the pair have left. The father has indeed created "absences" in the extreme.

But Magda's situation is hardly less desperate than her father's. Locked in her bedroom now, she accepts utter isolation. "I am lost in the being of my being. This is what I was meant to be: a poetess of interiority" (35). It appears that no one will ever come to lead her out of the maze she has spoken of earlier.

Magda attempts to confront the situation in the old schoolhouse where the now-departed Anna and Jakob lived. Staring at the benches and easel stacked against the wall, she tries to leech past events out of them by pure force of imagination, at one point picturing her father as one of the pupils. "What did Noah teach him about fornication? What did the six times table tell him about the iron laws of the universe?" (46). Whether in this schoolhouse or some other, the wayward father must have been taught the obvious lesson that even masters must bow to universal principles. Pushing the fiction of mastery too far results in iron consequences of mathematical predictability (the number six seems to echo the characters mentioned thus far: Magda, her father, Hendrik, Anna, Old Anna, and Jakob). But an equally cruel truth is that Magda herself is subject to the same "iron laws" as she asserts her own mastery through fictions.

We should pause here to consider a subtle but very real possibility. Perhaps the father has done none, or few, of the things

which Magda has fantasized. We have already seen her capability for accusing him out of her own sense of guilt. Moreover, her perceptions of him sometimes fail to mesh with obvious reality. For instance, at the moment when her imagination places the amorous pair in the father's bedroom, she hears him approaching down the hall. Barring the door with her body, she reverts to dread of his gigantic anger as she pictures "the black hole of the mouth from which roars the great NO, iron, cold, thunderous, that blasts me . . ." (51).

In almost ludicrous contrast, his knock is tiny, almost hesitant, "three light clicks of fingernail against wood" (51). Her perception does not alter, however. "I huddle, holding my breath" (51). As her father's footsteps move away quietly, she identifies a worse horror: "He did not wish to see me but to lock me away for the night! Cruel, cruel, cruel! I weep in my cell" (51).

This disparity between the lightness and evenness of his touch on hallway and door and the fevered pictures in her mind seems calculated to make us pause in our understanding of the situation. What, after all, do we really know of the father's actions? Certainly he has failed to win a wife, and is distressed about it. He has shown some interest in Hendrik's bride. Anna and Jakob have gone away. Beyond these three facts, the rest of our information comes from obvious fictions, or at best, inferences. The fornication may be real, but then again it may not. When a voice other than the father's seems to speak "through the silences" at "the far end of the house" where his bedroom is located, the reader supposes that voice to be Klein-Anna's (50). Perhaps it is, but we have no really concrete evidence for

thinking so. Andre Brink agrees that the father "may or may not have taken a black concubine . . ." (192). Indeed, if Magda's father were on trial for this act, would any jury convict him on the largely fictive evidence Magda has provided?

To begin at the beginning, is it not possible that the father, at a loss as to how he can relate to an oversensitive daughter whose guilt complex fires a morbid imagination, has sought a wife nearly as much for the girl's sake as his own? Could his interest in Klein-Anna stem from his hope that the young servant might provide some fresh womanly contact for Magda? Might they be speaking together about it? Could the father's gentle knock at Magda's door be an attempt to begin a quiet conversation which could lead to the father-daughter warmth she herself offered on the night he returned? Might Old Anna have left with her husband out of anger at being supplanted as favorite house servant, or for a completely unrelated reason? The reader, conditioned by Magda's fictions, might be forgiven for thinking these speculations naive. Such possibilities (along with others equally innocuous) do fit the facts as well as Magda's fantasies. They also have the advantage of being much less melodramatic, and therefore perhaps more likely, in an everyday sense, than the girl's lurid picture. A possible motive for fantasizing her father's guilt might lie in her own self-loathing. Silencing one's own guilt feelings by accusing others is a common practice.

With this in mind, we may be more alive to alternative interpretations as we read the next sentence: "Again the voices come

to me" (51). Although Magda is describing a conversation between Klein Anna and the father, this could simply be more fictive invention; then again, perhaps she actually hears voices from her own subconscious. Earlier she has noted that "in my solitude I hear voices, perhaps I am truly a witch-woman" (36). They may be speaking now, as they will certainly speak later.

In any case we should acknowledge the overriding fictiveness of what will follow. This and subsequent scenes are important, not because of their possible connection with any actual events, but as an illumination of Magda's mental terrain. She is indeed what she claims to be--"a poetess of interiority" (35).

Even though the father's adultery may be mere fiction then, it links with her tendency to accuse away her own self-hatred. At the same time that particular fantasy has the power to give Magda a very real problem, however, for the adulterous act separates residents on that farm and makes a further plot impossible. After all, characters fully out of contact with each other produce no stories. Since she will build a life on fictions, Magda therefore faces a kind of extinction, as she understands all too well. "I must not," she says, "fall asleep in the middle of my life. Out of the blankness that surrounds me I must pluck the incident after incident whose little explosions keep me going" (43).

Her search takes her to the old schoolhouse on the property. Here we may see evidence of Stephen Watson's observation that she, like all Coetzee's central characters, has "a great longing for history: that is, for a world of event, for a narrative in which

there is direction . . . in which a character has some continuity in time" (386). A school is a kind of window on the world at large, and on that world's history. But a girl who who feels such guilt at an accident of birth that she is compelled to escape from it at all costs is not likely to embrace either societal or personal recollection easily, despite her "longing" for it. "My life is not past," she asserts, "my art cannot be the art of memory. What has happened to me has not yet happened" (43). Her fear of history ultimately forces her out of the building entirely: "there is something that tells me I must get out of this schoolhouse and back to my own room" (48).

That room, symbolic of her final retreat into fiction, will be no shelter, however; the "iron laws of the universe" will follow her there. She envisions a "beast" that is "not enchanted by my prattle. From hour to hour he stalks me through the afternoon" (49). She expects him to kill her. "If I go on running I will only perish the more ignominiously . . ." (49). Then she lists possible identities for the beast. Her father, Hendrik, Anna--she considers and rejects each in turn, coming at last to the final possibility: "Am I the one to fear . . . because here in the heart of the country where space radiates out from me to all the four corners of the earth there is nothing that can stop me?" (50).

What can be so fearful about having infinite power of choice? Perhaps it is the fact that, although her fictions are attempts to attain mastery just as Jacobus' accounts were, "the iron laws of the universe" dictate that they spin along logical lines to inevitable

conclusions. The truth "in the heart of the country" is that while a master is free to choose any fantasies, all roads lead to the dominion of emptiness. Such truth is "not enchanted by my prattle"; that is, it will not yield to fictive magic. Even her freedom to transfer to another fiction is meaningless, a mere chance to switch masters. The beast in her is the subconscious knowledge that absolute mastery is always a fiction which carries inescapable consequence of entrapment, and therefore slavehood.

After imagining the pair at the kitchen table and later in his bedroom, Magda lies tossing on her bed. A moment later we find her "outside the door of their room" (54). We might be tempted to believe in the actuality of this scene, except that Magda takes the part of an omniscient narrator, imagining that after she knocks, "They look into each other's eyes, his look saying, What must I do?, her look saying, She is not mine" (54). This fantasy has Magda persisting until the father unlocks the door and grabs her wrist, forcing her to kneel, then flings her away and relocks the door. Nevertheless, a moment later he reappears to guide her forcibly back to her bedroom. There is even a hint of sadomasochism in the scene, as he stands over her, "his complete masterful self," and she tells herself that "If he wants to stamp [my body] to pulp . . . I will not protest" (55).

Without allowing the sexual cross-currents here to lead us afield, we can still see how her fiction has allowed her to win one round of their "game." When the father, in reality, comes tapping like a suppliant on the daughter's door, she forbids him entry. Her countermove is a fantasy in which she goes to "tap on the door" which

he has locked (54). She is rewarded with his masterlike appearance and a delicious walk to her bedroom. At that moment she is his master, even while remaining obediently slavelike, for he has obeyed where she earlier had refused. But her victory is tantalizingly brief, for he returns to his own bedroom again.

As if insisting on more attention than that, she continues her fantasy, ringing a bell outside his bedroom door. This time he answers with a blow that brings blood. Her response is unequivocal: "I am insulted and outraged" (57). This is the girl who would have accepted his stamping her "to pulp" a few minutes before. Obviously the real game in her mind is being played out on a level beyond the sexual, with the basic question concerning who shall be master of whom. Even so, "the iron laws of the universe" remain. Even in her fantasies, Magda cannot escape the slavelike consequences of her assertiveness, whether seen in the sexual realm or not.

Magda certainly achieves the status of master in the next episode. Reacting to the blow, she loads an old military rifle of her father's (58).[1] She pokes it into his bedroom window, and fires "toward the far ceiling of the room" (61). There is a satisfying scream, and Magda reloads. Her next shot is aimed as before, but the bullet hits the father as he grabs the barrel to pull the weapon away.

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[1]For what it is worth, this rifle gives evidence that the novel cannot be set, as Michael Vaughan has it, "sometime in the last century" (125). The Lee-Enfield was standard issue in the British Army from 1895 through the late 1940's (Quick 273). Thus its earliest appearance in South Africa would have been during the Boer War, 1899-1902, and the story must take place later.

With an abruptness akin to dreams, Magda leaves on a long walk. Then she is in her father's bedroom again, seeing him lying wounded "in the first morning light" (64). This may carry a slight echo of the Dusklands theme, wherein sunrise betokens the new assertion of masterhood. The father has increased the brightness of the room by pulling down the curtains to wrap around his blasted midsection. All the same, as Watson points out, "some of the realistic props would seem to suggest the nineteenth century (Magda speaks of 'dancing slippers,' 'daguerrotypes," and even a 'Weekly Advertiser' and 'Colonial Gazette')" (373). We can read this disjointed time-sense as another evidence of the narrative's reflexive nature.

A number of clues here point to the father's symbolic return to infancy, and thus slavelike dependence. The first has to do with the fact that the curtains which swaddle him are green. In several passages she has identified her own childhood with that color. She reports that "at the age of six I was wearing . . . a hideous bottlegreen frock" (40). She pictures herself as the mother of "a litter of runty girls . . . dressed in bottlegreen smocks" (42). But now her father is wearing that color, in token of his change from parent to child, master to slave. In a more direct reference, Magda reports half-mockingly that "He is sitting in a pool of blood like a baby that has wet itself," (68). When he asks for some liquor to help kill the pain, Magda scolds him in tones usually reserved for children: "There is no more brandy. Daddy gave it all to Hendrik; now that we need it there isn't any" (68). As well, the father's

sexual organs seem to have shrunk to infantile proportions. "Poor little thing," she says, "It is not possible to believe I came from there . . ." (69). A comment by Eugene Dawn seems to echo through this part of the book: "The blow that wins the war against the tyrant father is not a death-thrust but a humiliating blow that renders him sterile . . ." (Dusklands 26). The fact that Magda's father will die of his wound is really secondary; the important fact is his fall from power.

Magda now crosses into new territory on her fictive exploration outward--that of her relationship to the servants. Having deposed her father in fantasy, Magda imagines herself beginning to assert masterhood over the servants. She finds less-than-perfect success. After warning Hendrik not to hurt his wife, Magda sends the girl out, whereupon Hendrik gives an order and a warning of his own: "Miss must not get upset, but Miss is interfering too much" (75). The man then proceeds to beat his wife, and when Magda interferes he strikes her also. She follows the pair to where they are struggling on a bed in the schoolhouse, and just as she realizes that they have begun to copulate, Hendrik coolly mocks her, saying, "Miss has surely come to watch" (77). Thus Magda begins to experience the irony of the master who is powerless in the face of the humiliating blow. We may remember the father's earlier groans over his inability to find a wife in contrast to his servant's success.

As if in response to this revelation, Magda seems to toy with a new possibility. Might one imagine a world populated by a society of former slaves sharing equally in the absence of masters? She

identifies with the slavish side of society already, having spent her childhood with children of the servants, speaking "like one of them before I learned to speak like this" (6). Robert Post notes that "Magda, the suffering white female, empathizes with the oppressed black race to the point where she practically considers herself to be black" (70). But now her masterhood has isolated her from "the brown folk" as well, for whom she is one of the masters. They regard her across "valleys of space and time" (7). The father's death brings with it problems of burial and cleaning, but also an opportunity to test the depth of those valleys.

Magda responds with five fictitious episodes. In the first, Hendrik and his wife stand silently over her in the kitchen "waiting to hear what to do" while she apparently sits impotently (80). Obviously, without leadership nothing will happen. In the second, Hendrik takes a more directive role, suggesting that the smell is getting bad. Together they decide to rid themselves of it by fire and a sealing off of the father's bedroom. Although they work side by side almost idyllically, bricking the window then plastering and wallpapering the door, Hendrik's skills make him first among equals. The two women fall naturally into serving roles. While Klein-Anna brings coffee, "I mix the mortar. I wash the tools. I scrub his fingernails" (82). This arrangement puts her in much the same relationship to Hendrik that she held relative to her father.

The third episode corrects this by showing the two of them working as peers to ripsaw the bedroom completely off the house. "Our

labor brings us together," says Magda. "No longer is labor Hendrik's prerogative. I am his equal though I am the weaker" (82). Again, Klein-Anna brings coffee, as to a pair of workmen. (Apparently the new parity does not extend to her.) At this point Magda seems to sense how blatantly such a vision of equality violates "the iron laws of the universe," for she ends the episode with an equally outrageous distortion of the laws of physics. After they shove the severed room away, it "rises into the air" and sails off "clumsily, since it has no keel" (82). In a world consisting of masters and slaves, a classless society is keelless by definition.

After such mockery, one would expect Magda's fourth fiction to be more practical, and it is. She assumes leadership as they clean the body and prepare it for burial. They burn the nightclothes and bedding, and hang the great bedframe in the stable. However, this vision also has its odd moments. As they place the father's belongings into storage, Magda stops to read one of her parents' old love letters to Hendrik. She cleans the bloodstained bedroom floor unaided. Perhaps most strange, we discover at the end that they do not burn the presumably bloodstained green curtains, but put them "away in a drawer" (83). Is this a tacit claim that greenness, child-slavery, is not to be discarded easily? For the first time, too, Hendrik is shown at leisure. As Magda makes new curtains (not green), he "sits watching . . . my busy feet work the treadle and my nimble fingers guide the seams" (83). She is still, in a measure, subservient.

Magda's fifth fantasy finds the three in the kitchen just as

before. This time, however, Magda is full mistress. "Hendrik and Klein-Anna stand over me waiting for instructions" (83). Apparently, however, the cleaning and body preparation has been done, although they will bury the father a little later, perhaps for form's sake. Magda's thought-experiment now seems to aim at discovering whether she can bridge those "valleys" by beginning from a masterly standpoint and bringing them to her level by leisurely fellowship rather than labor. They spend the day going through the secrets of the house--a previously locked room, a wardrobe full of old clothes "that I would love to wear." But instead of wearing them, Magda slips into subservience as she puts them on Klein-Anna, especially when the girl "insists" on wearing a pair of the too-narrow shoes (85). Then they all walk onto the porch to watch the sunset while Klein-Anna struts, "mastering the shoes" (85). That word "mastering" seems to foreshadow the shape of events to come. An earlier fantasy had Klein-Anna accepting gifts from the father; the effect of those presents was the master's death. Now Klein-Anna is enjoying new gifts; do they foretell the decline of Magda's power over her and her husband? A concurrent image reinforces this view. Remembering the symbolism of Dusklands, we may notice that this scene takes place at sunset. Magda has already begun to find Hendrik attractive, recording a moment when she wants to "whisper something to him, something kindly and affectionate . . . about Anna," she ends demurely (85). Instead, in the first of two new fantasies within this one, it is Hendrik who says something to Klein-Anna about her. It is neither kindly nor

affectionate. The wife giggles as he ridicules Magda's odd appearance, habits and fears, ending with the question of whether he "should be the one" to rape her into womanhood. By now the realization is beginning to dawn that giving up one's mastery in a world of masters and slaves merely allows an equally ugly substitute to take charge.

In the second sub-fantasy, Magda orders a still-meek pair of servants to sleep in the main house with her. They finally consent, and that night Magda waits. "The clock ticks, time passes, no one comes" (88) Apparently she has hoped that Hendrik would visit and serve her as Klein-Anna did her father. Thus, in spite of their differences, these two versions agree on one matter. Magda, lonely, thinks of Hendrik sexually in a manner reminiscent of her father's feelings toward Klein-Anna. Both the slavelike and masterly roles she fantasizes seem to end in the same act. Is sexual contact the only possible bridge over those "valleys" allowed by "the iron law of the universe"?

The docile and rebellious sides of Hendrik's personality converge in the next episode, as the narrative adopts a single fantasy line to follow. At Magda's orders the two of them go out to prepare a grave for the father. Here Hendrik is the dutiful servant who digs while Magda watches. Later, however, he refuses to get into the hole in order to try it for size, and she must do it. Then, after they bring the body to the gravesite Hendrik will not help in actually burying it. That even Magda's fury cannot command him is clear as he "begins to march away" (91). She finishes the job alone, well after

nightfall. A day or so later he comes to demand his pay in strong terms. "He is actually threatening me in sober daylight," she says, "thinking that because I am alone and ridiculous I must also be weak and afraid" (94-95). But she really is "weak and afraid," and the "sober daylight" which Dusklands has taught us to see as symbolic of mastery works no magic for her. She is a person of the house, the shadowed indoors. As a woman she cannot claim actual mastery. Rather she must be content with status above a servant and below the real masters, the men. Thus Magda has never used money and has no access to her father's supply. Now she is forced to allow Hendrik to take sheep as payment in kind. This will reduce the farm stock and contribute to ruining the farm.

Apparently yearning for mastery in some form, Magda goes back to the job she knows best: housekeeping. She toils until "Every last ray of light that enters the house is thrown from bright surface to bright surface endlessly" (95). We are reminded of her early comment that "inside my skull the walls are glassy" (38). The sunshine of mastery can reflect on her, but she cannot seek it in externals.

She does acknowledge the need for ordering her exterior world. "Next comes the farm. One of these days, if they are not to stifle, the sheep must be shorn" (95). Moments later, however, she admits an inability to meet the needs of her animal and human subordinates. "Perhaps there will be no money unless I shear the sheep and sell their wool. In that case there will be no money" (96). A person of "interiority" cannot provide a place for either man or beast.

Hendrik begins to assert mastery in earnest as he takes possession of objects on the farm in lieu of money. His claims expand from a sheep per week to some of Magda's father's clothing. Magda notes that both servants are now "dressed in my parents' finery" (99). The situation triggers three different fantasies. In the first she take up the rifle again and shoots Hendrik as Klein-Anna runs. The second has them running away before she can shoot. In the third there is no rifle; Hendrik approaches to ask for tobacco, so he can smoke as the baas did. We should notice that in each case the former servants associate themselves with masters. The rifle is Magda's way of dealing with a master. In the absence of that, there is nothing to stop the upward movement of the former slave, and her own descent.

At last, in desperation, Magda realizes that to retain any mastery at all, she must get some money. She sends Hendrik with a withdrawal slip for her father's account. Of course, they cannot admit that he is dead, since such an admission would force a police inquiry. Lacking the father's signature he returns empty-handed. Clearly any pretense of mastery by Magda is at an end. Hendrik walks boldly into the kitchen and sweeps a serving-dish onto the floor. "He leans on the table breathing heavily. A fine chest, strong lungs. A man" (104). "'Miss lied!'", he exclaims, and her reaction shows complete submission: "I do not want to be shouted at, it only leaves me helpless" (104).

The next event is told in three separate fantasies with the same result; he rapes her. At the end she covers herself with "the green counterpane," whose color will remind us that she is completely

childlike and subservient once more.

Is Hendrik the master then, since he can force himself sexually on another? Certainly the father's ability to induce his servant's wife into bed was the mark of masterhood. But we should remember that Hendrik has no more ability to control money than does Magda. And as he continues to force Magda night after night, she comes to a perceptive conclusion: "I am humiliated. Sometimes I think it is my humiliation he wants" (112). Recalling Eugene Dawn's observation that humiliation is the great weapon of the slave against the master, we may conclude that the use of a slave's technique marks the slave himself. Earlier, successive fictions have tested whether slaves can live together in masterless harmony. The answer comes in Magda's words, "We three cannot find our true paths in this house" (112).

Thus once again in Magda's fictions, "the iron laws of the universe" are in control, determining a world whose history, as Coetzee emphasizes, is seen by the naturalist "as a struggle of all against all for survival and mastery" (Blood 47). The "iron laws" shape the destiny of characters and situations she imagines, no matter how many times she starts again. Strauss rightly says that "She makes beginning after beginning . . . but the consequences of her acts of freedom always have less to do with the acts themselves than with the trap she was in in the first place" (121). Masters, as mere makers of impotent fictions, are no more than slaves with futile dreams.

Even this life, such as it is, must end. When a neighbor farmer and his son ride up to ask after the father on "men's business", Magda

tells them that he has just ridden off with Hendrik (116). At this they depart and the two servants leave almost as quickly, to avoid having Hendrik prosecuted for the father's murder. Magda fantasizes their end; in three versions they are caught, and in the fourth the father returns, enraged that servants have been in the house. In the fifth Hendrik and Klein-Anna elect to live hidden in the house by day and emerge at night, Hendrik murmuring "whatever it is that men say to themselves on a piece of earth that is their own" (123).

Here, however, we begin to leave the fantasies of the book's second stage. No story emerges from these last five options. Instead comes something like the intrusion of the real world in which time has slipped by. Magda pictures herself as a "mad old bad old woman with a stooped back and a hooked nose and nobby fingers" (123). The outside world intrudes in other ways too. A twelve-year-old boy arrives at the farm with a tax letter and calls her "old miss," staring wide-eyed at "the crone in the black dress . . . with the big teeth pointing in all directions and the mad eyes and the mane of grey hair . . ." (124). Perhaps in an attempt to cross another "valley" she asks him about his sexual experiences. He flees.

Now the novel bursts outward to the final territory for exploration--the cosmos--in an ending which has caught the attention of several critics. Voices drift down from flying machines, or possibly great insects, speaking what she believes to be Spanish, but which is apparently an amalgam of several Indo-European languages.

Their first words (apparently in translation) are "When we dream

message fits her situation, for in moving outward she is also transcending her own fictions reflexively, for the outer cosmos surrounding the world of dreams is the world of consciousness. Literally she is now dreaming about her dreaming.

What appears at first reading to be simple madness is nothing more than the last, lurid visions before waking. Of course, she is not really coming awake after a night's sleep, but after a life spent outwardly doing routine things while inwardly creating a fictive life, perhaps adding a bit to a diary each day. The next message reinforces the idea, saying that, "confined within an oppressive narrowness and regularity, man at last has no choice but to turn himself into an adventure" (128). She has done this with an act of creation, through words. In a passage worthy of Wilde or better, Shelley, the voices add that "It is a world of words that creates a world of things" (134). Her fictions have created a world through words, the only stipulation being that they have had to obey "the iron laws of the universe." This has been a fictive world, or metaphorically, a world of dreams, although they have been real in that they have affected both her and us.

With this revelation we awaken fully into the cold light of a reality still defined by masterhood and slavery. Magda's father, now very aged, sits on the stoep. "He sees and hears nothing, for all I know he tastes and smells nothing, and who can imagine what the touch of his skin on mine is like?" (136). This is "interiority" with a vengeance. Years before, the click of his fingernails on her door

signaled perhaps the last chance of human contact between the two; now their isolation is an inescapable physical fact. We may debate the question of who "creates absences" in this story, but there is no question that Magda has at least sanctioned the isolating act.

Early in the book, Magda says of her father that "the real game lies between the two of us" (34). We can say that her weapon is her fictive imagination, and that although Roberts is correct in saying that there has been "no change, no movement, no development" in her actual life (30), Magda has endured by means of her fictions; she has lived to reverse roles with her father, and attain what mastery she can. Is she less guilt-ridden than before? After all, to assume the role of parent may be to escape from her own guilty infancy. The old man, diapered now, has become the equivalent of a newborn while she has taken the role of parent, and thus of master holding the power of love and forgiveness. Is this why the fictions ends at this point? If, as has seemed true, her interest in creating a dream world had been involved with her yearning for mastery, the father's increasing dependence might arguably have signaled the time of awakening.

Many critics find more straightforward reasons for the novel's closing scenes. One suggests that we might regard the farm as a microcosm of South Africa itself, with "the father as the Afrikaner baas, and Magda as the ineffectual, dreaming liberal," and "we leave her . . . eternally talking, narrating, reliving . . . just as South African literature has been doing for its deaf audiences . . . in a world that will not change" (Roberts 30-31).

This view has the drawback that Magda has finished her fantasies

by the very end--her narration does not go on "eternally" at all. Michael Vaughan seems to agree with Roberts' political reading however, saying that the novel as a whole amounts to no more than an unrelieved "exemplification of ascribed modes" of racism in South Africa, and thus a vote for the status quo (125). However, Stephen Watson sounds a note of warning: "the actual critique of colonialism that emerges from [Coetzee's novels] is hardly conventional" (371). That must be true; surely the novel is about more than racist mastery and slavehood. If "the real game" is between Magda and her father, then the issue is broader than present political concerns, even though it may encompass them.

Peter Strauss recommends a far more literary/philosophical reading of the novel's ending. "Coetzee is kept from finding a straightforward end to his story by a philosophy of action . . . which is hyperconscious about beginnings and less confident about consequences" (121). In other words, the incompleteness of Coetzee's own philosophy prevents a satisfactory ending. Strauss claims that therefore Magda's belief in an idyllic proto-cultural beginning is stronger than her trust in resolution, which state of mind causes a self-mocking return to idyllic style at the end. This view, too, has merit. Certainly the self-mocking is there: "(here they come, how sweet the closing plangencies)" (139) is one example he cites. As well, Magda's words become especially idyllic in the end as she says, "I am corrupted to the bone with the beauties of this forsaken world" (139). Moreover, she has given notice of her love of beginnings in

referring to a myth told by the black folk with whom she spent her childhood, "of a past when beast and man and master had a common life as innocent as the stars in the sky" (7). The ending reasserts that she longs to reenter this Edenic state, wishing that the sky-gods "would descend and live with me in paradise [here]" (139). By Strauss' reading, however, Magda realizes these yearnings to be empty at bottom, and we can regard the very last words of the novel as being in agreement with that perspective. Magda says that she would have written hymns (apparently on the idyllic past), but that "it was too easy" to do so (139).

These two viewpoints, the political and philosophical, are both valid then, but we need not accept the negative corollaries that some critics have attached to them. The novel's refusal to end with racial revolution or a neat denouement does not reflect any necessary weakness in political or philosophical insight. Rather, it may show strength, in that the reader's attention is lifted from the strictly two-dimensional problem of six people on a farm, or a group of people in a country, to a third dimension involving a world in a universe. After all, political questions are simply problems of any small group writ large on the earth. Similarly, a wistful yearning for happy endings of bygone years is based on a time-line extending to the horizon behind us. But it is significant that the novel's ending induces us to look <u>up</u> for the first time in the story.

Let us begin with the most important messages that drift down to Magda as she is awakening. At the end of a series of statements concerning human perception, the "sky gods" voice this close

paraphrase from Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit, paragraph 192: "It is the slave's consciousness that constitutes the master's certainty of his own truth. But the slave's consciousness is a dependent consciousness. So the master is not sure of his autonomy . . ." (130). In other words, since the master's perceptions are based on questionable information, the master's mastery is always in doubt. Within this statement is a syllogism.

> The world is apparently divided into two classes: masters and slaves--those who dominate, and those who bow.
>
> However, the masters are unsure of their mastery in the final analysis; dominated by uncertainty, they bow in their own way.
>
> Therefore, among humans, all are slaves.

That syllogism runs further:

> Since masterhood is a fictitious condition, aspiring masters are simply creators of fiction.
>
> But fictions must obey "the iron laws of the universe." As just pointed out, those laws make mastery impossible.
>
> Therefore, even in fictions, all are slaves.

We have noted that Magda's experiments in masterlessness with Hendrik and Klein-Anna have produced a keelless, floating relationship, and that her attempts to assume control have failed. If all are slaves, then the human race is in the same situation--drifting fecklessly in the absence of anyone with legitimate ability to bring order.

Fittingly then, Magda's first messages in stones to her "saviours" in the heavens are a hodgepodge of words from various languages, though their meanings tend clumsily toward one desire. She spells out "CINDRLA ES MI; and the next day: VENE AL TERRA; and: QUIERO UN AUTR; and again: SON ISOLADO" (132). They all point to the need for someone to come and control this drifting world of slaves.

"CINDRLA ES MI" recalls for us the famous fairytale-myth of the oppressed girl waiting for her prince to descend from his palace and end her thralldom to her ugly stepmother and stepsisters, whose own fictions make them beautiful to themselves. The three women are, in effect, ignoble masters who are mere perpetuators of Cinderella's unjust circumstance. The prince is the true master, whose arrival brings order. "VENE AL TERRA" seems to be a direct invitation for that prince to "come to earth."

"QUIERO UN AUTR" ("I want an other" in a mixture of Spanish and French) can be seen as related to that same myth. After all, the prince is other than--that is, different from--the rest of the characters. He can bring justice for Cinderella as no one else can. It is hard to escape the notion that Magda wants a kind of rescuer who will relate to her as no one has ever done before.

"SON ISOLADO" ("they are isolated"). "Son" is the Spanish pronoun "they," but in that case the verb should also be plural: "isolados." If this does not simply represent mixed languages, perhaps the mingling of plural and singular indicates that I, you, we, and they, are all intended as possibilities. In that case, "everybody is isolated" suggests itself as best reading. Is the whole world,

then, Cinderella? Who, then, is to take the role of the rescuing fairy godmother?

The answer fits in with the widening of Magda's vision to the mythos of theology. Magda's request on the "sixth of these days," seems to recall the Judeo-Christian myth of Creation Week, during which the Lord God created man (Gen. 1:26). Magda would create herself to be a new kind of human, "neither master nor slave, neither parent nor child, but the bridge between, so that in me the contraries should be reconciled" (133). Thus she wishes her creation week to culminate in her becoming a Christ-figure, one who can bring people together as equals under a new order.

For Magda, the biggest problem with such a request is how to make it. Lacking a Spanish dictionary, she leaves off creating words and spends her sixth day making an outline of herself on the ground, an obvious parody of God's activities on His sixth day: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground . . ." (Gen. 2:7). Magda admits that the picture she creates is idealized: "her figure fuller than mine . . . younger than myself too, this was no time for scrupulosity" (134).

The figure is posed in an enticingly sexual position, with a written message to match: "AMOR POR TU" ("love for you"). Perhaps we should pause here to consider why. Throughout the novel, sex seems to be the only link between humans that Magda can discover. As we have seen, her fictions involving her father are laced with sexual overtones; on the other hand, the father seems to prefer a sexual

relationship with Klein-Anna to a platonic warmth with Magda; again, her overtures to Hendrik are consummated in repeated rape; finally, her response to the visit of a boy from town is to ask a sexual question from which he flees in terror. In Magda's world, the only thing that can hope to draw people together is copulation. For her to try to seduce "the gods" is natural, then. Later the "voices" tell her that, for a deity, ignoring such a plea is equally natural: "God loves no one . . .and hates no one . . ." (134).

This is juxtaposed with a kaleidoscopic mixture of theological ideas whose point seems to be that God is so wrapped in mystery as to make His acts meaningless or at least imperceptible to human beings (134-35). Her own conclusion agrees: "As for the absence of God from the stone desert, there is nothing I can be told about this subject that I do not know" (135). She continues, "We are the castaways of God, as we are the castaways of history. That is the origin of our feeling of solitude" [italics in the original] (135).

Thus Magda lives in a world which neither history nor God will judge; in that sense it is a free world. As she has said, "Life in the desert teaches nothing if not that all things are permissible" (39). She repeats the idea at the end: "Everything is permitted here. Nothing is punished" (135). These statements, which carry echoes of Jacobus' similar claim, are paradoxical since for her the freedom of oblivion still carries consequences.

Magda is being punished throughout the book Her isolation from history is a kind of damnation, whether it results from a Calvinistic God's arbitrary choice or her own determined fantasizing. She herself

has said that "I struggle with the proverbs of hell," a reference to Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (26). But those very proverbs also promise a kind of freedom to the damned. One, for instance, promises an end to mastery and slavehood: "EMPIRE IS NO MORE! AND NOW THE LION & WOLF / SHALL CEASE" (Blake 216). Another urges that the individual "Drive your cart and your plow over the bones of the dead" (Blake 211). After noting that this novel is strewn with references from philosophers and novelists, Post says that this "novel is a veritable museum--in fact, graveyard--of the thought and literary culture of the past" (383). Magda's imagination is quite free to drive over sacred bones, including those of theological systems, demonstrating that "all things are permitted here" well enough. Thus whether Magda's damnation is the result of a Calvinistic God's arbitrary choice or of her own attitude toward outward reality, her banishment and its grotesque vision of freedom are obvious and permanent.

Clearly the implications of the master/slave myth are inexorable, even for those who try to escape through their own fictions. One may work her way outward fictively from herself to the cosmos without shaking off the oppressive power of that myth.

Criticizing the novel's ending as an expression of the author's limited philosophy or political naivete seems shortsighted, therefore. Rather we need to see the close as establishing the universal context for the story, bringing us firmly to questions over which man has pondered for millenia. Gillmer has said that In the Heart of the

Country is "arguably the best of Coetzee's fiction" (111). Paulin calls the novel "a strict and penetrating intellectual meditation on the nature of history" (87). This is not far from labeling the book a classic, and given the breadth of its sweep from the interior of a girl's mind to the most universal questions, it may come to wear that title in time.

CHAPTER IV

WAITING FOR THE BARBARIANS

As several critics have pointed out, Coetzee's third novel, Waiting for the Barbarians, take its title from a poem of the same name by Constantin Cavafy, in which these words appear:

> Now, what's going to happen to us without the barbarians?
> Those people were a kind of solution. (33)

Both the poem and the novel present a world divided exclusively between Empire and barbarian, master and slave. In the poem the barbarians disappear, leaving the masters with the psychological equivalent of half a world. In the book they seem destined to arrive in the guise of conquerors, slaves no longer. Obviously, without slaves one cannot be a master. In the absence of slaves, then, the masters will need a new "solution" to the problem of self-identity, either based on a reversion to slavery or to a third standpoint besides masterhood and servitude. This novel traces one master's search for that identity.

Coincidentally, we have this statement from an article by Coetzee on naturalism, published the same year as the novel: "For with the key term progress undefined save tautologically, i.e., the survival of those fittest to survive, why should one not forsee and even look forward to the triumph of the barbarian . . ?" (Blood 47). Once again, therefore, we have a novel growing out of naturalistic roots.

Waiting for the Barbarians thus has a clear kinship with Coetzee's two previous books through the master/slave theme, and it

develops that theme in similar ways. As well as focusing on the kind of psychological interiority one finds in In the Heart of the Country, this novel can be mapped out via an image developed in Dusklands: Eugene Dawn's vision of a twilit horizon which defines the boundaries of Empire[1].

The magistrate, who is otherwise unnamed, administers a frontier town at the Empire's desert border with the duskland. We may picture his world as consisting of four concentric perceptual landscapes, each with its own horizon: the physical territory of the Empire, beyond whose horizon lurk the barbarians, the larger psychological horizon which separates master and slave, the still larger temporal horizon separating the present from both a cryptic past and an uncertain future, and the largest circle of all, the ethical horizon, which concerns itself with all the others in separating the clean from the unclean.

These horizons can be seen through what Joseph Kestner terms "the spatial pictorial illusion," a way of designating characters, events, or themes in terms of frame superimposed on one another (112). In this case, we should visualize four concentric circles, each containing the previous ones, with each of the enclosed landscapes being subject to the authority of the territory surrounding it. The

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[1]Apparently to emphasize the master/slave horizon indirectly, the narrator capitalizes words relating to masterhood, such as "Empire" and "Colonel," while leaving slave-references like "barbarian" in lower case. This chapter will follow suit, even though that departs from normal usage. The word "magistrate" appears both ways; it will be lower case here.

Empire rules the central two circles--the physical territory which once belonged to the barbarians and the concurrent psychological landscape of masters and slaves. The temporal and ethical territories are beyond it; those it ignores since it cannot control them. Meanwhile time and justice, represented by the outer horizons, work inexorably to overturn that empire by making the erstwhile slaves into masters and giving its territory away. Thus Empire dooms itself through shortsightedness, while the ethical viewpoint provides the key perspective on the whole pattern. In the course of the story the magistrate confronts all of these landscapes, demonstrating that the duality inherent in each admits of no third position, and that the two which the Empire excludes from its thinking are, in reality, the only ones having any permanence.

Waiting for the Barbarians is divided into four sections thematically. The first shows two possible reactions for those confronted with the unknown beyond the Empire's horizons. The second deals with the problem of how to clean lives marred by the Empire. The third involves a trial of strength between the Empire and the ethical territory beyond its grasp. The fourth and shortest concludes bittersweetly, showing the magistrate's ethical victory as being unavoidably incomplete. This chapter will follow that pattern.

The book's first line takes the modern reader beyond his or her temporal horizons as the magistrate describes a newly-arrived Colonel Joll as wearing what for us is a very common item: "two little discs of glass suspended in front of his eyes in loops of wire" (1). He adds, "I have never seen anything like it" (1). This is not the 20th

century, then. Yet the sunglasses are there, along with swords and primitive guns. Lance Olsen comments, "How can there be sunglasses, on the one hand, and no advanced military weapons or motors of any kind on the other? Carefully, subtly, Coetzee jams our notions of where and when" (50). Another interpretation might assume an Empire using the equivalent of European 17th-century technology, for that era included both optic lenses and stained-glass windows as well as crude firearms. In either view, however, we are removed from our present world into a time and place of which there is no historical record--what Olsen calls "the landscape of the almost-dream" (51). As in the two previous books, such fabulation serves the reflexive purpose of freeing free us from our preoccupation with current political issues enough to glimpse the universals of the surrounding ethical terrain more clearly.

The sunglasses point to more than time dislocation, however. As devices to help one cope with glaring sunlight, they fit effectively with Dawn's metaphor for masterhood. The visitor who owns them is Colonel Joll, an intelligence officer from the imperial capital, where, he says, "everyone wears them" (1). Assumably the Empire's power is like the noontime sun there, producing a glare which is hard to withstand unaided. Moreover, as his Third Bureau is the "most important division of the Civil Guard" (2), Joll is empowered to carry the searching power of imperial sunlight with him. In the magistrate's words, "His work is to find out the truth" (3). Yet the illumination he uses to do it demands a kind of blindness, for as we

have already noted he must not see too far outward from the horizons which the Empire controls; hence, the sunglasses. Something obviously is wrong with the Colonel, something very like pretense, for even indoors he wears the glasses, though he stumbles over furniture as a result. The Colonel either does not know, or will not admit, that the light of Empire has its limitations, weakening steadily as one travels away from the noon meridian. For a man preparing to make incursions into the heart of barbarian country, this can be dangerous. The barbarians are slaves well enough, since much of their land is forfeit; moreover, they do not fight except by retreat. Still, the blindness that follows that retreat into deepening gloom is in no way safe. Nor is the question simply one of relative power. As Penner observes, "Joll is ethically blind, as is the Empire he represents" (36). That is his fatal weakness.

That ethical blindness allows a symbolic reading of Joll's comment as to why one might want to wear dark glasses constantly: "They save one from squinting all the time. One has fewer headaches" (1). Human beings exposed to the glaring ethical questions that accompany the Empire must squint if they are to accept that Empire as their own. The effort of such moral narrowing will, in turn, result in the psychological equivalent of headaches. Their answer is an artificial squint of tinted glass, and an intelligence service through whose darkened perception they may view "truth" comfortably. However, such devices are limited in their usefulness. Just as lengthened shadows bring the terrain of a duskland into clearer relief, even so the slant of softer light at the frontier allows people to approach

ethical questions of mastery and slavehood directly. There too, dark glasses and preconceptions of the Third Bureau are dangerously debilitating.

In ethical terms, the glasses may serve one more purpose. The magistrate wonders what "private ritual of purification" a torturer might use to rejoin the company of decent human beings (12). Such a man might feel enough subconscious guilt to want to hide his face behind two pieces of tinted glass.

The magistrate's clearer vision begins to trouble him as Colonel Joll goes to work immediately in search of the "truth" that he needs in order to fulfill his duty. Stories have spread concerning insurgency and ambush along the frontier. "The barbarian tribes were arming, the rumor went; the Empire should take precautionary measures, for there would certainly be war" (8). Significantly, these stories do not come directly from border areas, but from the capital itself (8). The magistrate is skeptical, noting that "once in every generation, without fail, there is an episode of hysteria about the barbarians" (8). He adds, "Show me a barbarian army and I will believe" (8).

The magistrate's practicality is no more than acceptance of his own horizons in order to avoid "hysteria." What he does not see, he will not presume. Conversely, what he does see, he ponders. His discovery of some old ruins near the settlement has opened up his temporal horizons, making him curious about the past. Again, having administered the town for a comfortable twenty years, he has not seen

jarring evidence of a basic conflict between the Empire and its ethical context. When that conflict presents itself, he will deal with it honestly.

Colonel Joll is exactly the opposite. Although his job as intelligence officer amounts to peering beyond normal limits of perception, his need to hold the Empire's truth supreme makes him an alien, permanently at war with the reality beyond the encircling horizons. His tactics for capturing the truth are as brutally direct as a Clauswitzian frontal assault: "First I get lies, you see . . . first lies, then pressure, then more lies, then more pressure, then the break, then more pressure, then the truth" (5). The fact that this technique violates all ethical imperatives is of no concern whatever.

As one who would look and act ethically, yet who is sworn to support the Empire, the magistrate is caught in a classic double-bind. That becomes clear as Joll deals with two prisoners, an old man and a sick boy, who were arrested in the wake of a fairly standard stock raid nearby. Although the magistrate spends some time "pleading for them" that "no one would have brought an old man and a sick boy along on a raiding party" (4), Joll interrogates the pair during the evening, after excluding the magistrate from the room. By absenting him, Joll cleverly removes the incident to a point past the magistrate's physical horizon, with the implication that this satisfies ethical imperatives. Indeed, the magistrate listens carefully, but reports that "I hear nothing" (5). Thus, by the standard under which he has successfully avoided "hysteria" in the

past, the magistrate could feel free of shame if his ethical sense allowed.

But it does not, for the claims of ethical territoriality remain firm. Even in beginning "to plead my own cause" (5), he admits his complicity in the torture, because of his cooperating with Joll so fully. Both men are guilty as individuals, and the claims of an Empire which can control the physical and psychological horizons do not escape those of the ethical one. Moreover, the magistrate now adds to his responsibility by increasing the psychological effect of the torture.

He goes to visit the scene when Joll is finished and finds the old man beaten to death, the boy rigid with horror. Reacting to this scene with characteristic humanity, he orders the corpse out of the boy's sight, loosens his bonds, has him fed. All the while, however, he pleads the Empire's case: "Listen: you must tell the officer the truth. That is all he wants to hear from you--the truth . . ." (7). He may hope that what he says is true, but his well-meaningness serves Joll's purposes admirably: "It has not escaped me that an interrogator can wear two masks, speak with two voices, one harsh, one seductive" (7). In effect, the magistrate is acting as a beneficent voice whose sympathy may do more to weaken the victim's resolve than the other's brutality. Obviously Joll has tricked him into that role by excluding him initially, knowing that a kind man would come to see and comfort the youngster. One suspects that the grandfather's broken body was left, not for the boy's, but for the magistrate's eyes.

Seeing himself trapped in such a hateful position, the magistrate allows himself to take one wistful backward glance, wishing that he had "gone on a hunting trip for a few days, as I should have done . . . put my seal on his report, with no question about what the word investigations meant, what lay beneath it like a banshee beneath a stone . . . (9). In other words, he wishes that he had retreated beyond the physical horizon so as to avoid crossing the ethical one. Yet knowing that the "banshee" was there would have been enough to have disturbed his conscience. Actual escape from guilt is impossible in such circumstances, and he knows it.

The magistrate's entrapment is clear. Ignoring evil in a territory he is duty-bound to protect would be morally wrong. Yet even his positive actions produce evil outcomes. Guilt results from both courses, and no third possibility seems to exist. Is there no way for him to conform to ethical imperatives? At least one critic seems to misunderstand the moral implications of the episode. Wood says that

> Where Coetzee would seem concerned to stress, as in the scene referred to above, that in the magistrate we have no real alternative to the Colonel, there is evidence in support of a divergent view. The magistrate responds humanely to the boy, whom he regards as a subject whose suffering and fears affect him; he therefore attempts to do what little he can to alleviate them. His stance allies him increasingly with the enemy of Empire. (135) [Italics in the original]

It is hard to find evidence in the novel that Coetzee seems "concerned to stress" the magistrate's being morally "no real alternative" to the Colonel. The two characters have been established as moral opposites from the first. The horror is that in his well-meaning "attempt to do what little he can to alleviate" the boy's

suffering, the magistrate only makes it worse. This picture of moral goodwill trapped into doing practical evil illustrates an ethically unbearable situation. Coetzee himself has commented that the magistrate is in a "doomed position," which is "riddled with contradictions," and that the man has "no choice" (Rhedin 6). In this the character no more rejects an ethically viable stance than a cancer victim willfully rejects health. It is just that neither knows how to get there.

Meanwhile, Wood's comment that the magistrate's "stance allies him" with the Empire's foes ignores the other horn of the character's dilemma. This scene shows, not budding alliance, but alienation--from the boy as well as from the Empire. Surely the brutal point is that the magistrate has no allies. In effect, he discovers himself to be in a no-man's-land beyond the psychological horizons of both master and slave while still living within their physical and temporal horizons. The fact that he is in neither a master's nor a slave's position is borne out by the magistrate's pleadings. As he speaks to Colonel Joll, he becomes "conscious that I am pleading for [the two prisoners]" (4). In turn, his already-quoted words to the boy plead for Colonel Joll as only wanting "the truth." He also says parenthetically, "At a certain point I begin to plead my own cause" (5). Clearly he is alien to both the master's and the slave's psychological territories. The rest of the novel will be given over to the discovery of whether a third location, within temporal and ethical territory but apart from the physical and psychological

master/slave boundaries, can be discovered.

To make any discovery, one must travel into the unknown. For the magistrate the process begins subconsciously with the first of six dreams picturing a world increasingly free from the master/slave strife. Its first picture is refreshing: "From horizon to horizon the earth is white with snow. It falls from a sky in which the source of light is diffuse and everywhere present, as though the sun has dissolved into mist" (9). This seems to connect with the imagery from Dusklands, since it pictures a world antithetical to the sun-and-shadow landscape of masters and slaves. Here the magistrate dreams of a clean place whose sunlight does not come from a single imperial source but is diffuse and universal, freely available everywhere. No empiric flag hangs from "the bare flagpole" (9). Moreover, the horizon of this clean world is reassuringly wide, pushing the walls and structures of Empire far away: "The square extends before me, blending at its edges into the luminous sky. Walls, trees, houses have dwindled, lost their solidity, retired over the rim of the world" (9). The inhabitants of this scene are children, who erect a castle with "a little red flag" on top of it (9). Obvious political readings aside, this is certainly a vision of a new world in which children, the ethically clean hope of the future, build together happily. Coetzee himself has remarked that the children mentioned in the book "might be able to make choices" impossible for the magistrate (Rhedin 7).

Still, this vision is only tentatively positive in its implications. The children remain shadowy and tenuous figures that

"melt away" as he nears them, and the one who remains has her back to him so that he cannot see her face (10). Thus the hope they represent is vague, more a product of wistful longing than of prophecy. The dream gives no assurance that such a benign future will come about.

It seems more distant than ever before when the magistrate to find that the Colonel has returned to torture the boy in the night with a small knife, turning it "delicately, like a key" in the boy's body (10). This new horror causes the magistrate to explore the Colonel's mind by trying to imagine how he can violate ethical imperatives so blithely. He wonders how Joll reacted the first time he tortured someone; did he "shudder to know that at that instant he was trespassing into the forbidden?" (12). Further, he ponders what "private ritual of purification" Joll might use to rejoin the company of decent men (12). Alternately, he considers whether the Empire might have its own standards of decency which allow "new men" to "pass without disquiet between the unclean and the clean" (12).

The truth is even more startling. These "new men" never cross to "the clean" at all. They cannot, since the empire is in direct conflict with the territory of ethics; such crossing would make them the Empire's enemies, as it will finally do to the magistrate. This fact begins to dawn on him as he says that the Colonel is probably "used to being shunned" as perpetually unclean (12).

The Empire has some questions as well, but typically seeks the answers by invasion beyond its physical horizon. After all it holds territory by naked power, not by reference to ethical imperatives.

Thus its representative, Colonel Joll, is absolutely confident of that power as he sets out on the next stage of the campaign.

Yet he is obviously not proceeding on the basis of truth. The boy's response to torture has been to agree with the official line that the clans are "arming themselves" for a great "war on the Empire" (10-11). The magistrate warns Joll against going into a hostile, poorly mapped area with a boy guide "who will say whatever comes into his head to please you . . ." (11). But Joll seems much more interested in projecting the military power of the Empire than in attending to reality. We see that power metaphorically as they ride out to carry forward the harsh light of Empire. "The sun glares so savagely from the surface that I have to shield my eyes," says the magistrate (13). Significantly, all but one of the soldiers look painfully away from the light; that one has a piece of colored glass "which he holds up before his eyes," and the magistrate wonders, "How far will this absurd affectation spread?" (14). The answer is obvious: right to the Empire's horizon, where it will be stopped by the surrounding temporal and ethical boundaries--that is, until time and justice knock the glasses off.

As the Colonel moves confidently out over the physical horizon, so, with much less certainty, the magistrate moves backward toward the temporal one of prehistory. We have already mentioned that near the fort is a sand-buried ruin of buildings dating from a time before the Empire's coming to the area. Since the present barbarians are nomads, the magistrate suspects that the structures are the remains of another Empire, and that perhaps "I stand over the head of a magistrate like

myself . . ." (15). To add to his interest, a number of little wooden "slips" have come to light; they are bound together in pairs, with writing on the facing sides. He has been unsuccessful in deciphering the writing. He even feels a bit foolish in the attempt "to find in the vacuousness of the desert a special historical poignancy. Vain, idle, misguided!" (17). Nevertheless, these ruins and artifacts make one thing clear. Other Empires have likely asserted themselves here, and are gone. This view over the temporal horizon, however dim, shows that the Empire is not eternal, and this helps the magistrate begin to cast off his bondage to it. By contrast, the discovery that even the most ruthless Empires are neither omnipotent nor immutable is still over the horizon for the Colonel.

Joll returns with artifacts of his own: a line of barbarian prisoners, whom he proceeds to torture. The magistrate's reaction is poignantly simple: "I feel old and tired, I want to sleep" and he calls that slumber "an oblivion, a nightly brush with annihilation" (21). This amounts to a death-wish from a man who would like to escape all horizons forever. Perhaps he wishes to recapture the sweet snow-dream, but it, and the rest it represents, do not come. During his waking hours too, he wants to distance himself physically from the "questioning" going on nearby: "I sit in my room with the windows shut" (22).

Now begins the second major section of the narrative, in which the human results of Joll's actions are dealt with.

One day the Colonel announces that his business is ended, and

leaves abruptly. This shows another result of their differing historical viewpoints. Having interrogated all the prisoners, Joll departs without a thought for the "sick, famished, damaged, terrified" people he leaves in his wake (24). For the moment he lives, no less than Jacobus, in a world oblivious to ethical imperatives, where "all things are possible."

The magistrate does not live in that world, partly because of his acceptance of the temporal landscape. "The new men of Empire are the ones that believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages; I struggle on with the old story . . ." (24). The Colonel has simply turned a page without regard to the human wreckage on the previous one; the magistrate takes responsibility for the past, seeking relief in an act of purification. "'Soap and water! I want everything as it was before,'" he shouts (24).

But turning the page backwards would be an impossible violation of temporal horizons. Even if his sense of history could change, the magistrate cannot eradicate the physical and psychological effects visited on the prisoners who are now his responsibility. Moreover, after they have been rehabilitated enough for release, not all can go. Of these, one girl in particular catches his attention. Half-blind and hobbling painfully with the aid of two sticks, she has been left behind to beg. Since vagrancy is against the law, he offers her work in his kitchen, but she refuses, saying with a vague gesture that she will be useless to him broken. He insists on the following day, and she comes to his room.

Clearly, this is a continuation of the cleaning process he began

in the torture room, and just as clearly he will not be able to cross the temporal horizon and undo the past. At the same time he worries about his ethical position--wondering "Can I really be about to excuse myself?"--and we are perhaps reminded of his encounter with the tortured boy (27). A moment later he makes the ethical dilemma even more clear: "The distance between myself and her torturers, I realize, is negligible; I shudder" (27). As with the boy, so now, he is afraid that his actions will simply add to the girl's torture, at least psychologically. Yet to do nothing would simply copy Joll's neglect. Either way he is trapped into identification with the Colonel. He chooses to respond as he did at Joll's departure--by applying soap and water. He washes her maimed ankles and feet.

Ironically, although this action merely seems to puzzle her, it comforts him with the rest he has lacked for so long.

> I lose myself in the rhythm of what I am doing. I lose awareness of the girl herself. There is even a space of time which is blank to me: perhaps I am not even present. When I come to, my fingers have slackened, the foot rests in the basin, my head droops. (28)

This narcotic effect is so sweet that he surrenders to it absolutely. "My eyes close. It becomes an intense pleasure to keep them closed, to savour the blissful giddiness. I stretch out on the carpet. In an instant I am asleep" (29). Recalling how long he has ached for relief, and how little he has found until now, we must pause to analyze this episode in light of its ethical implications.

Obviously the girl's feet are dirty, but she is as capable of cleaning them herself as the soldiers are of scrubbing the prison

room. Moreover, the main beneficiary of the act is the magistrate himself; his earlier comment about Joll's need for a "private ritual of purification" is clue enough as to why. As accomplice to torture, unwillingly or not, the magistrate requires "purification" also. Thus his question we have seen already--"Can I really be about to excuse myself?"--takes on a deeper significance. Penner sees the washing as being "in its outward form sacramental . . . much as Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anointed the feet of Jesus (John 12:1-8) and as Jesus bathed the disciples' feet (John 13:4-5)" (38).

In another version of the first story, Jesus says of Mary, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much. . ." (Luke 7:47). Thus a loving act of ritual cleansing/anointment can be seen as a means of expiation. Although this seems like elaborate sexual foreplay, it is quite different. "I have no desire to enter this stocky little body," he says (30). Washing barracks rooms is a beginning, but the sin of torturing another human being needs to be cleansed at its object. The magistrate does this by ritually soaping and caressing the broken places of an actual victim. The sweet sleep that follows for him is evidence that, at least temporarily, he finds peace through the act despite his lack of interest in penetrating her sexually.

The soldiers' telling him some basic facts about her and her father's torture is enough to set off his snow-dream again. This time he circles the "hooded child" until he can see her face: it is blank, "the face of an embryo or a tiny whale; it is not a face at all . . ." (37). His moving around the hooded figure is analogous to learning

something of the girl's history, while the blankness of the face implies the inscrutability of what he can see through that history. Obviously he feels a need to learn more.

In an interesting parallel he finds that an old passion, hunting, has gone flat to his taste. With the animal in his sights he finds himself uninterested in firing, for "My pulse does not quicken: evidently it is not important to me that the ram die" (39). Again, his unearthing of the mysterious wooden slips can be seen as another way of hunting. In fact, just as he must unwind the strings that tie the slips together in order to get at their writing, so he must find some ethical meaning which her violated body encloses. He says "that until the marks on this girl's body are deciphered and understood I cannot let go of her" (31). Fittingly then, he takes no interest in the slips while he has the girl's scars to occupy him. Rather, the two interests of hunting and archeology seem to come together in her.

Gillmer seems to feel that the magistrate's failure to learn the barbarian tongue, which he ruefully admits later (72), is tied to his interest in the slips. She says, "Still puzzling over the unknown script of some former civilization, he misses his opportunity to learn from her the living language of the barbarians" (116). But the girl's scars, not the slips, form the language that obsesses him.

As the ritual goes on, day after day, it becomes formalized with soap and water all over her naked body, followed by an anointing with almond oil, and the girl becomes used to it: "There used to be moments when she stiffened at certain intimacies; but now her body

yields when I nuzzle my face into her belly or clasp her feet between my thighs. She yields to everything" (30).

To everything physical, yes; but to the questions which attempt to probe the scars on her body, she makes no answer. One reviewer points out that the girl "yields everything but herself" (Kramer 11). She allows him to handle her body freely, therefore, until he reaches a tiny scar on her face: "'That is where they touched me,' she says, and pushes my hand away" (31). Because Joll and his men tried to force entry into her mind at that place, she defends "herself," to use Kramer's term, there. She also refuses to answer his questions about the torture. These things are private.

Nevertheless, the magistrate continues to probe with his questions. This gives some rationale for the unholy kinship he feels with Colonel Joll, of whom he has said, "In his quest for truth he is tireless" (22). For what it is worth, they enter the bodies of their subjects differently in one way, but exactly the same in another. Joll uses a knife in concert with his questions, while the magistrate uses oil. Both penetrate, and the ultimate object is the same: intelligence as to the interior being.

All the same he does not seem to want her in the way Joll does, as a mere quarry, for he seems bent on sharing himself with her. Following the hunting incident he approaches her to confess, "Never before have I had the feeling of not living my own life on my own terms" (40). These words seem to betoken more than a change in his attitude toward hunting. For twenty years, he has been a benign but

sexually potent master who bedded whom he liked. Now, as he hunts the buck but does not want to put a bullet into it, so he keeps yet another girl in his rooms, but does not feel the urge to penetrate her sexually. His masterly assurance is eroding.

Having heard this statement, the girl reacts with a directness which emphasizes the chasm between them. "'I do not see,' she says. She shakes her head. 'Didn't you want to shoot this buck?'" (40). After a long and awkward silence, she continues, "'If you want to do something, you do it'" (40). Of course the magistrate was perfectly free to pull a trigger, but if his aim were true the result would have been that "the proud ram" would "bleed to death on the ice" (40). Thus the question that has "robbed the hunt of its savour" (39) is whether the rewards of forced penetration are worth the inevitable consequence of turning a live thing into dead meat. This question operates on multiple levels, for the element of force is still present in their relationship.

She sees none of this, apparently. The act is something to be done, no more. "'You want to talk all the time,'" she complains (40), adding, "'You should not go hunting if you do not enjoy it'" (41). In other words, do not go to the trouble of taking girls into your bed without using them in the normal way. She does not see the situation from his point of view at all.

Nevertheless, she chooses that moment to answer a question he has asked fruitlessly before: how she lost her eyesight. It is as though she wishes to give him the only gift he seems to want, in token of her acceptance of him. His response is more questions rather than

gratitude at being allowed into a private part of her. She concludes, "I am tired of talking" (41).

The relationship makes him tired too. At times he resents "my bondage to the ritual of the oiling and rubbing . . ." (41). His discomfort has two sources, really. He feels a kind of slavehood to the ritual he has imposed, and is frustrated by her refusal to yield her mind as she has her body; both of these realizations force him to look squarely at the limits of his masterhood. He asserts that "I am the same man I always was," but "something has fallen in on me from the sky" (43). In the largest sense, that "something" is a clearer picture of the ethical terrain's supremacy over masterhood.

We should not be surprised at a barbarian girl's lack of empathy with a troubled master's viewpoint, for her own experiences have destroyed most of the possibilities of that empathy. We can see a token of that by regarding her eyesight as a symbol of her thinking. Instead of being totally blind, she does have peripheral vision: "I can see out of the sides of my eyes" (29). Therefore in order to look at something she must center her eyes away from it. Although the novel gives no further emphasis to possible symbolism here, we may recall that proper night vision requires exactly the same technique--one's clearest image in darkness comes from looking to the side of the thing observed. Therefore she is now most at home away from the brilliant sun of Empire, in the darkened world of the slave. We can read her earlier answer in that light: "I do not see. . . . Didn't you want to shoot this buck?" (40). All she knows of mastery is that

the master can do just what he wants. Thus her outlook as permanent slave causes her later refusal to join the magistrate freely: "No. I do not want to go back to that place" (71). In this she is far wiser than Joll, who confidently enters the darkened landscape of the slave while destroying his own night vision.

In an apparent attempt to reassert his masterhood, the magistrate visits his prostitute friend, apparently as much for the comforting falsehoods a slave tells a master as for her body: "'How I have missed you!' she sighs. 'What a pleasure to be back!' I whisper. And what a pleasure to be lied to so flatteringly!" (42). At this moment he calls the barbarian girl "beyond comprehension," visualizing her as being "without aperture" (42). Of course the prostitute is lying, as he says. She is no more open to him actually than is the barbarian girl. Therefore this scene might recall echoes of Magda's thinking; the magistrate also seeks comfort in fictions, and we have more than a hint of the idea that masterhood itself is a fiction.

That idea is reinforced startlingly in the next passage:

> Is this how her torturers felt hunting their secret, whatever they thought it was? For the first time I feel 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! (43)

By contrast, the magistrate seems intent on trying to enter such a "secret" body by caressing. And perhaps that is a possible way, for the night after he has visited the prostitute the barbarian girl guides him to stimulate her in a directly sexual way. She responds fully, but he thinks, "I experience no excitement . . ." (44).

Next morning, as she leaves for the kitchen with a "blank" face,

he wonders, "What do I have to do to move you?" (44). We can read this question in a number of ways, the most obvious being his wish to "move" her to tell him all he wants to know about her mental interior. However, "with a shift of horror I behold the answer that has been waiting for me all the time . . . in the image of a face masked by two black glassy insect eyes," both of which carry reflections of his own face, "my doubled image cast back at me" (44). Since masterhood is based on force, emotional appeal is absent from his eyes; he is as expressionless as an insect, or as Colonel Joll behind his shiny dark glasses. Slaves pretending otherwise are, simply put, prostitutes.

This vision of his own face in an insect's is odious to him. "I shake my head in a fury of disbelief. '<u>No!</u> <u>No!</u> <u>No!</u>' I cry to myself." He adds that "There is nothing to link me with torturers, people who sit waiting like beetles in dark cellars" (44). But he really is linked with them in two ways: he serves the Empire which employs them, and he does attempt to penetrate the girl's mental interior for intelligence. As if in resistance to this knowledge, he begins to visit the prostitute regularly, "captivated," as he says, "by her performance" (46).

This is evidently part of a denial pattern. He realizes "what I am trying to do: to obliterate the girl" (47). Then is all the rubbing more akin to the act of erasing than of caressing? After all, his delight in the prostitute is directly tied to her words, as we have seen. The barbarian girl largely refuses to talk to him as he wishes. This silence leaves him no fictions to embrace; at the same time the physical eloquence of the girl's broken and scarred body is

all the more telling in the silence. This is the context in which we should regard his view of that eloquent body: "My mouth forms the ugly word. . . . she is ugly, ugly" (47). In a sense, her body is an ugly word which he wishes to erase.

How will he effect the erasure? "I try to recall her as she was before the doctors of pain began their ministrations" (47). If he can fix in his mind a picture of her before the torture, that vision might serve as a kind of masking fictive overlay. This, of course, would involve making believe that one can cross the temporal horizon, but such a pretense is possible. Certainly it would be no more fictional than the prostitute's assurances of human affection across the psychological horizon separating master and slave. He tries to remember how she was the first time they saw each other, as the girl and her father entered the fort in a line of prisoners. Even with her help in recalling details, he cannot visualize that moment (48-49).

With this failure and the arrival of some new troops in preparation for the spring offensive, the magistrate's sense of foreboding deepens, and his dream returns.

"This is the worst it has snowed in all the dreams," he says (52). A sheet of ice, reminiscent of the expressionless insect-face he has seen already, leaves his "features . . . frozen"; his gloved fingers cannot tear it away (52-53).

Now, however, he begins "to see what the girl is doing. She is building a fort of snow" (53). It is complete in every detail but one: "'You must put people there!' I want to say" (53). He cannot

speak, yet "she responds" by turning her hitherto shadowed face toward him, "a smiling child, the light sparkling on her teeth and glancing from her jet-black eyes. 'So this is what it is to see!' I say to myself" (53). Here, in Penner's words is "the climactic moment of vision, in which the magistrate sees the girl as she was in a state of innocence before the torturers came" (43). Her eyes are "jet-black," unclouded (53). The fresh snow, falling thicker than ever, seems to symbolize the return of that purity to blanket the earth, and the model fort can stand for the most innocent, and perhaps even prophetic, vision of the actual fort in a world without masters and slaves.

The reality of their relationship remains depressing, however. He wants something other than forced sex from her, which is an impossible desire as long as he has the power to order her life. She cannot be satisfied with a man who denies himself to her sexually while visiting prostitutes. In both senses, then, he is right to remark that "She is as much a prisoner now as ever before" (55). The obvious answer is to take her back to her own people. In doing this, he also comes closer to her than ever before.

The two of them and three soldiers embark on a shortcut route into the desert and thence to the mountains where the barbarians winter. The magistrate has never travelled it. Day by day, mutual endurance breaks down the barriers between the soldiers and the girl. At last they invite her to their campfire, and the magistrate is amazed to hear that "she is at no loss for words. I am surprised by her fluency [in the frontier pidgin], her quickness, her self-

possession" (63). He adds that "she is a witty, attractive young woman" (63).

This is a shocking statement coming from the man who has described her as "ugly," seeing her in dreams as an unborn whale, for example. We need to remember, however, that this is the first time he has seen her in a social setting, as part of a society, small though it is. Before, she has been with him alone, appearing more as a symbol of his own tangled feelings than as a human being. Now, with both the Empire and the barbarians over separate horizons, there is space enough to allow personhood around campfires.

We may also remember that his new assessment of her is based far more on hearing than on sight, since the episode takes place at night. In the daylight of Empire she is a deformed, blinded victim. In the dark those pictures are secondary to the sound of her voice. Without the glaring artificialities of Empire, she is free to come to him with her fingers, wordlessly, and his reaction is that of normal man to a normal woman, without mention of crutch-sticks, ankles, or eyes. Even here, however, he must plead for himself. "'What of it,' I think. 'What if we perish in the middle of nowhere? Let us at least not die pinched and miserable!'" (63) "The middle of nowhere" is neutral territory, a simply human perspective, from which the world of Empire, of masters and slaves, seems impossibly confined.

He keeps her company in the tent, even during her menstrual period, then invents a ritual of purification to make the men easy about his having done so. As he describes it, "with a stick I draw a

line in the sand, lead her across it, wash her hands and mine, then lead her back across the line into camp" (70). He has thus joined her fully in her quarters, as she joined him earlier in his, back at the fort. Moreover, by his ceremony she is brought into the group again with him, both purified for the day. This happens at the exact border between barbarian and imperial territories.

In effect, this mutually acceptable ritual makes the group into a kind of miniature clan centered on the magistrate and the girl, an alternative to the great categories on either side of the border. He muses that "In twelve days on the road we have grown closer than in months of living in the same rooms" (70). In our terms they have momentarily crossed the psychological horizon dividing masters and slaves where it touches the edge of the world; there is no permanence in that place, but for an instant the dream of a masterless, slaveless world becomes palpable.

That moment passes quickly. Once they are firmly on the foothills of barbarian territory, the riders who have been shadowing them for several days suddenly emerge from the rocks, guns at the ready. Suddenly the magistrate seems a stammering child next to the calm barbarians and the girl. He begins naively.

> "Speak to them," I tell her. "Tell them why we are here. Tell them your story. Tell them the truth."
>
> She looks sideways at me and gives a little smile. "You really want me to tell them the truth?"
>
> "Tell them the truth. What else is there to tell?"
>
> The smile does not leave her lips. She shakes her head, keeps her silence. (71)

How can he not realize that the truth would be his and his three soldiers' death warrants? His ethics would be a source of trouble

anywhere in the world of masters and slaves. At the last moment, when the two part with a handshake (his hand firm, hers passive), he sees that regardless of what they have shared, "There is only a blankness, and desolation that there has to be such blankness" between a barbarian girl and an imperial magistrate (73). Finally they have not escaped the master/slave world at all, regardless of the brief moment in the desert.

After a brutal return journey, the party approaches the outpost with the magistrate slipping back comfortably into his old thought habits. Of the girl he says, "I find her face hardening in my memory, becoming opaque, impermeable, as though secreting a shell over itself" (75). However we interpret this image, clearly her face is becoming less human in his memory. At the same time he experiences a complacent sense of denouement: "All I want now is to live out my life in ease in a familiar world, to die in my own bed and be followed to the grave by old friends" (75). Arguably, these are the last peaceful thoughts of his life.

However, they lead into the book's third section, during which the magistrate confronts the Empire, and thus his own role in the master/slave world, directly. This is a direct test of the ultimate authority of ethical imperatives. It begins with a trial, and ends in victory for those principles and for the magistrate himself.

Instead of a happy welcome home, the magistrate finds himself placed under guard, accused of "treasonably consorting with the enemy" (77). This venturing out beyond the Empire's physical and ethical

horizons has placed him firmly over the psychological one.

The magistrate's description of the accusing officer's face is instructive. The man looks "from behind that handsome immobile face and through those clear eyes as an actor looks from behind a mask" (77). This alien expressionlessness is rather akin to the insectlike images he used in describing his own masterly coldness. That harmonizes with his answer to the charge of treason, asserting that "we have no enemies," and adding, "Unless we are the enemy" (77).

Earlier the insect face in his vision mirrored his own. Now "my alliance with the guardians of the Empire is over, I have set myself in opposition, the bond is broken, I am a free man. Who would not smile?" (78). He makes clear that he has been liberated from a very personal burden:

> my freedom to make of the girl whatever I felt like, wife or concubine or daughter or slave or all at once or none, at whim, because I had no duty to her save what it occurred to me to feel from moment to moment: from the oppression of such freedom who would not welcome the liberation of confinement? (78)

As we saw with In the Heart of the Country, masterhood is merely another, and in this case more degraded, form of slavery. Incarceration is preferable. They place him in the room used for interrogations the previous year.

In a sense this is an actual homecoming after all. He began to occupy this cell mentally when he refused to avoid moral responsibility for what went on here by going "on a hunting trip" at the first arrival of Colonel Joll (9). Later he affirmed his links to it by poring over the marks on the wall, imagining the tortures that took place here. Ultimately, his refusal to cross an ethical horizon

forced him over a psychological one. Still, since one's ethical stance is home in the more profound sense, this cell affirms that he has indeed arrived there. He sleeps peacefully "all day and all night, barely disturbed by the chop-chop of picks behind the wall . . ." (79). Of course he is tired from the journey, but the fact remains that the first effect of his imprisonment is a good, long rest.

His dreams are realistic in their imagery, however. He sees himself "again in the desert, plodding through endless space toward an obscure goal" (79). That is his actual position relative to the world of masters and slaves. His experience of the past year, coupled with twelve days' outward journey, has placed him beyond everyone's horizon, in a no-man's-land accessible to neither masters nor slaves. Neither the girl nor the Empire's "new barbarians," as he calls them, can understand their situations from the mental and ethical perspective of a former master. Both the girl and the torturers teach him much about his psychological self by means of his physical self; in so doing, however, they give his ethical self even more understanding, which removes him even farther from them.

This ethical journey has its hazards, for what if the understanding merely equates to an ethical impasse?

> I too, if I live long enough in this cell with its ghosts not only of the father and the daughter but of the man who even by lamplight did not remove the black discs from his eyes and the subordinate whose work it was to keep the brazier fed, will be touched with the contagion and turned into a creature that believes in nothing. (81).

In such a situation, the physical reality, including imperial borders

and by extension the psychological one of master/slave identity, may very well overshadow ethical boundaries as meaningless. For if ethical borders have no effect--if people like Colonel Joll really can move easily over the frontier between the clean and the unclean--then the only important consideration is pragmatic. One believes then, as he says, in nothing.

One cannot test the question by thought-experiment, however. The claims of the ethical man must be resolved in a pragmatic court, a trial of strength, for the prosecution demands it. To try the question ethically is to beg it, from the pragmatic point of view. Thus, although the magistrate asks repeatedly for his day in court, he actually is getting it under the terms of trial by ordeal. He has learned these terms in a characteristic way: "Pain is truth; all else is subject to doubt. That is what I bear away from my conversation with Colonel Joll . . ." (5). He probably means his comment sarcastically at the moment when he speaks; nevertheless Joll's lesson defines the road he will travel in the last half of the book.

Accordingly, then, his pragmatic trial begins in the magistrate's former office, which has undergone "careful reorganization" (82). The new occupant is a young officer from the capital who confronts the magistrate with depositions charging him with slack administration, bad morals, and with journeying to "warn the barbarians of the coming campaign" (83). To the magistrate's demand for hearing in "a court of law," the young man replies, "Never mind. You will have your chance to reply" (84). As we have seen, the young man's words have an ironic

accuracy about them, though it is unintended.

The first part of his ordeal thus passes quickly. His powers of office and citizenship vanish, including his ability to refute the accusations of others directly.

In the next stage, his captors begin on his physical/ psychological self. First they refuse him clean clothing. He washes his garments as best he can, but "In my nostrils there is always the mouldy smell of clothing that does not see the sun" (85). More disgustingly, the monotonous food is disturbing his bowels (85). Thus his accusers' power is beginning to extend across his body's physical horizon to probe his interior, entering through his nose and mouth. That probe is effective, and his psychological horizon shrivels before it. "I am now no more than a pile of blood, bone and meat that is unhappy" (85).

His reaction is to crave relief through his ears. He eagerly questions the boy who brings his food, asking about small, human matters: the granny and the dog. The boy answers politely but briefly, then leaves. At that, the magistrate feels the degradation of being unable to offer the simplest gifts: "I have nothing to give him, not even a button; I have not even time to show him how to make his knuckles go click or how to catch his nose in his fist" (86). One feels that he longs to give a gift that will be gratefully received, to hear the sound of "thank you" said afterwards. He shows clear evidence of the value he places on thanks by giving the boy a message of appreciation to the granny for the food that so troubles him. A man so sensitive might well be revived by a grateful response, even a

small one. It does not come. One of the book's sources of bleakness, in fact, is that none of his efforts at benevolence receive any actual thanks whatever.

All the same, he can fight back in his own kindly way. He manages permission to get a bucket of water to wash himself and his clothing so as to be more presentable to Colonel Joll when he comes (89). In getting it, he is also able to secure a key to his prison room. He walks out that night, free.

His first act is one of compassion. In the dark he stumbles over a feverish young soldier, who cries for water. The magistrate fetches it, then "I hold his wrist till he sinks back into sleep" (91). Only then does he force a barred window and escape; even his haste to escape is secondary to his ethical stance of giving comfort to others. As he hides through most of the day in the prostitute's room, he questions his own motives, as is typical of him. He accuses himself of "living in a dream" where "no harm can come to the guiltless" (94). This is too obviously contradicted by his recent experience.

Finally, however, he decides that his greatest fear is not of suffering harm but of his own uncertainty, of "the shame of dying as stupid and befuddled as I am" (94). This ties in directly with the issue of trial by ordeal. To die in a state of ethical defiance will mean a martyr's vindication. But for that he must die clearheaded, all questions resolved in his own mind. By contrast, he confesses that no one is as "confused and innocent of the world as I" (94). "And what is the point of suffering at the hands of the men in blue if

I am not iron-hard in my certainty?" he asks (96). His befuddlement is a terrible weakness whose shame can cause him to lose the trial.

In this state of mind he finds the afternoon heat unbearable (a possibly symbolic connection to the sun of Empire) and goes out to wander around the town. As he could not continue taking refuge in the prostitute's lies, so he cannot always remain huddled under her bed. His answers are, if anywhere, in the world at large, which he must encounter himself. A sentry tells him of the current campaign's problems involving sickness from bad water, also mentioning that the barbarians have begun to flood the fields. As darkness falls he tours the outer wall, noting both the inundated areas and the ruins where he found the wooden slips. The juxtaposition of these two features seems to invite the conclusion that all will be ruins shortly.

He sleeps outside, waking to find himself refreshed and clearheaded enough to realize that if he wants a trial, it must take place in the hands of the masters. Hiding may save his life, but it makes him "forfeit even the appearance of innocence" (101). He asks, "Why should I do my enemies' work for them? If they want to spill my blood, let them at least bear the guilt of it" (101). He will have his day in court, and he is absolutely certain of the moral victory.

His return is a demonstration of his self-assurance. The angry jailer grips his wrist and threatens, but in a highly symbolic act, the magistrate pries the fingers off twice, explaining that the man is at his mercy since the jailer had not reported the escape. As he promises to keep quiet and save the man, his fingers reach forward to grip the hand of the other. This turnabout is evidence that

kindliness has ethical power to win trials of strength. It is a good omen.

Back in his cell once more he hears cheering, and uses his key to unlock his door. He walks out into the glare to see Colonel Joll's party return with prisoners, and his immediate reaction again calls attention to Empire: "the heat--I'm going to be sick" (104). Joll's triumph means that the sun of Empire is strong, and the magistrate momentarily thinks of returning to the "cool dark" duskland of his cell, there to "lock the door and bend the key and stop my ears . . ." (104). Then he decides on another course, a way to demonstrate "that in the farthest outpost of the Empire of light there existed one man who in his heart was not a barbarian . . ." (104). At the same time he is determined "that I should neither be contaminated by the atrocity that is about to be committed, nor poison myself with important hatred of its perpetrators" (104). In other words, he will not cross the ethical horizon either in complicity in the crime, or hatred of the criminal.

Ostensibly his first problem is to get to the center of the crowd surrounding the prisoners, and he solves it with a time-honored trick: carrying a bucket of water which splashes those who are slow to move aside. Characteristically, it is a kindly ploy--who can object very much to a little cool water on his skin or clothing during a blistering day? But that imagery also ties in with a thread of symbolism running through the book.

Fierce sunlight dries the earth; thus the symbolic antidote to

the sun of Empire is water. If that sun shines too hotly, it bakes the land into a desert, finally making life impossible. The most striking use of this picture comes in the conversation with a young officer whose arrival signalled the nearness of the spring campaign. The officer listens skeptically as the magistrate mentions the barbarian belief that the settlement is doomed: "'You smile? Shall I tell you something? Every year the lake-water grows a little more salty'" (51). The explanation is that the lake has no outflow point. The water it receives evaporates in the sun, leaving a briny residue (59). Brackish water will eventually poison the crops, and make life in the outpost impossible.

The need for fresh water in the face of an imperial noontime is emphasized at a number of points in the book, of which the following list is a sample. When the magistrate imagines Joll's "private ritual of purification," he begins, "Does he wash his hands very carefully . . . ?" (12). Likewise, the magistrate bases his relationship with the girl on washing her feet (28). The snow in his dreams is a form of pure water, as is the snow that falls on the tent where the pair make love for the second and last time (66). When first imprisoned and despairing, he dreams of dust, not snow, and must "chafe" the girl's feet instead of washing them, as though the Empire's sun had dried the last possibility of moisture in the world (87). His hope is restored thereafter by means of a bucket of wash water that allows him to escape from the cell (89).

In a parallel image, his arid dream shows the girl as "the only key I have to the labyrinth" (87). The wash water gives him access to

a real key thereafter, and the water bucket is like a trick key to open the crowd. This symbol is yet one more hint of the difference between the magistrate and Joll, who uses a small knife "like a key" to probe the psychological terrain of the tortured boy (10). At least the magistrate chooses keys that are benign.

In fact the magistrate's benignity all through the book is neatly encapsulated in the image of his delaying his own escape from the cell to give water to the feverish soldier. From the first he chooses to stay and help rather than taking one of the various means of avoidance open to a man in his position. His outflow of benevolence continues despite its thankless reception, as naturally as water flows out of a healthy lake. He is a water-bringer in a dry land.

To be sure, a flow of water can be dangerous to the empire itself. During his escape he has been told by a sentry (who gives him a drink) that the soldiers who have returned early from barbarian territory "fell sick from the water--bad water out there, I hear" (99). (We have seen it already in the trip to take the girl back. At the edges of the dying lake, a horse and man break through the salt crust, sinking "chest deep in foul green slime" [60].) Meanwhile, he goes on, barbarians have breached a dyke and flooded the fields in order to destroy a large part of the winter food supply. Of course the barbarians may not have done this at all; as one critic reminds us, "the dam could have worn away and collapsed" (Olsen 50). Either way is the same, however, morally speaking. The "iron laws of the universe," to use Magda's words, are the real enemies of Empire.

Water, whether imposed in flood or poisoned through brackishness, is one natural means of counterattack against masterhood.

Perhaps that is why the magistrate's dreams are so involved with snow. As pure water blanketing the earth, snow seems to hold out some hope of a future in which the children can form just societies like snowcastles: away from the fierce summertime of Empire.

As a final symbol, we may notice that the ruins of the last Empire are buried in sand whose dryness suggests that they, too, were parched into defeat. The magistrate's day of freedom gives him a last, fascinating glimpse of them. The excavated sand is fast returning, but a post is still sticking up "with its faded carvings of dolphins and waves" while he is "blistered by the sun and dried by the wind" (100). The scene carries more than a hint that the only water finally available to that older Empire was on their artwork; apparently history is about to repeat itself.

Thus the race for survival depends on the bringers of water. That idea holds in a symbolic sense, too. As he shoulders his way through the crowd, and toward Joll's twelve prisoners, he carries a second kind of water--the idea of justice--with him in addition to his bucket full. He is about to testify to the claims of ethics in a brutal world.

Under his quietly accusing stare, the prisoners are beaten. Joll meets his eyes calmly during this, then picks up "an ordinary four-pound hammer used for knocking in tent pegs" (106). With the townspeople edging away from the magistrate, "The babble subsides" (106). In this context, the hammer is more than "ordinary," however.

It is the gavel that hushes a crowded court and opens the magistrate's trial by ordeal.

But here, too, is a twist. The magistrate is not really the accused at all, but the prosecuting attorney, while Joll and the Empire are the defendants. All that follows is an attempt to stifle his accusations rather than to prove him guilty. Accordingly, since any trial opens with the charge, the magistrate must begin, and the Colonel waits patiently until he does. At that moment it is clear that the magistrate's defensive pleading is over.

"'No!' I hear the first word from my throat, rusty, not loud enough. Then again: 'No!'" (106). The magistrate makes his accusation specific: "'<u>You!</u>' I shout. Let it all be said. Let him be the one on whom the anger breaks. 'You are depraving these people!'" (106).

The Colonel's answer is as pragmatic as we should expect from this kind of trial. A club-wielding sergeant knocks the magistrate to the ground, then breaks his hand. Grappling with the soldier in order to continue his accusation, the magistrate shouts, "'Look at these men!' . . . '<u>Men!</u>'" (107). The power of his words is attested by the fact that "Those in the crowd who can crane to look at the prisoners, even at the flies that begin to settle on their bleeding welts" (107). This crowd is the jury, whom the prosecutor has induced to reconsider the barbarians as human, perhaps for the first time. He is winning.

The next blow strikes him "full across the face," and his first thought is that it has blinded him (107). This is fitting too, since

blows, and the threat of blows, have induced blindness in the others. But he finds that his sight has not been destroyed, just as his ethical vision is unimpaired, despite all that the Empire can do. He is still morally free. "I am so profoundly grateful that I cease to feel pain" (107).

When he contemplates his actions back in his cell, however, their implications disturb him. He is the lifelong servant of the Empire, and no revolutionary. Yet Joll's trial must also prosecute the system for which he is the agent. This paradox forces the magistrate back to embracing old prejudices as he contemplates his luck in being carried away before he could say more. "Would I have dared to face the crowd to demand justice for these ridiculous barbarian prisoners with their backsides in the air? Justice: once that word is uttered, where will it all end?" (108).

Metaphorically speaking, his vision has been much like the girl's for a long time. She is blind in the center and sighted at the periphery. He, too, sees clearly until he looks straight at the problem of Empire; then a lifetime of imperial heat shows its results in an ethical cornea dulled in the middle. The girl has given his ethical vision a new clarity, but only at the edges. He has been the Empire's servant too long to change his thinking more radically. Coetzee himself replied to an interviewer's question as to whether the magistrate could "go over the edge to something new," by saying "No, there's no choice for people like that" (Rhedin 7). Despite the magistrate's improved sight, his psychological horizons cannot shift completely. Nevertheless, his dream comes back with more comfort than

ever before. The girl, who originally was a faceless figure, is now herself, and beautifully so. "'Why are you dressed in your best?' I want to say, 'I have never seen you looking so lovely'" (109). Moreover, her snowcastle has become an oven from which she offers him freshly baked bread. One critic sees all that as "suggestive of a sacrament" connected with his washing her feet earlier (Penner 40). These elements, together with the blood he has tasted after that last blow, form a communion ceremony, as if to commemorate his at least partial passage over the psychological horizon from the Empire, and toward union with others on the simple level of humanity. It is also a kind of thanks, if only imaginary.

Now it becomes Colonel Joll's turn to cross-examine. Seated in the magistrate's office, he accuses the magistrate of using the little wooden slips to send messages to the barbarians. He demands to hear the meaning of the writing on them. Once again, however, the Colonel finds himself the accused, as the magistrate pretends to read several letters from the slips. He tells a father's story of a boy whom "the soldiers took away" to be tortured and killed (111). This obvious attempt to make the Colonel see his victims as human beings with families is a prelude to his next mock translation of a squiggle: "It is the barbarian character <u>war</u>, but it has other senses too. It can stand for <u>vengeance</u>, and, if you turn it upside down like this, it can be made to read '<u>Justice</u>'" (112). The magistrate's linking those three terms produces a clear message: any way one looks at the situation, the human thirst for justice resulting from Joll's

viciousness will result in a righteous war of vengeance. The Colonel is about to discover the results of ignoring ethical imperatives.

Joll's response is bland. "You have no idea how tiresome your behavior is," he says (112). He dismisses the slips as "gambling-sticks" in which he has no real interest, but even here is a telling point. The barbarians may well gamble a war on such concepts as vengeance and justice. Joll, the pragmatist, thinks that they will lose.

Nevertheless, the Colonel continues trying to cast himself in the role of accuser. Next, he threatens. "I ask you to consider soberly: what kind of future do you have here? You cannot be allowed to remain in your post. You have utterly disgraced yourself" (113). Of course, all this is meaningless to a man already expelled from his post, psychologically severed from Empire. Equally silly is the warning that they will prosecute him. The magistrate cuts him off with the fervent request that such prosecution should begin immediately. Joll's last charge is most painful, as being most accurate. "'You seem to want to make a name for yourself as the One Just Man,'" he says. Then he adds that "'to people in this town you are simply a clown, a madman'" (114). Moreover, "'You want to go down in history as a martyr, I suspect. But who is going to put you in the history books?'" (114). This threat is the hardest blow of all, yet the magistrate answers it equally strongly, saying that a much greater truth exists that cannot be hidden:

> "You are the enemy, Colonel" I can restrain myself no longer. I pound the desk with my fist. "You are the enemy, you have made the war, and you have given them all the martyrs they need--starting

> not now but a year ago when you committed your first filthy barbarities here! History will bear me out!"
>
> "Nonsense, there will be no history, the affair is too trivial." He seems impassive, but I am sure I have shaken him. (114)

For the Colonel to fall back on the triviality of the "affair" can also be seen as a confession, or at least as a weak attempt to downgrade the magnitude of his own crimes. Moreover, it may have shaken him for another reason. We may recall Jacobus' remark from Dusklands, that the Hottentots "threaten to have a history in which I shall be a term" (81). If the Colonel loses the war he has set himself to prevent, they themselves will write the history. It may be likely that their history will ignore the magistrate, but Joll's part in it will assuredly not be "trivial."

Here we should pause to consider a criticism which Paul Rich has leveled against the novel, saying that it "twists the nature of historical understanding at the terminal point of imperialism" (387). Rich maintains that invading barbarians do not revise Empire's "historical mind" in real life. He points out quite rightly, for instance, that "the 'barbarian' invasion of Christendom by the Arabs brought immense advances in architecture and mathematics" (387). But surely that amounts to cultural carryover, not agreement on historical emphasis. Would The Cid have authorized the same version of Spain's subjugation and reconquest as the Arabs would have written? In emphasizing that the victors write the histories, the novel is hardly on unproven ground. As though to clinch his argument, Rich adds that

> It is the Western-imported colonial culture in South Africa which has manifested an absence of historical understanding, while it has been the forces of African nationalism which have been concerned to attain historical awareness (387).

But this amounts to no more than to say that the last masters have gotten their perspective wrong, and that the barbarians will readjust it from their own point of view with which Mr. Rich--and we too, perhaps--will agree. But that is no contradiction of the novel's viewpoint. Clearly the reader is to gain satisfaction from the thought that Colonel Joll should be in the histories from the magistrate's point of view, and that the barbarians will put him there.

The interview ends with the Colonel's turning the magistrate over to the warrant officer whom he met on his return from the barbarians. They attack the basis of his accusation--that human beings have a dignity worthy of respect by other human beings. Of the utterly brutal counterargument they write in his flesh he says, "They came to my cell to show me the meaning of humanity, and in the space of an hour they showed me a great deal" (115). In one of their lessons they bring him water, parodying his own benign actions. They teach him that

> a body . . . can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, [and] . . . 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 until it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself. . . . (115)

Castillo says that the torturers "teach the magistrate the impossibility of maintaining a sense of self, a sense of masterful control over persons and events" (79). Perhaps so, yet his ethical self certainly reasserts its authority presently, even as the tortures reach their limits. After a number of distressingly petty games, a

drunken chief torturer, Mandel, dresses the magistrate in a woman's clothing, then hangs him, first by the neck until he has nearly suffocated, and then by the feet. This takes on the feeling of a mock crucifixion, with the magistrate as Christ figure or "One Just Man," as Joll has termed him at the end of their last interview (114). The implied link with the crucified Jesus seems to be reinforced subtly as the magistrate "prays" for the people he has served, even though he can do nothing to stop the screams "of a body that knows itself damaged perhaps beyond repair and roars its fright" (121). He thinks, "let us only pray that [the watching children] do not imitate their elders' games, or tomorrow there will be a plague of little bodies dangling from the trees" (121). To all outward appearances, the trial makes the magistrate a laughingstock, but on the ethical level, where the Empire cannot reach, he is winning it in powerfully evocative ways.

Then, suddenly, the torture is over. The anti-barbarian hysteria has become much worse. "The air is full of anxious rumors" (123). All misfortunes, from the rape of a little girl to the pillage of food are blamed on them. However, as one critic reminds us, "a soldier from the Empire could have raped the girl," and the other events could have similar explanations (Olsen 50). The magistrate gives the same picture: "Of what use is it for the shopkeeper to raise the alarm when the criminals and the civil guard are the same people?" (123). Obviously the time to play games is over for everyone. The settlement is a doomed city, and the rule of law is breaking down with the dwindling food supply.

One day Mandel tells the magistrate that he is free, because "we can't go on feeding you forever" (125). The magistrate protests that he is a prisoner awaiting trial, to which Mandel replies, "'How can you be a prisoner when we have no record of you? Do you think we don't keep records? We have no record of you. So you must be a free man'" (125).

The reply to such insolence is the pragmatic question of who will finally write the history involved. That thought has already "shaken" Colonel Joll, according to the magistrate. Besides, even if no one's history records the victory formally, it stands in the magistrate's memory, as it will in others'. As one critic says, "What he did was make public his humanity and chastise others for their inhumanity" (Post 72). At very least a number of townspeople have looked at barbarians like men for the first time. Something is changed, affirmed, in any case.

The power of the magistrate's moral stance was shown at the beginning of his voluntary imprisonment when he gripped his jailer. Now, at its end, "I manage to catch [Mandel's] arm," holding him for a last, penetrating question which, fittingly, concerns ethical and psychological horizons, and the need for cleansing water:

> "I am trying to understand the zone in which you live. I am trying to understand how you breathe and eat and live from day to day. But I cannot! That is what troubles me! If I were he, I say to myself, my hands would feel so dirty that it would choke me. . . ." (126)

Mandel gives the only reply open to a man living in ethical poverty: a blow and a curse. His last words tell the magistrate to "go out and

die somewhere!", but Mandel is the one who draws away as the magistrate throws out a final challenge: "'When are you going to put me on trial?' I shout at his retreating back" (126). Once again we can recall his comment about how "The new men of Empire are the ones who believe in fresh starts, new chapters, clean pages" (24). Mandel's parting wish is that the magistrate erase himself, but neither the magistrate nor the truth he has stood for will die so easily. Nevertheless, the magistrate too is unsure of just what that truth has been. He continues, "I struggle on with the old story, hoping that before it is finished it will reveal to me why it was that I thought it worth the trouble" (24). In other words, the larger context of truth, which will give meaning and purpose to his act, is still unclear. Thus his victory is clouded, to match the blind spot in his ethical vision.

Now he begs in the square, as did the girl. But the signs of his victory begin to be felt. "I discover that I am not without friends, particularly among women, who can barely conceal their eagerness to hear my side of the story" (126). They give him sympathy and food. Both are very welcome. But there is sadness too, because the magistrate's predictions are coming true; many people have left, including the little prostitute, whose departure seems to symbolize the fact that the comforting lies are melting away. Pack animals are impossible to buy; people hoard what they can and sneak away as they can, out of sight of their neighbors for shame. He says that "The soldiery tyrannize the town, "exhorting people to stay and looting by turns (130). Concurrently, "premonitions of winter are everywhere"

(131). Clearly the magistrate's world is doomed.

In a picture connected with the water imagery we have noted before, the magistrate goes down to the lake to think. "Calf-deep in the soothing water I indulge myself in [a] wistful vision" of becoming one of the fisher-folk as an alternative to "the cold road back to the capital" (133). But all such, he says, "Without exception . . . are dreams of ends: dreams not of how to live but how to die" (133). He believes that "everyone in that "walled town sinking now into darkness" has the same dreams under the setting sun of Empire.

Of course, Empire itself has no such dreams: "One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolong its era" (133). The Empire is like a drowning man, willing to claw anything down in order to live itself in water already too deep for it. In thinking of ruined lives, he remembers the girl: "However kindly she may be treated by her own people, she will never be courted and married in the normal way: she is marked for life . . ." (135).

So thinking, he drifts into sleep, to dream of the snow a last time. The girl has become an infant, directly in his path as the blizzard cannons him forward into her. He tenses with horror, but "The bump is as faint as the stroke of a moth. I am flooded with relief. 'Then I need not have been anxious after all!'" (136). After the impact, "I am gone, carried by the wind" (136). Clearly, since he is swept away by the coming storm, his relief is not based on his own salvation, but the child's. He, and the Empire he so reluctantly represents, are to be erased, but the children, the future, have a

chance. The thought is characteristic of him. While he swung from the tree, screaming, he worried about the resultant impact on children's play. He has been a martyr to a better future that he cannot and shall not see. But he has found enough promise in his dreams to believe in it.

All the same, the little settlement continues to deteriorate. In his wanderings the night before, the magistrate caused a mistaken panic among the fisher-folk. Now, because of the uproar, soldiers begin kicking down their huts, while the magistrate pleads, one last time. Again he is met with blows and curses, and a soldier echoes Mandel's sentiment: "Why don't you go off and die somewhere?" (138). Justice will not die, however. It is the Empire that is doomed, as the shriveling town gives evidence.

But the magistrate does not really claim to be the One Just Man as Joll has charged. He remembers having sentenced, years ago, a peasant conscript boy who was charged with desertion when he wanted to visit his mother and sisters. At that time the magistrate argued against private interpretations of justice. "'But we live in a world of laws,' I said to my poor prisoner, 'a world of the second-best'" (139). He almost resigned over such scenes. "But then, I thought, someone else will be appointed to bear the shame of office, and nothing else will have changed" (139).

This scene bears closely on the question of justice. If the barbarians win their war of justice, will the final result be a mere change of rulership? Will their vengeance serve to elevate the human

condition? What good is served by a change of masters if the human predicament remains the same? That question applies glaringly to the coming barbarian invasion. The first sign of the returning expedition is a crucified corpse that rides into the fort, the barbarians' grim gift in token of the many such gifts which the Empire has given them. (The girl herself, with her broken body, was such a gift.) Vengeance is certainly coming, but will it be justice in any sense to change the identity of the torturer from Colonel to barbarian?

Ironically, too, the Empire's torturers do not remain for an accounting. In a rising wind akin to that in his dream, the magistrate sees the town troops preparing to leave as Mandel makes a hypocritical speech about a "cessation of operations along the front for the duration of the winter," to cover the obvious fact that they are fleeing (141). Then Joll and his bodyguard arrive in the middle of the night, staying only long enough to demand fresh horses that are not there.

The defeat has finally removed Joll's dark glasses. In telling us so, the magistrate refers indirectly to both water imagery and the fact that the imperial sun is now well below the horizon: "His face is naked, washed clean, perhaps by blue moonlight . . ." (146). With his lenses washed away, the Colonel is newly in a position to see something of the ethical terrain. Simultaneously Joll has been reduced from a powerful, sunlit figure to a skulking fugitive, a "faint blur against the blackness" of his carriage (146).

The magistrate's first impulse is to exact vengeance. "An urge

runs through me to smash the glass, to reach in and drag the man out through the jagged hole, to feel his flesh catch and tear on the edges, to hurl him to the ground and kick his body to pulp" (146). A number of people would be on hand to help him, as evidenced by the stones that begin to hit the carriage. But his ethical boundaries remain firm, and he obeys his earlier determination "not to poison myself with impotent hatred . . ." (104). Instead, he will give the Colonel a short lecture, "a lesson for him that I have long meditated" (146). The Colonel seems to want some contact also, for "he sidles across the seat until he is looking at me through the glass" (146). His glasses off, the Colonel is for the first time in a position to see another person, even in darkness.

The moment is important for the magistrate too. One critic says that he "perceives that it is only through seeing the other in the imagination that we are able to overcome such hatred" (Penner 43). In token of this new sight, and with Joll's face cleared of the dark glasses, the magistrate imagines Joll's childhood memories "of his mother's soft breast, of the tug in his hand of the first kite he ever flew as well as of those intimate cruelties for which I abhor him . . ." (146). Thus the magistrate can now look clearly through those "cruelties" to the innocent child behind. More, he can speak to that child.

The lesson takes the form of a single sentence, which Joll seems to repeat after him, perhaps as a child getting something by heart, perhaps in derision: "'The crime that is latent in us we must inflict on ourselves,' I say. I nod and nod, driving the message home. 'Not

on others,' I say" (146). Whether the Colonel is receptive to the new ethical world this message brings him or not, the magistrate's ethical responsibility demands that he deliver it, and he does.

Whether Joll understands or not, we may. Penner links this "crime" with "the plague that Camus saw within us all," the imperative to murder (43). If that is true, then the only question for those infected with the plague is whom we will murder. The magistrate affirms that we are ethically obligated to "inflict" it "on ourselves." Earlier, the magistrate has accused the Empire of exactly the opposite intentions, of working out "how not to die" (133). Thus its interest is precisely in murdering all others. It blinds its devotees like Joll in order that they may carry out its interests more effectively. When their blinding glasses fall away, then they are ripe for guidance into a better perspective, if they will hear.

Of this passage, Penner says that "The magistrate has attained sufficient vision to overcome his double-thought identification with the torturers through a will to truth" (43). That disconnection allows him to take the role of law-giver who is now in a position to teach at least the rudiments of that truth. Moreover his refusal to hate the Colonel shows the impartiality of a good magistrate. The magistrate is not sure whether Joll has actually taken his first look over the ethical horizon, or has merely scoffed at the idea; nevertheless the lesson has been delivered. Joll whirls away, and the remnant population settles down to await winter and the barbarians.

We are not surprised to learn that water is a primary concern,

both actually and symbolically. The townspeople begin to dig a well, but find to their horror that they have opened a mass grave whose bones are very old. This seems to answer the mystery of the lack of human remains in the sandswept ruins. The real ancient settlement was here, exactly on the site of the new one, and if we needed confirmation that history is about to come full circle, this would give it. One of the workmen remarks that "'They aren't buried properly,'" but lie in disheveled heaps (148). The overall impression is of a remnant population, slaughtered and flung into a pit. The workmen refuse any more contact with the site, so the magistrate must cover it over himself. That night the magistrate dreams that he stands in the pit, now awash with swampy muck. "'Poisoned water,'" he remarks to himself (149). The old bones of history, like the "iron laws of the universe," have erased Empire's new beginning by washing it away. He continues, "I must be careful not to drink here" (149). This seems to make yet another connection with his earlier determination "not to poison myself with impotent hatred . . ." (104). Certainly one can hate the ministers of the Empire, including Joll and the magistrate. Certainly, they can hate back. All have a supply of old bones, old wrongs, whose wetting will produce a poisoned swamp that goes on infecting forever. Just as the magistrate himself has had to re-cover the actual pit, so he has led in bringing a cry for compassion to cleanse the wells of that outpost despite its memories and fears.

The last section of the book begins at this point, where other novels might end. It is a measure of Coetzee's art that he does not

leave the magistrate in the position of the "One Just Man" in triumph. Rather we see a return to human questions and doubts without any final promise of happy endings.

The magistrate takes up briefly with an old lover who brings him back to the ethical questions which he has not really resolved. Having worked in the kitchen with the barbarian girl, she can remind him of what he cannot deny. "Sometimes she would cry and cry," she says, "You made her very unhappy. Did you know that?" (152). He knows, and "a wind of utter desolation blows over" him (152). As with the peasant boy he sentenced long ago, he is ethically acute enough to realize his own responsibility for giving pain, even given good excuses. This is not a return to the hyperconscious "double thought" that identified him as another Joll, but a refusal to darken his eyes to the ethical responsibilities inherent in taking charge of others' lives.

In that regard, the magistrate's last vision of children in snow is touching, especially because it is not a dream. Finding himself "inexplicably joyful," he approaches to see that they build a snowman with a "great round body," evocative of his own self-description, almost as though they were erecting a monument to him as being an important pioneer (155). They have forgotten the arms, but he does not want to interfere enough to tell them (another indication that he wants no more manipulation on his conscience). He could be speaking of himself as he says, "It is not a bad snowman" (156). He is not a bad man either, as shown by his willingness to bear responsibility in

order to do the good he can.

Critical opinion of this ending is sharply divided. Some critics see the magistrate as guilt- and trouble-free at the end. Indeed, Rowland Smith charges that the book ends with a syrupy sweetness, or in his words, a "C-major denouement" (202).

Ironically, others see the ending as all too bitter for the novel's characterization and plot structure: "Where Coetzee would seem concerned to stress that in the magistrate we have no real alternative to the Colonel, there is evidence to support a divergent view" (Wood 135). The evidence consists of the magistrate's good acts and intentions, along with the undisputed deepening of his thinking, in contrast to the Colonel's unremitting malevolence. According to this interpretation, the magistrate cannot be ethically paired with the Colonel, and Coetzee should have made the ending draw a clearer distinction between them. Another critic agrees: "If the magistrate is guilty of anything . . . it is probably at the level of the unconscious, where all of us have buried memories of a primordial, imaginary crime" (Du Plessis 84).

Actually, earlier morbid self-association with the Colonel aside, the magistrate is no less ethically responsible for the harm he does than are the rest of us. Specifically, his having made the girl suffer is no "imaginary" charge leveled by a feverish conscience, but a fact attested to by the magistrate's last bedmate. That he meant well is irrelevant to the pain she suffered. The ethical vision of this book is too clear to be confused. As one reviewer says, the magistrate "is all men at all times who collaborate with indecency"

(DeVilliers 19). In a world of masters and slaves, the magistrate cannot walk away a fully free man, even as regards his conscience. One critic sums up by saying that "The novel is an unremitting exploration of the concept of justice" (Brink 193). That is correct, despite any natural wish that it would remit just a little.

A more sectarian ending would have involved the magistrate's escape to a world where the ethical territory ruled uncontested in the physical and psychological realms and where, moreover, all trespasses were forgiven. There are at least four great systems of thought where that is possible--Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judeo-Christianity--but the magistrate embraces none of them, perhaps because his still partially Empire-blinded ethical vision sees none. On the other hand, one may dream of such a possibility's opening up in the lives of the children for whom the magistrate has felt so much anxiety, if they themselves were not to receive as strong a blinding by the Empire. Coetzee himself seems to suggest that kind of hope, saying that the children "might be able to make choices that [the magistrate] finds impossible" (Rhedin 7).

Thus the book ends with his statement that even this momentarily joyful scene leaves him "feeling stupid, like a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead to nowhere" 156). The "nowhere" is the yearned-for ethical position superseding masterhood and slavery. He knows that the ethical position is real, for he has demonstrated its staying power. Yet such a land of promise does not appear. As he himself says, "There has been something

staring me in the face and still I do not see it" (155).

Dovey interprets this unavailability of a land of promise as a critique of the liberal novel generally:

> The road that leads nowhere is both the impasse with which the liberal novel so frequently terminates, and the aporia, or "unpassable path," which Coetzee's reading of the genre has revealed, an aporia which is a feature of the liberal discourse itself. (266)

Such a reading seems a localization of the broader principle of the ethical stance which is yearned for but not found in a world of masters and slaves.

Some who regard Coetzee as a failed political writer are disturbed also by what they see as the lack of a firm political vision at the end. This criticism has two answers. First, according to Coetzee himself, such a lack of vision is typical in South Africa today: "The feeling that we are directionless is widespread. People have no feeling of being on the road to anywhere, or of knowing where we are on the road to" (Tales 74). Second, and more generally applicable, for one trapped in a world of masters and slaves, all political changes merely switch the identity of the masters. That kind of change makes no ethical difference. The only solution is to transcend the world of masters and slaves. The problem dwarfs mere political thought, however well intentioned, and thus invalidates some of the political criticism of the novel.

This ethical perspective casts serious doubt on statements like Michael Vaughan's, that the novel "can say next to nothing, and certainly nothing reliable, about experiences outside the modality of its own racial-historical dialectic" (128). Actually, an "unremitting

exploration of the concept of justice" can say a great deal outside a given "modality," and one's political views might well be affected afterwards. Sheila Roberts asserts that "the reader is left with some measure of comfort in the knowledge that the ordinary, essential rhythms of life can be mainatined if only we rid ourselves of the Colonel Jolls" (Standpunte 49). Certainly, Ms. Du Plessis reports that a "radical ideological turning" took place in her own mind after reading the book (87).

But that is no license to see the book itself as political at its core, despite Irving Howe's statement that "To scant the politics of Mr. Coetzee's novel is to pull its teeth" (36). After all, the subject of basic human helplessness before the forces of history and society is at least as old as the Iliad, whose purely political implications matter little. Within the context of the novel, those who seek solutions within political systems are, simply put, either the servants of Empire or barbarians. Harvey agrees, calling all exclusively political interpretations, especially those relating to South Africa specifically, "simple-minded answers," even though "it may well be true that South Africans, more than others, will experience some sharp pangs of uneasiness and guilt as they read" (4). Ms. Du Plessis' testimony certainly bears out the latter.

To repeat: what the magistrate's world needs is an ethical location apart from the duality that presently invests it, a place where one may be neither master nor slave, but a child who plays without imposing, being imposed upon, or hurting, anyone. Our very

yearning for it seems to suggest such a world, as witness the critics who think they see it in the novel. But it does not appear within either the physical, temporal, psychological, or ethical horizons of Empire's world; it is like a dream from the Magistrate's subconscious. If it ever came to light, then the magistrate would see the place toward which his face is set as we leave him. It would also be a land where there were no barbarians to wait for. That would be, not "a kind of solution" as in Cavafy's poem, but the actual one.

CHAPTER V

LIFE AND TIMES OF MICHAEL K

J. M. Coetzee's Life and Times of Michael K has received surprisingly little critical attention in contrast to the response which greeted Waiting for the Barbarians. Critics have generally seen this fourth book as yet another comment on the South African racial situation, or as a "critique of colonialism" in general (Wetson 389). One reviewer finds it "more powerful than countless political pamphlets" (Manguel 411), and another says that the "meaning of what white has done to black stands out on every page" (Gordimer 4). However, being identified as merely one more addition to the growing shelf of anti-apartheid propaganda would not excite a great deal of critical interest in any book.

The main controversy surrounding the novel has centered on Nadine Gordimer's denial of a likely connection between it and Kafka's "The Castle," whose protagonist is identified only as "K". Post answers that effectively, with enough connections between the novel and Kafka's works to end the question (73). Dovey devotes much of her fifth chapter to fleshing out parallels between critical readings (some by Coetzee himself) of "The Burrow," "The Hunger Artist," "The Castle," and "The Trial," and the text. Thus we may consider that links between Life and Times of Michael K and works by Kafka have been sufficiently established.

At the same time, the linkage seems to produce unwarranted conclusions in some readers. Dovey, for example, takes a standard

poststructuralist stance in asserting that the novel's point is "the relationship of mastery and servitude between reader and text . . ." (333). This is a fair conclusion. However, she apparently means it to be the only conclusion:

> While Coetzee's novel conforms to the codes of the genre in conveying a lesson, we shall see that this is a lesson whose application, like that of Kafka's fables and parables, remains restricted to the process of writing and reading itself. (323)

That is almost too exclusive a statement to be taken seriously.

On the other hand, no critic has yet attempted to block out the thematic "lesson" of the book through formalist inquiry tied to the myth of the master/slave world. We can take direction from some remarks by Coetzee himself on naturalistic thinking:

> Zola's overriding thesis is that degeneracy . . . is not an affliction of individuals who can simply be expelled from society (imprisoned, institutionalized, sterilized): society itself is an organism, and the degeneracy of individuals is in fact a symptom of the sickness of the social body. (Blood 45).

This chapter will consider the novel to be an experimental outworking of the idea that masterhood/slavery has produced that degeneracy in society and in one individual. Two important deterministic symbols we will trace are the burrowing animal and the descending cycle.

The world we have identified by its master/slave pattern includes four distinct types of people in this novel, all interrelated through the ongoing metaphor of farming. The government and landowners are masters who own and fence the land. The slave world they oversee is split into three categories: workers and soldiers are like domesticated animals; the growing population of rootless drifters are

like nonaggressive wild animals which burrow or hide as they infiltrate the fences for food; and renegades are like predators that, at the extreme, make war against the farmer himself.

Michael's identity as a rabbit is reinforced at various times in the story, but he is also linked with other animals, mostly those associated with burrowing and/or food-theft: a snail (3), an ant (83, 97), a worm (107, 182), a mouse and a monkey (181), a parasite (116), and so forth. For convenience we will use the term "burrower" in refering to the role they represent.

The thematic tension of the book grows out of Michael's attempts to transcend that deterministic role by finding a free place and a vocation all his own. Farming, even on the tiny scale involved, presupposes a measure of control over a parcel of earth. This control is available only to masters; no burrowing animal has it. Again in one's own right, one must become a master regardless of one's innate ability with the soil. If one will not or cannot adopt that role, then he cannot grow his own food reliably. There is no free position between burrower and farmer; in trying to find it, Michael is like the magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians, who seeks a third position apart from the master/slave dichotomy, and fails. The ultimate futility of the search for a free state in relation to the earth is the thematic thread we will follow in this chapter.

Symbolic of the ultimate hopelessness of the search, the plot of this fourth novel involves a series of cycles which commonly leave the characters at their starting points, but lower or less fortunate than

when they began. In effect, the characters' experiences trace a series of descending spirals.

The narrative itself forms such a shrinking cycle. Part One, from the omniscient point of view, is 126 pages long. Part Two, in first person narration, has 39 pages, approximately one third the length of Part One. Part Three returns to omniscient for 14 pages, diminished again by about two thirds. The idea of reduction seems to be woven into the very fabric of this novel.

Finally, the overall narrative cycle can be divided into stages of degeneracy: Michael's birth and employment, his reemployment as his mother's protector until her death, his quest for a section of earth to take her place, his last institutionalization, and his final return to Cape Town. We will use these stages as waymarks in our consideration of the novel.

Michael K is born into the domestic class; his mother's role in life to "polish other people's floors" is established early (4). Yet even though the book is set in the vicinity of Cape Town, his racial identity is never openly alluded to; although the legend "CM--40--NFA--Unemployed" on his papers may stand for "Colored male, age 40, no fixed abode. . . ," the CM could as easily mean "Caucasian Male." Moreover, we are (so it seems) distracted from his race by a glaring birth defect which appears in the book's opening line. "The very first thing the midwife noticed about Michael K when she helped him out of his mother into the world was that he had a hare lip" (3). That deformity will set him apart from the rest of society at once, thus obviating the need to stress racial issues. In addition, it sets

up a very effective metaphor for the progress of the narrative, which will take him from the role of domesticated servant to that of burrowing animal. It also foreshadows a life of oppression; hares (along with some of the other animals mentioned) are the natural food of every predator in the forest.

This identity with a burrowing animal links immediately with the shrinking-cycle pattern as well. Michael's mother is coming full circle from her own birth as a domestic servant, but without her son's facial disfigurement. Thus there has been a drop in fortune which changes the birth cycle into the beginnings of a downward spiral. Ironically, the midwife herself claims that such children "bring luck to the household" (3). It will not be so.

Michael's malformed mouth prevents his sucking, and forces his mother to feed the baby "with a teaspoon, fretting with impatience when it coughed and spluttered and cried" (3). This introduces a major subtheme through which the pattern of the downward spiral is worked out as the book progresses. Michael will starve gradually in a series of cycles, each time coming back to being fed by others, until the end.

His deformity keeps him with his mother, watching her work and "learning to be quiet" (4), until he is sent to a school for orphans. Then he takes a job with Parks and Gardens division in Cape Town, digging on other people's land just as his mother has scrubbed floors she has not owned. At first he seems dissatisfied with such work, for he quits; then, "after a spell of unemployment" he takes a job as

"night attendant at the public lavatories in Greenmarket Square" (4). Perhaps this is a step up in pay; we are not told. In any case, like a young hare he discovers predators for the first time. Muggers in a subway leave him with a "slash across his arm, a dislocated thumb and two broken ribs" (4). As though giving up any hope of a better position, he completes the cycle by going back to Parks and Gardens to stay. We should notice, however, that he goes back slightly worse off physically than when he joined them the first time. The damage is not permanent, but he is not quite so well, either, and thus his path slopes downward, however slightly. Nonetheless he finds such a love for working with the soil that "Sometimes on Saturdays he failed to hear the boom of the noon gun and went on working by himself all through the afternoon" (4). This is certainly a picture of a man with a vocation, forced or not. He is like a domesticated burrower, one not entirely comfortable with his job perhaps, but who feels an affinity for digging in the earth. Thus he is not badly off, all told, as the first major cycle ends.

The second major cycle begins as his mother sickens, worsens through neglect at a hospital, and retreats into a windowless concrete utility room belonging to Mr. and Mrs. Buhrmann, for whom she has worked. She thus becomes the equivalent of a burrowing animal whose unserviceability makes her vulnerable; since she cannot work she lives "in dread of the end of the Buhrmanns' charity" (6). In effect, she decides to close a cycle by going back to her birthplace, a farm near the town of Prince Albert, some 200 miles away. At about the same time Michael receives notice that he will be laid off from his job,

ending one cycle and beginning another as he assumes a new role: "He had been brought into the world to look after his mother" (7). Thus Michael transfers his concentration from cultivating the earth to caring for his mother. Within this cycle are several smaller ones, as we shall see, each marked by further degeneracy.

By now the reader who is accustomed to Coetzee's usual disorientation of settings may be startled to discover the abundance of accurate detail in this book despite the mythical farm pattern set up so far. Whereas Eugene Dawn, for example, finds himself in the fictitious Loco Motel in nonexistent Daulton, California (Dusklands 35), Michael moves among carefully named places that are real. He does not work at "a park" but De Waal Park, specifically. He and his mother live on Beach Road in Cape Town's Sea Point, and one can trace on a map his and his mother's later odyssey through the city "along Sir Lowery Road and the suburban Main Road, over the Mowbray railway bridge . . ." (23), then east through places like Stellenbosch, Touws River, and Prince Albert (see map, Appendix A). For any novelistic realist or naturalist, this kind of detail would be standard. For Coetzee, however, it is a real change from his previous style. We should pause to consider the nature and purpose of this change.

Perhaps it is meant to focus attention on Michael in a way reminiscent of the magistrate's trying to clarify his townspeople's perception of the barbarian prisoners whom they have never seen (Barbarians 107). The deemphasis of color may aim at bypassing the automatic prejudices of the reader. At the same time, clear focus on

location places Michael in the same position relative to South Africans as the captive barbarians are to the people in the public square: perhaps for the first time they are ready to obey the plea, "Look at these men!" (Barbarians 107). In showing that the two and their class, though commonly discounted because of their station, are as real a part of Cape Town as this park or that boulevard, Coetzee seems to be shouting the same message as does the magistrate.

The episode during which Michael struggles to get his stricken mother home from Somerset Hospital seems similarly aimed at a feeling of actual encounter through another technique:

> At the desk Michael K asked for the use of a wheelchair and was refused it. Carrying her handbag and shoes for her, he supported his mother the fifty paces to the bus stop. There was a long queue. The timetable pasted on the pole promised a bus every fifteen minutes. They waited for an hour while the shadows lengthened and the wind grew chilly. Unable to stand, Anna K sat against a wall with her legs before her like a beggarwoman while Michael kept their place in line. When the bus came there were no seats. Michael held on to a rail and embraced his mother to keep her from lurching. (6)

Here we are given a series of short, declarative sentences, whose effect is a feeling of hard factuality. The result of this kind of understatement is an emotional buildup in the reader, especially since the scene is made up of such details as come from universal human experience.

Michael's experience at the railway and police stations continues the pattern. His mother's illness does not "constitute special grounds for getting them on a train in under sixty days, and after "two hours in a queue behind a woman with a whimpering baby" Michael is rewarded with some forms which he patiently takes "to Room E-5" the

next day, as per instructions (9). The result is that permits will be "mailed in due course" (9).

Throughout, we are given to know that travel is made harder by wartime conditions, with guerrillas ranging the countryside and police operating highway checkpoints. Realistically then, one would not expect the Prince Albert police, whose clearance is required, to welcome one more indigent couple. (Waiting in the face of despair also echoes major themes from In the Heart of the Country, and Waiting for the Barbarians.) It is through such realism that the book forces us to look at Michael and his mother as being humans like us, regardless of our prejudices.

A neighborhood riot destroys what little peace is left to mother and son, who react exactly like burrowing animals, huddling "quiet as mice in their room beneath the stairs, not stirring . . ." (12). After order is restored they emerge to find the building vandalized, and the Buhrmann's apartment deserted. Cautiously they move upstairs since that is the address to which their travel permit will be mailed. But the arrival of men to remove the damaged furniture serves notice that their ability to live in the apartment is very tentative.

Meanwhile, Michael works to make a cart in which to push his mother so as to give her some fresh air. This is a modified wheelbarrow, perhaps symbolic of his having transferred vocations from gardener to tending his mother, identifying her strongly with the earth which she supplants temporarily as an object of Michael's efforts. Perhaps a subtle pun is included here, since she goes from her "burrow" into a "barrow." The shape of the cart hints at another

cycle as well, for the cover makes it "look like a tall perambulator" (20). His mother's life has reversed direction, lowering her through a kind of infancy toward the death that will shortly overtake her.

Michael has begun a new cycle in regard to society at large too. His job as park gardener provided some contact with humans as a human; he was doing work he loved in a way recognized by others as valuable enough to earn him promotion to "Gardener grade I" (4). Now he has left that service for two reasons beyond his control--his being let go and his mother's illness--which spirals him inward, away from interacting with society at large, to focus on her.

His attempt to leave Cape Town legally is a cycle too, descending to its close as Michael visits the police station a second time to ask about his permit. At least on the first occasion there was something Michael could do--go through line and initiate his paperwork. This time his utter helplessness is apparent as the woman at the desk simply refuses to talk to him after his long wait in line. He decides that his mother's health will not stand another month of winter, and determines to leave. They are "wasting their time waiting," he tells her (18).

In effect Michael and his mother are trying to cross a fence stretched around Cape Town; domesticated animals must wait for their owners to open gates, but burrowing creatures can make their own way. Michael, whose hare lip and natural digging (gardening) ability make him a burrower, is naturally adapted to the task.

Placing his mother in the wheelbarrow, Michael starts out before

dawn on the main roads hoping to catch a ride. None is offered, and the long pull gives evidence of Michael's physical robustness, "the soundness of his heart, the strength of his limbs" (19), for the cart is unbalanced and he must strain to hold it evenly, mile after mile. This will serve as a reference point as we note his physical decline through the book. Some time after noon, they are halted at a roadblock where Michael pulls "the cart through an arc" and heads back again (22). "A shower of rain" makes their return all the more gloomy, and helps establish the feeling of decline as they arrive at Sea Point and finish the cycle.

Their next attempt finds them with grimly lowered expectations, if nothing else: "K knew now that they might have to spend many nights on the road. Furthermore, his mother had lost all appetite for travel . . ." (23). The shower has become a steady rain, and the plastic cover which Michael has rigged does not keep his mother very dry. Like rabbits or mice, they travel more covertly this time, keeping to back roads.

This helps them avoid the official people, but puts them directly in the way of two predators, knife-wielding drifters who try to rob the mother and son. They approach Michael much as badgers threaten a squirrel who ferociously defends his hoard, until his tenacity turns them away. He will be identified as a squirrel later (137), and we see them follow him for a while afterwards, "the one with the knife miming obscenities and threats to K's life" (26), "badgering" him, in the common phrase.

Mother and son arrive in Stellenbosch, some thirty miles from

Cape Town, where she becomes much worse overnight. In the morning another cycle closes as she enters a second hospital, where she lies in seeming neglect once again, "on a trolley in a sea of trolleys" (27). Perhaps the fact that Michael watches his mother being ignored makes the situation worse and emphasizes the downward cycle. Noticing that she seems to have stopped breathing, he calls a nurse who gives her pulse a perfunctory check, then says acidly: "'I am just one person. Not two, not three--one. Do you understand that, or is it too difficult to understand?'" (28). Later care does nothing to reverse the mother's coma.

Meanwhile, Michael is ending a cycle of his own. He offers himself as a domestic for free, perhaps in token payment for his mother's hospital stay, but finds no one to whom he can make the offer. Finally a man hungry for conversation buys him a hot chicken pie. This exchange of service for service is a delightful one, although Michael actually listens very little: "The man told him of his sister's uncontrollable fits of shaking. K listened to the birds in the trees and tried to remember when he had known such happiness" (30). This is his last freely chosen employment, if one can call it that.

From now on he will take the role of burrowing wild animal, finding his own food covertly when he is not induced into either charity (as when a family feeds him) or forced labor. The one exception involves his attempt to grow food, to act as a landowner/farmer, attempting to combine the roles of burrowing and

agriculture. It will be a doomed experiment.

His mother dies in the hospital while he, refused a chair in the building, sleeps in an alley. But his mother's death brings a change, as though it is evidence for his loss of vocation and therefore qualifies him for charity. He is allowed to sit for most of the day, a staff member brings him a plate of food openly (he has had to steal before), and they wink at his sleeping in a laundry basket. The next day they send him away with his mother's ashes, along with a present of an extra ambulance uniform and toiletries in a package. He himself notes the difference in their attitude: "'Why do you give me this?' he asked. 'Don't ask me,' said the girl. 'Maybe someone left them behind.' She would not look him in the face" (33).

The staff's change from irritation to charity makes Michael as uneasy as they. He starts to throw away the bundle, only keeping the clothes on reflection that his own are beginning "to smell" (33). He has no trouble asking for help out of a temporary human need, acting as a hitchhiker with his mother and taking her to a hospital. At the same time, he apparently feels uncomfortable, as though he recognizes the change which such attention signals. Later he will say ruefully, "I have become an object of charity" (181). Clearly the novel's second major cycle has begun.

This now-thwarted wish to be a working partner in human society is symbolized by his actions as he drifts around Stellenbosch for some days: "There were long periods when he sat staring at his hands, his mind blank" (33). He is obviously at a loss as to what he should do with them. An ability to contract freely for work would give him,

metaphorically, a place on the farm, but though he tries to ask "for garden jobs" he shrinks "from the distaste that householders, owing him no charity" show him (33). Charity seems to have become the key to all his relationships with society now. In a sense, he is attempting to come full circle and go back to the land at the sufferance of the farmer who does not want him. His barrow disappears, but he hardly notices; he has no real further use for it.

Charity--a free ride--takes him out of town and into a kind of extended version of his mother's cycle of returning to her birthplace. One day as Michael wanders the streets, an old teamster invites him to clamber aboard his outbound wagon, and he accepts with the hopeful words, "'If you need help I can help'" (35). But the old man declines, dropping him off in the country. Michael keeps trudging along in the original direction, toward Prince Albert, carrying his mother's ashes.

On the way he meets a predatory soldier who searches him on the road, then robs him. "'That's my mother's money, that she worked for,'" he protests. Then he asks whether the man thinks that the war is for "'taking other people's money'" (37). The soldier's reply is a naked threat: "'Thief. Watch it. You could be lying in the bushes with the flies all over you'" (37). To a farmer or, in this case perhaps, his watchdog, a rabbit is innately both a thief and a victim. As if to add insult to injury, the soldier gives him back a ten-rand note, calling it a "tip" (38). Michael reacts in his own way, going into a farmer's field to pick some apples and carrots, "chewing

as quickly as a rabbit" (39). He imagines the approach of the rabbit's natural enemy, "a huge Alsatian streaking out to attack him" (39). Rabbitlike also, he is caught in a trap the next day, when the police net him at a roadblock and load him aboard the train for an unknown destination.

In answer to his question of where they are going, another prisoner evokes the dual nature of this master/slave world by saying "'There are only two places, up the line and down the line'" (41). Clearly, Michael is going down it, in terms of society. The story thus far has been of loss--of his struggle to live in increasingly straitened conditions. He has lost his job, his home, his ability to move legally, his mother, his cart, and above all his newly-acquired sense of vocation as his mother's caretaker. Nevertheless, there seems to be no turning around; although the rails may circle, he will arrive at his destination "down the line" in due course.

They arrive at a guerilla-demolished section of track, where Michael and the others labor to move the landslide. In his half-starved condition, Michael cannot do the work, in contrast to his marathon journey with his mother just a short time before. Clearly, he is moving "down the line" physically in parallel with his other losses.

Its work done, the press gang is disbanded and Michael continues toward Prince Albert, meeting threats from the farmers along the way. He meets a man on the street, however, a tradesman with "a wooden tool chest," whose family takes him in for the night. The man makes a statement which strikes Michael as being odd. "'People must help

people, that's what I believe'" (48). Michael turns the idea over in his mind: "He might help people, he might not help them . . . anything was possible. He did not seem to have a belief . . . regarding help. Perhaps I am the stony ground, he thought" (48).

How does the idea of people's helping people fit in with the farm-world of masters and slaves? Naturally, masters are in a position to give charitable gifts, but who has heard of cows, foxes or rabbits helping one another? The idea of mutual help presupposes a world in which all are human together; Michael knows nothing of that kind of world. In that sense his mind has been made stony by the circumstances of his life.

The term "stony ground" itself seems to refer to one of Jesus' parables: "Behold, there went out a sower to sow. . . . And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth . . . but when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away" (Mark 4:3, 5-6). Jesus explains a few verses later that "the sower soweth the word" (Mark 4:14).

Here the word which Michael comes in contact with is "help," as applied to people generally, and he does not know how to deal with it. Is this consistent with his experience up to now? All gifts have come to him as undependable charity from above. Although the Buhrmanns gave his mother an unused storage area to live in, she was terrified that they would throw her out eventually. The hospital gave his mother a place to die, and him several meals, but he had to sleep in an alley most of the time; on his exit they gave him a change of

clothing. The predatory soldier gave him a tip. The police gave the work gang freedom when the job was over. A farmer may throw a person off his land, while a tradesman might give him a night's shelter. Benevolence seems random, unpredictable. Michael's mind has been pressed into a stonelike shape by this environment; rain and sunshine are the same to a stone.

Yet Michael's ossification is not complete. His previous question to the nurses was a serious one; it is at least partially answered by the need of human intersupport. The idea, backed by the actions of the family, have elicited an emotional response in Michael too powerful to express. "His heart was full, he wanted to utter his thanks, but finally the words would not come" (48). After all, he has accepted a similarly rooted concept already: "he had been brought into the world to look after his mother" (7). Now he is taking her ashes back to her birthplace, and completing the cycle of her birth and death. His mother is his link with the rest of humanity, and with the earth. To see his duty to her is only one step removed from seeing all humans as part of a larger family to whom he is equally bound. His full heart indicates that he still might come to embrace the concept.

At Prince Albert, Michael discovers that the farm his mother remembered is probably the Visagies', abandoned for years. After an all-day walk he reaches it, makes his way inside, and settles down for the night. His mental reaction is interesting. Earlier he wondered "whether there were no forgotten corners and angles and corridors between the fences, land that belonged to no one yet" (47). This farm

seems to embody an answer: "Now I am here, he thought. Or at least I am somewhere" (52).

Back in Stellenbosch he had to stay in motion, walking through the streets and taking shelter under his barrow in the rain. There he "stumbled through the days, losing his way often" (34). Now he is at a destination of sorts. The cycle of service to his mother which seemed to run out meaninglessly as she died in Stellenbosch has finally carried him here. If this is not the right farm, at least it seems like a niche of territory unoccupied by either masters or slaves.

At the same time, his identity as burrowing animal has been reinforced as well, for here is a place where he can go to ground. In token of his sense of belonging, he finds a freedom in his tongue: "Here I can make any sound I like," he says (56). For a man with a hare lip, that is a rarity, and it is an indication of budding self-mastery. In traveling he has coveted the silence which makes such voice-freedom possible:

> He could understand that people should have retreated here and fenced themselves in with miles and miles of silence; he could understand that they should have wanted to bequeath the privilege of so much silence to their children and grandchildren in perpetuity. . . . (47)

Now he must decide what role to play on his land. He has come as a burrower with something to store, and indeed, the police will term him an "Opgaarder," a hoarder, "like a squirrel or an ant or a bee" (137). He has carried his mother's ashes here as carefully as a squirrel brings a nut to its lair. Of course, unlike a real squirrel,

what he hoards is not food for himself, and by this time he has begun to starve. Therefore hunger forces him to choose a new role that will feed him.

His first attempt is predatory. Discovering a herd of goats, he determines to kill one for food with his pocketknife. Neither he nor the knife is fitted for hunting large animals, however. Only after an exhausting, day-long chase "in a great circle" (53), does he catch and drown one in the muddy slime of the farm's pond. He is revolted and saddened by the event: "He would have liked to bury the ewe somewhere and forget the episode; or else, best of all, to slap the creature on its haunch and see it scramble to its feet and trot off" (55). Hungry as he is, he does not have very much of the predator's stomach for killing and eating. He cleans the carcass, eats what he can, and is sick for three days afterward. By the fourth day the rest of the goat meat is bad. He buries it. This cycle is over quickly, leaving him even more malnourished after his illness. He continues to live by killing and eating small things--birds, lizards, grasshoppers. But these are clearly stopgap measures. Large prey are beyond his desires or adaptive powers.

He obviously needs to find a different beginning. The narrator tells us that "There was another step, apparently, that he had to take but could not yet imagine" (58). As a hoarder he comes to it instinctively, however, in burying his mother. At first he simply digs a hole for the bundle of ash, but this does not seem quite right. Recovering the packet, he distributes "the fine grey flakes over the earth, afterwards turning the earth over spadeful by spadeful" (59).

This change of manner is a clear indication that his role as Opgaarder has successfully entered into a new cycle: "This was the beginning of his life as a cultivator" (59). His role in life "to look after his mother" has been blended into his devotion to Mother Earth. Indeed, the connection was made earlier when he put his mother into a wheelbarrow, but now the synthesis of the two roles is more direct and plain.

We may recall Eugene Dawn's Oedipal myth in Dusklands too, as we notice that for the first time Michael has access to the body of the Mother Earth on his own terms. He finds a cache of melon seeds and plants them with a sense of peace. His "deepest pleasure" comes when he sluices the dam water at sunset, watching it turn the earth "from fawn to deep brown. It is because I am a gardener, he thought, because that is my nature" (59). It is also because he, like one of Dawn's Oedipal son figures, is against a father figure who fights to keep Mother Earth to himself. Michael's melon seeds symbolically impregnate the earth in defiance of all fences and ownership.

This idyllic time is short, for his birth has not entitled him to share in the fenced-in "silences" that he has aspired to. One day he returns to the house at noon to see "a pale plump young man in khaki uniform" (60). This is the Visagies' grandson, who assumes that Michael is the caretaker they have left behind. Although he is an Army deserter, and therefore no friend of the government, his identity as heir to the farm introduces a master/slave society in miniature, with Michael in the role of domesticated predator or pack-animal. The

boy sends Michael out to hunt for food, then instructs him to shop discreetly at Prince Albert. Admittedly, he couches his instructions in the language of equality, pleading that "I am speaking to you as one human being to another. . . . There is no war here on the farm" (64). Nevertheless, Michael feels that the boy is trying "to turn him into a body-servant" (65). In token of the return of the master/slave condition, his voice is once again that of a slave, "trying to bring out words," but stumbling as he feels "the old hopeless stupidity invading him" (60). Michael's world shrinks a bit as he moves his sleeping mats from the house to a hillside.

He sums up the situation succinctly: "I let myself believe that this was one of those islands without an owner. Now I am learning the truth. Now I am learning my lesson" (61). That lesson is that no place in his world offers freedom from one of the four identities mentioned earlier. One may be a master who owns the land and its growing potential, the property of a master, a wild predator that robs, or a wild burrower that steals and hoards.

No burrowing animal farms. In trying to grow his own food he has trespassed, not only on someone else's land, but also on the prerogatives of a farmer/master. That is no way for a burrower to live, as he will discover in attempting to continue the experiment later.

Thus the arrival of a real, hereditary master deflates Michael's hopes. Either he can live as a servant until he is called a thief for squatting, or he can leave. How ironic, then, are the grandson's words, "there is no war here on the farm" (64). The real war is not a

military engagement, but the inescapable conflict between master and slave at all levels and all times.

Michael has been engaged in that war since birth. His mother's best efforts kept him alive when he was unable to take her breast, but under the government's surrogate fatherhood at the waif's home, he was forced into the role of burrowing animal. There all the children were underfed. This made them into thieves, and, very likely, hoarders: "Hunger had turned them into animals who stole from one another's plates and climbed the kitchen enclosure to rifle the garbage cans for bones and peelings" (68). He recalls that "My father was a list of rules on the door of a dormitory" (104). Those rules did not prevent his hunger.

All the same, Michael does not accept the role of thief willingly. The earth is a mother-figure for him, giving food; he does not need to steal what is his by birthright. The masters have placed fences between mother and child, however, and now he must leave what she has begun to produce for him. We may be reminded again of Eugene Dawn's version of the Oedipal myth as Michael regrets that an umbilical "cord of tenderness . . . to the patch of earth beside the dam . . . must be cut" (66). Dawn pictured a world wherein a government fought its sons for possession of the earth, their mother. Michael has taken possession of her long enough to plant seeds and see sprouts which he calls "my children" begin to grow. Now he loses possession of her, and the "children" will die.

Michael leaves. As though to reaffirm his role as burrowing

animal while rejecting the part of a thief, he buries the the tin of money and goes off cross-country. His own father, the masterly class system, has won and ended this cycle, turning Michael into a burrowing fugitive again but a little lower, since he has been goalless; he now travels, not toward a positive desire, but only to get away.

Since he wishes to take his food straight from the earth herself, as a gardener, having to steal it from other people is unnatural. Admittedly the governmental father-figure gives him two other options to starvation, forced labor and charity, but neither will allow him access to the earth. As in the waifs' home long ago, he has "climbed the kitchen enclosure" in leaving Cape Town to reach a thrown-away farm. Now, having "grown older" and "learned [his] lesson," he has found himself forced into starvation, reduced to the identity of a stone. He grows harder and more passive, losing his desire for the nurture of the earth and other people. "It is no longer the green and the brown that I want but the yellow and the red; not the wet but the dry" (67). He concludes that "I am becoming smaller and harder and drier every day" (67). He has called himself "stony ground" before, and now he seems to be making that description good.

But to be completely parched is to die, and he has not yet lost all interest in living. After some days spent slowly starving in a hillside cave, Michael makes his way down the mountain toward Prince Albert, where he is picked up by the police as a vagrant and charged with "being drunk and disorderly" (70). They attribute his debilitation to "alcohol poisoning" (70). So starved that he cannot hold down food, Michael finds himself on a hospital bed with a tube in

his arm, a charity case whether he will or no.

Thus Michael's first attempt at living freely has failed. He has found no physical or social place where one may escape the world of masters and slaves without starving to death. Just as the magistrate learned in the wilderness that one has no permanent ability to live freely, so Michael is discovering the same thing in "learning his lesson" (61). He characterizes his situation by saying that "I am like an ant that does not know where its hole is" (83).

After a few days he is transferred to a resettlement camp, where the idea is reinforced by a cadre man: "'That's your home from now on,' he said. 'It's the only home you've got, keep it clean'" (73). As he feels the confinement of camp life, he realizes that he has come full circle--back to the way life was in the waifs' home. He must become accustomed to an atmosphere of stealing again, for instance, in doing his laundry: "'You leave your clothes there,'" a woman warns, "'they'll be gone in the morning'" (75).

One thing has worsened, however. Food is not automatically provided as it was at the home. A group of women comes in a van to provide a hot meal, but when he asks for a portion, he is told that "'It's for the children only'" (76). They do sneak him some soup, but this is obviously a temporary measure (77). Again his experience takes on the appearance of a spiral downward.

Others are caught in similar spirals. One man tells how he was let go, along with the eight members of his family, after working for a farmer for twelve years. Yet he, like Michael, would rather have

freedom than be forced into the security of the camp, a farm animal behind fences. His conversation with the policemen who picked up his family is instructive: "'They said, "Where would you rather sleep, out in the veld under a bush like an animal or in a camp with a proper bed and running water?" I said, "do I get a choice?" They said, "You get a choice and you choose Jakkalsdrif"'" (80). The implication is that, given the choice, he will elect to be free as long as he can, just as Michael has, for people behind barbed wire are effectively in prison. His friend puts it very clearly by explaining his choice not to visit Prince Albert on Sunday with the words, "if we are going to be in jail, let's be in jail, let's not pretend" (83).

The logical answer for one who would be free is escape. Michael approaches a guard asking to be allowed to climb the fence, and the exchange serves to highlight how basic is the choice between domestication by the masters and freedom:

> "Why do you want to run away? You've got a home here, you've got food, you've got a bed. You've got a job. People are having a hard time out there in the world, you've seen it, I don't need to tell you. For what do you want to join them?"
> "I don't want to be in camp, that's all," said K. "Let me climb the fence and go." (85).

The man refuses and Michael goes back to the barracks. Nevertheless, the guard, himself a kind of domesticated predator, feels no love for the masters at bottom. Later he confides that "'the day I get orders to go north [to the front] I walk out. They'll never see me again. It's not my war. Let them fight it, it's their war'" (86). The "they" are obviously the masters in the government.

As Michael continues to live in the camp, his yearning for

freedom begins to harden into an understanding of the world of masters and slaves: "It seemed to him that scene after scene of life was playing itself out before him and that the scenes all cohered. He had a presentment of a single meaning upon which they were converging" (89). He does not yet see that meaning, but his thinking is becoming clearer.

On the other hand, the masters do not not think clearly at all. They blame the camp people for a fire which starts in a welding shop and spreads to destroy a local museum, symbol of the masters' version of history. The facts are that three men are missing from the camp, that they were seen on two bicycles at the nearest road junction, and that the door to the welding shop was forced (93). The police instantly put these facts into a story of sabotage. Of course, others might have forced the welding shop door; even if the three did so (perhaps in order to repair one of the bicycles), the fire may have started inadvertently.

Nevertheless the police search the camp violently. Although everything returns to normal by degrees, Michael now has one more reason to get clear of the camp; obviously it is an easy target for governmental retaliation. Michael's final decision to leave may be aided by an offhand comment after a relatively pleasant number of workdays stringing wire for a farmer who tells him that he has "a feel for wire," then goes on to say that good fencers are always in demand, for, "'If you carry stock, you need fences: it's as simple as that'" (95). This may give a man who lives behind wire something to think about. In a sense, he and the others are simply stock which the

masters feed and clothe just enough to make them useful.

After a drunken fight results in a stabbing, Michael has had enough. He climbs over the barbed wire and walks "all night, feeling no fatigue, trembling sometimes with the thrill of being free" (97). Yet he cannot escape the master/slave landscape. He keeps having to cross fences, which serve notice over and over that he is "a trespasser as well as a runaway" (97). Finally, he reaches the abandoned farm he has fled earlier, thinking that "surely now I have outlasted the last of the Visagies. . ." (97). The deserter-grandson is indeed gone, and Michael has come full circle again, walking up to the deserted farm.

He approaches it a little less freely than he did before, realizing that "A man who wants to live cannot live in a house with lights in the windows. He must live in a hole and hide by day. A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living" (99). Michael will burrow into the earth, his ur-mother, and hide in her bosom. He finds a place where, "Three hundred yards from the dam two low hills, like plump breasts, curved toward each other" (100). He hollows out and finishes a snug bunker between them where he will sleep by day. He has no illusions as to its permanence, however, realizing that at "the next hard rain" water will "come pouring down the gully through his house" (101). Likewise, an invasion by either predators or masters would wash him out as well.

He plants the last of the pumpkin and melon seeds, dispersing them through a field of veld-grass to hide them. He takes even

stronger precautions; he cannot use wholesale irrigation, which would be too obvious to a casual passer-by. Instead, he goes to each seed in turn, "carrying water from the dam in an old paint-tin. This is hard enough, but prospects for growing food are worsened by his planting "in the latter days of summer" (101). We may remember the same situation in the magistrate's settlement, as the townspeople wait for winter and the barbarians. Michael, in effect, is preparing for both also, and just as inadequately. Once again, therefore, although he might seem to have come full circle, he is really still descending in a spiral by accepting more primitive living and harder work.

His physical condition worsens again, accompanied by a telltale loss of appetite: "Hunger was a sensation he did not feel and barely remembered" (101). He eats insects, grubs, roots. In his lightheaded condition, he seems to have nearly escaped the bonds of earth, and thus the strictures of the fenced-in master/slave world. In fact, "His step was so light that he barely touched the earth. It seemed possible to fly. . . ." (102). In the waifs' home he used to dream of flying, too (133). Apparently the image is a powerful one to him, for at a number of points in the narrative Michael looks up to notice portents in the sky: jet planes and military aircraft, meteors, etc. These are things which ignore all fences. Symbolically at least, he seems to feel more like an independent being, if only momentarily.

Ironically, it is here that the true power of the master/slave world asserts itself. Michael is not free to transcend that world--only to change roles within it, if he is able. Even a measure of freedom produces masterhood, despite his wishes. This is clearly

shown by his taking on some of the very characteristics of masterhood which he himself has found so odious. The goats, and later other creatures, are interested in eating the plants he tends so carefully. He thinks "how much easier it would all be . . . if there were a fence around the dam . . . with its bottom edge staked a foot underground to stop the burrowers" (117). Lacking that, he finds himself needing to rest by day when he feels more secure, and stay up at night to protect his land and till it" (103). Much as he wishes to combine roles, he cannot think like a burrower and a tiller at the same time. Cultivating the land only means that he has begun to change sides in the master/slave world, not that he has overcome the imperatives of it.

Of course is newly-seeded masterhood is fictive, for the real world has its own agenda, and Michael is a slave to all sorts of fears during that supposedly secure daytime. At times he cannot sleep, "straining his ears for the noises that would herald his discovery" (105). In this state of mind he is "in danger of becoming more timorous than a mouse" (105). We have already noted his being linked with rabbits and squirrels; now the metaphor involves moles and mice--nocturnal creatures--in a world too flooded with light. Again we may remember the magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians who can find neither a viable third position apart from master and slave, nor a way to combine the two.

In Michael's case this impossibility is shown by the realization that there is no free place in his world. The earth is a patchwork of

other people's territories, crisscrossed by fences. Coetzee himself comments openly on this idea "that the South African earth belongs to certain people and not to others--an attitude embedded not only in ethnic Afrikanns thinking but in the concept of the ancestral farm as the heartland of the Afrikaner . . ." ("The Great South African Novel" 81).

Even when the specific owners, like the Visagies, are not present, one must watch out for their predatory relatives--"runaway soldiers [or] off-duty policemen who come to shoot the goats for sport" (106). After laughing at his "pathetic tricks," they would "kick my backside and tell me to pull myself together and turn me into a servant . . . so that they could eat grilled chops while I squatted behind a bush with my plate of offal" (106). Either group will enslave him. One day his fears begin to be realized when he sees the farmhouse door ajar, evidence of someone else's arrival. The sight washes away all imaginary mastery, making him into a burrowing animal under an imperial sun, "as naked as a mole in daylight" (105). The visitors are predators, rebel troops who stay overnight in the farmhouse. In deciding not to make himself known to them, Michael says that he wishes to "keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening" (107). In effect, he is a hoarder of gardening who recognizes that joining the intruders would automatically bind him to their work, when he feels the need to be loyal to a life of tilling, and therefore serving, the earth. The narrator, however, says that a gap lies between "this reason and the truth that he would never announce to himself" (109). His "understanding" baulks before this

"truth" (110). We may guess as to what it might be.

The real reason for his not joining those who fight against the masters of South Africa is implied in the schoolroom memory he relates a moment later. Michael remembers his despair when confronted by an arithmetic problem: "Twelve men eat six bags of potatoes. Each bag holds six kilograms of potatoes. What is the quotient?" (110). In one sense, of course, the "quotient" is three kilograms apiece, but in the world of masters and slaves people will not get equal shares. That fact makes the "quotient" a meaningless answer in any practical terms. The masterless world that he searches for is just as nonexistent as the world of quotients, and therefore he cannot escape the world of masters and slaves. He himself would react exactly like a master if he were to move upward, as we have seen in his earlier wish for fences around his garden. Why abandon his service to the earth in order to change her masters? His hope in the face of this is to seek a duskland by burrowing downward: "Let darkness fall soon, let the earth swallow me up and protect me," he thinks (107). He hides until the guerrillas leave, and watches as one empties the dam. "That is a mistake," he thinks, remembering the masters' ability to fly and imagining the resulting green patch that will attract the eye of army or police helicopters. "They can see everything from the air," he adds, "that by its nature does not hide underground" (112). He is right, then, to be a burrower.

However, a burrower who tries the master's trick of farming is still vulnerable. The orange roundness of the melons will be very

noticeable in all the green. "I should be growing onions," is his conclusion (112). Obviously, onions too are burrowers, but a steady diet of onions would be even less palatable than one of melons, and the downward trend seems to be reinforced once more, at least in Michael's thought.

Before the government patrols arrive in their turn he is given time to begin eating his pumpkins. He recites grace before the first one, saying "the words he had been taught," and "directing them no longer skyward but to the earth on which he knelt . . ." (113). Again this hints at his realizing that his home is the burrower's earth, not the master's sky. One reviewer explains this shift in religion as informing the whole book: "Beyond all creeds and moralities, this work of art asserts, there is only one: to keep the earth alive, and only one salvation, the survival that comes from her" (Gordimer 4). Immediately he feels a powerful surge of gratitude, and chews "with tears of joy in his eyes" (113). Like his mother, who kept him with her until this became impossible, the earth has sheltered and provided for him. Michael has learned to look increasingly downward for relief from a world of master and slave, and now the earth, godlike, has rewarded his attention, at least temporarily.

Ironically, this has produced the parody Oedipal cycle we saw begun earlier. He speaks of the pumpkins as being "a band of brothers," a comment we may compare with Eugene Dawn's statement that imperial forces in Vietnam are like a "father putting down the rebellion of the band of brothers" (Dusklads 24). In a moment reminiscent of Dawn's stabbing his only son, Michael knifes "the

firstborn" pumpkin "without a struggle" (113). Michael has become a mock father figure in his own right, and thus a parody master, just as we saw in his wishing for fences. Once again we are brought to the realization that one may only change roles within the master/slave world--transcending that world is impossible.

In seeming response to this inability to escape the master/slave world, Michael embraces the duskland increasingly, as though trying to find some free territory between the two possible roles. He becomes even more like a burrowing, nocturnal creature as he tries to farm.

> He had become so much a creature of twilight and night that daylight hurt his eyes. He no longer needed to keep to paths in his movements around the dam. A sense less of sight than of touch, the pressure of presences upon his eyeballs and the skin of his face, warned him of any obstacle. His eyes remained unfocussed for hours on end like those of a blind person. He had learned to rely on smell too. He breathed into his lungs the clear sweet smell of water brought up from inside the earth. It intoxicated him, he could not have enough of it. Though he knew no names he could tell one bush from another by the smell of their leaves. (115).

But the laws of nature decree that man shall not live on pumpkins alone. His gums bleed, his bowels run, and he has spells of cramps and dizziness. Moreover, with all the pumpkins ripening at once, he cannot preserve them effectively. What predatory skills he had are withering also: "He tried to shoot birds but had lost his skill with the catapult as well as his old patience" (117). As he reaches the later stages of starvation, a rainstorm washes him out of his burrow as he has expected all along, and he sits "Propped in a corner in the rushing water" (120).

Michael can find "nowhere better to go," the narrator tells us (119). This can be seen as a metaphor for his whole experience. In

the world of master and slave he has found himself a place outside the main current, it is true, but Mother Earth cannot protect him from a wetting. Like the magistrate, he discovers no place to live, in any humanly fulfilling sense of the word. Thus it seems appropriate that in replying to the soldiers who find him, he answers "'I live nowhere'" (120).

As they continue to interrogate him, he voices the most profound truth about his recent experience: "'I was sleeping and you woke me, that's all'" (123). Just as "in the rushing water with the sodden coat pulled tight around him, he slept and woke" (120), so in a very real sense, his attempt to live freely in a world of masters and slaves was a dream that came to him as he sat inescapably soaked in that world.

Not able to find any guerrillas, the soldiers blow up the farm, but as if to offset any disturbance over the fact, Michael's words put this into a broader context. "Every grain of this earth will be washed clean by the rain . . . and dried by the sun and scoured by the wind . . ." (124). His earthy outlook finds a certain peace in such ideas: "There will not be a grain left bearing my marks, just as my mother has . . . been washed clean, blown about, and drawn up into the leaves of grass" (124). This seems to hold out the promise that once the games of master and slaves are ended in death, all life turns to serving the earth and its fruits, just as Michael longs to do. In token of this, and of his continued roles as storer, he carries a pocketful of seeds away with him. This is the note which serves as

counterpoint to the explosive charges of the soldiers, ending part One of the book's narration cycle and the second degeneration cycle at once.

Part Two is narrated by the doctor at Kenilworth rehabilitation camp, a former race track near the town of Wynberg. He, along with his commandant friend, Major Neil Van Rensberg, combine to form a personality very like that of the magistrate. Although they are united in their wish to act ethically, they are divided in their attitudes toward Michael, just as the magistrate is of two minds regarding the girl. These officers make overt the struggle which took place only inwardly in the magistrate. Also like the magistrate, the doctor is otherwise unnamed.

Michael's arrival behind barbed wire completes his second degeneration cycle, and accordingly his condition is worsened. Having collapsed during physical training of new internees (we may remember his stamina in the last camp, allowing him to do such jobs as stringing wire), he has been brought in to the infirmary more dead than alive. After examining and questioning him, the doctor begins to suspect the truth: "I am not sure that he is wholly of our world" (130). As we have seen, that is an understatement; Michael is bent on burrowing out of the world of masters and slaves given any opportunity whatever.

As they talk, the obvious fact emerges that the government's records on Michael are completely wrong. First, they have his name as "Michaels," based on an error at the previous camp. There follows a string of inaccuracies as outlined by Major Noel van Rensburg,

Kenilworth camp's commandant:

> "According to this," he said, "Michaels is an arsonist. He is also an escapee from a labour camp. He was running a flourishing garden on an abandoned farm and feeding the local guerrilla population when he was captured. That is the story of Michaels." (131)

The doctor reacts to the dossier on "Michaels" with a disbelief akin to that of the magistrate as he views Colonel Joll's first prisoners for interrogation. The magistrate asks, "Living in fear of everyone, skulking in the reeds, what can they possibly know of a great barbarian enterprise against the Empire?" (Barbarians 18). The doctor says, "'They have him mixed up with some other Michaels. This Michaels is an idiot. This Michaels doesn't know how to strike a match. If this Michaels was running a flourishing garden, why was he starving to death?'" (131).

The Major, no Colonel Joll, answers indirectly in pointing out the practical problem associated with too much benevolence: "'At the moment you have got more patients flowing into your infirmary than flowing out, and my question is, are you going to do something about it?'" (132). The infirmary cannot become a sanctuary from the government. It exists to allow people like Michael to "rejoin camp life and have a chance to march back and forth across the racetrack and shout slogans and salute the flag and practise digging holes and filling them up again" (132). It is ironic that the government should decree such an artificial regimen on a burrowing animal as to make him "practise digging holes" to no purpose, or that an infirmary should exist solely for the repair of the body without regard to the spirit. The doctor wonders, "Do any of us believe in what we are doing here?

I doubt it" (134). Empires do not thrive on doubt.

By contrast, he is convinced that Michael's thinking is so strongly integrated as to be unreachable. "He passes through these institutions and camps and hospitals and God knows what else like a stone. Through the intestines of war" (135). Elsewhere he is compared to "a parasite dozing in the gut" (116). Just as Michael sat curled and soaked in his burrow during the rainstorm, so he huddles miserably in the viscera of the masterful government. He is both a parasite who takes nourishment from the system, and a stone that provides it no food value. We may remember a parallel image, in which Michael has speculated that he is "the stony ground" (48). It appears that such ground is also the enemy. At one point the major receives these instructions for defense: "If there is grass, burn it. If there are stones, remove them. Every stone casts a shadow" (160). This seems to dovetail with now-familiar imagery from Dusklands and Waiting for the Barbarians: the sun of Empire needs for all stones to be removed, for each produces a tiny duskland. Thus Michael's statement, "I am not in the war" (138), is not strictly true. In a sense he and many other rootless people are the terrain whose features tend to help one side or another, however passively, in any battle. He is also lodged in the government's inflamed intestine, like it or not.

These two images effectively answer a question Michael asks at various times through the book. "Why do you want to make me fat? Why fuss over me, why am I so important?" (135). The answer is simple;

the government needs to digest him, and too many stones produce a starvation diet. No wonder the government is concerned to set up "rehabilitation" camps so as to convert these indigestibles into something with food value for it. People like Michael must be induced to march and shout slogans.

Put another way, all domestics, burrowers, or even predators are important to the government as they relate to how it can use their energy. As a parallel we may remember that the camp fences Michael so despises seem intended to reshape him into something bovine that will work slavishly. The doctor observes that in Michael's case the result has been "like a bunny rabbit sewn up in the carcass of an ox" (164). The government parades labor battalions of such remade men "to prove that we can turn enemies into friends," but the doctor observes that the pretense is hollow: "they march with spades on their shoulders, I notice, not guns" (134). More stone is mixed in with such material than the government cares to admit.

The image of the government's digestive system works well in another way. One employed by the masterly government stays in its bowels until no longer useful. Then he or she is excreted. Michael says bitterly that his mother worked for other people all her life, "But when she was old and sick they forgot her" (136). After she had died, the masters said, "'"Here is your mother, take her away, she is no good to us"'" (136). Finally, as the doctor will argue to the major, Michael is just as useless.

But the doctor's direct response to the question about Michael's importance is different. "No one is forgotten. Remember the

sparrows. Five sparrows are sold for a farthing, and even they are not forgotten" (136). This is a direct evocation of the Canaan myth, echoing the words of Jacobus' assurances to the Hottentots he is about to slaughter: "Have faith, be comforted, like the sparrow you will not be forgotten" (Dusklands 101). Since Michael has never seen evidence of this remembrance, as witness his comment about his mother's being discarded, such a statement is meaningless to him. The doctor finds the idea to be just as inadequate to explain his thinking toward Michael. He says, "Nevertheless, he is right: I do indeed pay too much attention to him. Who is he, after all?" (136).

This question may explain the doctor's part of an interrogation, which is so different from the Major's:

> "Tell us about your friends who come in the middle of the night and burn down farms and kill women and children," said Noel. "That's what I want to hear."
> "Tell us about your father," I said. "You talk a lot about your mother, but you never mention your father." (139).

Despite all the obvious evidence that Michael is not linked with the guerrillas in any way, the major believes the official line and bases his interrogation on it. The doctor, again like the magistrate, tries to approach Michael's human side, even pleading for information in a way reminiscent of the magistrate's confronting the tortured boy (Waiting for the Barbarians 7). Michael responds to neither. Like the barbarian girl who cannot or will not respond to the magistrate's questions, Michael meets this probing with "a silence of a kind one experiences in mine shafts, cellars, bomb shelters, airless places" (140). In other words, the burrowing animal stays in his tunnel.

Afterwards the doctor and Noel argue as to what must be done next. The doctor emphasizes that he can provide no information, and thus no nourishment for the government: "'there is nothing there, no story of the slightest interest to rational people. I have watched him. I know! He is not of our world. He lives in a world all his own'" (142). That is the paradox that Michael represents in the world of masters and slaves. As we have noticed before, he is not of that world, does not contribute to it, yet he is in it enough to starve and to be a mute obstacle to the government's peace. The doctor asserts that the best answer is to make up a story as though Michael has confessed. Such a fiction will spare Michael the unnecessary pain of a trip in a police van and more interrogations, and will help the masters to pass the time more comfortably through a sense of progress in the war. We may recall from In the Heart of the Country that Magda uses fictions for much the same reason, and that they serve her tolerably well, until the awakening.

In the government's case, that awakening will look a lot like the arrival of the barbarians whom the magistrate waits for. The major, too, will have to face a reckoning, as the doctor makes plain: "'when the shooting stops and the sentries are fled and the enemy walk through the gates unchallenged, they will expect to find the camp commandant at his desk with . . . a bullet through his head'" (143). Like the magistrate too, the major makes clear that he stays for moral reasons, saying, "'If I don't do it . . . somebody else will, and that somebody will be worse than me'" (143). The magistrate himself has thought of resigning, but "then, I thought, someone else will be

appointed to bear the shame of office, and nothing will have changed. So I continued in my duties until one day events overtook me" (Barbarians 139).

Those events seem to be coming soon for the doctor and the major. Shortly "the distinction between rehabilitation camps and internment camps is to be abolished," with Kenilworth receiving "battle-hardened soldiers" as prisoners (153-54). Unlike the magistrate, whose ethical, healing side makes him stay on in the settlement after the others have fled, the major will probably resign: "'You need an iron man to run an iron camp. I am not that kind of man,'" he says (154). The doctor himself says nothing about leaving as yet. Thus we can see the strong possibility that a Colonel Joll will enter the camp one day, and that the doctor will become a kind of magistrate in counterpoise to him.

At the moment, however, the doctor obeys his obligation to maintain "flow," discharging Michael into the main camp. It is a mistake which results in a very short cycle. Michael is back two days later, having collapsed during punishment for refusing to sing, and is more adamant in his insistence on not eating. He pulls out the feeding tubes. The doctor explains to the major that Michael "Profoundly does not like" camp food, and adds, "Maybe he only eats the bread of freedom'" (146). That, of course, is why Michael must starve--in a world of masters and slaves there is no such bread. In a long letter which we never see delivered, the doctor tries to come to terms with Michael's refusal, wondering at one point whether his time

in the Karoo desert gave him a taste for that bread of freedom. "Did manna fall from the sky for you. . . ," he asks; "Is that why you will not eat camp food--because you have been spoiled forever by the taste of manna?" (150-51). Obviously the experience of freedom is a kind of food that spoils one for servitude.

More subtly this seems to recall the Canaan myth we found in Dusklands, wherein Jacobus used the story of recently-freed Israel's conquest of the Land of Canaan to justify his dominance of the Hottentots. Still, any oppressed group might find enough "bread of freedom" in the wilderness to fuel their own quest for masterhood. Thus although Michael is no revolutionary, he still represents a threat to the existing order. The doctor makes the situation quite plain: "The laws [of the nations] are made of iron, Michaels. I hope you are learning that. No matter how thin you make yourself, they will not relax. There is no home left for universal souls . . ." (151). That is, souls who respond to the overreaching laws of human equality and freedom--what Magda called "the iron laws of the universe" (In the Heart of the Country 46), are doomed to run afoul of national laws. In effect, Michael is being ground between two masses of legal iron, ethical and military. The doctor concludes that "If you will not compromise you are going to die" (151). Michael takes another option: he leaves.

At this the doctor changes his attitude radically from profound pity to adulation, having caught a vision in place of Jacobus' Canaan myth of colonization. Heretofore a high-level domestic worker, the doctor signals his conversion to would-be burrower with these words to

the now-absent Michael:

> Yet I am convinced that there are areas that lie between the camps and belong to no camp, not even to the catchment areas of the camps--certain mountaintops, for example, certain islands in the middle of swamps, certain arid strips where human beings may not find it worth their while to live. I am looking for such a place in order to settle there. . . . I am not so foolish, however, as to imagine that I can rely on maps and roads to guide me. Therefore I have chosen you to show me the way. (162)

Despite the fact, attested to by Michael's near-starvation, that he has found no such place, his steadfastness gives the doctor hope of finding that promised land somehow. He sees Michael as a kind of Christ figure.

In a brilliantly multifaceted allusion, the doctor answers his own question regarding Michael's father and birth, reaffirms the link between Michael's mother and the earth, and hints at a celebrated messianic connection--all through a parody of Genesis 2. He says, "With Michaels it always seemed to me that someone had scuffled together a handful of dust, spat on it, and patted it into the shape of a rudimentary man . . . a genuine little man of earth" (161). Even if Michael's Creator Father made "one or two mistakes" on this second try, the passage seems to refer to the Pauline doctrine of Christ as a second Adam: "And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit," and "the second man is the Lord from heaven" (I Corintians 15:45,47). We may remember, too, that the Adam of Genesis 2 is a gardener, just as Michael is drawn toward being.

The doctor couches his regret for not following this messiah in terms reminiscent of standard sermon ideas about the need of

preparedness for the Second Coming:

> The truth is that the only chance I had is gone, and gone before I knew. The night that Michaels made his break, I should have followed. It is vain to plead that I was not ready. If I had taken Michaels seriously I would always have been ready. I would have had a bundle at hand at all times, with a change of clothing and a purse full of money and a box of matches and a packet of biscuits and a can of sardines. (161)

Even though the doctor's words seem slightly self-mocking at the end of that quote, they echo wryly some of Christ's final instructions to His followers. "But now," He said, "he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip [bag or satchel]: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." Recalling that Michael is accused of arson, perhaps the matches stand in place of a sword in addition to their being a necessity. Moreover, this visit to Kenilworth is a kind of Second Coming; it is the second time that Michael has been in a government camp, and it places him back in the outskirts of Cape Town.

Now, finding his chance gone, the doctor fantasizes a scene wherein he pleads with Michael's fleeing figure to lead him to that land of promise: "'It is off every map, no road leads to it that is merely a road, and only you know the way'" (166). This seems to echo Christ's words, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

One irony remains. "Michael" is the name of the archangel commonly identified as Prince of Israel and thus as the Messiah (Daniel 10:21 and 12:1). But the doctor unthinkingly accepts his government's secularized version of the name, even though Michael has corrected him once: "He says his name is not Michaels but Michael"

(131). Christian faithful are promised "life through his name" (John 20:31). But what if the believer has the name wrong? On one level at least, this is further evidence that the doctor does not take Michael "seriously" enough yet, even while claiming to want to follow him.

As readers, we have his name right. We also have seen him described as a stone, which couples with messianic imagery also, for many scriptural texts symbolize Christ in that way. "I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded," is one example (I Peter 2:6). Is Michael to be seen as a Christ-figure in the book as a whole? At least one critic thinks so. "By combining, in Michael K, the figures of Christ and Kafka's K, Coetzee achieves a result almost as moving as the fusion of Christ and Don Quixote in Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin" (Brink 193).

Michael, in parallel with his supposed Creator, has made "one or two mistakes" in his theology, however. Witness the fact that at the height of his success as a pumpkin farmer, he began to concern himself with fencing out his fellow "burrowers" (117). This is strikingly at odds with his earlier thoughts while eating the stolen carrot in the farmer's field, and his later saintly pronouncement that "what grows is for all of us. We are all the children of the earth" (139). Both before and after his brief experience as a proto-pumpkin farmer, he has voiced egalitarian ideas, but not during it.

Whatever the case, Michael himself has never made the slightest move toward attracting a following, much less preaching a sermon. Still he is a unique character: a burrowing animal that would rather

farm than steal or be predatory, and whose convictions are killing him. Such a rare breed might well appeal to a sensitive doctor yearning to escape a kind of judgment day, when the barbarians of both sides in the war will collide at Kenilworth.

Part Three of the book, itself a degenerative waymark, completes the narrative cycle, returning to an omniscient narrator as Michael returns to Sea Point "after his long walk" (171). In its fullest context that walk has taken him on a great round trip from from Cape Town to Prince Albert and back. As one critic puts it, "K has come full circle and is back in Cape Town. . . . He has survived, but his freedom is only a matter of degree" (Post 75). This brings up the question of whether his freedom constitutes a rising, rather than a descending, spiral. If Michael's "freedom" must be "defined negatively," as another critic asserts, the ability to be "'out of all the camps at the same time'" (Gordimer 4), then it doesn't betoken any progress at all, since he has been out of all camps at several points. Actually, Michael's journey has amounted to a spiral downward, a pattern we have noted already. He returns physically and morally degenerated, and in that sense is less free than when he started.

His physical tattering is most obvious. Whereas he left fully clothed, he now is shoeless and naked except for the overalls he stole in escaping from Kenilworth. Having been robust enough in departing to wheel his mother all day at a steady pace, he returns half-starved and weak. True, he is still able to travel by foot, but the effort costs him greatly.

A parallel change is taking place in Michael's mind; in fact the physical and mental seem to blend as they weaken.

> Then he returned to the beach and lay on the sand listening to the ringing mount in his ears, the sound of the blood running in his veins or the thoughts running through his head, he did not know which. He had the feeling that something inside him had let go or was letting go. What it was letting go of he did not yet know, but he also had a feeling that what he had previously thought of in himself as tough and rope-like was becoming soggy and fibrous, and the two feelings seemed to be connected. (177)

A very worn rope does become "soggy and fibrous" simultaneously as more and more strands break and bristle outward. This novel is a record of one man's gradually weakening in the same way, fiber by fiber. He works for less, hopes for less, owns less, as time goes on. Attempting more at any stage would break him, like a disintegrating rope. It is hard, then, to agree with Gordimer's assertion that "All along, the dying Michael has been growing," like one of his own seeds (4). His life may show, as she asserts, that "Beyond all creeds and moralities . . . there is only one: to keep the earth alive, and only one salvation, the survival that comes from her" (4). But Michael's experience shows this negatively, like starvation used to demonstrate the value of food. That he cannot grow in the present world of masters and slaves is precisely the point.

In token of his mental deterioration, Michael has gone from not seeming "to have a belief regarding help" (48), as we have seen in his conversation with the young tradesman, to having an extremely cynical attitude toward it: "I have become an object of charity, he thought. Everywhere I go there are people waiting to exercise their forms of charity on me" (181). In return these people want him "to open my

heart and tell them the story of a life lived in cages" (181). That is certainly true of the doctor, who saves Michael from police interrogation by lying, then explains that he has done so because "I want to know your story" (149).

But the charity of others is less easily explained by such a cynical outlook. The young carpenter who says that "people must help each other" affects Michael deeply at the moment: "His heart was full, he wanted to utter his thanks, but finally the right words would not come" (48). Nor do the nurses who give him the clothes probe his history.

Surely charity has more complex roots than Michael can fathom, however clumsily those roots are described by the people giving it. Although it can involve a kind of voyeurism that hungers for one's "story," it need not. Even the doctor who centers his explanation on that idea shows that he is concerned for Michael as an exceptional person whose wisdom one might follow so that one's own story might have a happy ending. At best charity is an active expression of faith in a yet-unseen world beyond masterhood and slavery, where all humans "help each other." Michael's generalization has far too little validity, since it ignores these episodes and possibilities, but it does show that the contraction of his mind is keeping pace with his body's.

Thus he merely gives in to the gifts of his last benefactor, a pimp who keeps two prostitutes and whose kindness is certainly motivated on more than one level. The pimp reports his motive as being simple benevolence, claiming that he has said to himself,

"'"That man is definitely undernourished! That man definitely needs a square meal inside him!"'" (174). Michael vomits the wine which the pimp gives him, but manages to hold down some bread and condensed milk as one of the prostitutes volunteers something of their story at the pimp's urging. Michael sketches his experiences briefly, and the man does not press for details.

That night in their camp on a hill overlooking Sea Point, the pimp shows a second reason for his concern. He picks Michael's pocket, thinking him asleep, but finds only the seeds Michael has carried since leaving the farm. After recovering as many of the seeds as possible early in the morning, Michael walks away. If the pimp were simply a thief, one imagines, he would take no further interest. But again the pimp's motivation is not so easily defined. In yet another cycle the pimp seeks Michael out at the beach. Again he offers gifts: a drink of brandy and the services of one of his girls. When Michael struggles against her handling him, the pimp offers rough reassurance, saying, "'Relax, my friend . . . this is Sea Point, this is the day when all good things happen. Relax and enjoy yourself'" (178). Michael does relax. Whether he enjoys himself is an open question. However, we have seen that Michael's idea of others' charitable motives does not take anything like this into account, since the pimp does not want his "story" at all. Yet a defensible answer for it grows directly out of the world of masters and slaves.

The pimp is a kind of master in his own right. The two prostitutes whom he facetiously calls his "sisters" are in reality his

slaves, for they speak and act on his orders almost exclusively. Again, though he is as landless as Michael, he inhabits unoccupied buildings when not sleeping in the public park, and his appearance is striking: "How does he stay so neat, living on the mountain?" Michael wonders (178). He seems to have done what Michael has tried and failed at--carving out his own nearly invisible niche in a world of fences.

Certainly it is the business of the master to take, but the tradition of masterly gifts of reward and beneficence is equally rooted in human thinking. One asserts one's masterhood in that way too. Thus it seems possible that the pimp needs an object of charity in order to play his masterly role fully. That idea is reinforced as the trio leaves Michael with a promise to return in the evening for "a party" but also with a warning: "'It is difficult to be kind,' he said, 'to a person who wants nothing. You must not be afraid to say what you want, then you will get it. That is my advice to you, my thin friend'" (179). In other words, if one wishes for the good graces of a master, it is necessary to acknowledge his supremacy by addressing him with requests. Perhaps it is this tacit affirmation of the master-slave relationship which has embittered the taste of most charity for Michael. Michael's reaction is to go to ground once again, reentering the storage room that his mother once occupied, thinking, "If I lie low, I will escape the charity too" (182). This also amounts to coming full circle, to the extent of reentering the womblike room. He left his mother's body identified by his face as a hare; he reenters that room saying that "the truth about me" is that

"I am a gardener" (181). This would seem like progress until he clarifies the image: "I am more like an earthworm, he thought. Which is also a kind of gardener. Or a mole, also a gardener, that does not tell stories because it lives in silence" (182). It is difficult to see this statement as reflecting positive growth.

His last recorded thoughts recall his mother's solution for a baby who could not suck: spoon-feeding. He dreams of going back to the Visigies' now-shattered well and drawing out water, one teaspoon at a time so that, "in that way . . . one can live" (184). As the spoon represented Michael's first answer to his problem of nourishment, so it stands for his last. We have therefore completed the penultimate cycle of his life. The final event will be death, mirroring his birth. It probably will not be long in coming.

Then, in the concluding irony, his body will lie in that storage room/womb indefinitely, until someone removes it in a grotesque parody of stillbirth, or the solution hinted at by the doctor: "It would have been better if his mother had quietly suffocated him when she saw what he was and put him in the trash can" (155). In effect, the world of masters and slaves has done that for her, aided by Michael's own insistence on freedom even at the cost of starvation.

All the same, this is not an unrelievedly bleak picture, for it affirms that Michael's spirit is unbroken; he can still make plans in the face of hopeless outward circumstances. Too, he dreams of a companion--"a little old man with a stoop and a bottle in his side pocket . . ." (183), with whom he shares those spoonfuls of water.

Clearly he has taken some kind of vision of human cooperation with him in going to ground.

However, the dominant theme at the end is death. Michael's yearned-for third location apart from the world of masters and slaves, his devotion to his mother, and his affinity for the earth, all come together in that final solution to his problem. Everyone's life is a steady movement toward death, but his becomes a virtual quest for it however deterministically imposed--looping in great and small cycles, interrupted by well-meaning charities, expressed in the animal life most concerned with self-burial for protection. Now, finally, he can rest.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Vladimir Nabokov has said that a novelist is a kind of teacher who may appear in three basic guises: "Propagandist, moralist, prophet--this is the rising sequence" (5). If J. M. Coetzee may be said to teach as well as to engage our interest, where on this scale must we place him in the light of his first four novels? Despite the views of those critics who regard him purely as a propagandist in the context of South Africa, we have seen evidence that his work is to be taken far more broadly. Let us review the evidence briefly.

Dusklands separates itself from present-day South Africa by physical distance in the case of the American Eugene Dawn, and by an eighteenth-century character who speaks out of twentieth century philosophical concerns in the case of Jacobus, the Afrikaner pioneer. At the same time the novel's emphasis on myth moves both sections into the timeless world of masters and slaves. Dawn's sun-scorched, Oedipal landscape is far more real than the physical world he inhabits; it impinges on the actual world with enough power to result in the stabbing of Dawn's pitiful son. Likewise, Jacobus lives within the mental landscape of the Canaan myth, which works in him to produce four dead Hottentots, a raped village, and a verified history composed of lies. Because the book shows us fictions which stand apart from any specific setting, yet which govern truly, its message is universal and timeless.

Although at first glance In the Heart of the Country seems firmly

tied to South Africa, its reflexiveness serves as a cutting charge to sever those ties at the same moment. We find ourselves floating outside of time and space once again, engaged in a fictive world whose landscape includes two notable features: masters and slaves. After various experiments in self-liberation that move from her interior to the infinite, Magda, the protagonist, finds herself in a closing scene that only reaffirms the master/ slave myth more strongly; she, a lone mistress, tends an aged, voiceless infant/slave on an otherwise barren plain.

Waiting for the Barbarians moves into the wholly fictive realm by another route, presenting a straightforward tale of masters and slaves about to change roles in a desert duskland in which the sun of Empire bakes the desert as it descends toward night. The surreal setting, deliberately framed to disengage the reader from historic locations or times, focuses our attention forcefully on the magistrate's attempt to find an ethical position free from the bondage of the master/slave world, and makes his failure the more poignant. Yet the setting is real enough to engage our emotions as the magistrate returns to his old masterly role of caring for the doomed town in the face of the barbarian invasion that will sweep them and their memory from the earth.

Life and Times of Michael K seems intensely realistic, by contrast--so much so that critics like Nadine Gordimer praise its direct relevance to the South African situation. Yet it, too, includes enough fictive dislocation to move our attention from a

particular country at a given moment to the timelessly mythic master/slave world, especially in an Oedipal context. Michael's attempt to tunnel out of the master/slave world turns into a series of cycles spiraling downward naturalistically, until he finds isolation to be his only refuge, even to the point of death.

Coetzee's fifth novel, Foe, follows the same pattern of disjuncture from the real world. Although it stands outside the scope of our main study, we should pause to consider it briefly.

Foe is as fabulatively remote from specific South African scenes as is Waiting for the Barbarians or the first half of Dusklands. In parallel with Defoe's novel, Foe moves from the shores of the New World to the island belonging to "Cruso," and from there to England, but even a superficial comparison with the original work fictively revises Defoe's version of how the original book was written. The "real" story, as fabulated by Coetzee, gives Cruso's island a new arrival, Susan Barton, and includes a mute, tongue-mutilated Friday and no cannibals; in short, this narrative presents a markedly different situation from the original.

With Cruso as master and Friday as slave, Susan Barton is left to seek a role between or apart from them on the island. This need sharpens on their return to England after Cruso's death. She is left alone to care for the slavelike Friday in the face of oblivion (since her role will be written out of Mr. Foe's novel when it appears). In effect she attempts to occupy the impossible middle ground fantasized by Magda, sought ethically by the magistrate, and hungered for by Michael K, with the same result as theirs: ultimate isolation.

Foe also includes reflexive paradoxes, as do Coetzee's earlier novels. The very idea of a hidden reality behind Defoe's novel is unsettling, and moreso since this is a fictional story pretending to correct our understanding of how the older novel (itself a pretended history) was written. Pretense pretending to correct pretense is a sufficiently complicated idea. Even more paradoxically, that older story might have no more real an impact on a reader today if it were genuine history, and Coetzee's fictive revision would be as real, too, if readers allowed it to modify the impact of Defoe's book on them. Coetzee could not have chosen a more suitable 18th-century novel to use for disengaging the reader from the everyday world.

The resulting symbolism is as memorable as that in Coetzee's other novels. For example, Michael K.'s problem of having seed, without the ongoing ability to plant and harvest a crop, is reversed in Foe: Cruso terraces endlessly, but his island has no stock of seed to sow. A reviewer comments that "The myth of those unplanted terraces . . . takes hold of the imagination" (Furbank 995). Indeed it does, especially in the mythic context of masterhood and slavery, wherein both sides are helplessly caught in a sterile environment until outside help arrives.

At the same time, this confined environment is one in which "all things" are "possible" (Foe 37). This is especially true in terms of a master's fictive freedom. When Susan Barton asks Cruso how Friday lost his tongue, the castaway master seems to smile at her while relating several fictive tales, all beginning with "perhaps" (Foe 23).

As with Jacobus and Joll, Cruso controls history; whether Friday's own version would differ will never be known, a fact amplified by Friday's not understanding more than minimal English.

Thus, although Cruso would seem ethically far removed from the likes of Jacobus and Joll, there are similarities. Jacobus plays with the history of Klawer's death just as Cruso does with Friday's muting--through a series of tantalizing fictive alternatives. Both men thus flaunt their utter control of the histories involved. Certainly Cruso might have learned the facts by teaching Friday a bit more English and then asking simple questions to which the other might have pantomimed answers. Again, although this lack of interest in teaching Friday more English than would be needed by a hunting or herding dog seems different from Joll's obsession with getting his barbarian victims to talk, it is ultimately the same in terms of its purpose. As Susan Barton says, "'There are times when . . . I use words only as the shortest way to subject [Friday] to my will. At such times I understand why Cruso preferred not to disturb his muteness'" (Foe 60). What Joll enforces by torture is essentially the same: that words shall be used exclusively for the benefit and comfort of Empire.

Cruso is only different from Jacobus and his gun, as well as from Joll and his little knife, because of the utterly abject nature of Friday. Susan Barton's question, "'How do you punish Friday, when you punish him?'" receives this reply: "'There is no call to punish Friday'". . . . "'Friday has lived with me for many years. He has known no other master. He follows me in all things'" (37). Cruso has

what the other two long to attain, and therefore needs no weapon.

Friday's seeming uniqueness can be misleading as well. He is Coetzee's only utterly mute character thus far, even surpassing Michael K.'s harelip-slurring and inability to have others understand his story properly. Yet it is only the outward show of what has taken place psychologically in every novel we have considered, for none of Coetzee's slaves ever becomes capable of speaking as a normal human. Dawn speaks fascinatingly, but his words carry no final effect whatever; it is his knife which makes the lasting difference, and that only on his little son. The servants of Jacobus have their last words recorded, it is true, but those words change nothing. In Klawer's case, all we can be moderately sure of are his tears--the rest is wrapped inscrutably in Jacobus' fictions. Magda's words only manipulate her own perceptions; reality, apparently quite alien to anything she has said, rolls on. The barbarian girl is Coetzee's most articulate slave; she is also a slave for the shortest time, coming over the Empire's horizon and returning again. All the same, she has trouble communicating her misery to the magistrate, although he greatly wishes to hear it. Friday's muteness is only physically different from that of his peers; in the master/slave context, it presents a situation very akin to theirs.

Susan Barton herself has some kinship with both Magda and the barbarian girl, neither of whose stories will enter history. Magda has buried her actual experiences in fictions. The barbarian girl, who has spent time in an island-like outpost with the magistrate,

dares not tell her people the truth when she returns to them. Similarly, even though Susan Barton fights to have her story told, she cannot prevent her obliteration from it under Mr. Foe's authorship.

Even Mr. Foe, who seems unique at first glance, conforms to a basic pattern in the world of masters and slaves. A master who can manipulate history freely, then pass it off as true, Foe is next-of-kin to the Jacobus who swore out a fictionalized account in a deposition. At the same time he himself is not free, but must hide from his creditors, at least periodically. This presentation of master-also-as-slave is paralleled in our picture of Magda's father, who could not escape the demands of "the iron laws of the universe" (In the Heart of the Country 46), and of Jacobus' whose dread of having to pay back his moral debts makes him ask "Will I suffer?" (Dusklands 106).

With this familiar master/slave pattern as a background then, Coetzee's last novel illumines the twentieth-century problem of dismantling colonial systems. What does one do with the abject slave who would "'rather sleep on the floor at his master's feet than on the softest bed in Christendom'" (41)? Of course, this is Susan Barton's assessment--no one asks Friday, who certainly has not volunteered to follow his master onto that ship. Yet is it moral to simply discard him? Susan Barton rejects this solution by inducing the sailors of the rescue ship to capture Friday. She says that they should "not abandon him to a solitude worse than death" (Foe 39). She adds that "He is a child of his silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born" (Foe 122). To the unborn, all countries are

alike, and to those whom colonialism has kept enwombed, any freedom for which their lives have left them unprepared might amount to an abortion. She asks, "Should I liberate him into a world of wolves and expect to be commended for it?" (Foe 148).

But can a master, even a sympathetic one, take final responsibility for such a decision? The magistrate's experience with the barbarian girl would indicate that he or she cannot. Would Friday agree that his lonely enslavement in England is better than solitary freedom would have been on the island? The truth seems contained in the dance that Friday performs in Mr. Foe's scarlet robe, a dance whose purpose is "to show forth the nakedness underneath" (Foe 118). The naked truth is that Friday is a potent man, a "dark pillar" within that borrowed robe, to whom freedom is his natural state. Put another way, Friday hungers for the same "bread of freedom" that so engages Michael K (Life and Times of Michael K 146). Michael prefers freedom in isolation to life under the care of others, and his attitude seems paralleled in Friday, as well as in the recent histories of many former colonies around the world.

Thus Coetzee's latest book joins the others in presenting a mythic universe of master and slave through reflexive detachment and gains with them the ability to carry meaning across borders of space and time. Strauss says that these novels "never become simple metaphysical games, detached from the concerns of ongoing life . . . [but rather] a critique of western civilization" (126).

Such pictures of human life, or at least of western civilization,

are very far from anything narrowly propagandistic. On the other hand they come very close to prophecy, as Nabokov terms it, even though Coetzee's books are too rooted in the present (whatever their time setting) to involve foretelling future events.

Prophecy, at least in the western Biblical tradition, does not always purport to tell of things to come. Perhaps more importantly it may articulate the present so clearly that it strengthens one's vision as a first step to change. Often too, it comes wrapped in fiction which catches the imagination, as when Nathan the prophet told a tale of sheep theft to the adulterous King David, then replied to David's sentence of death for the villain, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7). Coetzee's novels can be read as prophetic, then, not because they predict anything necessarily, but because they illumine the human condition in some sense through myth-based fictions.

As Stephen Watson writes:

> [Coetzee] has provided more insight into the colonizing mind, as well as the dissenting, colonizing mind, than any of his contemporaries. Even if this were not enough, there remains that passionate hunger in all four of Coetzee's novels to escape the warped relationships that colonialism fosters. Nobody has given a more forceful expression to this hunger. . . . (390)

This dissertation has sought to explain, at least partly, how Coetzee presents that insight and that hunger.

Beyond considering the novelist as teacher, however, Nabokov continues:

> Finally and above all, a great writer is always a great enchanter, and it is here that we come to the really exciting part when we try to grasp the individual magic of his genius and to study the style, the imagery, the pattern of his novels or poems. (5-6)

Whether Coetzee's novels carry that kind of enchantment is as yet an

open question, far beyond the scope of a single study. Like the myths which inform his work, Coetzee's writings must submit to an immense jury over long years before the answer will be at all clear. Still, their emphasis on the universal and timeless, along with their ability to catch the imagination of various readers in several countries already, show that these novels have already taken a step toward becoming classics.

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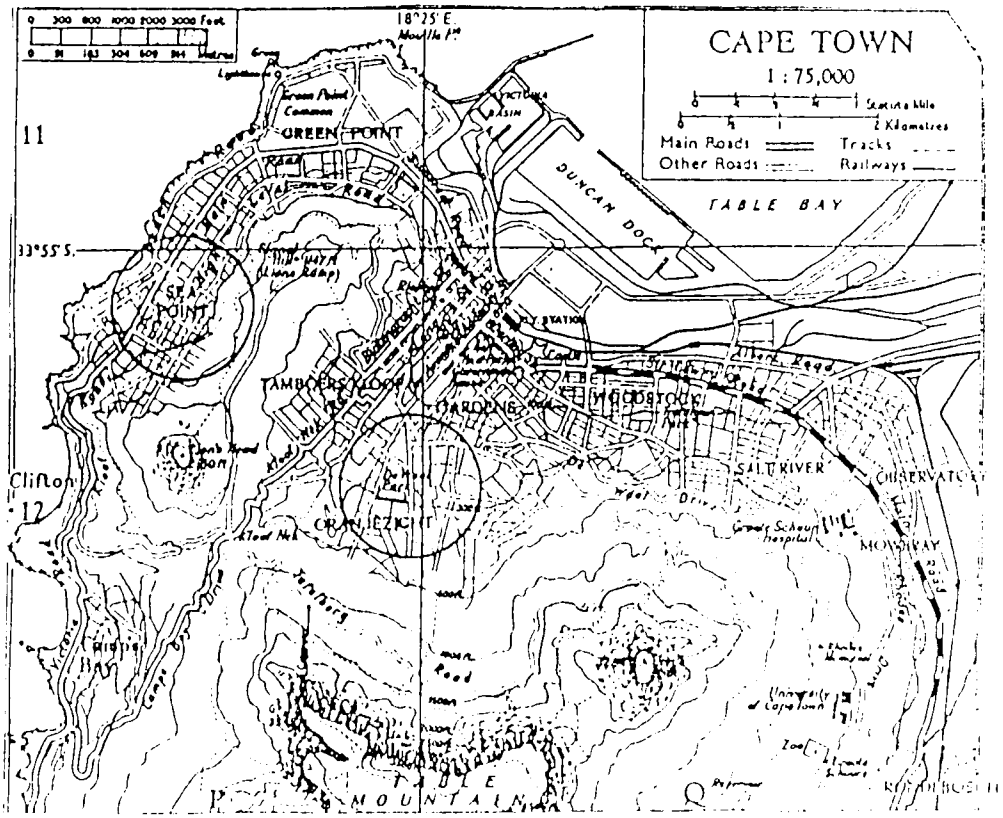
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APPENDIX

Map 1

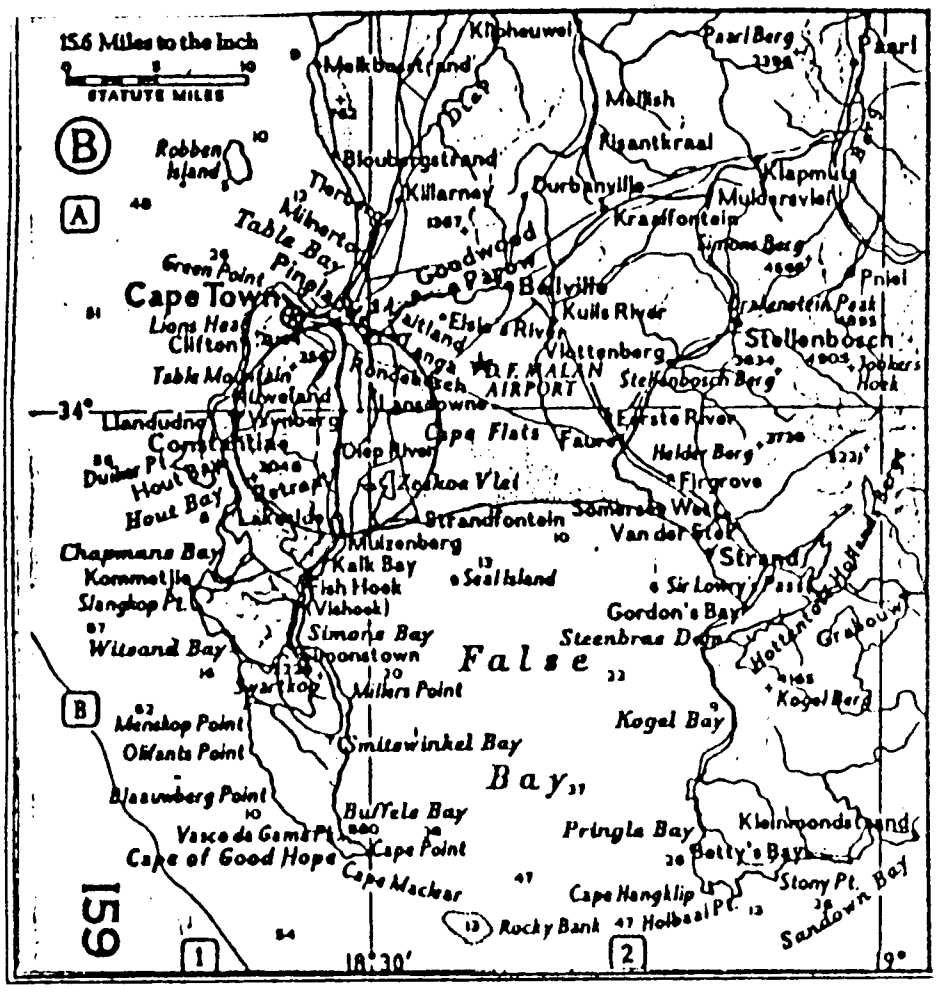
Cape Town



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Map 2

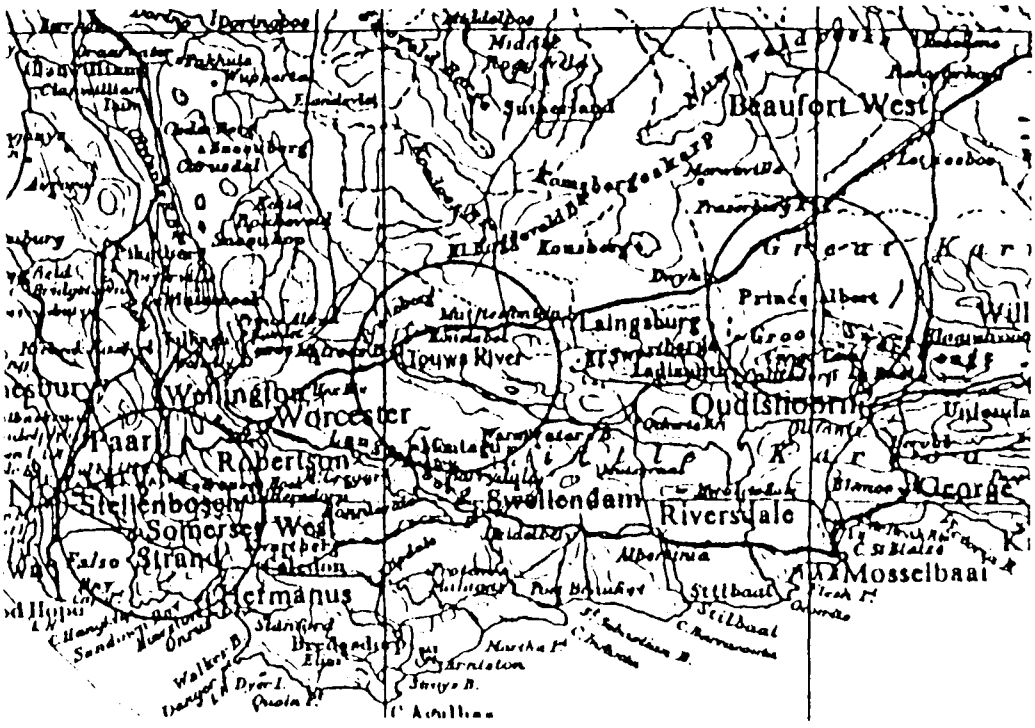
Capetown and Vicinity



National Geographic Atlas of the World 159

Map 3

The Cape



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VITA

Jan Charles Haluska was born in San Francisco, California, on December 17, 1941. Working in his father's print shop gave him an early appreciation for written language while it seemed, for a while, to prepare him for the business world. After graduating with an A.A. degree in business from College of Marin, Kentfield, California, in 1962, he spent three years in the Army (Heidelberg, Germany), returning home via a four-month tour of the East. Two years in the family business left him restless enough to enroll at Pacific Union College in Angwin, California, where he graduated with a B.S. degree in aviation in 1971. From there he entered the M.A. program in English at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, graduating in 1974 with secondary teaching certification.

Jan taught English from 1974-1981 at Georgia-Cumberland Academy, Calhoun, Georgia, serving as flight and ground instructor there also. Then, after taking a year in residence at The University of Tennessee toward a Ph.D. in English, he joined the faculty at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists in Collegedale, Tennessee. He continues to teach at the college, residing in Collegedale with his wife, Marcia, and two sons, Aaron and David.