The shifting frontiers of belonging in the fiction of J.M. Coetzee

Dawn Grieve
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THE SHIFTING FRONTIERS OF BELONGING

IN THE FICTION OF J.M. COETZEE

By

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the award of

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Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the fictional works of J.M. Coetzee to date. There are two aspects to my argument. First I posit that Coetzee adumbrates the prevailing crisis of belonging in the world and the universal yearning for a sense of connectedness. Secondly, I maintain that Coetzee prompts a review of the demarcation lines that divide and alienate in two ways. He installs boundaries that are shifting and unstable. He also represents numerous frontier transgressions that expose the permeability of these finite conceptual constructions and reveals their potential for revision. It is my contention that Coetzee exploits the discrepancy between an ideal of stasis and the dynamic nature of reality in order to demonstrate the possibilities inherent in change. The opportunities for re-imagining frontiers and expanding a sense of belonging are evident in the aporias that show up in both the fixed notion of frontier and the mutating individual experiences of belonging.

This study not only examines a broad range of general cultural theory and more specific critical commentary on Coetzee’s fiction but also provides an integrated response to Coetzee’s own writing, both fictional and non-fictional.

Coetzee’s project can be seen as both metaphysical and metafictional. I concur with most recent critical assessment that his fiction transgresses critical containment and offers extension to a range of debates, from theories on the ethics of reading to postcolonial discourse. The physical realities that Coetzee traces lie across the bounds of rational thinking. He uses textual representations of the body as ontological sites that exceed existing epistemological frameworks. It is my thesis that his oeuvre challenges the very conditions upon which Western discursive structures are founded. These transgressive modalities that lie outside familiar socio-political models call for a creative response from the reader. I have identified the traditional African philosophical concept of ubuntu as a useful tool with which to articulate Coetzee’s feint gesture towards a future site of shared belonging. This study argues that the responsibility of the reader is central to this process.
Coetzee uses the performative function of fiction to adumbrate his metafictional objective, which is to inspire his readers to ethical action.

The overarching claim of this thesis is that Coetzee’s ethical call is to make a difference in the real world. Coetzee’s novelistic methods urge the reader to extend a sense of responsibility beyond hermeneutic engagement with the texts into their own life. Coetzee’s enterprise is, consequently, of great significance in the ongoing debate about the value of literature, the relevance of theory and the need for continuing scrutiny of the agendas of all participants. Similarly, his writing contributes to the vibrant cross-cultural dialogue within South Africa, across the wider African continent and globally, and this continues to open up fresh opportunities for belonging.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

Date 30-01-05
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I would also like to thank my family: my husband, Tom, and my children, Bronwyn, Mary-Anne and Peter for their enthusiasm, support and love.
A NOTE ON THE THESIS

Where the texts of J.M. Coetzee are quoted within the body of the thesis, references have been abbreviated as follows:

1974  Dusklands (D)
1982  Waiting for the Barbarians (WB)
1982  In the Heart of the Country (IHC)
1985  Life and Times of Michael K (MK)
1987  Foe (F)
1988  White Writing: On the Culture of Letters in South Africa (WW)
1991  Age of Iron (AI)
1992  Doubling the Point, Essays and Interviews: J.M. Coetzee (DP)
1994  The Master of Petersburg (MP)
1996  Giving Offense (GO)
1997  Boyhood (B)
1999  The Lives of Animals (LA)
1999  Disgrace (Dg)
2001  Stranger Shores: Literary Essays (SS)
2002  Youth (Y)
2003  Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons (EC)
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1. INTRODUCTION

The recent awarding of the Nobel Prize for literature to J.M. Coetzee adds to an impressive array of prizes for his writing from both his birthplace of South Africa and the international literary community. The accolades for this reluctant celebrity are extensive but, in spite of widespread praise, his work has frequently prompted keen debate and much controversy. That very discussion attests to the political relevance of his fictional enterprise, for Coetzee consistently represents uncomfortable interrogations of the numerous positions that we occupy, the authority that these stances imply, the frontiers that are thus installed and the price that we must then pay for our choices. These protean frontiers and the implications for a sense of belonging are the focus of this study. I shall trace the shifting frontiers of belonging in a diachronic examination of all of the novels in his oeuvre, to date.

The pivotal thrust of my thesis is that Coetzee plays on the shifting, unstable condition of the frontiers in the novels, thus exposing the aporias and flaws in the conceptual construction of frontier as impervious and immovable. His novels prompt a review of the barriers that divide and alienate. My purpose is threefold. I shall examine the complicities of all participants: the writer, the characters and the reader in the hermeneutic process of erecting such fences. I shall also consider the range of strategies that Coetzee employs to unsettle established frontiers and to urge the reader to rethink the conventional boundaries that contain our sense of belonging. Finally, I shall show that Coetzee’s game is not only to scrutinize frontiers but also to encourage the reader to imagine belonging afresh.

Coetzee has created a body of work which challenges the very space which all discourse occupies. Coetzee employs the physical and the fictional to represent his metaphysical and metafictional concerns. The physical realities that he adumbrates lie across the bounds of rational thinking. He uses textual representations of corporeality as ontological sites that exceed existing Western epistemological structures in a number of ways.
It is my intention to demonstrate how Coetzee's transgressive approach makes a major contribution to literary theory and actual cultural and political environments. I suggest that he does this from a marginal position, as the interlocutor between academic thinking, the real world and his creative constructs. He sets his novels up on the boundary between many discourses, transposing some of the theoretical ideas into fictional form but always avoiding the restriction of identifying fully with any position and defying critical containment.

It seems to me that the yearning for connectedness is not fulfilled in Coetzee's novels. The recent publication of Coetzee's Nobel lecture reiterates the isolation of his protagonists (2003b, p.6-7). In this brief narrative the character, a re-inscription of Robinson Crusoe, repeatedly rails against his solitude on the island and his separation from loved ones in England and yet, once home, he avoids company, choosing instead to reflect on the imaginary life of an unnamed character. The overwhelming impression at the end of the tale is one of failure to belong. It is, however, in this very failure that Coetzee is enacting the cost of the frontiers that we install. And, more importantly, he is goading his readers to risk seeking creative options to extend a sense of belonging.

It is my overarching argument that Coetzee presents a sustained ethical drive throughout his works of fiction. I shall show that his ethical responsibility is not merely to question and expand the frontiers of belonging and to represent alternatives to existing patterns of belonging but it is also to generate an ethical impetus in each text that will spur the reader to an ethical response.

Coetzee reveals the frontiers to belonging that seem to pervade modern Western consciousness and he provides excellent examples of revising these boundaries in an attempt to increase a sense of belonging across diverse regions and between different peoples in the world today. All of his protagonists strive to avoid being confined or excluded by the many literal and figurative frontiers that prevail. The physical internment camps, the perceptual traps of colonial heritage, the cage of fame, the prescriptions of eschatology, the hegemonizing strategies of interpretation and even the frameworks of language are all examples of enclosures that contain and estrange. Each subject continually attempts to exceed these limitations, whether historical, physical, psychological, intellectual or textual. Overall these characters fail to secure a sense of
belonging. Nevertheless, at the end of each novel there is a residue of hope for extending a sense of belonging beyond his words into a lived experience in the world.

Temporal and spatial modalities intersect in the various forms of the frontiers that Coetzee represents. From a temporal view point, the changing political milieu, both locally and internationally, is the outer contextual frame in which the novels are crafted. Within each text, the dynamics of the narrative shift the margins that disturb the sense of belonging of the characters. Coetzee also uses a number of metafictional devices to move the boundaries of perception out of familiar domains.

There are a number of spatial connotations of the notion of frontier that are significant to this thesis. Frontiers are sites of great tension and can be seen as precarious definers of belonging. A frontier implies a finite barrier that separates the known from the unknown. Transgression of this divide involves risk. Territorial frontiers are historical lines of demarcation between groups of people. The countless records of disputes across these lines bear clear testimony to the many oppositional associations of the frontier. There is frequently not agreement about the geographic frontiers that exist. National borders often separate members of the same minority groups and this leads to challenges. In a parallel vein, the frontier that distinguishes terrorist from freedom fighter is currently a topic of hot dispute within the international arena. The frontier can, therefore, be described as ambivalent, for it provides protection for those within the fold and yet it traps them within set confines.

It is my contention that the tension which Coetzee exposes in the shifting frontiers is exacerbated in another dichotomy that is inherent to a sense of belonging. Whereas belonging might imply a stable condition of identification with others and/or places, Coetzee reveals a sense of belonging to be an elusive or transient state that cannot be finally fixed. In each novel he tracks a continual process of yearning to stabilize an identity for the self in confrontation with the other. He charts a variety of different performances of such encounters and the mutating patterns of belonging and exclusion that ensue. Again the discrepancy between an ideal of stasis and the dynamic nature of reality is emphasized. Yes, for Coetzee, such uncertainty does highlight the anxieties that are so prevalent today. But I maintain that he achieves so much more in the representation of this duality.
Coetzee not only interrogates simple oppositional understandings but he also demonstrates that a sense of self is incomplete and permeable. It seems to me that this double assertion is the basis of his hopeful projection beyond the texts. The shifts in various experiences of belonging within each narrative and across his *oeuvre* as a whole reveal that the lines that divide and separate are porous and mobile. This refutes notions of impenetrable fixity and binary thinking. Instead Coetzee favours provisionality, fluidity and a shifting sense of self in relation to ever-changing external circumstance. I believe that it is this openendedness that Coetzee inscribes with ethical potential.

I maintain that Coetzee’s novels offer a broadened and provisional border-zone in which a sense of belonging that is transgressive of past paradigms of association and inclusive of future sharings can be re-imagined. The ethical implications of such re-visioning are central to his project. Boundary existence connotes ambivalence, transgression, absorption of difference and risk. It seems to me that, by expanding the concept of frontier, Coetzee has opened it up into a shifting site of creativity with as yet unknown prospects.

The springboard of my engagement with Coetzee’s writing is Mark Sanders’s proposal that the literary work is an important site for considering the “responsibility-in-complicity” of the intellectual (2002b). Sanders argues that ‘any theory that privileges oppositionality or resistance is an incomplete account of responsibility’ (2002b, p.8). In his discussion of the intellectual’s resistance to indefensible systems, such as apartheid, Sanders posits the notion of unavoidable complicity: ‘When opposition takes the form of a demarcation *from* [Sanders’s italics] something, it cannot, it follows, be untouched by that to which it opposes itself...When opposition does not free one from complicity, but depends on it as a condition of possibility, responsibility is sharpened’ (2002b, p.9-10). In my opinion, this “responsibility-in-complicity” that Sanders defines can be seen as the ethical point of origin of all of Coetzee’s fiction that implicates the writer and the reader.

Coetzee installs the various forms of encounters between identities, between the self and the other, in order to examine the inadequacy of Manichean understandings and to transcend oppositional discourse. As a linguist, he includes reflection on the process of representation and the meanings that lie behind the Western philosophical and literary canon, which such self-consciousness refracts. I believe it is as a metalinguistic exercise
that he transcends the binary oppositions and envisions a truly ethical way-of-being which provides a novel example to his readers.

Coetzee uses a number of techniques to achieve this transcendence. He hones in on the body as the site of sensate experience that incorporates and exceeds rational cognition. Using the physical position of his protagonists to subvert their attitudinal positions, Coetzee adumbrates the logical flaws in their worldviews and provides alternative opportunities of lived experience beyond the limitations of intellectual justification. He employs a number of textual strategies to represent shared identification between characters. This creates interesting glimpses of a shared experience of belonging to motivate the reader towards ethical action beyond the text.

The self-reflexive style of his work continually emphasizes the role of the writer and presents a fine awareness of the complicities of the author and the function of writing in perpetuating hegemonies. Coetzee’s gaze encompasses both local and global history, a wide range of recent and earlier literature, the current debates on cultural and literary theory and critical commentaries. There is slippage between non-fiction and fiction in Coetzee’s work. Historical events and current social realities inform his fiction. Thus he establishes an intricate intertextual web, which sets up an oblique laminated dialectic with his critics and a more direct engagement with fellow novelists and poets, the historic events in which his writing is embedded and prevailing thinking.

Finally, Coetzee’s methodology draws attention to the reader’s sense of complicity in the signifying process. This accentuates the shared responsibility of the reader. It is here that the work of the novelist has the potential to be transformed into ethical action in the world.

I think that there are a number of clear parallels between the fictional world of Coetzee’s latest protagonist-writer, Elizabeth Costello, and the real world of the author. Most significantly, the description of the impact of Elizabeth’s writing, by her daughter, can also be seen as a poignant analysis of Coetzee’s own extensive influence. In a brief story about Elizabeth Costello that was published in the New York Review of Books in January 2004, after the 2003 release of the main collection, Helen describes the effect of her mother’s writing. She says that it has ‘changed the lives of others, made them better
human beings, or slightly better human beings...Not because what you write contains lessons but because it is [Coetzee’s italics] a lesson...You teach people how to feel. By dint of grace’ (Coetzee 2004, p.12). For me, this is the crux of Coetzee’s merit.

I suggest that Coetzee’s writing requires the kind of ethical sensibility that Jane Adamson describes:

This kind of non-detached, responsive way of being-in relation entails the surrender of intellectual dominance and cognitive security. It entails risk-taking, and a capability to be in mystery, without defensively reconstructing the world to fit one’s desired shape and pattern. It involves imaginative excursiveness, a going-out of oneself, and also a letting-into oneself of things that may delight, surprise, shock, challenge, intensely disturb. (1998, p.107)

1.1. THE THEORETICAL POSITION OF THE WRITER

Positionality is vital in any examination of Coetzee’s work. Most of his critics would concur that the site from which he writes is strongly contested for it is at the junction of a number of debates. On the one hand, there is the discussion surrounding his own complex heritage as a white South African, an Afrikaner, and a Western intellectual and his present circumstances as an internationally acclaimed novelist and a new migrant to Australia. On the other hand, he situates his writing at the confluence of different discourses. While it would appear that he deliberately selects such nexi, his purpose is less clear. There is now general consensus on the postcolonial focus of his gaze, although the ethical implications of his texts are still keenly debated. He most certainly succeeds in displaying the paradoxes, inconsistencies and collusions in the dominant narrative discourses of Western epistemology: history, politics, cultural theory and the literary canon. In fact, the proliferation of academic engagement with his work is witness to the rigour with which he installs his challenging games. The interrogation of identity formation and the quest to belong in these changing times form a persistent theme, however.
Location of the writer is especially relevant as Coetzee's motherland, the transitional times in which he writes, both locally and globally, and his international stature are highly problematic to any attempt to trace his diasporic sense of belonging. Any effort to secure such a "homeland" would be impossible and counterproductive, for it would entrap the author in the artificial constraints created by this reader's eye. It is, however, essential to consider his relationship with his physical and intellectual environment in order to explore some of the influences that may have impacted upon him, while acknowledging that these will only ever be partial and provisional. Besides the socio-political environments of America, South Africa for the most part, and now Australia, he has also been strongly influenced by the writings of others. Some of the effects can be read in his comments on his personal choices and the positioning of his writing, and his academic essays on the work of others, from the Greek classicists to his fellow white and black South African writers, and novelists and philosophers from across the Western world.

Any attempt to locate the relevance of his *oeuvre* requires a consideration over time. Coetzee has been publishing his fiction for the last twenty-nine years. The period from 1974 to the present has been witness to dramatic transformation in the South African political arena where the vast *official* structure of discrimination based on race has been razed. The majority of the population now enjoys full political participation in their country for the first time, and yet alienating barriers to a sense of belonging persist in the economic hardships experienced by so many and the devastation wrecked by the AIDS virus.

On the international front, there has been some reconfiguring of world power alignments. For example, in the West concerns about the imperialist drive of communism have become superseded by a network of terrorist attacks against Western subjects and fear of excessive capacity for war has shifted from the U.S.S.R. to North Korea and the more elusive anti-Western terror organizations. These changes have had significant impact on the sense of belonging for all involved. Numerous commentators remark on a modern crisis of belonging. It is into this variable and unpredictable space that Coetzee inscribes his narratives about the shifting frontiers of belonging.
A diachronic address of the themes that preoccupy Coetzee may identify either changes or similarities over time, depending on the position of the critic. For example, David Attwell points out three ‘seismic shifts’ (1993, p.118) in Coetzee’s writing across the sequence of his novels up to, and including, the publication of *Age of Iron*. This supports Attwell’s claim to a developmental process that Coetzee undertakes within a historical and political context (1993). In contrast to Attwell’s argument, Sue Kossew maintains that Coetzee’s essential focus has remained the same, and questions, which are raised in *Dusklands*, continue to be addressed in the entire novel sequence (1996, p.2). Kossew’s work includes a study of *The Master of Petersburg*. Kossew suggests that Attwell’s dual ‘concern to place the work historically and to find a developmental pattern in Coetzee’s writerly career . . . tend to obscure what is, . . . , a primary issue in Coetzee texts; that is the ambiguity and ambivalence of the speaking positions of his narrators’ (1996, p.4). Kossew continues that, while Attwell identifies the position that Coetzee’s protagonists occupy as ‘the ambiguous condition of post-coloniality that South Africa inhabits’ (Attwell quoted in Kossew 1996, p.4), he does not expand upon this argument. Her study writes into this critical aporia, paying particular attention to the ambivalent role of the postcolonial writer and the shared responsibilities of the reader.

Dominic Head goes some way to bridging the gap between the positions taken by Attwell and Kossew. Head’s text also concludes with an examination of *The Master of Petersburg*. He maintains that ‘[t]he typical Coetzean preoccupations are all present in this first novel: the analysis of the colonizing psyche; the emphasis on textual structures; the challenge to novelistic conventions, and the self-critique’ (1997, p.3). While there may be some discrepancies between the postcolonial and postmodern definitions given by Kossew and Head, they both concur that Coetzee has sustained the same primary interests throughout his fiction (although both of their critical studies have only considered novels published before 1995). In addition, Head states that:

[t]here is, however, a sense of intellectual continuity through the evolution and development of ideas already present in the *oeuvre*’s opening work. Consequently there is no clear sense of phases to, or clear breaks in, the sequence; rather there is a sense of consolidation and development - a looking back as well as a looking ahead - in each new work, which also represents a unique project in its own right. (1997, p.3)
It is my contention that Attwell and Kossew offer complementary rather than oppositional arguments. Coetzee certainly does present the duality of the settler writer in each of his novels, as Kossew demonstrates in her detailed postcolonial reading of his work. Nevertheless, as Attwell asserts, Coetzee’s writing is also responsive to the critical and the historical realities of the times, including the shocking events that occurred during the states of emergency and the new patterns of post-apartheid relations. Head argues that ‘Coetzee’s work … suggests that postcolonialism as a critical field will need to be reformulated as the processes it maps progress’ (1997, p.160). Here Head is identifying what can be seen as a crucial link between Attwell and Kossew. This does represent both similarity and difference over time. It is this duality that I propose to examine in Coetzee’s novels.

Barbara Adam’s theoretical consideration on the limitations of traditional concepts of time provides a useful metaphoric tool for a critical commentary on Coetzee’s work that considers both a sustained focus and a development of ideas in the novels, rather than prioritising one approach over the other. Adam maintains that ‘...existing models for the structuring of our understanding of social life are based on unacceptable dualisms and take as separate what is fundamentally indivisible’ (1994, p.90) and this includes our classical Cartesian dualistic perspectives of time such as synchrony and diachrony. She proposes the potential of the metaphor of the hologram:

The language of causal determinism is misplaced in a holism where the connections are simultaneous and where everything implies everything else. Simultaneity, mutual implication, and complexity, the time aspects that pose such insoluble difficulty for traditional social theory, appear manageable for a theory based on holographic principles. (1994, p.160)

When used as the modality within which Coetzee’s novels are examined, this visual metaphor would allow for each of Coetzee’s novels to be read as a multiperspective whole, which includes both similarity and difference with other texts. According to Adam, ‘[h]olography has shifted understanding from causal, sequential linear connection chains to interference patterns and from mechanical interaction, organization and transmission of information of individual part to mutual implication’ (1994, p.58).
I now wish to position Coetzee’s fiction more specifically in relation to the increased interest in ethics in literature over the past few years and to the dynamic discussions on the relevance of postcolonial studies in South Africa and globally. The continual vigilance of Coetzee in scrutinizing hegemonic oppressions, including the role of the writer and reader, is commendable for its ethical implications. I would argue that Coetzee’s narratives go beyond oppositional interrogation to open up a space for creative opportunities that lie outside the texts. I shall be considering the mutating barriers to a sense of belonging and the possibilities of belonging that might occur outside the boundaries of resistance. I do acknowledge the limitations of literary criticism in making a practical difference in the world but I would argue that Coetzee’s novels stir the reader to more than mere speculation.

It would appear that much of the current deliberation on ethics centres on who is responsible for the future. In spite of a cacophony of perspectives and a lack of traditional philosophical grounding of much ethical literary commentary, Lawrence Buell identifies the ethical responsibility of reading as ‘one of the most significant innovations of the literature-and-ethics movement’ (1999, p. 13). Derek Attridge elaborates on the ethical responsibility of reading, using the philosophical insights of Emmanuel Levinas (1999, pp.20-31). He argues that this involves potential challenge and risk, for it occurs prior to the formation of moral-political rules and it involves the cognitive, emotional and physical facets of the reader (1999, pp.28-29). He asks: ‘How does the new, the other, come into being when all we have is what we have?’ and he implies that ‘innovative literature and creative criticism’ provide the answer (1999, p.30). It is this inventive responsibility of both the writer and the reader that I shall consider in this study.

I suggest that the notion of ubuntu provides an effective conceptual device for analysing Coetzee’s work for a number of reasons. It brings together the seemingly contradictory notions of imagining future ‘when all we have is what we have’. It is also an invaluable critical tool with which to consider both Coetzee’s urge to exceed the inadequate frameworks of Western epistemology and the contextual environment of renewal in the “New” South Africa. This term, ubuntu, reflects many concurrent cultural trajectories of the immediate South African experience and expands the transcontinental dialogue with African philosophy. It can also be seen as a concept that might be of great
significance to the wider discourse on ethics in literature; thus the local contributes to the general. Importantly, an aesthetic of *ubuntu* offers an example of ethical momentum to the rest of the world.

In my opinion *ubuntu* implies a sense of shared belonging which is clearly future-oriented. According to Sanders, ‘*[u]buntu can be understood as a notion of reciprocity: a human being is a human being through other human beings’ (1999, p.4). Sanders explains that it is the “tranformational potential” of the concept that has prompted its widespread embrace in post-apartheid South Africa: ‘*Ubuntu* takes the place of something absent, something that may never have existed, that lacks a proper name, yet is promised by being posited’ (1999, p.14). In defending an *ubuntu* aesthetic, Michael Titlestad argues that *ubuntu* is an aesthetics of ongoing process, of the desire to experience ontological possibilities (1998, p.7). While Titlestad cautions against ‘the oppressive hegemony of optimism’ (p.7), he asserts that ‘[i]t is in language that all things are figured out of silence into the real’ (1998, p.8). Certainly the language of Coetzee’s novels create a number of opportunities that prompt the reader to conceive of a sense of shared belonging.

I maintain that the field of postcolonial criticism has now negotiated some consensus on the ambiguity and the ambivalence of postcolonial textual representation and on the collusiveness of the writer and reader in colonial domination and exclusion. There has been an increasing focus on hybridity and the inadequacy of basic oppositional dualities (Homi Bhabha 1995, Graham Huggan 1995, and Trinh Minh-ha 1995). Ongoing responsibility is acknowledged, however the jostle for a place to belong persists. Perhaps a shift in the paradigm of what constitutes belonging in new global orders will allow for a respect for other ways of belonging so that the contested site can be shared as a place to which different people can coexist.

It is my contention that the postcolonial positioning of Coetzee’s is well articulated by Head. He argues that ‘we can conceive the model of postcolonialism as transitional to be an extended [Head’s italics] moment of great significance in world history, an economic decolonisation involving movement toward a post-industrial world not yet in evidence’ (1997, p.160). In a review of three texts on postcolonial studies, S. Shankar suggests that the three authors, Leela Gandhi, Aja Loomba and Bart Moore-
Gilbert all intimate that postcolonial theory might have reached a ‘point of exhaustion’ in providing useful methods for analysis of the past (1999, p.146). In their different invocations of “globalization”, Shankar concludes that ‘[i]f the word at the beginning of postcolonial studies was Said’s particular notion of ‘Orientalism,’ will the word at the end be ‘globalization?’’, perhaps signalling new opportunities for postcolonialism rather than its end’ (1999, p.152).

In this nascent stage of interdisciplinary discourse on globalization, Alys Weinbaum and Brent Edwards propose the term “critical globality” to distinguish a method of reading that offers ‘a means to think both on the same plane as, and against the grain of, the neo-imperialist celebration of the ‘globalization’ of culture and capitalist markets’ (2000, p.271). It is my intention to examine the unsettled sense of self and connectedness with place and with others that is experienced by the protagonists and a few other characters in Coetzee’s novels. Then, using the hermeneutical tools of “critical globality”, I shall consider the call for ethical action that Coetzee seems to be making.

This call is not just a theoretical exercise. In post-apartheid South Africa, Kelwyn Sole issues a warming about the possible elitism of postcolonial theorists (1997, pp.116-150). He observes that, amidst the eagerness of academics to ‘clear a space for the ‘other’ to speak’ (1997, p.140), there is also a reluctance to negotiate the underlying socio-political and economic realities of the country (1997, pp.116-150). Sole posits that ‘‘post-colonial’ literary studies in South Africa have become trapped in overweening culturalism’ (1997, p.130), to the neglect of the material circumstances of many who are “other”. Heeding Sole’s admonition, I assert that Coetzee’s novels engage closely with a number of social issues and they impel the reader to take concrete action in the real world, not just in the academy.

Identifying a crisis of belonging might be regarded as the commencement of bridging process between retrospective postcolonial criticism and a current focus on “critical globality”. There are difficulties associated with the specific bridging processes between different philosophical conventions. On the one hand, postcolonial discourse has questioned the superiority of Western rationality. On the other hand, as W.J. Ndaba maintains, the critique of the absolutism of Western thinking by many Africans often
remains caught in ‘positivistic epistemological paradigms’ which then does not ‘develop bridgeheads with other traditions’ (1999, p.176). Instead, Ndaba proposes that African philosophy can be seen as an invigorating and equal contributor to global debate (1999, pp.174-192). I agree with Ndaba and I further suggest that the vibrancy, inclusivity and focus on the future of the concept of *ubuntu* provide the means for such cross-border dialogue.

It is my thesis that Coetzee undertakes such an initiative in his novels. Rather than searching for origins, Annemarie Carusi calls for a socially effective ‘reconstructive programme’ based on heterogeneity, and in which historicism is present and future, rather than past oriented (1991, p.103). The question of how to deal with the violent antagonisms of the past and to create different structures of coexistence continue. It is to this challenge that Coetzee invites his readers. Breyten Breytenbach proposes that ‘[a] beginning, I’d imagine, would be to keep active our sense of topography and our understanding of the human desire to belong somewhere’ (1996, p.154). It seems to me that this is a good starting point for a study of Coetzee’s fiction.

The geographic, temporal and intellectual site from which Coetzee writes has prompted keen postmodernist and postcolonial assessment of his work. Some have pondered whether his work is modern or postmodern (Carusi 1991, Kenneth Parker 1996). Others question his ambivalent relationship with both the postcolonial and the colonial (P.R. Wood 1994, Parker 1996, Stephen Watson 1996, and Jayne Poyner 2000 among others). So, too, the relationship between his novels and the discourse of History has been an ongoing debate (Attwell 1990 and 1993, Helen Gallagher 1993, Mike Marais 1996a, Parker 1996, Benita Parry 1996, Watson 1996, Head 1997, and Georgina Horrell 2002 among others). These analyses can depend upon precise definition of the terms used. Finally, each risks being a game of semantics aiming at hegemony. Watson avoids such a risk by proposing that Coetzee articulates a ‘failed dialectic’ in his novels (1996). He argues that Coetzee uses sophisticated *mise-en-abyme*: Coetzee extends the textual representation of otherness, without academic colonization of the voice of the other (1996).

I favour the emphasis on his intermediary, transgressive, provisional and elusive qualities because this focus takes up Coetzee’s own cue as the master player in his

In my opinion Coetzee’s use of the fictional form allows him to enter into dialogue with international and local theorists and critics of his writing and still include vital “creative play” beyond an intellectual contest. Martha Nussbaum explains that it is the literary imagination that can inspire public imagination to steer ethical social reconstruction (1998, p.224-225). Coetzee offers both the body, as a metalinguage signifier, and moments of shared physical identification to provide invented glimpses of just such a metaphysical possibility.

1.2. A DIACHRONIC ENGAGEMENT WITH COETZEE’S NOVELS

Overall, this is a diachronic engagement with Coetzee’s fiction. Similar themes are repeated throughout his oeuvre, although the angle and focus of his gaze shifts in response to prevailing theories and circumstances. I shall examine a number of novels individually, while still taking into consideration the similarities between the novels and the differences over time according to Adam’s holographic metaphor, as I explained in the previous section. On two occasions I compare two novels in order to mirror the likenesses and to highlight the contrasts between them as further evidence of Coetzee’s dual approach.

The two works that are to a greater extent autobiographical, namely Boyhood (1997) and Youth (2002), inform the readings of the other novels but they are not closely examined in this thesis. The question of whether they are an accurate representation of Coetzee’s earlier life or a merging of imagination and time-tainted memory cannot be answered. There is certainly an indistinct elision, between the author’s private life and his public works, yet I would argue that, unlike the other novels, these two texts are far
more serious than a textual game of wits, an intellectual exercise. Some critical commentary of Coetzee’s writing merely extends the very frontiers that Coetzee is eroding. Interpretations that consider Coetzee’s work as straightforward mimesis of a real socio-political environment miss the ironic subversions that are central to Coetzee’s game.

Throughout his work, Coetzee has exposed the flaw in all confrontational positions that set up one identity or discourse in opposition to another. He has meticulously revealed that all positions of judgement are tainted and therefore unworthy of casting judgement. Now he offers aspects of his own boyhood and youth for public scrutiny. I suggest that critical analysis of the lived experience that is depicted in the two semi-autobiographical works might undermine the interrogations of the ironic subversions in the other novels and hence subvert the valency of this study as a whole. At issue here is the distinction between the games of fiction and real life. Indeed, Coetzee’s apparent confessional honesty is a courageous example of self-scrutiny that could be demeaned by gratuitous critical assessment and risk exposing the unworthiness of the assessor. That is not to say, however, that a consideration of the performative modality of these texts would be transgressive of Coetzee’s personal stories.

A brief consideration of Coetzee’s writing in the seventies reveals a focus on the broad implications of colonial occupation and some of the effects of imperialism on both the colonizing and the colonized subjects. He also considers the ambivalence of the speaking positions of his narrators, the function of the recorded narrative and the role of the writer in extending frontiers. In his earlier work, Coetzee achieves a sweeping overview of colonial domination without becoming entangled in the specifics of local socio-political and academic negotiations. In spite of his later engagement with these realities, I suggest that Coetzee is still able to maintain an independent, borderland ideological position.

In the novels written in the 1970’s, all players find themselves barred from a full sense of belonging. The bizarre outbursts of violence perpetrated by both Eugene Dawn and Jacobus Coetzee, in Dusklands (1974), result in their alienation from those around them and their psychological incarceration in imaginary, self-validating constructions. The colonizing myth becomes a self-perpetuating trap that ironically excludes both of
these colonizers from a sense of belonging. The magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1982a) and Magda in *In the Heart of the Country* (1982b) do not identify with some of the more overt practices of domination and they are both, in fact, victims of oppression themselves, yet their subversive responses frequently reveal covert, albeit unintentional, complicity with the process. Neither can evade their historical positioning, although both glimpse fleeting images of shared belonging beyond the boundaries of their worlds.

In each of these earlier texts the colonized are only viewed through the gaze of the colonizer-narrator. The voices of the marginal others are silenced by multiple layers of inscription and erasure by both the author and the narrators. The narratives of Eugene and Jacobus in *Dusklands* are ironically monological. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate seeks to decipher the scars of empire on the body of the “barbarian” girl but he fails to acknowledge her independent agency. In *In the Heart of the Country*, Magda’s reports on the compliance of the servant couple are increasingly replaced with anger at their defiance of her authority, thus her record shifts from defining their role as employees, or who they are for her, to a denial of who they become for themselves. So too, these colonized others are withdrawn by Coetzee from each of the texts prior to the conclusion of the narratives, leaving a stain of absence that accentuates the isolation of the protagonists.

Concerns with time and space are central in Coetzee’s novels. In the first three novels, Coetzee has carefully distanced his writing from contemporary events in South Africa. In *Dusklands* the American setting of the first section and the seventeenth-century timing of the second South African section ensure that remoteness. The time frame and the location of *Waiting for the Barbarians* are mythical. While *In the Heart of the Country* is situated somewhere in the Karoo region of the Cape Province of South Africa, the timing of the narrative is unclear, merely highlighting the metaphoric exclusion of Magda from current affairs beyond the fences of the farm. This novel does address some of the issues relating to the South African society of a racially based master/servant hierarchy, but many of the geo-political details of the time when Coetzee was writing the text are avoided.
A consequence of repeated distancing from contemporary events in South Africa has been that Coetzee has been able to engage with many of the broader issues implicit in the colonizing process, without having to consider the operational structures that the Nationalist government used to reinforce apartheid. The most pervasive of these strategies has been the restriction of the movement of black people for a number of reasons, perhaps primarily to secure the efficient positioning of this disenfranchised labour force. Such geographical containment of the majority of the population is evidence of a highly organized plan to divide and rule. The most overt of boundaries, whereby this government maintained control in South Africa, was an intricate system of racially defined laws that dictated where different groups could live, work or travel. The cultural impact of this policy has been so widespread that it has been the overriding focus of many novelists and academics of the humanities in that country. Nevertheless, Coetzee has consistently sought to avoid being enclosed in one of the contesting intellectual camps, which Clayton describes as ‘the power politics that have riven the South African scene and are refracted through academic life and criticism’ (1994, p.154). His elliptical approach in the 1970’s has enabled Coetzee to evade many of the sectarian debates among his literary and academic peers.

For not engaging directly with the realities of the oppressive rules of discrimination in his own homeland, Coetzee has been strongly criticized in the past. Among his most ardent critics have been Peter Knox-Shaw (1996), Parry (1994 & 1998), Parker (1996), and Watson (1996). Many of these scholars have challenged his reluctance to represent the tensions in South African society, and so call the attention of his readers to the urgent need to redress the damage being perpetrated by the regime.

I agree with Attwell (1998) that Coetzee has responded to his critics in the two novels, *Life and Times of Michael K* (1985) and *Age of Iron* (1991). Even though *Life and Times of Michael K* is abstruse in its future timing, the central theme of the novel is the consequence of apartheid, the dilemma of where people belong. *Age of Iron* is a direct realist portrayal of the violence that occurred in Cape Town in 1986. It seems to me, however, that Coetzee is able to expose some of the starkest aspects of state enforcement of apartheid, without relinquishing his resistance to taking up an alternative political stance. By aligning the main narrators in both texts with the shifting position of the margins, Coetzee is deliberately choosing an uncertain, provisional position from
which to speak. In my opinion, his continuing refusal of political allegiances, now that the National Party control in South Africa has been replaced by a new government that is not racially constituted, is clearly evident in his later post-apartheid novel, *Disgrace*. The advantage of his non-sectarian reflexive approach is that his writing continues to provide a voice of critical scrutiny that challenges all positions of authority, while creating an ethical condition of ongoing responsibility from which alternatives might emerge.

While Coetzee continues to represent the ambiguous position of the postcolonizer-as-narrator, during the eighties and nineties there are two notable shifts in his writing, which can both be described as a honing of his gaze rather than a change in his outlook. First, the marginalized others maintain a more persistent presence until the end of the texts. This attests to the centrality of their position in the unfolding narratives of the local region and the wider significance of their representation in ongoing theoretical debates. Secondly, Coetzee’s eye narrows onto the numerous barriers that the network of apartheid laws erect in his next two novels that are located in South Africa. By exploring the complex map of population segregation, Coetzee engages directly with one of the most debilitating aspects of the system. The increasingly intricate pattern of exclusions and inclusions, that formed the basis of government policy for most of the second half of the twentieth century, has had extensive ramifications on the sense of belonging of all people in that country. It is this pervasive crisis of belonging that Coetzee is addressing in *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Age of Iron*. The ramifications of that damaging system that persist in post-apartheid South Africa are laid bare in *Disgrace* (1999b).

Coetzee sharpens his focus on the colonized in the texts written after the 1970’s. In the earlier three works the colonized leave a chimera of their imprint on the consciousness of the narrators but Coetzee removes them from the text, out of the direct view of the narrators and the readers, before the end of the novels. While the identity of the excluded others may still be impenetrable in the next three novels, these fringe-dwellers become the focus at the end of the text, with the colonizers themselves receding out of sight. *Life and Times of Michael K* concludes with Michael, alone, imagining a future on the land with a companion. The white woman protagonist of *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren, is dying at the end of the text, leaving the tramp, Vercueil, to convey her letter to
her daughter in America. In *Foe* (1987) both the storytellers, Mr Foe and Susan Barton, have died by the final scene, and an unknown narrator observes the extensive force of the silent Friday’s presence. This increasing focus on the marginal others demonstrates a developmental aspect to Coetzee’s fiction.

The boundaries between the postcolonial critique and neo-colonial repetition are troubled in *Disgrace*. While David’s surrender of the last vestige of his sense of belonging, his attachment to the lame dog is foregrounded, Petrus’s occupancy of the future fills the background scene in terms of his land ownership and the two related expected children to his wife and proposed wife, Lucy.

The collusive role of the writer and the reader in installing hegemonic structures comes to the fore in three of the novels. While the complicities of the writer are most overt in the first of these texts, *Foe*, the associated responsibilities for the outcome of an author’s influence become the focus in *The Master of Petersburg* (1994). The notion of “responsibility-in-complicity” becomes extended in this novel in the blurring of the margins between identities. Even the reader is implicated by her/his involvement in the entangled signifying process. The eight narratives about Elizabeth Costello present a pastiche of the embeddedness of all lives that attests to our individual obligation for the world as it is and as we wish it to be.

In chapter two I first consider Coetzee’s representation of the personal and collective frontiers to a sense of belonging in two narratives. A modern story of the damaging effect of violence on an individual’s psychological health contrasts with a tale of an aggressive eighteenth-century explorer. Each protagonist is trapped and isolated within the restrictive framework of his colonial consciousness. In a retrospective dialectic I then examine the textual strategies that Coetzee employs to re-examine the crisis of belonging that these characters experience. It is my argument that Coetzee offers a review of the notion of frontier that allows the reader to envisage a way out of the debilitating sense of estrangement that is pervasively associated with Western identity, even though such revision is not available to either protagonist.

Coetzee presents a shift in thinking about frontier as a solid and immovable line dividing two opposing sides towards a space that is more permeable and dynamic, where
negotiations between both sides can occur. Coetzee uses the various historic accounts of the second narrative of imperial expansionism to present a revised discourse on frontiers. He combines a specific historic and geographic model of territorial occupancy and naming to present the idea of a frontier as a widened area that is continually open to change.

This reconsidered approach to boundary as a broadened and incomplete arena is then read back into the discrepancies in the brittle self-representations of the two protagonists. The contradictions between their well-reasoned self-justifications and their increasingly paranoid and manic behaviour can be seen as perforations in their rigid self-formulations. In the light of Coetzee’s revision of frontiers, these flaws allow the reader to contemplate what might lie beyond the isolating captivity that each narrator’s closed and confrontational sense of self reflects. It seems to me that Coetzee’s ethical purpose commences here. The idea of being open to the influences and dialogue of others suggests a more amenable approach to working together with others to create a shared sense of belonging.

Theories relating to ongoing subject formation in relation to others and to place, such as those of Julia Kristeva (1992) and Paul Carter (2000a), inform the discussion on the issues of alienation and creating more expansive options for shared belonging. The retrospective dialectic that is set up not only exposes the fallacy of fixed imperviousness that can be associated with the personal margins of identity and the collective understanding of boundaries but also presents a dynamic border area that is porous and open to being continually re-imagined beyond the text. The ethical drive here is for ongoing renegotiation of the multiple frontiers that separate and estrange, and continual vigilance to ensure that frontiers are sites of more inclusive reconsideration, rather than definers of confrontation.

The key themes that Coetzee persistently uses to reconfigure shifting notions of frontier and the ways in which these might be revised to enhance a sense of belonging are introduced in this first novel. These include the Western individual’s extensive sense of alienation in the world, from unease about recalcitrant aspects of the self to confrontation with others. Coetzee also presents a continual movement between perceptions of centre and margin, multiple frontiers from various temporal distinctions
to spatial barriers and language hegemonies, the body as presence that cannot be framed by rational discourse. The similarities between the two narratives link different ages and locations and point towards global significance and the ethical responsibilities of holographic “creative play” (in Adam’s terms).

The exclusion from a sense of belonging for a colonial daughter in *In the Heart of the Country* is critiqued in chapter 3. In this novel Coetzee is interrogating the colonial myth that possession secures a sense of belonging. I trace the limitations between the parallel constructs of Magda’s isolated inner identity and her entrapping outer reality. Place, time and language all present oppositional boundaries to Magda’s yearning for connectedness, her drive to reconfigure a community of belonging for herself. Arturo Masolo provides the philosophical starting point for my approach that emphasizes the continual cross-fertilization between African and Eurocentric ontologies. Coetzee subverts traditional conceptual patterns by destabilizing the dualities of fact and fantasy and linear and cyclical temporal modalities and the implications associated with spatial symmetry and asymmetry. This has the effect of unhinging fixed ideas about belonging and it creates a sense of openness to other ways of thinking. It is my contention that, having called into question some known frontiers that define a sense of belonging as a precedent for unsettling frontiers, Coetzee then directs his attention to the highly controversial frontier of sexual transgression. Three of the characters, Magda, her father and Hendrik, are all transgressors and are themselves transgressed. By providing a blurred boundary between abuser and victim in the closest colonial frontier, the body, Coetzee is raising doubt about the finality of all of the frontiers that we erect. Into this disturbed swirl of identification markers, Coetzee presents two opportunities for beginning to imagine a community outside the restrictive fold of a Western heritage.

It is my argument that Magda offers transition from a closed and exclusive past to a future of coexistence. This extends the expanded notion of an incomplete and porous border-zone of the first novel to include identification among people as a vital aspect of belonging. For a short while Magda is both the colonizer and the colonized as the owner of the farm and the object of Hendrik’s counter-colonizing sexual claim. Even though she does not recognize the comparison, the fact that the two of them share the same theoretical position can be seen as a movement forward from the incapacity of the protagonists in the first fictional work. As tenuous and uneasy as that brief moment of
commonality may be, it can be seen as a strategy to prise open the hostile barrier between opponents. So too, Magda actively envisions her unity with the essential femaleness of Klein-Anna. This creative site is characterized by an emptiness that transcends the limitations of existing cultural discourses and projects an intimation of sharing for the reader to develop. Coetzee is once again presenting an ethical challenge to his readership to reappraise the frontiers that define us and our floundering sense of displacement, and he is inspiring us to listen to new strains of creativity.

In chapter four I compare two novels, *Waiting for the Barbarians* and *Foe*, in order to demonstrate the two aspects of Coetzee’s trajectory. This includes a sustained scrutiny of imperial structures, the inescapable restrictions of the reluctant emissaries of the colonial enterprise, the magistrate and Susan Barton, and his transgressive approach to discursive frontiers in order to seek out cross-border opportunities for coexistence. There is also some development in his representation of otherness. Heeding Njabulo Ndebele’s call for reciprocal listening within a heterogeneous society (1994), it is my contention that Coetzee not only subverts familiar Western cultural paradigms, including key temporal, spatial, ecological, Christian and gender concepts, but also increasingly pays attention to the potential of the unknown narratives of the other voices of “barbarian” girl and Friday. Gary Saul Morson extends Bakhtin’s idea of open-ended time with the theory of “sideshadowing” (1994) that is of particular relevance in my study of alternative options of co-existence in Coetzee’s two texts.

There is a shift across the two novels from a distant outline of the hegemonies associated with narrative form in *Waiting for the Barbarians* to a close-up gaze on the ambiguities of narrative authority. Questions about the narrative, to whom it belongs and whom it excludes and the ways in which the silenced others can be recuperated without being appropriated are examined. Again physical presence transcends the boundaries of discursive thinking from the postcolonial to gender discussions and invites the reader to look beyond current debate towards her/his own complicity in the signifying process and the ethical implications of opening up new patterns of negotiation on belonging in place and with others.

*Life and Times of Michael K* and *Age of Iron* offer parallels of the extensive damage to any sense of belonging that the apartheid system wrought and these are
examined in chapter five. Again the comparison reveals both Coetzee’s ongoing concern with the debilitating ambiguities of the colonial condition and a developmental aspect to his writing that engages with the changing geo-political environment and current critical thinking. Some historic information provides a necessary outline of the apartheid system. The brutal impact of the segregation laws on the society is evident in both texts, yet Coetzee’s fictions extend beyond mere mimesis. Kwame Appiah flags the inadequacy of oppositional discourse to address present-day postcolonial needs (cited in Bell 1997), while Jean-Marie Makang stresses the epistemological importance of *ubuntu* as an ‘ontology of participation’ (1997). The notion of *ubuntu* provides an inclusive theory for analysing the transitional value of the two marginal characters. Michael K and Vercueil are each a textual representation of an ‘in-between’ hybrid ontology that is metonymic of engagement with both African and European traditions and offers cross-fertilization of ideas for diverse people to belong on the African landscape and with others. This South African example is of global significance.

The performative modes of address of the two narratives are quite different. The drive to establish meaning can be seen as a drive to secure belonging through rational domination and is not easily avoided as the dialogue between the narratives of Michael K and that of the medical officer demonstrates. The process of relinquishing this central position of authority is explored in Mrs Curren’s story. The suffering bodies of others and her own cannot be ignored for they impose a transgressive purpose that defies all logic, the foundation of her entire worldview. Although Mrs Curren does relinquish her past attachments, she does not achieve a sense of reciprocity by the end of this text. Nevertheless, the examples of Michael and Vercueil do open up a creative space for belonging in place and with others that lies beyond existing legal and discursive structures.

In chapter six I consider *The Master of Petersburg* as a pastiche of multiple mergings between identities. The pervasive blurring of boundaries between different factual and fictional stories unsettles all frameworks of association whereby meaning is secured and presents continually mutating patterns of affiliation and conflict, similarities and differences. My study of this mobile provisionality is supported by ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), Kristeva (1982, 1991 & 1992), Bhabha (1995) and Michel Foucault (cited in K. Racevskis 1988 and J, Rajchman 1985). In the diachronic textual
representation of Dostoevsky, his inner emotional trauma at the death of his stepson, Pavel, intersects with his outer experiences of alienation in St Petersburg. Dostoevsky’s identity as a public figure and as a private man who is separated from the place and people with whom he belongs are both represented. In this doubled performative mode I demonstrate how Coetzee creates new opportunities for belonging that exceed the boundaries of individual identities and established discursive structures, while not forgetting the ethical implications of writing and interpretations. The mirroring of the many dualities of the protagonist reveals a fault line in his sense of self, through which otherness seeps. This crack is ambivalent, for he comes face to face with the demons within himself and he is able to escape his desperate isolation in his mergings with Pavel, in his inner imagination and his outer appearance in the dead boy’s clothes.

The paradox that this novel exposes is that self-validation and belonging, as well as self-abnegation and exclusion, both occur in relation to others. By acknowledging the devil within the self, the individual is able to engage fruitfully with others in shared collaboration, without reducing the other to a reflection of the self or perceiving the other as incomprehensible. This is relevant to the lives of the author and the reader and their interactions with others as well as in broader political and cultural spheres.

Dostoevsky is trapped in the specific realities of a complex mesh of synchronic intertextual allusions and yet he transcends these constraints in his writing, for it is fiction that is able to map out a space that challenges all premises upon which systems of meaning are based but is non-oppositional. Biblical imagery of the Crucifixion attests to the risk and courage of moving beyond our epistemological comfort zone in the ambivalent connotations of sacrifice and salvation and emphasizes the importance of writer and reader accountability for ethical choices in the game of signification that they are playing.

Post-apartheid South Africa provides the setting in which the maps that define our sense of belonging are scrutinized in Disgrace. In chapter seven I examine the protagonist’s shifting position in the new environment and his quest to belong in unfamiliar socio-political configurations of the times. By tracing David Lurie’s cyclical journey, I follow the trail of an essential frontier to belonging that is the disparity between static concepts that fix a sense of identity and the dynamic reality of lived
experience. There is progression in the theme of relinquishment, which was introduced on the death-bed of David’s predecessor, Mrs Curren, in *Age of Iron*. David, literally and figuratively, moves away from a defunct framework in which the laminations of his hegemony secured his sense of himself and his place in society. He comes to a full appreciation of his own abasement in a most insignificant place where, stripped of all attachments and past affiliations, he begins to be receptive to different forms of belonging that are not defined by the past but are open to creative change.

Coetzee’s perennial concern with the confining paradigms of Western patterns of belonging is evident. The ambivalent example of the new landowner, Petrus, is both a neo-colonial repetition of past dominance and a sign of a new form of coexistence. In the embodiment of three women David is given three examples of transformational relinquishment relating to sexual domination, canonicity and colonial occupation. Marais argues that *Disgrace* flags the possibility of ethical action (2000:59). This nub of the novel begins in the final lines in a site from which all meaning has been cleared, a space for fresh invention. Bill Ashcroft’s discussion on “habitation” rethinks notions of occupancy that are empowering to the dispossessed (1997). I extend Ashcroft’s theory to include the idea of shared empowerment that is grounded only in presence rather than in historic Eurocentric patterns of ownership. The future coexistence of the two pregnant white and black women on the land and their shared roles as wives of the new landowner projects an option of unknown ethical potential beyond the text.

In chapter eight I show how the shifting pattern of transitory associations and solitariness of *Elizabeth Costello* (2003a) is evidence of the modern crisis of identity and belief. Mae Henderson describes a cross-border perspective that encompasses a view of both sides of frontiers without displacing the margins (1995, p.27). This notion of “double vision” informs my reading of duality of the Elizabeth Costello lessons that brings scholarship and fiction together. On the one hand, each lesson installs a detailed discussion of a different theoretical proposition. On the other hand, the “creative play” of the fictional narrative exposes the limitations of conceptual thinking and rational discourse that is not embedded in specific lived experiences. This balance highlights the value of the novel as a site where ideas can be negotiated and extended beyond discursive frontiers.
The desire to belong is universal, although a secured sense of belonging remains elusive. In this chapter I examine the aporia between the present condition of being and a future-directed longing for connectedness in the various facets of Elizabeth’s representation. Coetzee sustains his focus on the ambiguities of marginal existence and the transgressive value of the body while he charts a range of escalating anxieties of the times.

All players, the author, the audience at his lectures, the characters and the readers are shown to be complicit in constructing the world that we confront. Coetzee’s novels reveal how our judgements create the fences that form our sense of belonging and exclusion. In *Elizabeth Costello* Coetzee extends our gaze to encompass global issues and our personal responsibility for reconfiguring the boundaries that demarcate and divide. Her final vision through the gates reveals the emptiness of a future promise of a final place of belonging and persuades the reader to refocus on ethical action now.
2. DUSKLANDS: AN ENDLESS DISCOURSE ON FRONTIERS

*Dusklands* consists of two distinct novellas. The first is the narration of a mythographer, Eugene Dawn, whose professional task as a member of the War Office is to improve the effectiveness of America’s military machine in Vietnam, but his private life is increasingly disrupted by the effect of his imperial project. The second is a three-part account of the confrontation between an eighteenth-century explorer, Jacobus Coetzee, and the Khoisan people of the Western Cape in South Africa. Jacobus’s own narrative is followed by two other accounts of the events that he records. The two apparently disparate narratives explore similar traits of the colonial identity.

In this chapter I propose to demonstrate that Coetzee establishes a dialectic juxtaposition between the two narratives in *Dusklands*, which underscores the range of personal and collective barriers to a sense of belonging. These start with the immediate irritations of Eugene in which his physical needs interfere with his concentration and conclude with broad geographic frontier concepts. I do agree with a number of critics, Wood (1994), Kossew (1996) and Michael Vaughan (1998) among them, who argue that these tales emphasize the ambiguities of the imperial process, and yet it is my contention that the work achieves more than this. I think that Coetzee’s novel includes examples that erode connotations of rigidity frequently associated with colonial consciousness. I further maintain that these more flexible edges allow the reader to think about how the many boundaries that segregate and exclude can be renegotiated. Questions relating to the barriers that we erect spur the reader to contemplate her/his role in setting or shifting frontiers in order to improve a sense of belonging.

All of the main themes relating to the numerous frontiers to belonging that are repeated throughout Coetzee’s fiction will be introduced in this chapter. These include the encounter of otherness within the self, which will develop into various imaginary mergings between characters in later texts, and confrontation between the self and others. The geopolitical environment of each story also establishes a framework of spatial and temporal margins that compound singular and group experiences of connectedness and isolation. Coetzee interrogates the authority associated with establishing meaning and the ways in which both the author and the reader are
implicated in such a process of signification. It is in this border-crossing between the fictional and the real worlds that Coetzee’s ethical purpose can be discerned.

The frontiers in *Dusklands* are pervasive and layered but they can also be seen as porous and expandable. The way in which Coetzee represents individual identity and general territorial frontiers in this first text encourages an active revisioning of the essential idea of an impervious dividing line between opposing positions and, instead, offers the mobility of shifting entrenched patterns of thought to open up options for more inclusive approaches.

In my opinion, the textual gaps between the self-representations of both Eugene and Jacobus and their actions signify identity frontiers that are permeable and have the dual potential for contamination and renewal. There is a contrast between these two characters’ self-rationalization as thoroughly logical people and their increasingly manic behaviour. This attests to their vulnerability to the people and situations around them. It also implies that the margins of their sense of self are spongy. It is as if the effect of the violence in the world cannot be kept at bay. They each perceive their encounters with others and with the circumstances in which they live as tainting to their “pure” private self-construction. Their specific experiences of confrontation exacerbate their sense of estrangement, yet the holes that are exposed in their respective self-portrayals as thoroughly rational people also create an impression of unavoidable porosity which leaves a creative space open for alternative ways of being.

Different possibilities of relating to invasive otherness that cannot be kept out are not realized in the text, however, for each tale ends with the protagonist trapped in a self-delusional gridlock, or duskland fog. Nevertheless, there is a shift in the notion of frontier from a solid and confining barrier to an incomplete boundary that invites innovation. This possibility is hinted at in Eugene’s surname, Dawn. I suggest that Coetzee makes use of the dynamic textual potential that he adumbrates in this first novel to rethink the maps that define our sense of belonging in his subsequent fiction.

The theories on subject formation and the abject of Kristeva provide a useful loom through which to weave Coetzee’s trajectories. Both writers share similar interests in the importance of language in the continual mediation of meaning and a sense of
identity. Coetzee endorses the linguistic ideal of dialogism, whereby ‘reality and history are purely the constructs of language’ (DP, p.145) and he argues that the primal “I” cannot be recovered (DP, p.75) and so the quest for the “I” becomes an attempt to confront a void or, in Jean-Paul Sartre’s representation of consciousness, as ‘a hole through which nothingness pours into the world’ (quoted in DP, p.74). It is the distinction between the “I” as an apparently cohesive construct that is represented in a narrative and the existential experience of the narrating self as a fragmented being that Coetzee traces in all of his novels, beginning with Dusklands. The protagonist of In the Heart of the Country, Magda, emphasizes this duality: ‘I create myself in the words that create me’ (IHC, p.8).

As a psychoanalyst, Kristeva is concerned with the incomplete and continuing formation of the subject. Her first mentor, Jacques Lacan, added to Freudian theory with a definition of a pre-Oedipal, mirror stage (1992, p.127). Kristeva has extended these ideas. Like many of her contemporaries, Kristeva also believes that meaning is not stable, so identity is not fixed. Subjects are only ever in the process of becoming. For her, they may be said to be ‘subjects-on-trial’, as they continually need to define themselves against others in an on-going attempt to stabilize meaning (1992, pp.128-129). There is a gap between our self-perception and our self-representation. Like Sartre, Kristeva’s theory is based on an essential confrontation between subjectivities that exposes the disparity between the enunciating “I” and the enunciation event. It seems to me that Coetzee traces around these lacunae in the protagonists’ dual representations as mind and body, their encounters with others and their orientation in their worlds. The eventfulness of the narratives can be seen to contradict the self-representation of the two narrators.

Some of the ramifications of such discrepancies are further illustrated in Coetzee’s later fiction. In The Life and Times of Michael K, the soldiers’ interpretation of Michael K as a calculating terrorist when they discover his cache of pumpkins on the neglected farm, contradicts his solitary, non-confrontational nature. The contrast between the inner angst and the outer renown of the character of Dostoevsky in The Master of Petersburg explores this difference in detail.
From the outset, Coetzee sets up the body as the ambiguous signifier that troubles the neat demarcation between the rational and the irrational. This study of belonging commences with the two protagonists and their individual sense of self as divided into a mind/body dichotomy. Eugene and Jacobus appear to be hemmed in by their inflexible self-perception. Bodies, both their own and others, present textual evidence that challenges their self-representation as fixed identities whose justifications for their rigid worldviews are valid. Each character attacks a child in a most overt contradiction of their professed sense of their own superior sense of humanity. Their actions contradict their words.

Coetzee shows similarities in both protagonists’ inability to secure an impenetrable hold for the self. This occurs when the holes in their self-justifying armoury are exposed in their violent confrontation with others. Paranoia about his boss, a man ironically also named Coetzee, continually distracts Eugene’s attention. The weakness of Jacobus’s dominance is uncovered when his servants defy him. The incompleteness of identity and the vulnerability of the self in encounters with others are reinforced in the parallel tales of these two subjects-on-trial. In the end Coetzee ensures that they are each cordoned off from others to contain their damaging malaise. Again Coetzee encourages a review of frontiers as sites of defence and segregation by following the fractures in the protagonists’ reasoning and by finally isolating them to halt the spread of their aggressive madness.

Even though Coetzee contrasts the tight enclosure of Eugene’s encounter with the world around him in a series of neat rectangular motifs with the expansive canvas of Jacobus’s adventure, the limitations that their respective horizons present are the same. On the one hand, Eugene is anxious to confine his activities and his gaze to the well-managed compartments of a number of rooms and the clearly marked frames of his collection of war photographs. Jacobus, on the other hand, offers a sweeping brush-stroke into an unknown hinterland. Nevertheless, the threat of that which may lie beyond their respective spatial and conceptual frontiers is equally formidable as a destructive force that counteracts their self-construction. In Eugene’s tale, Coetzee uses two strategies to further perforate the concept of a set frontier. First, parallel imagery collapses the distinction between indoor and outdoor scenes. Secondly, the protagonist’s
uncanny appreciation of his condition in spite of his obvious mental imbalance raises doubts about an absolute barrier between sanity and derangement.

The geocultural map that is documented in the historic accounts that follow Jacobus’s narrative offer two further shifts in the theory of frontier. In these subsequent recordings, Coetzee expands the spatial and temporal implications of a frontier into a broadened, more malleable area that reflects back onto the identities of the two protagonists and encourages the reader to rethink the imperviousness of the barriers to their sense of belonging. Within a spatial modality, I consider the historic “widened” borderland zone of Namaqualand, and the implications for rethinking the idea of frontier as an expanded site for creative sharing rather than as a separating line between binary oppositions. In a diachronic scan I also examine the way that the naming of nature by successive inhabitants and explorers highlights temporal openendedness. This, in turn, connotes incompleteness and receptivity to future re-inscription.

By inverting the chronological time sequence of the two narratives and presenting the more recent story before the eighteenth-century tale, Coetzee is installing a retrospective dialectic. This has the effect of reinforcing the idea of historical continuity. In both narratives, Coetzee demonstrates that colonial domination results in a loss of a sense of self for it denies the other. The second novella also presents expanded conceptual ground in the tracings of unfinalized territorial and naming domains in subsequent historical accounts that prompts a retrospective reconsideration of the unyielding identity of Jacobus and the closed modern story of Eugene’s debilitating alienation.

In my opinion, Wood (1994, pp.181-195) and Vaughan (1998, pp.50-65) provide complementary starting points from which to examine the individual experiences of isolation of the two protagonists. Wood pinpoints the essential ambivalence of identity formation in his observation of the similar way of being-in-the-world of both characters where ‘the Other, whose independent existence as a centre of consciousness has been denied, or demeaned, or impotently raged at, is now appealed to in order to affirm my own existence’ (1994, p.182). I suggest that this causes a perpetual tension between a desire to belong and a sense of exclusion. Vaughan concurs with Wood that the main characters display identical ‘modes of consciousness’ in that they are both agents of the
same Western imperialist thrust to know and control nature and he adds that the drive to
subjugate and dominate implicates Western civilization as a whole, including Coetzee
and his readers (1998, pp.54-60). It seems to me that Vaughan’s stance can be seen as an
extension of Wood’s suggestion of a contradiction when he argues that ‘Western
civilization is in a state of profound, indeed irreversible crisis...[because the] reversal of
the impetus of Western domination can only come from the outside, [Vaughan’s italics]

It seems to me that the importance of Vaughan’s contribution is his identification
of the significance of the ambiguous malady of estrangement and entrapment within
Western consciousness in the novel. I further suggest that this represents a widespread
危机 in a sense of belonging that has global implications. I agree with Vaughan that
Coetzee’s first novel exemplifies this ambivalent state and that Coetzee is unable to
provide an explanation of the condition for he presents an acute critical awareness of the
limitations of fictional language to reflect experiences outside the modality of its own
dialectic (1998, p.60). Nevertheless, it is my argument that Coetzee accomplishes more
than a mere recognition of the symptoms of the double-edged colonial identity.

I propose that Coetzee presents two expanded geographic frontiers that offer a
precedent for shifting out of the restricting impasse that Vaughan observes. Coetzee
describes the marginal territory where the Nama people and the Cape adventurers roam
and as a site that is inhabited by people from both sides of the colonial divide and the
progressive re-naming of natural features implies an incomplete process. Both examples
attest to a capacity for sharing and ongoing dialogue that is of mutual benefit beyond the
specific eighteenth century context. When these historic and geographic reconfigurations
of a broadened frontier zone are read back into interpretations of confrontational identity
formation, the creative potential inherent in the flaws that have been noted in the rigid
rational self-definition of the two protagonists becomes highlighted. This retrospective
approach reinforces the latent value in renegotiating the way in which we construct our
sense of self and our perceptions of our place in the world.

It is also my intention to extend the metafictional critiques offered by Kossew
and Attwell. I agree with Kossew’s identification of a twofold quest in the novel,
namely, a literal expedition into an unknown landscape and a metaphorical journey into
their own psyches by the two protagonists (1996, pp.41-47). Kossew further suggests that a paradoxical emptiness that dispossesses the penetrator is encountered at the heart of darkness (1996, p.43) and she concludes that Coetzee is focussing on the relativity of historical account and the fictive nature of the colonizing self (1996, p.47). This core emptiness is encountered by most of the characters in Coetzee’s novels from Magda in his next novel, In the Heart of the Country, to Elizabeth Costello in his latest work. While I do acknowledge the fictionalising process in all representations of the self and the provisionality of all discursive formulations, which Coetzee’s novels emphasize, I am concerned with discerning a textual site that may lie beyond the colonizing self, where the post-colonizer might also be able to take up provisional residence and a sense of shared belonging might be experienced by all.

In my opinion, the effect of the parody that Attwell identifies in Coetzee’s novel (1993, pp.35-48) is to destabilize the referents that secure subject positioning. As a consequence of this unsettling, both protagonists, Eugene and Jacobus, experience parallel traumas in relating to those around them and they become increasingly isolated. Attwell argues that, in spite of a diagnostic and critical focus in this first novel, ‘it also finds a minor corner in which to position a different, displaced narrative subject, one that will develop and steadily find its own voice, or voices in the corpus as a whole’ (1993, p.58). This, I would add, points to an alternative creative space of belonging in the continuing process of decolonisation. It is the capacity of this frontier space to expand into an elastic and absorptive site where ethical co-existence can be conceived that I intend to examine in this and subsequent chapters.

2.1. THE PERSONAL

2.1.1. THE MIND/BODY DICHOTOMY

Coetzee presents the mind and body dichotomy of the subject as the most immediate site of confrontation in which individual identity is wrested. In Dusklands he explores the tension between modernist Cartesian consciousness and physical representation. Using Kristeva’s theory of the abject, I shall track the incongruities
between the two narrators' self-expression in language and their behaviour. The fissures between their thinking and their experiences are evidence of the incompleteness of their identity and their escalating struggle to carve out a safe site of belonging for themselves in the face of confrontation. The abundant connotations of uncontrollable leakage in both narratives attest to the partial and indistinct margins of identity. While this certainly does explain the two protagonists' insecurities, in my opinion it also unlocks a space for the reader to ponder ways of being that might inspire an attitude that is more willing to embrace otherness within the self and also the differences of others.

I agree with both Head and Kossew who suggest that this narrative requires a resistant reader. Head states that 'the novel requires a resisting reader, able to resist the element of enactment, and to recognize a positive self-critique in the restrictive style, a process of catharsis in which the postmodernist writer confronts (and exorcizes) the danger of self-enclosed textual play' (1997, p.3). Kossew suggests that 'the discourse of the text compels the reader to read against the narrator's voice, revealing the self-mythologizing and self-fictionalising processes in which the writer has become involved' (1996, p.36). Each of these critics recognizes the self-defeating cycle of modern identity politics in Coetzee's text.

It is my intention to extend the notion of a borderland position so that not only flaws in immovable "frontier" construction are highlighted but also feasible new choices can be mooted. It seems to me that Kristeva's theory of the abject contributes to her idea of subject formation as an ongoing process that provides for both an interrogation of frontiers as rigid dividers and as places of enormous embryonic optimism (1982). Theory of the abject not only vivifies the ambivalence associated with the aporias in mind/body dichotomies but also prompts reflection on creative opportunities (1982).

I contend that the abject, as defined by Kristeva, is the conceptual site at which a sense of belonging and exclusion that is associated with all models of frontier commences. Kristeva returns to Freud's work to explore more fully the development of the child's consciousness prior to Lacan's mirror stage. Freud claimed that in primary repression the superego separates the abject from what will become the subject and its object. Ferdinand de Saussure defined linguistic meaning as a system of difference, and difference is established by boundaries that can be seen as the constructs of geometry.
Victor Burgin describes Kristeva’s abject as ‘the origin of geometry’ (1990, p.115), hence, it seems as if the abject is both the origin and limit of meaning. It appears to hover on the fluid boundary between a sense of identity and a sense of meaninglessness that continually threatens to negate a cohesive sense of self. Coetzee adumbrates such erratic and anxious attempts to fix a stable notion of being-in-the-world by the two narrators in *Dusklands*.

I think that Coetzee enacts the ambivalent symptoms of horror and awe that lap at the edges of the consciousnesses of Eugene and Jacobus. This is evidence of the abject position that they seem to occupy. Most significantly, the abject is simultaneously the point of potential obliteration and the font of creativity, according to Kristeva (1982). The response of the reader echoes the disgust and fascination of the characters with their own abject situations, thus implicating the reader in the same abject void of nullity and enthusiastic expectation.

Coetzee shows that Eugene’s uncontrollable muscular activity is the source of his anxiety for it does not obey the rules of the symbolic order. I agree with Wood who states that Eugene ‘tries to master the world by dissolving it into an image or projection of his own subjectivity. Anything that resists this process, anything distinct from Eugene’s subjectivity (including his own body), is consequently a source of exasperation, anxiety and loathing’ (Wood 1994, p.182). He appears to manage his thoughts well. They are so methodically set out. His ideal ‘is of an endless discourse of character, the self reading the self to the self in all infinity’ (*D*, p.40). But he is irritated by his own involuntary habits and he declares: ‘I am the subject of a revolting body’ (*D*, p.7). This separation of his will from his actions augurs badly from the beginning. Ominously, he states: ‘My body betrays me’ (*D*, p.7).

The climax of the dramatic action confirms the disparity between Eugene’s literary self-representation and his literal reality. He is overwhelmed by emotional distress but, ironically, he is unable to articulate his feelings for emotions do not conform to the laws of reason. As the seat of emotion, Eugene’s body has been the container of his intense anguish. When his affective frustration becomes so pent-up that his body can no longer restrain it, it bursts into the incongruous stabbing of his son. This
spontaneous act of panic is yet another resistance to his projected subjectivity (D, pp.43-44).

Coetzee’s shift in focus from Eugene’s mind to his body allows the character to ignore the breach between his vicious action and his perception of himself as a reasonable man. When he cannot continue to maintain this false separation between his thoughts and what is actually happening because the presence of the others, his wife and the police, and his own violation of another has come threateningly close to damaging his own subjectivity, he stops his self-justification and refocuses his attention. He shirks responsibility by shifting his acute awareness away from his mental processes to his physical sensations. It is significant that his ideal of self-knowledge becomes highly articulated self-delusion. His inner psychological state becomes his external, physical reality, when he is sent to a psychiatric hospital.

On one level Coetzee demonstrates that Eugene cannot escape from his Western colonial consciousness, although, on another level, fluid motifs of boundary transgression allude to alternative perspectives. The gap between Eugene’s semiotic responses and his cognitive training has upset the balance of his inner and outer identity. Confrontation with the shocking war photographs, coupled with his inability to express the trauma that he feels, builds up tension within Eugene’s body, like the pressure in a volcano that then erupts and overflows. He recognizes the ‘dolorous wound’ that is bleeding inside him, a wound ‘weeping somewhere in the cavern behind my eyes’ (D, p.34), although the reason this wound cannot heal is that it is an internal metaphysical cut in his sense of self. Rational representation loosens its hold and spills over into the irrational attack. These images of abjection transgress neat binary formulations. Eugene becomes the perpetrator of the very violence that he has so painstakingly set out to avoid. Yes, the character is trapped and yet his textual performance has brought to light the perforations in his rigid sense of self and this has opened up the possibility of renewal.

From the mind/body contradiction, one can deduce that the power and integrity of the rational are neither stable nor inviolate. It is Eugene’s physicality that challenges this authority. The ramifications of this conclusion can be witnessed in the recent history of the author’s own country. The immediacy of the body as an ambivalent site of injury
and healing is a focal metaphor in a number of Coetzee's novels, including *Waiting for the Barbarians*, *Age of Iron* and *Disgrace*. The importance of the body in establishing transitional meaning will be traced in subsequent chapters.

Coetzee frequently uses metaphors of disease to emphasize the complicit, boundary position of the individual in socially destructive processes. In *Age of Iron*, Mrs Curren's breast cancer is metonymic of the malaise of apartheid and a sign of her ambivalent position as a critic and beneficiary of the unhealthy system. Thus external events are linked to the most immediate site of consciousness, the body. Fiona Probyn maintains that '[d]isease metaphors display the instability of interpretive (authoritative) meaning and also render binary thinking problematic' (1998, p.214). In my opinion Probyn is drawing attention to an idea that punctures the apparently imperviousness of rationality and reveals its limitations. Probyn does briefly refer to the theory of abjection, as posited by Kristeva, to support her argument for challenging oppositional approaches, and yet I suggest that she does not consider the positive options beyond an analysis of the shortcomings of confrontational viewpoints.

I concur with Probyn's suggestion that Coetzee uses the metaphor of cancer as an agent of deconstruction that 'problematises the inside/outside, self/other distinction which constitutes or fortifies perceptions of a unified self because it is anomalous and abject' (1998, p.214, 217). Coetzee describes Eugene as defiled by 'a cancer of shameful knowledge' (*D*, p.10), which can be seen as the source of his splintered identity. The repeated images of bodily secretions (*D*, p.8, 12, 36, 50) attest to Eugene's obsession with matter that is neither part of the body nor separate from the body. These signs wear away at the framework of his logical self-construction.

Coetzee can be seen to subvert the imperial project in Eugene's imagining of a 'hideous mongol boy' invading and possessing his body (*D*, p.40). Attwell identifies a metonymic chain between 'the body, the child-parasite and the historical Other' and I support his interpretation that the stabbing of his son is an attempt by Eugene to re-establish 'the coherence of the transcendent self' (1993, p.54). Of course Eugene fails to transcend the fracturing implications of his perception of contamination. The final abject equation between his heart and the ball in a toilet cistern confirms Eugene's discursive failure. Nevertheless, I think that the blurring of the margins between the body of the
self and the other in the metonymic links that Attwell observes also signifies the erasure of a separating frontier and introduces a note of positive anticipation. The theme of mergings between different characters and the ethical inferences of common understandings is further developed in *In the Heart of the Country* and *The Master of Petersburg*.

Coetzee extends his subversion of the colonizing project by expanding upon the abject symbols of disease and leakage and the connotations of defilement and segregation in the narrative of Jacobus. Even though Jacobus does not display the modern self-analysis that preoccupies Eugene, he shares the same narcissistic interest in the incontinent issue of his sick body. To prevent the spread of his infection he is quarantined in the hut reserved for menstruating women. Thus he is reduced to the lowly status of a contaminated female, in this patriarchal society. Like Eugene, Jacobus's perceptual limitation becomes materialized as a bodily isolation. He has the misconception that his central colonial position as definer of boundaries is secure. Yet he not only loses this controlling stance but his condition and location signify the erasure of those boundaries and his marginalisation in the world of the Nama others. This shift between centre and margin that is dependent upon the position of the gaze becomes the leitmotif of *Age of Iron*.

I agree with the commentaries of Attwell (1993), Probyn (1998) and Vaughan (1998) who each present fine analyses of Coetzee's representation of the failure of various characters as integrated identities, although I maintain that they do not address the textual implications beyond an analysis of the specific self-enclosed representations of the characters. As I mentioned earlier, Attwell does flag the potential of the displaced narrative subject that will be teased out in Coetzee's later novels, but he does not expand on this potential within *Dusklands*. In calling for a resistant reading in which Coetzee's critique of the corrosive loop of self-rationalization is noted, it seems to me that Head and Kossew are looking beyond the disjointed identity, which is a symptom of a Western crisis, towards a feasible site of belonging.

It is my contention that the arguments of these earlier critics can be extended by adding the fresh prospects associated with frontier revisioning. I think that Coetzee's first novel makes these possibilities available to the readers beyond the restrictions of the
characters’ self-defeating outlook. Eugene’s incarceration officially asserts that he is a threat to the health of the society. Jacobus last destructive rampage doubles the theme of mental disturbance. And yet, Coetzee’s writing also embodies the abject point from which meaning emanates. Such meaning lies beyond both narrators’ framework of reference and their diverse lived experiences. It offers an intimation of remapping the frontiers that create a sense of belonging and exclusion for the reader.

Coetzee offers these two parallel stories that span centuries and continents in order to reinforce the pervasiveness of the Western drive towards dominance and the impression of historic and global enclosure in a colonial mindset. The similarities are extensive but there is a marked absence of any example of responding differently to the frontiers in order to extend a sense of belonging. Both of the narrators are unable to venture outside of the disabling vortex of self-justification but the gaps that are uncovered in their logic do unbolt the boundaries of identity to revision. Their narratives each represent the duality of the abject as the embodiments of porous self-construction and the textual representatives of a marginal space in which a creative possibility might emerge for the author and his readership.

I have shown that the disjuncture between the inner thoughts and the outer circumstances of Eugene and Jacobus reflects that they are each caught in a self-delusional Western worldview. Yet, it is the cracks in their self-representation that urge a re-reading of the breaks so that the frontiers that we install to secure our sense of belonging, but that end up imprisoning us, can be reappraised. I have extended the arguments of other critics by positing that the very flaws in the boundaries that restrict rational discourse might provide the opportunities for shifting or rethinking the frontiers of our Western consciousness.

2.1.2. CONFRONTING THE “OTHER”

In this section I shall examine the impact of violence, whether directly encountered or remotely witnessed or imagined, upon the two protagonists. This can be seen as the main theme that connects the two disparate narratives. The distinction
between their self-portrayal and their dubious behaviour can be seen as the destructive effect of confrontation with others on the individual's sense of self. The oppositional mode that they each adopt suggests a defensive attitude that confirms the precariousness of their sense of belonging. Certainly the vulnerability of "subjects-on-trial", to use Kristeva's term, renders the already slim chance of rethinking frontiers risky. After all, frontiers serve the purpose of protection and are not easily dismantled.

I propose to uncover the lacunae in the narrators' reasoning in order to expose their paranoia about the aggressive or derogatory intentions of others. By examining these irrational errors, I shall again be reconsidering the conceptual parameters of the narrators and the restrictive force of established frontiers. It is my contention that the fault-lines that show up also present repeat opportunities for the reader to contemplate new patterns of interaction and belonging.

Violence is the most overt representation of confrontation. Whether violence is immediate, as in Jacobus's experience, or telescoped, as the specifics of the Vietnam War are for Eugene, a sense of self is affected. It would seem that the damage caused by confrontation cannot be evaded. It not only negates the identities of the perpetrators of aggression, but it also ensnares all onlookers in a destructive cycle. Just as Eugene is scarred by his focus on the distant war, so the reader is implicated as a witness to the violence that Coetzee depicts.

The author, himself, has indicated that his own sense of identity is injured by violence. As a white South African, he has felt complicit in the racial conflict in his homeland, and he has declared that he feels such revulsion against violence that any sign of it within himself becomes introverted as violence against himself (DP, p.337). It seems to invest and efface his sense of self. It is from this paradoxical position, in which his own identity is vulnerable, that Coetzee writes.

The theme of pervasive complicity is threaded through all of Coetzee's fiction and finally comes under close scrutiny in the Elizabeth Costello lesson in which the problem of evil is shown to be an unavoidable collective responsibility. This is first represented in Dusklands, when, in spite of his efforts to avoid the harsh facts of the war, Eugene cannot escape from the circle of hostility. He becomes a perpetrator like
Jacobs. These first Coetzee protagonists are unable to escape their Western colonial consciousnesses, as Vaughan rightly suggests (1998). I contend that Coetzee is offering the reader the prospect of reassessing self-perpetuating hegemonies by revealing the defects in the narrators’ self-defence in this first novel.

In the example of Eugene, Coetzee represents a character who appears to be his own worst enemy, but who is, in fact, the victim of the insidious damage of violence. To some extent I agree with Hanjo Beitessem’s analysis of Eugene as a perfect allegory of the Western subject who is crippled by his own individuality (1990, p.128), which can be understood to refer to his obsessional self-absorption. But I suggest that this definition does not take into account the deforming blow of the violent images of war upon his identity.

Coetzee sets up a sharp contrast between Eugene’s professional task as a mythographer and his private self-mythologizing narrative project that highlights the character’s blindness to his self-defeating game. Roland Barthes argues that myths perform a double function by clarifying our understanding of something and then by imposing that signification on us (1957, pp.109-159). Eugene seems to show great insight into this two-edged process when he attempts to manipulate Viet Cong obedience to the voice of authority by using their radio service to transmit subversive propaganda (D, pp.26-31). He does, however, fail to appreciate that the framework of his own identity is simultaneously undermined. It is his aim to ‘show the enemy that he stands naked in a dying landscape’ (D, p.31). There is a stark similarity in his purpose for the enemy and his description of himself as ‘[s]taggering in my bleeding armour, I stand erect, alone on the plain, beset’ (D, p.29). He remains unaware of the irony of his identification as a targeted opponent, according to his own terms of myth-making. The military metaphor clearly implicates him in the violence that he tries so hard to resist.

Throughout the narrative Coetzee demonstrates an escalation in Eugene’s paranoia that is a direct reaction to the war photographs to which he continually refers. He rushes home, imagining that his wife is being unfaithful, even though he has no evidence to substantiate his anxiety. Finally his senseless act of violence against his own child confirms his inability to cope with the atrocities implicit in his war project. The intrusive harm of violence takes its toll on his self-representation as a measured
intellectual. Ironically, his opinions are no longer valued as the representation of a rational mind and his work is lost in the piles of useless paperwork about the war, when he is hospitalized.

Unlike the first narrator, Coetzee represents the second narrator, Jacobus, as an overt aggressor, whose sense of identity is established in confrontation with others. His oppositional stance is evident in his statement: ‘the gun saves us from the fear that all life is within us’ (D, p.84). I am of the same opinion as most critics, who concur that Jacobus’s need for violence sets up the frontiers that define his sense of self. Peter Knox-Shaw states:

[T]he narrator confronts - in place of a dark, infinitely recessive self - a centre of complete emptiness. The lack of an apparent self prompts him to view his identity as coterminous with that of the external world, I am all that I see’ [says Jacobus in D, p.84] … only by demonstrating his separateness - only by bringing death into the world - can he preserve a belief in external life. (1996, p.117)

Attwell agrees with Dovey who identifies an inherent flaw in Jacobus’s logic (1993, p.51). They both argue that Jacobus’s standpoint is self-defeating because his identity is confirmed by the recognition given by the other, but when he destroys the other there is no longer any validation of the self (1993, p.51). Jacobus kills all his Khoisan servants, rationalizing that ‘through their deaths I ... again asserted my reality’ (D, p.113). Parker concludes that Jacobus is left alone, facing the horror of his own death and attempting to evade that frightening but inconceivable possibility (Parker 1996, p.114). I do support this commentary on the self-destructiveness of violence, but I think that the text goes beyond the disabling spiral of Jacobus’s experience and directs the gaze of the reader to options outside the negative cycle.

Coetzee installs one of his fundamental literary concerns, a concern that persists throughout his oeuvre, in his first novel. This is the ambivalence of the subject position of the post-colonizer-as-writer. Jacobus uses the language of a colonizer, thus he takes comfort from the assumed sympathy of a reader for his central superiority, his imperial status. Like most critics, N. Armstrong and L. Tennenhouse posit that, for Jacobus, there is a compulsion to represent that which is culturally other as a negation of the self. They conclude that such a representation requires that otherness be taken personally so that the apparent “idleness” of the “Hottentots” is interpreted by the Boers (Afrikaners) as an
act of violence (1989, p.16). I would add that this mimetic style serves a dual purpose. It establishes a tenuous link that connects J.M. Coetzee with a possible forefather (given the name), Jacobus Coetzee (the character in the novel), and his historic complicity with the architects of apartheid (DP, pp.242-243). Mimesis, however, can also be a tool of postcolonial subversion.

The events of the narrative certainly undermine the proclaimed position of the narrator. In ‘Idleness in South Africa’, Coetzee writes: ‘The moment when the travel writer condemns the Hottentot for doing nothing marks the moment when the Hottentot brings him face to face with the limits of his own conceptual framework’ (1989, pp.127-128). The limitation of Jacobus’s perspective is clear from the start. He believes that he can use his possessions to retain his controlling edge in negotiations with the Khoisan people. When they disregard his ownership and divide the goods out among themselves, he loses his delusion of leverage or his conceptual buffer, the protective sheath of his identity. His ill health and consequent isolation are metonymic of his actual helplessness and his marginalization. In Jacobus’s shift from centre to margin, Coetzee is showing up the cracks in the character’s sense of self. It is through these cracks that Coetzee is pointing towards alternatives.

I have argued that Coetzee uses violence as a catalyst to draw out the discrepancies between the fallacious self-representations of the two narrators and the friability of their imperialist worldviews in the face of opposition. Their final isolation is evidence of a textual attempt on the part of the author to end the repeating pattern of destruction upon society in general. I have asserted that Coetzee prompts the reader to rethink the frontiers that define a sense of belonging in a dual textual strategy. He literally ensures that the protagonists are quarantined to contain the spread of their contagion and he sketches the false reasoning of the two protagonists in their efforts to defend their cruelty. Both tactics render frontiers as porous sites for reappraisal.
2.2. FOLDS OF SPACE

2.2.1. CONTAINING THE "I"

Coetzee installs the sequence of rooms in which the narrative of Eugene is set and his collection of photographs with similar properties. Meaning is constructed by the parameters of these rectangular spaces. In this section I intend to demonstrate that the rooms and the photographs are complementary ambivalent signifiers, metaphors for shielding containment and entrapping exclusion. It seems to me that Coetzee is excavating the notion of entrenched frontiers in two ways here. On the one hand, the margins of these spaces are rich with the significance of the enclosed scene as well as the implications from beyond the framing, hence the boundaries seem to expand with excess meaning. On the other hand, the contradictory connotations of protection and restriction can be interpreted as negating each other. This results in an entirely untenable or nullified frontier site. Both assertions reiterate my argument that Coetzee is addressing the need for an expanded perspective of frontier as a permeable and flexible place for new negotiations on belonging and honest scrutiny of the price of exclusion.

I suggest that Coetzee shows that the parallel professional and personal myths that Eugene so painstakingly creates fail to serve his sense of belonging because they both ignore any dialogue with otherness in their construction. In other words, Eugene denies the contribution of others in the creation of collective myths and relies only on his own gaze that increasingly becomes disconnected from the world and those around him. The main drama is a climax of interaction, but, even then, the narrative is tunnelled through the distancing filters of Eugene's internal dialogue. This fortifies the paradox of his inability to separate his sense of an isolated self from the events that occur outside of himself.

By juxtaposing the neat limits of the rooms and the photographs with the limitless range of the two opposed outside environments (the U S A and Vietnam), Coetzee highlights the character's inner weakness in the face of the national conflict. Beitsem's proposition that the obsession of the subject with his own subjectivity results in complete alienation from nature (1990, p.129) clearly establishes that the only place where Eugene has a sense of belonging is indoors. This is because he feels in
control in these well-regulated environments where he can select and arrange his ideas. He feels safe and secluded from dynamic reality and chaos of the outside world that is depicted in the war images.

In the textual performance, Coetzee traces the fallacy of attempts to compartmentalize different aspects of one life. The library is the conceptual ideal of a safe space for Eugene: 'The lights of Harry S. Truman hum in their reserved, fatherly way. The temperature is 72. Hemmed in with walls of books, I should be in paradise' (D, p.7). In such an environment, he is apparently free to revise old myths and to construct new myths according to his own voyeuristic, self-serving whim, unhindered by the messiness of outside realities. Ironically, though, the walls of books mirror the 'wall of trees' (D, p.16) in one of the photographs. In this parallel imagery the distinction between constructed and natural boundaries is conflated. This sequence of association shows up the risk that Eugene faces of losing his grounding in the fictionalising layers of his 'protective fabrications' (D, p.14). And it reveals yet another flaw in the narrator's claim to a rational disposition.

The call for a resistant reading that is made by Head and Kossew is most useful for exploring Coetzee's subtext that steadily peels away the laminations of Eugene's delusional self-construction. The structure of the narrative is sequential, with each of the five sections located in five different rooms. The sections of the text are separated by an unspecified leap in time. This creates a dual effect of continuity and disjunction and the increasing impression of the protagonist's mental deterioration. While Eugene's movement from one room to another represents a temporal progression, it also signifies a claustrophobic regression in his psychological mobility. This ends in a state of immobile stalemate when Eugene is hospitalized.

In my view, Coetzee un hinges the reader's perception of the stability of frontiers and he calls into question the rigidity of the frontiers that we erect in the final section. On one level, the frontier that was associated with being confined, but safe, in a room persists. On another level, the ambivalent associations of entrapment and protection are mutually negated. Eugene's imposed seclusion and his chosen withdrawal erase the frontier between his and others' perceptions of what would be best for him and for society. Ironically, his precarious identity appears to be secured. He also demonstrates
excellent appreciation that his psychosis is the outcome of stress, and an even more incisive understanding of the ontological implications of his "case" as a stabilising of their own reality for his doctors. Nevertheless, his paranoia is also exposed when he imagines that the subjects in the photographs 'are waiting till I leave home before they attack' (D, p.50). This revelation is at once reassuring and unsettling to the reader. While it justifies Eugene's continuing confinement, it does not negate the validity of his profound insight into his mental state. Coetzee seems to be challenging the reader to question the finality of the traditional frontier between reason and insanity by asking: Where does such a demarcation line lie?

In this section, I have examined the parallel significance of rooms and photographs as ambivalent frontier metaphors of belonging and exclusion. I have shown that Coetzee has offered two extensions to the concept of frontier that allows for a malleable border-zone in which meanings that seal our sense of belonging can be revised. First, the margins of the two constructed sites under consideration here are widened with the parallel signifiers from both sides of the divide. Next, in a fine textual ploy, Coetzee has questioned an essential frontier that has defined the meaning of delusional. In this way, he has disoriented the reader and presented a test to us all to examine the assumed fixed foundations upon which we erect all borderlines, particularly the frontiers to belonging.

2.2.2. A WIDENED FRONTIER ZONE

The similarities and differences between the two narratives encourage critical dialogue. Whereas Coetzee starts to destabilize the preset indicators that define a sense of belonging in Eugene's confined narrative, I think that he increases his commitment to interrogate all reference markers in Jacobus's venture. Now I will consider how Coetzee displaces the orientation points of historicity and political boundaries. I suggest that, by upsetting geo-historical maps, Coetzee is increasing the conceptual frontier region into an area where old patterns can be reformulated with vibrant open debate and a commitment to greater inclusivity of formerly divided people.
By situating the explorer’s eighteenth-century narrative in a sequence of different referential frameworks, Coetzee provides for a range of comparative assessments that both assert and refute the authenticity of his story. Jacobus’s report is followed by a twentieth-century historian, S.J. Coetzee’s account. This distancing creates an expectation of clarity and the breadth of perspective of hindsight. S. J. Coetzee certainly does provide details of some contemporary events as a broader “factual” historical context in which to embed this specific adventure. So too, the actual location where Jacobus trekked is clearly plotted in the real place names that are frequently quoted. It would then seem as if this outline might confirm the facticity of Jacobus’s two expeditions into the interior. The inclusion of Jacobus’s official 1760 deposition in the appendix extends the impression of a true story. The suggested familial linkage of Jacobus, S.J. and the real writer, J.M. Coetzee, further endorses the historical authenticity of the character. In contrast, the “translation” of the Afrikaans Afterword and the Dutch Appendix also points to some editorial licence and Attwell provides detailed evidence of Coetzee’s ‘cavalier’ use of historical record (1993, pp.44-48).

The sources of Coetzee’s material and his “translation” of those sources is a blend of documented event and poetic play. All facticity is destabilized, including the veracity of past records. This also casts the validity of the opinion which is so freely given by both Coetzee characters, Jacobus, the adventurer, and S.J., the historian, adrift. Rather than confirming the authenticity of one form of discourse, this strategy ensures that each chronotopic (in the sense of a temporal-spatial relation defined by Bakhtin) narrative is merely one semiotic template among many. Besides these textual maps that seem to trace out their specific contours of signification so carefully, lie what other meanings or places of belonging? This widens the idea of frontier from a binary partition to a site of dynamic variety and collaborative creativity.

In my opinion, Coetzee is using these discrepancies to unsettle the discursive foundations upon which Western claims of authenticity, identity and authority are constructed by signalling different versions of familiar patterns that continue to overlap with unfamiliar patterns and etch new designs into a cultural landscape. These reconfigurations also allow for fresh forms of coexistence and the possibility of increasing a sense of shared belonging. Similar revisions of established maps occur in all of Coetzee’s work. In Waiting for the Barbarians, for example, the human and natural
environment of the border-post that is so hostile and strange to the imperial troops is home for the colonial magistrate.

It seems to me that the boundary in-between the South (the Cape colony) and the North (the land of the Nama), which S.J. Coetzee identifies as ‘a treacherous neutral zone free of the feeling of destiny’ (D, p.116), is an example of a conceptually broadened frontier zone. This presents an interesting understanding of frontier, which is more usually a clear boundary between two different regions and orders of belonging, even if there is doubt about the specific territorial split. In S.J.’s terms, the frontier becomes a spatially expanded geo-political area, with a less finite demarcation line of geographic and identity division.

This in-between space is also consistent with a myth of colonial history. The zone between the crop farms of the Cape Colony and the “wilds” was neither neutral nor free, because this interim space was marked, named and occupied by the trekboers and it steadily shifted Northward as the frontier cattle farmers needed new grazing. Their movements were unhindered by government, hence the land beyond the Cape was to remain an area without identified boundaries for some time (A. J. Böeseken 1975, pp.60-62). There is a paradox inherent in the identity of the trekboer. On the one hand, an outcome of the freedom from administrative and societal restraints was that these graziers ‘increasingly identified themselves with the African continent and had never known another home’ (1975, p.62). On the other hand, the trekboer, as exemplified in Jacobus, showed himself to be bound to the destiny of the South by his colonizing identity. This ambivalence is articulated by Noël Mostert who states that the trekboers essentially regarded themselves as answerable to no laws other than their own and those of God, and yet they remained dependent on the Cape for the very source of their freedom, ammunition (1992, p.168).

Coetzee’s ironic use of the word ‘treacherous’ attests to the unrestrained violence that the men like Jacobus wielded with their guns to secure their place, thereby making a mockery of the neutrality of this zone. But it also refers to a more subtle treachery inherent in the myth of neutrality: the self facing the horror of the self as other. The mutability of this relationship is indicated when Jacobus contemplates the intentions of the Nama when they take him in and nurse him. He concludes: ‘The Namaqua, I
decided, were not true savages. Even I knew more about savagery than they. They could be dismissed' (D, p.104). In getting to know them he has discovered that they are not the savage other against which he can mark out the boundaries of his own “civilized” identity. He, himself, becomes the savage other when he returns to the settlement of his own people and he gluts himself ‘on a day of bloodlust and anarchy...an assault on colonial property’ (D, p.106). Here the treachery echoes Eugene’s identical description of both Marilyn and the Viet Cong as “other”.

The myth of S. J. Coetzee’s definition of a neutral zone is clearly exposed in a parallel description of space by Jacobus:

Savages do not have guns. This is the effective meaning of savagery, which we may define as enslavement to space, as one speaks obversely of the explorer’s mastery of space. The relation of master and savage is a spatial relation...From the fringes of the horizon he approaches, growing to manhood beneath my eyes until he reaches the verge of that precarious zone, in which, invulnerable to his weapons, I command his life. Across this annulus I behold him approach bearing the wilderness in his heart...On the far side he is nothing to me and I am probably nothing to him. On the near side mutual fear will drive us to our little comedies of man and man...He threatens to have a history in which I shall be a term. (D, p.87)

This physical and discursive site from which Jacobus’s narrative is recounted is also the metaphoric location in which Coetzee situates his text. It is a precarious site, at risk of being worn away by the destructive logic of the colonizing power of language and yet offering potential for a closer identification with Africa and a place of belonging. Hence, I maintain that it is a permeable space between the South and the North and, as such, it is a creative site in which rigid oppositions have the chance to be reconstituted. For Carter it is porosity that is perhaps the essential quality for shared participation in the making of place (2000, pp.1-15). Given that the editors of Space and Place: Theories of Identity and Location agree that ‘[i]t is not spaces that ground identification but places...Place is space to which meaning has been ascribed’ (1993, p.xii), it would seem that Carter is suggesting a shared space of identification in which both verbal and iconic signs ‘harbour the initial conditions of a sociability whose vitality depends on the meaning of terms not being sharply demarcated but remaining porous, blurred, context-permeable’ (2000, p.9). In Dusklands the ‘treacherous neutral zone free from destiny’ (p.116) might be such a site. I further suggest that this is the ‘minor corner’ of artistic survival that Attwell identifies in this first novel of Coetzee (1993, p.58).
Foucault's attempt to free philosophy from the restrictions of dogmas has had a significant influence on Coetzee. Foucault has said that modern thought 'cannot stop itself from liberating or oppressing' (quoted in A. Carusi 1991, p.106); consequently, to name something is to try to control it. The novelist concurs that we name in order to subjugate (DP, p.342). He creates narratives that lack a middle, like a 'buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button' (F, p.121). He does not name the button because to name is to establish linguistic containment, hegemony and a denial of other identification or ownership.

Between the many Afrikaans place names used in the text, Coetzee has dispersed Khoi and San signifiers to mark out Jacobus's journey. The Koussie is the Khoi title given to one of the rivers (D, p.67). This is an admission by Jacobus that the area he is traversing has prior meaning, ascribed by others. S.J. Coetzee also flags the different names for another river. The Khoi called it the Gariep. Jacobus named his "discovery" the Great River, and one Robert Jacob Gordon renamed it in honour of the House of Orange (D, p.128). While each successive exploratory thrust does deny previous claims, the mere recognition of other names by Coetzee opens up an awareness of overlays of history and shared attachments to the same landmarks. This can be seen as evidence of listening, which surely Coetzee is hinting might be the starting point of dialogue with Africa.

Coetzee depicts the attempts of the colonizer to establish dominance over the unknown wilderness in Jacobus's arbitrary naming of the fauna and flora, as in the camelopard (giraffe) and boesmangras (D, pp.123-24). S. J. Coetzee says that '[i]n this way Coetzee rode like a god through a world only partly named, differentiating and bringing into existence' (D, p.124). This attests to the commanding colonial power of Jacobus for his role in extending the body of information about the region that lay beyond the known landscape of the South. Nevertheless, this assessment does admit that the terrain was already partly named by the San people. The use of the present participle also implies that the naming is only a partial process that is never finalized. These inferences suggest a temporal continuum that is mobile and incomplete.

Both the historically layered names for specific geographical features and the continuousness of the process clearly indicate some acknowledgement of the mutability
of an expanded "neutral" border-zone. This, in turn, allows for a space in which the self and the other can participate in making and marking a place to belong.

I have examined the way in which Coetzee has used the specific history of the Cape in the eighteenth-century and the two geographic motifs of an expanded border-zone and the continual renaming of natural features to spur readers to expand their thinking on the implications of frontier and how creative selections for belonging might be conceived.

2.3. A TEMPORAL DIALECTIC

It is in the retrospective dialectic between the two narratives, that Coetzee is re-reading history in order to prompt a review of the modern crisis of identity and estrangement. In the previous section, I explained that Coetzee revisits the details of the frontier zone North of the Cape settlement in the eighteenth-century, a site that has become iconic in the representation of racial conflict in South Africa. He discovers opportunities for revising notions of frontier into a broadened and more fluid conceptual space that encourages sharing. When the apparently closed modern story of the first narrative in Dusklands is retrospectively reconsidered in the light of the past example, new ways of thinking about belonging can begin.

The modern crisis of identity in which a subject is alienated from all around her/him and is unable to experience a sense of connectedness in the world is evident in the gap between Eugene’s theoretical knowledge about the world and his practical inadequacy to engage with others. The fact that neither Eugene nor Jacobus can cope with disturbances, whether these are from outside or within his own body, is a double-edged sign. On the one hand, his sense of an absolutely rational self is damaged by his inability to maintain detachment and he becomes delusional in his defence of his tiny cell where his self-image can be preserved. On the other hand, his inescapable embeddedness in the world suggests that his identity is not finalized. This presents the reader with some hope, even though it fails to do so for the protagonist. Jacobus’s story broadens the palette to include a roving perspective that confirms the pervasive
estrangement of colonizers from the territory that they claim and the people who inhabit that land. It also extends the notion of incompleteness beyond the subject and his sense of self to a wider context, which is also continually shifting.

By adumbrating the aporias in both a modern and a historical subject's sense of who he is and where he belongs, Coetzee is not only encouraging a resistant reading of the text, as Head and Kossew maintain, but I would argue that he is also encouraging the reader to resist the Western model of detached rational domination in favour of a more interactive involvement in an ever-changing world.

It seems to me that the first notes of Coetzee's call to ethical action as the basis of a sense of belonging are sounded here. It is a call that requires the acknowledgement of complicity for the global realities that we have helped to create as the starting point for sharing responsibility. This call grows louder with each subsequent fiction. The lesson, 'The Humanities in Africa' in Elizabeth Costello, is, perhaps, the most compelling today. "Responsibility-in-complicity", as articulated by Sanders, is the prerequisite for coexistence and belonging. Increasingly, Coetzee outlines the complexities of the ethical responsibility of the writer in his later work. The price that the writer pays is foregrounded in The Master of Petersburg. Elizabeth Costello faces the demand for final accountability 'At the Gate' in Coetzee's latest work. For the reader, the interrogation begins with the multiple frontiers that are adumbrated in the novel, and then ethical responsibility only just commences.
3. UNLIKELY POSSIBILITIES OF SHARED IDENTIFICATION

In this chapter I shall examine the way in which Coetzee destabilizes some of the frontiers in *In The Heart of the Country*. He upsets the neat divisions of a number of dualities in the journal entries of the narrator, Magda. These include the demarcation line between fact and fiction, the margin between nature and culture as it is exemplified in cyclical and linear temporality and the association of spatial symmetry with harmony and symmetry with discord. In my opinion, Coetzee disrupts these numerous familiar boundaries in order to open up a conceptual site so that the ethical potential of border transgression can be more fully reviewed. It is within this expanded notion of frontier that I develop the main thrust of my argument.

I contend that Coetzee revisits the fundamental assumption that sexual transgression is only an essential expression of the most immediate form of negation of another person. By troubling the simple separation between perpetrator and victim, it seems to me that Coetzee is rethinking the barriers that we erect between ourselves and others. I shall explore the tension between the protagonist’s drive to transgress the confining boundaries of her heritage and her failure to secure a sense of connectedness with others. Magda is clearly trapped by her colonial reality, although Coetzee’s re-appraisal of set sexual frontiers does allow him to adumbrate two experiences of her sharing the same position with the servant couple, Hendrik and Klein-Anna. It is my contention that Coetzee offers these as creative possibilities for shifting the frontiers of belonging. I consider that Coetzee uses both opportunities of identification with others as progressive sites of transition between the closed hierarchies of a colonial and a neo-colonial past and the as-yet-undefined socio-political patterns of future postcolonial coexistence.

Coetzee introduces the notion of a broadened zone where existing frontiers between individuals and the world around them can be rethought in the two narratives in *Dusklands*. In the previous chapter I argued that the fractures between the intellectual, emotional and physical consciousness of each of the protagonists exposed their increasing estrangement in the face of confrontation. I further maintained that Coetzee re-presents one historic colonial frontier as a wider mobile marginal space that remains
open to reinterpretation. I added that this move away from the traditional view of an impenetrable frontier towards a more open-ended site of ongoing negotiation between opposing sides could be read back into the aporias in the stories of the two main characters in order to review their personal barriers to a sense of belonging.

It is my thesis that in his second novel Coetzee builds upon his initial representation of an expanded frontier that is permeable to fresh contributions about the maps that we construct. Again Coetzee represents the ways in which existing divisions inhibit a sense of belonging and he provides two fine textual examples of ways in which these margins can be revised. Even though his overriding concern continues to be the restrictions of Western patterns of thought and the impossibility of escaping from a colonial consciousness, Coetzee extends the idea of a larger borderland site where a sense of belonging can be increased. He does this in two shadings of shared identification that can be seen as meta-textual transitional modalities between past divisions and future understandings.

Although I concur with a number of critics, including Atwell (1993), Watson (1996), Ian Glenn (1996) and Head (1997) among them, who argue that Magda is caught in the alienating historical impasse that is the trap of all Western identities, it is my assertion that Coetzee also uses the fiction to envision a space outside the hierarchies associated with a Western worldview. These include the binary co-ordinates of domination and subservience, physical occupancy and ownership as well as the hegemonic drive of language over other signifiers.

I maintain that Coetzee again traces the ambivalent reality of an imperial legacy, as others have noted, and I contribute to this criticism by proposing that Coetzee adds two possibilities of transcendence for the postcolonizer in his second novel. The main characters in Dusklands are utterly trapped by their own self-delusion and it is only with retrospective reflection that the flaws in their positions become evident to the reader. In In the Heart of the Country the protagonist herself goes beyond her lonely experience as a daughter of the colonies, in theoretical and imaginary rather than actual terms.

I believe that Coetzee is positing that textual representations of belonging can be seen as inadequate, for the very language contains and limits the notion. I consider that
Ulf Strohmayer’s idea that belonging is a future-oriented concept ‘that tries to leave space for the inexpressible to become’ (1997, p.185) is most relevant. He appears to be stressing that any sense of belonging is incomplete and requires a capacity for ongoing connections. This calls to mind the future-orientation of the concept of ubuntu as posited by Sanders and Titlestad. In terms of Strohmayer’s suggestion, I assert that Coetzee uses the novel to trace around two meta-lingual instances of relating to the others. These are Magda’s theoretical identification with Hendrik and her imaginary connection with Klein-Anna. Both examples bear enormous global significance for future interactions between previously divided people, regardless of their local circumstances.

Coetzee shows that Magda briefly occupies a transitional position twice in the novel. First, she can be seen as both the colonizer and colonized. This occurs when she occupies these contradictory positions simultaneously as the heir to her father’s land and as the forcibly possessed other, by the counter-colonizing act of Hendrik, the farm labourer. For a short while she shares the in-between hypothetical position of being both the colonizer and the colonized with Hendrik. Secondly, Magda imagines merging with the physical identity of another woman. It is in their essential female emptiness that she dreams of her link to Klein-Anna. This can be read as a way of being-in-the-world from which future connectedness to others or shared belonging can emanate. In the light of Strohmayer’s hypothesis it is significant that this metaphor of the female body as an empty space is divested of pre-existing patriarchal meaning and becomes, instead, a trope for unwritten metalingual feminine potential. Here I maintain that Coetzee is calling attention to the emerging transformational value of the collective voices of women in Africa.

In *In the Heart of the Country* Coetzee uses strategies that are similar to those used in the first novel. Like the earlier text, this novel critiques the ramifications of all oppositional dualities, which continually reinforce the segregation and enclosure of the protagonist. The narrative style accentuates the isolation of a solitary colonial character in Magda’s first person account. Using the format of a personal journal, Coetzee again unsettles the factual foundations of narrative. In this text he blurs the boundaries between actual events and Magda’s imaginative fabrications. He accurately defines the narrative form as ‘an unstable interior monologue in which the narrator enacts the psychological breakdown attributable to, and representative of, the divisive colonial
mind' (1997, p.51). This becomes obvious when her two brutal acts of parricide are contradicted by her father's reappearance, twice. Thus Coetzee provides another detailed interrogation of the imperial stance but it is extended to include the ambivalent position of a woman in a patriarchal colonial hierarchy.

I contend that Coetzee now also aligns his gaze to focus directly on the gaping hole in the colonizer's sense of belonging to a community. While her textual predecessors concentrated on their own control over their situation, Magda is willing to surrender some of her authority in order to fulfil her most poignant desire to belong in relationship to others. She does not have a sense of belonging. The question is, why? Magda has a binary view of the world, in which she is caught as 'the reluctant polestar about which all this phenomenal universe spins' (IHC, p.116). She sees herself as occupying a fixed position alone in the centre and the rest of the world as the ever changing oppositional "other". She longs to be 'at home in the world not at the centre' (IHC, p.135). It seems to me that Coetzee is proposing that being at home implies sharing in a dynamic sense of belonging with others, for it is only in relation to others that a sense of self can be outlined. Magda's longing for connectedness with others attests to a shift towards recognizing the importance of others in achieving a sense of belonging for the self in Coetzee's work.

3.1. THE CRITICAL CONTEXT

I maintain that Coetzee exposes the fallacy of omniscience and the drive to domination inherent in colonial thinking by subverting the imperial process in which all writing is ensnared. In post-structural terms, all writing is caught in a double bind, namely that it is in the reading, rather than in the writing, that a text acquires significance. If the text is regarded as a performative act, then this maxim can be seen to imply that it is in the participation of an audience that meaning is ascribed. Carter provides an excellent explanation of the prescriptive agenda of imperial history that is sustained by the illusion of an all-seeing spectator observing a performance that aims to fulfil 'a higher destiny' (1994, pp.375-377). Carter seems to be suggesting that all who
participate in the colonial enterprise, whether as writers or readers, share claim to a common purpose of establishing hegemony.

It is this assumption that Coetzee debunks by destabilising the meaning of Magda’s tales, thus rendering her as a dubious heroine, whose “higher destiny” is thwarted by her final entrapment in the petrified garden of her own literary creation. I agree with Dick Penner’s assertion that the contradictions of previous accounts create doubt about the veracity of the events, which Magda recounts (1989, p.56), but I also append the suggestion that the spectator-reader of Coetzee’s novel is acutely aware of her/his own disorientation in a whirl of true and untrue stories.

It seems to me that, without an external verifying voice to distinguish between fact and fantasy in the text, the reader is free to explore the consequences of the destabilized boundaries of Magda’s world. In spite of the unhinging of the truth from reality, Magda’s sense of identity cannot be detached from its geopolitical positioning. I contend that this novel is partly a metaphoric enactment of the inescapability of history and the patriarchal frontiers to belonging for ‘the daughters of the colonies’. As both a textual construct and a fragmented identity, Magda’s dilemma is surely one of belonging. But Coetzee’s novel is also about boundaries and how they are set up, their transgression and the implications of those transgressions for all the borderland inhabitants, particularly Magda.

Coetzee exposes a weakness in colonial discourse in Magda’s failure to develop a sense of community on the farm. I support Dovey’s statement that the self is ‘always constructed in relation to the Other [Dovey’s italics] within the context of a social totality, making the achievement of an autonomous or essential identity entirely illusory’ (quoted in K. Wagner 1989, p.7). Magda is quite obviously not able to establish a relationship with others that can sustain a sense of belonging in the heart of the country. To Dovey’s argument, I would add that it is Magda’s literal and her literary proprietorship that sets up the barrier between herself and others. She asks: ‘Is it possible that I am a prisoner not of the lonely farmhouse and the stone desert but of my stony monologue?’ (IHC, p.12). The absence of dialogue and the fantastic dramatic sequences in the novel accentuate her isolation and her failure to connect with others.
Magda’s failure clearly demonstrates one of Coetzee’s overriding metafictional concerns, namely, that ‘[f]raternity ineluctably comes in a package with liberty and equality’ (DP, p.97). Attwell is responding to Coetzee’s statement that ‘[a]t the heart of the unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure of love’ (DP, p.97), when he identifies Magda’s problem as one of impossible social reciprocity (1993, p.65). I think that Attwell is accurately drawing attention to the core dilemma of the local political setting, and yet I think that this fiction of Coetzee is also able to transcend the temporo-spatial positioning of the protagonist in a malfunctioning society and to project a fictional shadow of fraternity or ubuntu, albeit uneasy and momentary, as a precedent upon which future communities might be founded. Even though her historical, psychological and physical enclosure seems to prevent Magda from actually connecting with others, she does share the same transitional position as Hendrik and identification with Klein-Anna as another woman. Coetzee is looking beyond the frontiers of apartheid with a thin thread of anticipation in these speculative and original ties.

I propose that it is in Magda’s tangled textual web of seeking to belong that Coetzee redirects the gaze of the reader towards future undefined patterns for postcolonial belonging. Glenn moots that this novel is offering more than an analysis of a specific political environment or a theoretical formulation, like colonial discourse, and he is arguing for Coetzee’s foresight beyond current thinking (1996, pp.120-137). According to Glenn, Magda has already performed the function of the critic and he states that ‘Coetzee’s aim here is to prevent, anticipate, those answers (psychological, historical, sociological) that might allow us to avoid following Magda’s spinning of her tale, that might permit us to fit her into some pre-established critical category’ (1996, p.135). I certainly agree with Glenn, and I add that Coetzee is redirecting the reader to examine the critical processes that we employ and the limitation that these impose upon our sense of belonging.

Coetzee creates Magda as a character who is hemmed in by the realities of her setting and who presents a theoretical and imaginary connectedness with others as evidence of how to move beyond specific geo-political and discursive confines. I fully concur with Head that Magda cannot break out of the racial-historical mould that frames her existence as an ‘ideological construction’, even though she does represent a ‘moment of impending awakening and political change’ (1997, p.64). Head, however,
does not elaborate on her transitional function. It is this aporia that I aim to address. As the daughter of apartheid, Magda does not know the language of transformation. But perhaps the question to be asked is: Does transformation require the tools of analysis to occur or are the words merely a subsequent confirmation that change has taken place? As I propose to demonstrate in the next sections of this chapter, it is in her transgressiveness that the narrator experiences two surprising opportunities of shared identification. These allow her to represent a novel place that transcends her textual positioning and acknowledges the need for finding new ways of connecting with others as a basis of any sense of belonging.

Coetzee establishes Magda’s shaky link with African people as her chance break out of her untenable role as a colonial agent. Glenn explains that Magda’s marginal existence is complicated by the fact that her intellectual reality is European, but her physical reality is African (1996, p.129). But what might her African reality imply? Andre Viola recommends that it is time for diverse ethnic communities in Africa ‘to look across long-standing barriers’ for cross-fertilization of ideas and example (1998, p.224). The volume of academic and popular engagement in such “cross-border” cultural discussion at present is evidence of the eagerness of so many to listen and share ideas for future coexistence. It seems to me that Coetzee was already teasing open the thinking of his readership when the apartheid era was at its zenith. By unsettling the many boundaries in In the Heart of the Country, Coetzee is creating the possibility for such ‘cross-fertilization’.

Masolo’s theory is particularly useful in an examination of the attempts of Coetzee’s character to define herself in Africa (1997). Writing on the politics of representation, Masolo favours an interactive invention of a unique African identity that, while it acknowledges the value of past ontologies, is also embracive of diversity, pluralism and change (1997, p.298). Masolo stresses the difference between the imaginary and the real and the way that the political can manipulate the imaginaries (1997, p.298). Magda’s deformed identity can be read as the manipulation of her imagination by her colonial reality. Just as Masolo proposes a future-directed focus on identity not being fixed but continually negotiated, so I suggest that Coetzee offers his protagonist a theoretical and an imaginary opportunity to look beyond the confines of her Eurocentric heritage. I further maintain that it is in her interaction with the
"Coloured" couple on the farm that she is able to experience these transgressive moments of sharing a sense of belonging.

3.2. BEYOND LANGUAGE

Coetzee presents language as an ambivalent medium for Magda’s representation. It enables her textual creation and it restricts her to a dominant position. Kosswell stresses the link between language and power in the contradictory role of ‘daughters of the colonies’ who are both colonizer and colonized: ‘Bound up with this colonizing power of language are the issues of the dialectic place and displacement and of finding an authentic voice (ie an identity not imposed by the centre)’ (1996, p.62). Even though such an authentic voice is not heard in the text, it is my opinion that Coetzee does achieve a shift away from the centrality of the written word towards recognition of metalingual fictional signifiers of transition that flag new ways of listening.

The use of English creates a separation from the Boer identity and introduces the sanction of the metropolis. In the second edition of the novel, all direct speech was written in Afrikaans and all other writing was in English. This highlights the duality of her life: her Afrikaner origins and her wider Eurocentric heritage. Susan Van Zanten Gallagher states that the Afrikaner mythology of the ‘Chosen People’ supports a hierarchical world view in which ‘language has been a crucial means of creating identity and a tool of oppression’ (1991, p.37). I suggest that this split adds another lamination of colonial authority that reinforces Magda’s verbal jail.

Acknowledging the layered hegemonies of language, I shall be considering Coetzee’s attempt to create a transitional meta-textual space that redirects the gaze of the reader outside the enclosures of the existing structures of authority to a site of potential sharing. Magda’s search for a ‘life unmediated by words’ (IHC, p.135) appears to be unrealistic for she depends on words for her textual existence and it seems to contradict her desire for belonging with others because relationships depend on communication. Ironically, however, the two aspects of her life that allow her to transcend her isolation are not represented verbally. Her dual transitional position as colonizer and colonized,
let alone the similarities between herself and Hendrik, are not explicitly stated. She does articulate her awareness of a space of shared identity with Klein-Anna, and yet her journaling merely represents a physical trope for emptiness, a space devoid of specific verbal signifiers but signalling a wisp of eagerness to understand the diverse range of authentic voices of women in Africa.

3.3. BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

Dualities form a dominant stylistic pattern in this novel. In the absence of much conversation, Coetzee installs a metalingual dialogue by juxtaposing different temporal and spatial modalities. In this section I shall demonstrate how Coetzee disturbs the margins between different temporal and spatial dualities in order to revise the fixed patterns of connection in these familiar modalities. By troubling the outlines, Coetzee is again prompting the readers to question the parameters that we use to define ourselves and our positions in the world. He urges us to reconsider the frontiers that we take for granted and the limitations that these impose upon our ability to reconfigure our maps of identification. By expanding the connotations of finite boundaries into more flexible zones, Coetzee is laying open a site for investigating more transgressive cross-border possibilities. The narrative pieces upset the neat distinction between cyclical and linear temporality. Similarly, the balance of spatial symmetry is disrupted. The precarious position of the protagonist continues to shift in relation to both modalities and this is evidence of her insecure and tenuous sense of belonging and her unsuccessful attempts to establish lasting relationships with others.

Coetzee shows that the margins between cyclical and linear temporalities are unclear and do not yield up tidy formulae for enlightenment. In *White Writing* Coetzee offers an antipastoral critique of the Afrikaner literary tradition of the *plaasroman* in which rural life is idealized as a return to the harmony of nature (1988, p.64). I concur with recent critics who claim that *In the Heart of the Country* fits into the antipastoral tradition that Coetzee theorizes (Attwell 1993; Glenn 1996; Head 1997; and Kossew 1996), although I assert that Coetzee is not installing an equivalent counterposition. Even though Coetzee may be subverting the temporality of the *plaasroman* in Magda’s
narrative, I maintain that he is not providing a viable alternative temporal modality in which she can reside comfortably.

The domestic rituals can be read as an antipastoral technique that contradicts the pastoral idyll. The parallel temporal modes of the indoors and the outdoors seem to connote synchronicity for the time of the seasons to which pastoral life corresponds is imitated in the routine cooking, polishing and preserving of the household. The continual cleaning is, however, aimed to keep the corrosive effects of linear time, in the tarnishing of the copper and the reclaiming dust from desert, at bay, hence the natural and the cultural cycles clash.

This oppositional form does not seem to produce much meaning, however. The linear progression of time that is evident in the steadily depleting stock of purchased supplies and the departure of the servants is denied in Magda’s obsession with the cyclical seven-day flight schedule of the aeroplanes. Ironically, this is mimetic of the cyclical temporality of the pastoral idyll and yet, unlike farm productivity, it yields no significance. By the end of the novel, Coetzee has been highly successful in destabilizing both temporal modes, for Magda’s entries conform to neither. Her conclusion that ‘perhaps there is no time ... perhaps there is only space’ (IHNC, p.123) seems to cancel both modalities and leave her existence suspended in a temporal vacuum of not belonging.

In my interpretation, Coetzee uses a sequence of spatial modalities to stage an ambiguous trajectory of entrapment and estrangement that traces the inability of the female protagonist to belong in a patriarchal structure. In spite of a number of moves, in the end Magda cannot escape the bonds of her colonial inheritance. Her disturbing last choice to remain behind the locked gates of a petrified garden perpetuates the myth of her attachment to a defunct pastoral model and it confirms her entrapment in a sterile timeless place. In a chapter on the farm novels of C.M. Van den Heever, Coetzee argues that ‘self-realization - realization of the self not as an individual but...as the transitory embodiment of a lineage - becomes tied to landownership’ (WW, p.87). Similarly, Magda’s identity is inextricably bound to her role as an inheritor. The dilemma for her, like Lyndall in Olive Schreiner’s novel, The Story of an African Farm, is that ‘to accept
the farm as home is to accept a living death' (*WW*, p.66) because as a female identity she does not fit easily into the imperial patrifocal mould.

Coetzee also presents contrasting overarching spatial metaphors of symmetry and imbalance that reiterate the dualities of organized containment and disruptive disorder. These are both equally alienating and attest to Magda's lack of a sense of belonging. The symmetrical "H" pattern of the house is one of a number of layered spatial patterns of enclosure. The traditional design of a Cape Dutch homestead is the physical enclosure that mirrors Magda's ideological and historical enclosure. Symmetry suggests order and balance: features of imperial diligence, the pride of a Calvinistic Afrikaner heritage, and yet it includes the contrasting implications of control and entrapment. Rob Shields's argument that "[s]patializations are central to cultural hegemony and dominant ideologies" (1997, p.189) prompts a closer scrutiny of the house as a trope of ambivalence. Notions of "Heaven" and "Hell" as well as the connotations of the notorious Irish "H" block prison and the contradictory associations of alienation and belonging at home are signified in the shape of the dwelling. The respective rooms of the father and his daughter could reflect their juxtapositioning '...the real game lies between the two of us' (*IHC*, p.34), but, in fact, they are ironic parallels of each other. The irony here is that Magda's textual web is, itself, woven with threads of her colonial inheritance, her language and her Eurocentric source of reference, hence her attempts to subvert her father's power are doomed for she derives her authority from the same source as he does.

In my opinion, Magda's room is a signifier for her uncertain occupancy, since it is a displaced space that does not fit comfortably into an African landscape. Initially, it is her cloister (*IHC*, p.8), a cool, protective haven to which she retreats from the searing elements, thus avoiding the reality of the environment. The roses on the wallpaper (*IHC*, p.48) are yet another emblem of nostalgia for the flora of the Northern Hemisphere, a denial of affiliation with the local setting. The contents of her room: the pen and paper, the books and the furnishings, confirm her European heritage and her flimsy sense of belonging in the heart of this foreign country.

Coetzee destabilizes the patriarchal hierarchy and exposes the precariousness of all positions within the established order and this is played out in Magda's changing
response to her room. I maintain that the equilibrium of any social architecture sets up a clear sense of belonging because everyone knows his/her place. At the outset, the routine of Magda’s life suggests outward complicity with the patriarchy as the woman of the house. But a sense of belonging is an unstable and dynamic condition because any disturbance upsets the entire structure and all participants. Coetzee unsettles this balance and Magda’s tentative sense of belonging when Magda’s father breaks the code of behaviour and takes the servant, Klein-Anna, to his room. After this transgression, Magda comes to regard her bedroom as a ‘black vortex’ (IHC, p.56), a cell to which the master of the house banishes her to avoid her censure. She is further alienated from her room when it becomes the site of her most intimate dispossess. But this is not a repossession of her by another. She does not become one of Hendrik’s women. She is merely violated, explored and then forsaken. Her room is then a multivalent metaphor for her displaced position that is neither European nor African and her transgressiveness as a recorder of imaginary parricide and victim of another’s transgression. Her room can be seen as a space that transects conventional boundaries and invites a re-evaluation of the margins that delineate belonging. It is, therefore, my assertion that even the frontiers of sexual transgression associated with this space can be reconsidered as sites of innovative possibility. The same can be said for the parallel bedroom of the father.

Coetzee shows that the frontier between harmony and dissonance is fragile and vulnerable, even at the point of origin. As the head of the household, Magda’s father can be seen as the apex of that colonial hierarchy. His bedroom is hub from which the whole organization is controlled, but it is also the site in which disruption and chaos begin. This room shifts from being the centre of colonial power in the occupancy of the father and it becomes a marginal place of horror and death (IHC, pp.78-80) that is metonymic of Kristeva abjection. The anthropologist, Mary Douglas, reaffirms that: ‘[a]ll margins are dangerous. If they are pulled this way or that the shape of fundamental experience is altered. Any structure of ideas is vulnerable at its margins’ (Quoted in Kerryn Goldsworthy 1996, p.53). Magda dreams of sealing, amputating and setting adrift this damaged limb of the house, in order to contain and separate the malignancy lest it spreads and taints the rest of the house. This wish to quarantine disease echoes the isolation of both protagonists in Dusklands to prevent further contamination. I have explained that the flaw in the rational self-representation of the two protagonists in the first novel reveals a split in their sense of self, out of which new schemes for belonging
might be initiated, so now the abject site of the father’s sexual transgression and death in his daughter’s journal might also signify the starting point for a wider rethinking of sexual frontiers in *In the Heart of the Country*.

Coetzee describes a fragmented female identity who is locked in the heart of the country but does not belong in a patriarchal colonial design. He rearranges well-known boundaries between juxtaposed temporal and spatial modalities to expose the lack of reciprocity that Attwell observes. By unsettling the expected frontiers of her positioning in temporal and spatial terms, Coetzee is also urging the reader to review rigid cultural attitudes about sexual transgression, in order to find an avenue for a female subject to experience empowerment outside the established order. Magda may fail in her attempt to subvert her imperial history and to create an alternative narrative in which she has a sense of belonging with others. But the outlook is not bleak. Coetzee does deliver a glimmer of hope in the transitional frontier site, which Magda occupies with the colonized Hendrik and Klein-Anna. These two intangible connections link her with future possibilities.

3.4. TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES

In this section I shall trace some of the sexual frontier transgressions that Coetzee installs in order to highlight the transitional potential that the protagonist’s marginality embodies. As I have intimated, it is my opinion that the multiple, mirrored transgressions of the boundaries that define the complex colonial architecture in *In the Heart of the Country* damage the structure of a hierarchy that separates individuals into culturally imposed roles. Within the system these roles keep people apart. Both Penner (1989, pp.63-65) and Attwell (1993, pp.60-66) have stressed the significance of transgressiveness and disregard for the law in Magda’s tale. I agree that the fracturing outcome of these many transgressions exposes the gaps between Magda’s desire to belong in a reciprocal relationship with others and her inability to break out of her isolation. Her sense of identity is the product of her imperial inheritance and she cannot shift these internalized frontiers that perpetuate inequality and separation. Yet I aim to demonstrate that Magda is able to transgress the confines of her heritage in the
theoretical position that she shares for a short while with Hendrik. This expanded idea of a shared boundary position opens up the notion of frontier to another more significant sharing across a cultural frontier in the imaginary identification between Magda and Klein-Anna.

Coetzee shows that Magda is an ambivalent representative of colonial ideology, who is at once willing and resistant. She acknowledges that she is not just a passive victim of her father’s domination but a cog in the wheel of oppression, when she questions, ‘Who is the beast among us? ...Is it my snarl I hear in the undergrowth?’ (IHC, p.50). Her intention is to author a new identity for herself, like Susan Barton in Foe and Michael K in The Life and Times of Michael K. She attempts to transform her world in two ways: by destroying her father’s hegemony which has kept her so separate and by befriending the servant couple, Hendrik and Klein-Anna. In both attempts she fails. Although her yearning for an alternative narrative in which she can enjoy a sense of belonging remains elusive, Coetzee does provide a fictional glimpse of belonging beyond the bounds that constrict her life as a colonial consciousness and a textual construct. Coetzee sets up the foundations for the possibility of some future common ground in her relationship with the two servants.

3.4.1. COLONIZING THE BODY

Coetzee’s depiction of frontier transgression is most explicit in the sexual relationships in the novel. I intend to examine Coetzee’s representation of the many sexual contraventions in the light of the overriding obsessional chimera of Magda, which seems to be a longing for sexual union but is, in my opinion, a desperate longing for being with others. It seems to me that the dialectic that is created between the various sexual encounters and Magda’s desire for union rearranges the parameters that define transgression. The validity of these frontiers is also called into question. On the one hand, sexual violation is aimed at establishing dominance and can be regarded as a denial of the integrity and hence the identity of the individual. According to cultural geographers, Heidi Nast and Steve Pile, the body can be regarded as the closest territorial site (1998, p.2), thus transgression of the body can be read as a violently
colonizing act against another. On the other hand, Magda’s ambiguous response to the aggressive assault of Hendrik upon her raises queries about clear-cut definitions of sexual frontiers specifically and frontiers in general.

Coetzee shows that the apartheid monument was a construction of mutually reinforcing myths of which racist sexual myths were a vital building block in a policy of “divide and rule”. Among these are the sexual myths that entrap Magda and stifle her ability to connect freely with others and to transform her world. According to Barthes, myths disempower people from enacting change (quoted in Barnard 1998, p.124), hence myths about interracial sexual relations were influential in bolstering apartheid legislation.

Sexual myths have performed a significant function to justify the position of the colonizer and to reinforce an antagonistic attitude to all who are considered to be racially different. These myths have facilitated laws that segregate people and reinforce unjustifiable barriers between them. C. Stember articulates the myth in which ‘the sexual desire in the black man [is converted] into obsession for the white woman and sexual excitement in the white man into anger and violence toward the black’ (1976, p.197). This world view led to legislation to protect the “perceived vulnerable” white woman from the “apparent threat” of the black man. Prior to recent legislative reversals in South Africa, there were a number of laws restricting intercourse between Blacks and Whites, which culminated in the total banning of all extramarital interracial sexual relations between Whites and “Non-whites” in the Immorality Act of 1927 and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1950 (Sollors 1997, p.407). These laws entrenched divisions.

It seems to me that Coetzee deliberately tests the whole notion of transgression and the implications for the boundaries that we observe and how these might be erased in the real and imagined sexual encounters in the novel. While Coetzee may outline a number of interracial sexual relations in the work that have contravened the law of the land at the time, the question of whether these actions are transgressive depends upon the positions of all of the participants, including the reader, in ascribing meaning. These positions are frequently duplicitous. Sexual fantasy and reality in In the Heart of the Country together weave the different meanings of “transgressive” into a mangled web that traps the narrator in her isolated colonial consciousness and challenges the
hermeneutic perspective of the reader. Just as the real and the unreal are wound into a
textual knot, so contradictory desires and transgressions in which natural laws of
physical integrity and desires for intimacy have become entangled with, and thwarted
by, the laws of segregation and taboo. The threads of meaning soon become so
intertwined that the separation between them is lost. Numerous legally definitive
margins become destabilized and open to re-evaluation from the fresh perspective of a
desire to belong.

Coetzee presents three transgressors in the novel but each of these is also
transgressed, hence they are each violators and victim who figuratively stand astride the
very frontier that they contravene. The father’s sexual relations with Klein-Anna are
transgressive. The Dutch Reformed Christianity of the Afrikaner farmer would condemn
any extra-marital relations. As the harbinger of the social structure, there is an
expectation that he upholds the law. When he entices Klein-Anna into his bed with
trinkets, he is defying the moral and legal codes on extra-marital and interracial sexual
intimacy. This transgression serves to erode the respect that the patriarch has
commanded. He is also the casualty of his daughter’s psychosexual attack.

I think that Hendrik’s sexual transgression of Magda can be seen as a counter-
colonizing act. He transgresses the law of the land and the integrity of Magda’s body
when he rapes her. His action is a fulfilment of the colonial myth. Condemnation of
Hendrik’s repeated penetration of Magda is compromised, however, for the narrator has
also repeatedly yearned for intimacy and she has envied the couple’s relationship. After
the initial assault she is desperate to please him, thereby partially converting the
meaning of his acts of rage into desired embrace. The frontier between transgression and
desire becomes indistinct. Hendrik’s counter-colonial role as assailant is short-lived.
Magda is left knowing the isolating ramifications as the victim of this most intimate
colonial domination but without any enduring sense of connectedness.

Coetzee employs a metaphor associated with sexual transgression to describe
Magda’s attempt to secure her sense of self as an oppositional female identity to her
father. The daughter fails because she attempts to subvert his authority from within the
structure of patriarchy. It seems to me that Magda is the pivotal player in redefining
sexual transgression here. Her triple wrongdoing raises debate about all other frontiers
that are associated with bodily violation. She is transgressive of the bodies of her father, Hendrik and Klein-Anna for, by coveting their intimacy, she admits: ‘I have broken a commandment’ (IHC, p.11). Her transgression against her father goes deepest. It is as if his patriarchy is a denial of her feminine identity. She stabs him to death. This can be read as a feminist inversion of a rape, with the knife representing the phallus. It is perhaps even more foul, for it is an act of incest. Here Coetzee has reversed the usual form of the father imposing himself upon the daughter. The transgressiveness in her violent attack is extensive, for she defies numerous discourses from colonialism to patriarchy to religion. The fact that her father, the figure of the law, does not die, in spite of a number of accounts of parricide in her journal, suggests that her solitary imaginary outcry remains unheard.

Here Coetzee is showing up the inadequacy of the twin phallic symbols of domination available to a woman, the knife and the pen, to topple patriarchal control. He is emphasizing that female identity requires tools from an order that is different from the dominant patriarchal perspective, if a new sphere for belonging is to be conceived. The same dilemma will again come to light in the discussion on Susan’s Barton’s efforts to author her own story in Foe.

Coetzee presents the contrast of Magda’s unfulfilled desire and her father’s later impotence with the virility and passion of Hendrik and Klein-Anna, as a potent of things to come. Magda sets out to be an active agent in changing the structure of her rural society, but she cannot control the form of that change. Evidence of her failure is that the patriarch is still present at the end of the text, as an invalid, passionless and wordless but still a burden of unfulfilling responsibility for the heir to his dominion. Hendrik, the ambivalent object of her desire and the subject of her violation, has fled with his wife, leaving a vacuum of otherness.

Coetzee's novel exposes the impotence of all oppressive measures and it shifts the gaze of the reader beyond the text itself, beyond Magda’s representation of the couple, Hendrik and Klein-Anna, to the potent voice of the oppressed, and the language of emancipation. *In the Heart of the Country* was first published in 1977, one year after the Soweto riots, perhaps the seminal moment in the unstitching of apartheid. For the next fourteen years, the Nationalist government resorted to a series of desperate actions
to defend a policy of repression, restriction and exclusion of all those who were racially classified as "non-white". Questions about the capacity of the English language to give form to a reality beyond resistance, beyond disgrace, will be addressed in chapter seven. According to Sanders, resonances of the voices of the feminine and dogs present the 'raw materials' (2002a, pp.363-373) of an as yet unknown new era in *Disgrace*.

The margins between the colonizer and the colonized are blurred in the ambivalent positions that the father, Hendrik and Magda occupy. They are each transgressors and victims of transgression. The father is literally or figuratively emasculated by his daughter, therefore, the transitional position of being simultaneously the colonizer and the colonized is only shared by Hendrik and Magda for the duration of his use of her body. Nevertheless, this site provides a perspective of common understanding of the violation that colonization perpetrates.

In the numerous transgressive engagements in the novel, I have shown that Coetzee traces the incapacity of a female identity to undo the hegemony of her patriarchal heritage from within and her inability to create an alternative narrative of belonging with Hendrik and Klein-Anna within the existing social structure. I have also discerned a shared site in which the protagonist shares a transitional space as both the colonizer and the colonized *body* that carries an intimate knowledge of the transgressive scars of colonization beyond the boundaries of imperial enclosure. This unlikely example of sharing with another patriarchal figure is, however, problematic for the future. The postcolonial implications of this uneasy coexistence are explored in the chapter on *Disgrace*.

**3.4.2. HOW REAL IS OUR POSSESSION?**

I contend that Coetzee is exposing the crack at the heart of all colonizing acts, namely that possession is not synonymous with belonging in *In the Heart of the Country*. The rhetorical question 'How real is our possession?' (*IHC*, p.114) strikes at the heart of the multiple tasks of seeking out a sense of belonging. Magda says: 'To the spur of desire we have only one response: to capture, to enclose, to hold' (*IHC*, p.114). I
maintain that she is verbalizing a universal yearning for belonging that remains elusive for it cannot be finally secured. While she may not be able to escape the isolation that proprietorship implies, beyond the folds of her textual and historic hegemony, she does envisage a metalingual identification with Klein-Anna that transcends the suggestion of ownership that is frequently associated with belonging.

In this section, I shall argue that by shifting the positions of the centre and the margin, as exemplified by Magda and Klein-Anna, Coetzee is dissolving the frontiers that separate the identities of the two women and he is representing an imaginary space in the consciousness of Magda that lies beyond the confining realities of possession. Even though it is a space that belies critical ownership, the energy associated with feminine creativity can be felt. How this will generate new forms of understandings remains to be seen but the responsibility of the reader to listen to the unfamiliar strains is clear.

Coetzee has frequently used the voice of a woman as a position from which to speak that is ‘outside current power relations’ (DP, p.11). After Magda, Susan Barton in Foe, Mrs Curren in Age of Iron, and Elizabeth Costello are female narrators who provide a range of opportunities for Coetzee to interrogate otherness, to explore a way of being that is marginal and to consider the broader cross-fertilizing ramifications of borderland existence.

The history of feminist readings of Coetzee’s fiction presents an interesting parallel to cultural commentary on South Africa in a postmodern example of mimicry. During the apartheid era, the overriding concern to most students of the humanities was the inequity of racial discrimination of the majority of the population. In the light of the gross violations of human rights in the segregationist laws, the secondary considerations of gender issues were largely neglected by the academy. Similarly, during this time Coetzee’s commentators tended to debate his commitment to overall political change, while largely ignoring his use of women as narrators or protagonists in a number of his novels. Attwell noted this critical silence in the mid 1990’s in the ‘Afterword’ to a collection of critical essays on Coetzee (1996).
Since the installation of new inclusive democratic processes in 1994, there is eagerness among cultural critics to seek opportunities for revisioning the national consciousness. During this transitional phase the position of women in the society has been high on the agenda. The history of the local environment has complicated generalizing readings of “the feminine”, with questions being raised about which women are being represented and for whom they speak. Both Eva Hunter (1993) and Viola (1998) draw attention to the specific circumstances of feminist debate among women from different racial groups in South Africa.

In tandem to this overarching cultural movement, there have recently been a number of keen readings of the women in Coetzee’s work, although there is by no means agreement about how to read Coetzee’s female narrators and characters. Some, such as Josephine Dodd, regard Coetzee’s textual inscriptions of women as representing more of the same patriarchal appropriation that panders to ‘First-World voyeurism’ (1998, pp.63-164), while others view his female characters as allowing ‘[n]ew, unimagined possibilities to emerge’ (C. Briganti 1998, p.85). The different responses of Marais and Boehmer to Coetzee’s representation of woman in Disgrace will be examined in chapter seven.

The commentaries of Probyn and Kossew are relevant to my reading of Coetzee’s work. It seems to me that Coetzee appeals to the notion of ‘feminine difference’ that Probyn identifies (2002) as a way out of the loop of unavoidable complicities that Kossew observes. He does this in Magda’s momentary appreciation of her bond with Klein-Anna. Probyn points out that interpretations of most critics who conflate Coetzee’s self-positioning and his woman narrators, unproblematically, fail to recognize his textual use of ‘feminine difference’ (2002). For Kossew, Coetzee’s position is mediatory and ambivalent: it simultaneously signifies a distancing from, and concurrence with, the position of the postcolonizing woman writer (1998). She claims that ‘Coetzee’s women narrators are each, in their own ways, concerned to find an authentic ‘woman’s voice’ to set against patriarchal authority but their search is complicated by their own complicity in that authority’ (1998, p.168), and Coetzee, himself, is caught in a double bind, because he includes ‘his own author/ity in the ‘contest ... about having a say’” (1998, p.177).
In my opinion, the fulcrum around which all real and imaginary construction is negotiated in the novel is Magda’s question: ‘How real is our possession?’ (IHC, p.114). It defines the problematic moment at which her identity coalesces, a moment of convergence of the external situation and the internal consciousness of the self. The colonial expectation of this young woman comes into jarring confrontation with the realities of her needs. In her clumsy efforts to fulfil her external, learnt role and to satisfy her inner longing for community, Magda finds herself caught in the web of her historical placing and consciousness, unable to connect with the servants and eventually being abandoned by them. Her identity is trapped in the strictures of her background.

Coetzee demonstrates the marginality of the female voice in patriarchal discourse. He juxtaposes the centrality of the protagonist’s textual web and her actual marginality in that farm society, thereby showing the flimsiness of Magda’s legitimacy. In fact, she only gains legitimacy by default of a vacuum in the hierarchy that needs to be filled to prevent the whole structure from collapsing. She is the mistress of the house only because there is no wife. As the daughter, she is heir to the land merely because there is no son. She is in charge of the farm because her father is absent. Even though she is well versed in the European literary canon and informed in African oral mythology, she is the legitimate heir to neither legacy because, as a colonial child, she cannot claim unequivocal descent from either. So where does this daughter of the colonies belong?

There does not seem to be a legitimate space for female difference outside the domain of the father. Magda achieves a position from which to speak by claiming the roles officially intended for others, although even the marginal authority of her voice is denied in the lack of any responsive audience at the end of the text, with her deranged father still silently claiming his tenure and the servant couple gone. As herself, she does not have a recognized space in any discursive schema out of which she can begin to create meaning. She has not learnt the language of the mother, for the mother is absent in death. Nevertheless, she takes up a creative feminine position outside the law of the father, but it is a position that disturbs rational scrutiny. She says: ‘I am the mad hag I am destined to be’ (IHC, p.8).
Coetzee elaborates upon the logistical complications associated with the position of feminine difference and the problem of where such a subject belongs in a patrifocal environment. It is difficult for others around Magda to relate to her, for she does not occupy a familiar and therefore comfortable position in the hierarchy. As a consequence, she cannot interact easily. Attwell argues that, because her colonial heritage has created a barrier between herself and the others on the farm, her sense of self can only be achieved by auto-suggestion (1993, p.65). Magda’s legitimacy is tenuous and her position is not clearly recognisable within the parameters of given master-servant, masculine discourses. As I have shown, she attempts to upset the external hierarchy by first eliminating the patriarch. Next she transgresses the boundaries between herself and the servants, in order to shift her position from the margin to the centre, as the new head of the household. From this clearer colonial position, she hopes to rewrite her narrative, claiming the right of belonging.

While I agree with Attwell that Magda is unable to establish reciprocal fraternity with Hendrik and his wife Klein-Anna (1993, pp.60-66), I maintain that this assessment only refers to relationships in terms of the existing dominant culture. I further contend that, as an exemplar of feminine difference, Magda is able to experience an imaginary moment of merging with Klein-Anna that goes beyond the parameters of the patrifocal system. This is one visionary flash of release from her internalized colonial jail. In this instant she, too, experiences the sense of belonging that the servant woman’s legitimacy affords.

Coetzee presents an ironic inversion of the familiar colonial pattern of legitimacy in Magda’s glimpse of her commonality with Klein-Anna. He sets up the character of Klein-Anna in a central position of legitimacy that contrasts with Magda’s marginality. Klein-Anna is the legal wife of Hendrik. She performs the clearly defined job of housemaid. Even as the sexual mistress of the master, she gleans a semblance of legitimacy from his final patriarchal authority. In the “real” context of a troubled South Africa at the time in which Coetzee wrote this novel, Klein-Anna’s racial grouping and her gender suggest an important responsibility. She represents the role of the woman who is other than white in the struggle of her people for a political voice. There is great legitimacy vested in such a position, for it implies that she is the bearer and nurturer of future changes beyond the repeating cycle of history. A metaphoric interpretation of her
character invites the reader to listen to the faint but focal rhythms that may emanate from her feminine presence, in the hope that they will become more audible, now that some of the restraints of apartheid have been razed.

I suggest that Klein-Anna’s presence is the catalysing hub of the text. Her authority is undeniable, and yet she is almost silent. She only intervenes to check the sequence of events once, when she tells Hendrik to stop hurting Magda (IHC, p.98). This action allows the white woman an instant of recognition: ‘she is a woman, therefore she is merciful. Is that a universal truth?’ (IHC, p.98). In an ironic twist, the narrator, herself, enacts the fallacy of such a universal maxim, in her own lack of mercy for Klein-Anna when she is beaten by her husband for being unfaithful. Klein-Anna is a counterbalance to Magda’s duplicitous role as a “liberal colonizer”.

The meticulously organized society provides a place for each member, hence identity is largely shaped by the rigid pattern of the structure as a whole. As I have shown, Magda only fits into that framework uneasily. Now, in addition to her already tenuous position, Magda actively ignores the divisions that this structure imposes by flouting the rules of conduct. This collapses the framework within which her marginal identity has been defined. She judges that she has the right to witness the intimate reconciliation of the couple and she justifies her decision to transgress the social barrier of privacy by representing herself as the protector of an unfaithful wife against the wrath of her spouse. But Magda’s position is deeply flawed. This desire to become entangled in the domestic quarrel of the servants is starkly ambivalent, for she has been ruthless in her own condemnation of Klein-Anna. By blaming the maid for her infidelity with the master of the house, Magda does not have to face her own guilt for committing the more heinous crime of stabbing her father.

Again Coetzee is drawing attention to the friability of frontiers for the fixed divisions in the colonial pyramid are so easily collapsed, leaving an unsupervised space that is open to new meanings. In my opinion, Magda’s abuse of justice and of her position of authority undermine the entire organisation of the farm community. On the one hand, she appeals to the hierarchy of authority, which holds her little world in such tight control for her own security. On the other hand, she inverts the rules and destroys the arrangement by her total disregard for the code of behaviour required of such a tiered
society. She has certainly undone the binding of the social fabric, but her sense of freedom is still on her own restricted terms, the terms of her superior feudal self-image, hence her experience of belonging is still ambivalent. Even so, within a more porous social framework, her sense of self now appears to be more receptive to the flow of influences that she chooses.

In the previous section of this chapter, I demonstrated that Magda does embody, rather than articulate the possibility for a non-oppositional stance. She fills that transitional gap between colonizer and colonized, when she occupies both positions simultaneously as the heir to her father’s land and as the forcibly possessed other, by the counter-colonising act of Hendrik.

I do, however, believe that her imagined merging with Klein-Anna is even more significant. She asks: ‘how much keener does my question become when woman desires woman, two holes, two emptinesses’ (IHC, p.114). This union does not represent a binary desire for the other, as a complement. Instead, it represents a desire for recognition of the other as the same, a sharing of the same essential femaleness. The female identity of Magda does merge fleetingly with the femaleness of Klein-Anna, when she says: ‘If that is what I am then that is what she is too, anatomy is destiny: an emptiness, or a shell, a film over an emptiness longing to be filled in a world in which nothing fills.’ (IHC, p.114). A Hegelian synthesis of opposites cannot be achieved. This union is hence a “logical” failure. Magda intuitively knows that ‘it is the first condition of life forever to desire, otherwise life would cease. It is a principle of life forever to be unfulfilled’ (IHC, p.114).

Here Coetzee is proving an example of metalingual identification that transcends the frontiers of race and culture. This momentary imaginary merging with Klein-Anna opens up an opportunity for Magda and her trapped colonial consciousness to listen to the other, without anticipating “solutions” but with an willingness to find similarities in Klein-Anna’s difference. As I have already intimated, Klein-Anna leaves a shadow with the reader, after she departs from the text. I believe that she, as a representative of South African women who are other than “white”, occupies a vital, if still uncertain, position in her immediate geo-political location, in later post-apartheid society and in the broader theoretical context.
Belinda Bozzoli suggests that, historically, there has not been a significant feminist movement in South Africa (1995, p.119). Yet the editors of the text, in which her chapter is published, suggest that Bozzoli may not have given adequate attention to the protest movement among women in the country, the heart of South African patriarchy (W. Beinart & S. Dubow 1995, p.9). Acknowledging the political power that Coetzee invests in the aporias in his novels as more than mere passive resistance but rather as strategies that interrogate the dominant discourses (Marais 1996a, pp.74-81), I contend that Klein-Anna’s silence attests to the resistant power of rural women of Africa, regardless of their racial classification.

There is keen feminist negotiation among women from different racial groups in South Africa. Both Hunter (1993) and Viola (1998) draw attention to the specific circumstances of this debate. Hunter says ‘black women are defining themselves, and their opposition to sexism, in their own terms - that is, in resistance to any hegemony of western feminism over and above the oppressions of race, class and patriarchy’ (1993, p.12). In the intellectual realm, there is an audience eager to hear the voices that have historically been silenced, overruled or ignored. Hunter elaborates on the debate between black and white feminist writers in South Africa: Sisi Maqagi is wary about white women usurping the right to theorize about black women’s work, while Jenny De Reuck responds to this reluctance to hear white feminists speak, by stressing the urgency for all South African women to resist silence and speak up (1993, p.12). Hunter concurs that, given the continuing marginalisation of women of all cultures from the “peace” negotiations:

women must meet the challenge to move toward a condition in which difference is no longer equitable with separateness, as under apartheid. This transformation, moreover, must occur within the context of as full a recognition as is possible of the facets (class, culture, race, and age, for instance) that constitute their difference. (1993, p.15)

In this debate, Viola notes a plea for restraint to be exercised by white feminists (1998, p.220). In the past, Dorothy Driver described the position of white women in the South African context as serving a ‘mediatory role’ as members of the dominant group but sympathizers with colonized women (March 1988). In the new South Africa, the notion of white women acting as mediators for black women could be seen as continuing
a defunct power imbalance. In 1996, in an effort to redress the absence of women’s voices in the past, a number of women collaborated to compile the first historical anthology of South African women’s writing that was published in 2002 (Driver 2002). The multiplicity of contexts and the continually changing gender process point to a heterogeneity of voices and the importance of reading as a ‘transformative act’ (2002, p.170) that acknowledges ‘difference without fearing it and without fetishising it’ (2002, p.170).

I maintain that, as long ago as the 1970’s, Coetzee created the character of Klein-Anna to represent the potential that marginal women of colour might offer for more diligent listening by all postcolonizers. Perhaps this is a call for the voices of black women to be heard. Magda’s brief merging with Klein-Anna gives the subject a momentary appreciation of the other woman’s value, precisely because Klein-Anna does not derive creative energy from confrontation. Also, because Magda’s experience of otherness is felt within her own sense of identity rather than as an external engagement with otherness, there is less risk of her fetishising the difference of the other woman.

It seems to me that Lucy’s controversial choices in Disgrace can be linked to the same potential. In Coetzee’s post-apartheid novel, Lucy shares the legitimacy of a pregnant wife with Petrus’s first wife. Lucy’s capacity to belong in her new chosen family will depend upon how she will respond to the mentoring of this silent woman who is other than white. Further discussion of Coetzee’s representation of the feminine will be undertaken in chapters four, seven and eight.

I propose that Magda’s fleeting awareness of a metaphoric merging of her femaleness with the femaleness of Klein-Anna embodies a vision of transcendence beyond the warped relationships of colonial subjects and beyond the confines of Western discourse and language. Klein-Anna offers an instant of hope to Magda, in spite of the overwhelming impediment of her colonial shackles.

In my opinion, Magda’s textual merging with Klein-Anna also reveals Coetzee’s perennial conviction that the imagination can transcend the confining realities of the dominating ideology of the time and the tools that represent that domination, the language, to offer a glimpse of identifying with otherness. Thus the postcolonizer is able
to envisage a space not of possession or control but of shared belonging with the colonized. I think that, in this one transient moment of fusion, feminine emptiness becomes the transitional opportunity for new modes of connection or ubuntu. One might take the purpose of the brief imaginary merging of Magda’s body with that of Klein-Anna to be for the receptivity and the creative potential that “similarity in difference” offers, rather than for confrontational attempts to fill the space of the other with meaning established by the self. Thence the imagination of the reader takes Coetzee’s cue and moves beyond the text.

I have demonstrated that Coetzee teases open traditional notions of frontier by blurring the familiar temporal and spatial boundaries. Coetzee also extends the field of cross-border communication by urging readers to reconsider their unquestioned acceptance of the fundamental frontier of sexual transgression in search of areas of shared identification from past patterns such as the transitional overlap of colonial and postcolonial experience. Finally, Coetzee presents the imagination as an invaluable resource for moving beyond established frontiers and considering whole new ways of belonging with others.
4. RELUCTANT EMISSARIES

In this chapter I propose to set up a critical dialogue between two of Coetzee’s novels: Waiting for the Barbarians and Foe. Both texts have been read as allegories for the process of imperial expansion and its history and as critiques of attendant discourses (Dovey 1988 and Jolly 1996). By examining some of the parallels, convergences and disparities between the two first-person narratives, I shall first explore the boundaries to belonging that reluctant emissaries of colonialism confront and the means by which they hope to shift these. Then I shall examine the fictional and non-fictional people to whom the narratives belong. The link between the failure of the narrators to record their stories and the frontiers to belonging will also be explored. Finally, the opportunities for cross-border sharings and the implications of “responsibility-in-complicity”, to use Sander’s description for authoring and reading, will be considered. In this comparative analysis of the two texts, I shall demonstrate that Coetzee’s praxis presents a sustained focus on the complicity of reluctant emissaries of colonialism, while he simultaneously responds to shifts in prevailing critical thinking and directs the gaze of the reader towards the ethical, beyond the bounds of ongoing Western discursive practice.

As I have argued in the two earlier chapters, it is my contention that Coetzee shifts the binary paradigm of inclusions and exclusions in his novels by widening the precarious borderlands to allow for creative glimpses of belonging. He installs his protagonists as boundary inhabitants whose sense of belonging is uncertain. In Dusklands Coetzee interrogates both the permeability of modern identity in Eugene Dawn and the eighteenth-century Cape myth of a neutral zone between the Namaqua and the trekboers as a site of permeability where Jacobus encounters the other beyond the frontier and the other within himself. Magda in In the Heart of the Country hovers on the edges, eager to surrender her patriarchal heritage but unable to escape, except as an imaginary textual construct.

Each of Coetzee’s novels is quite distinct in the narrative setting and choice of subject, although they are all finely linked by a primary concern of the author with the implications of authority. Throughout Coetzee’s oeuvre, he has maintained a focus on the position of the ‘reluctant colonizer’, a description that Watson uses, in accordance
with Albert Memmi’s formulation, to define Coetzee’s own role as author (1996, pp.13-36). Drawing on recent postcolonial theory, other critics have favoured the term “postcolonizer”, as coined by Simon During, to signify Coetzee’s boundary position of critiquing the second world “settler” society from within (Attwell 1993, p.22; Head 1997, p.17; Jolly 1996, p.3). Many of the protagonists in his novels duplicate this ambivalent stance, both in their experiential encounters and in their task of recording their stories.

It is my contention that Coetzee interrogates the position of the liberal humanist as a member of the dominant group and her/his attempts to evade identification with the repression that this group perpetrates by aligning her/himself with the oppressed other. Memmi suggests that the dilemma for the ‘leftist colonizer [is that] his role is unliveable’, thereby implying that such a boundary existence is untenable (1965, p.148). Coetzee certainly seems to concur with Memmi in his novels, for his protagonists are not able to transcend their paradoxical positioning. This is surely an issue of not belonging to either side of the Manichean divide? It is also the dilemma faced by postcolonial thinkers. In accordance with Gayatri Spivak’s suggestion that this is a deconstructive position which the theorist simultaneously inhabits and critiques, Emmanuel Eze contends that it is also a place of dangerous potency, and, as a critical project, it must necessarily remain a project of double-gesture’ (1997, p.14). Here the inescapable complicity and the corresponding obligation of responsibility of the intellectual that Sanders identifies in the apartheid example (2002a) is most visible. This uneasy duality is surely the point from which Coetzee begins to consider what it is that constitutes ethical action. This is the pivotal question around which all of his fiction is spun.

A review of Noel Mostert’s text, Frontiers (1992), by Coetzee in Stranger Shores provides an investigation of that most contested boundary in South African history, the Eastern Cape border that is particularly useful for a consideration of frontiers generally (2001, pp.272-281). Here Coetzee argues that Mostert rehabilitates ‘the alternative course of frontier history’ of the real pioneers, the trekboers and he further maintains that this ‘bastard history has been written out of the story of South Africa’, thus the marginality of those who resided on the frontiers of past colonial maps is exacerbated by subsequent exclusion of their narratives from the grand narrative of History (SS, pp.335-336). If, as V.Y. Mudimbe suggests, ‘[h]istory is a legend, an
invention of the present [that] is both a memory and a reflection of our present' (quoted in Masolo 1994, p.195), then such silences are, indeed, a commentary on current historiography and narrative practice in general. The ruling order produces this inviolable silence as a condition of its power, but this is also the condition for its powerlessness.

The latter theme is the sustained metafictional focus of many of Coetzee’s novels. The two key aspects of narrative practice in the borderland zones which he installs concern first the narrator’s desire to belong and the shifting frontiers which s/he encounters to her/his sense of belonging and secondly, the narrative, itself, to whom it belongs and whom it excludes.

I suggest that Coetzee recuperates similar borderline locations in his fiction in order to interrogate the processes in which boundary inhabitants attempt and fail to secure a transitional site of belonging for both themselves and their narratives. They are not able to avoid silencing of the other, while still narrating their own story. This failure certainly seems to imply an impasse that echoes the unliveable role identified by Memmi, yet I suggest that a residue of opportunity that transgresses the limits of colonial control remains.

In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate discovers inscribed shards of wood among the ruins of an earlier community in the desert beyond the settlement and he believes ‘they hold the key to the social structure of a forgotten culture. The underlying assumption is that language is vital for the constitution of a culture, and that culture can be read as a text’ (Beitessem 1990, p.117). At the end of the novel, the magistrate abandons his attempt to write a record of his own settlement, acknowledging his inability to present the “truth” of the past events (*WB*, p.169). In this failure of his protagonist, Coetzee is demonstrating the ambivalence of language and, more specifically, narrative, its authority and its limitations.

Beyond the boundary of words, the power of non-verbal self-representation in the physical presence of the other cannot be denied. In his commentary on the oppressive silences effected in the construction of cultural narratives in his analysis of *Foe*, Attridge argues against an ‘inviolable core of silence to which the dominant
discourse can never penetrate...because the most fundamental silence is itself produced by — at the same time as it makes possible — the dominant discourse’ (1996, p.181). He stresses that Coetzee does not represent a mystical or Romantic yearning for meaningfulness beyond language (1996, pp.185-186), although he does achieve breaks in the totalizing discourse in his narrative that is ‘constantly aware of the problems inherent in its own acts of representation... [through which] presently unimaginable ways of finding a voice, and new ways of hearing such voices, come into being’ (184-6). Thus Attridge can be seen to be flagging perforated frontiers as the site for potential ideological change in Coetzee’s writing.

Coetzee’s work hinges on the double bind of verbal representations of the metalingual subjective stance of others. He focuses on the energy that lies beyond Western epistemological mastery as the problematic source of colonial limitation and a starting point for postcolonial release. He includes brief imaginary glimpses of experience beyond this boundary that attest to the perviousness of boundaries that Mostert affirms in his alternative history. I assert that these border-crossings may begin to open a way for shared belonging. Coetzee’s creative enterprise also widens the possibilities for such coexistence beyond the specific narrative or quasi-historic site to any number of global frontier settings with relevant theoretical applications.

Both novels being considered in this chapter are overtly “theoretical” and provide complementary platforms on which the contests between opposing discursive positions are staged. The chronotopic (to use once again Bakhtin’s term for the dual time/space modality of events) positionings are significant in establishing sites of inclusion and exclusion. The changing identities of the narrators reflect their shifting sense of belonging. Likewise, specific others represent the ambivalent embodiment of frontiers that resist teleological penetration and yet provide creative presences that cannot be denied and invite engagement.

*Waiting for the Barbarians* depicts the ambivalent position of an official law provider, the magistrate, in a frontier settlement and his encounter with the imperial law enforcement troops that arrive from the capital to assert colonial dominance among the surrounding peoples. A primary issue in this text is who is responsible for the damage done to the “barbarian” girl and her people? The changing configurations of justice and
authority that are both external and internal to the magistrate continually shift the
frontiers to his belonging in an unnamed cultural and geographic landscape, at an
unspecified time. Within a wider historic gaze, the role of the magistrate in the imperial
design and the record of his tenure come under scrutiny.

In *Foe* these two themes of authority are expanded. The role of a number of
"players" is interrogated. The functions of the various accounts of the classical *Robinson
Crusoe* story are also questioned. In this text the timeframe is taken from the canonic
precursor, although this is clearly linked, in the fourth and final section of Coetzee’s
novel, to a current retrospective gaze. At times the geography is explicit, as in the
English settings where Susan Barton attempts to have her story recorded. At other times,
like the last scene, the location is not given. In the mutilation of Friday, *Foe* repeats the
violence of colonizing the other depicted in the maiming of the "barbarian" girl in the
earlier novel, but in this text the narrative record and to whom it belongs is central. By
installing a number of claimants, Coetzee is able to interrogate the authority of each
position and the complicity of each in the silencing of the others. Thus this later novel
can be read as broadening the collusive involvement in the colonial project, while
simultaneously making the alternative presence of the other more immediate and vital.

Both texts also include mythic, remote locations. The vagueness of the mapped
co-ordinates of the unnamed frontier garrison town in *Waiting for the Barbarians*
resembles the floating positionality of the island (*F*, p.26). Both connote a broader
representational geography. The spatial distancing emphasizes the gap between the
colonial margins and the imperial centre. Similarly, the timeframe of both narratives is
equally removed. The only means of transport in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is provided
by horses, suggesting an earlier setting. *Foe* links Susan’s attempt to record a revision of
Daniel Defoe’s nineteenth-century texts, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Roxanna*, with Coetzee’s
present-day authorial effort. This might imply a wider retrospective view that extends
the universal relevance of the texts and installs a breadth of perspective between past
colonial practices and current postcolonial thinking, although such a wide scope can be
juxtaposed by reader attempts to draw out the meaning of the allegorical allusions.
Consequently, this contradiction of diverging and converging perspectives also seems to
effect an hermeneutic deadlock. These “defamiliarisation strategies” have also proved to
be effective styles for giving the eye of the censor the slip across the span of South
African Nationalist Party anxiety about subversive writing in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Russian authors also used defamiliarisation in this way. In his later work, *The Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee draws upon the example of Dostoevsky to serve his own, similar purpose.

I suggest that the lure towards an expansiveness of the reader’s gaze is confined by the very cultural frontiers that the characters themselves cannot avoid and also by the reader’s own impetus to secure meaning and closure. The reader becomes a complicit “leftist colonizer”, as constrained in her/his critical comment as the narrators in the novels and equally eager to seek out a place to belong. Here the question to be asked is: What are the epistemological requirements of belonging, or, to put it another way, is knowledge a prerequisite, albeit hegemonic, to belonging? How can the “leftist colonizer” cross the boundary of understanding and still experience a sense of belonging in place and with others?

4.1. ERODING EPISTEMOLOGICAL BOUNDARIES

Foucault has undertaken an exploration of the limitations, the historical effects and the intrinsic dangers of rationality and his research has been extended by postcolonial theorists for whom a primary task is to question the superiority of Western rationality and its universalising impetus (Boehmer 1995, p.244). This is particularly relevant in the African context, where, according to Masolo, ‘modern African thought seems somehow to be basically a product of the West. The conceptual framework of African thinking has been both a mirror and a consequence of European hegemony... The invention of Africa as a product of Western discourse is an illustration of the power of knowledge’, and Africans today conceive of themselves in Western epistemological terms (1994, pp.180-182). Masolo affirms the value of Mudimbe’s pluralist approach in which Mudimbe encourages contact rather than estrangement between different cultural perspectives (1994, pp.191-192). In a later commentary, Masolo maintains that the crisis for epistemologists has been the outcome of assuming the existence of universals, resulting in a great gulf between generalizing judgements and the heterogenous worlds

Both of these theorists focus on encouraging African thinkers to move away from the antiquated notions of Negritude, posited by Tempels, Sartre and Senghor, towards confidence in their own specific and dynamic identity. Their call for open dialogue between individuals in which ‘[e]very experience can only claim a relative validity in comparison with others’ (Masolo 1994, p.250) bears important wider significance. It seems to me that Mudimbe’s efforts to find an authentic site for African identity theory by ‘eliminating the gap between the ‘rational’ and the ‘irrational’ through the definition of knowledge as paradigms of discourse and representations’ (Masolo 1994, pp.191-192) encourages wider engagement with alternative paradigms. Mudimbe’s philosophy spurs the “leftist colonizer” to relinquish his/her attachment to Western conceptual hegemony and cultural construction, and to participate in transcultural dialogues in order to learn new ways of belonging.

Within South Africa, Ndebele has been encouraging the reconstruction of that society by promoting heterogeneity and reciprocal listening. In a widely acclaimed article: ‘The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Some New Writings in South Africa’, he advocates a similar focus on individual stories rather than formulaic abstractions (1994, pp.141-159). It is my opinion that Coetzee has excelled at this for he has always upheld the value of specific tales about unexceptional characters and their private struggles to deal with the world in which they live. Ndebele advances that, in post-apartheid South Africa, ‘every individual will be forced, in a most personal manner, to take a position with regard to the entire situation...It will be the task of literature to provide an occasion within which vistas of inner capacity are opened up’(1994, pp.57-58). I believe that Coetzee’s methodology sets such an example. The marginal positioning of his characters and their persistent self-scrutiny together afford opportunities for the reader to expand her/his own perspective. Coetzee undermines the global drive of Western epistemology in his work and he excavates a space for different paradigms of discourse in the presences of the “barbarian” girl and Friday.

By referring to the idea of open-ended time, which Bakhtin identified in the polyphonic fiction of Dostoevsky (1984), I propose that the desire of the two embedded
authors, the magistrate and Susan, to write a multivocal narrative and their failure to do so, results in the stalemate which Memmi posited. The magistrate is ‘[l]ike a man who lost his way long ago but presses on along a road that may lead nowhere’ (WB, p.169) and there appears to be no way out of the ‘maze of doubting’ (F, p.135) for Susan. In contrast to the failure of the two narrator-authors to record their stories, I suggest that Coetzee changes from a monological form, reflective of only the magistrate’s voice in the earlier text to a trivocal representation of the voices of Susan, Mr Foe, who is a recuperation of the renowned author Daniel Defoe, to whom she appeals for help with writing, and an unknown narrator in the final section of Foe. In spite of the polyphony, the voice of the other, as represented by Friday, remains unheard.

Morson extends Bakhtin’s theory on the fictional representation of open-ended time. Morson’s work provides an excellent basis for considering the strategies that Coetzee installs to look beyond the stalemate experienced by the resistant colonizer, towards a space for belonging with others (1994). Morson has developed the concept of “sideshadowing” which ‘invites a special kind of dialogue that can enrich our perspective through an open-ended engagement with alternatives’ (1994, p.280). Morson suggests that, as well as the ‘actualities and impossibilities’, there is another option of ‘real possibilities that could have happened even if they did not...that deepens our sense of the openness of time’ (1994, pp.5-6). It seems to me that Morson’s thinking contributes to the idea of an expanded frontier for coexistence with otherness because it signifies a willingness to consider options that may not be visible (or, more precisely, heard in terms of language and narrative).

An example of this “sideshadowing” is only briefly alluded to at the end of Waiting for the Barbarians, when the magistrate learns how he had made the “barbarian” girl unhappy from her friend, Mai (WB, p.166). The close communication between the two kitchen hands contrasts with the lack of understanding between the magistrate and the “barbarian” girl. Here a lost opportunity for the intimacy that he so desired blows ‘a wind of utter desolation’ on the magistrate, for he realizes that his relationship with the girl could have been different (WB, p.166).

In Foe, Susan’s sustained attempt to ensure that her alternative to Cruso’s story is recorded, brings “sideshadowing” into full focus. And yet, in spite of this feminist,
doubled version of Defoe's tale, the depth of the "sideshowing" has not been plumbed. Friday remains a persistent burdensome load to Susan, and yet, ironically, she does not acknowledge his "sideshowing" contribution. She states that 'Friday's desires are not dark to me. He desires to be liberated, as I do too' (F, p.148). There is a shared sense of marginality between the female protagonist and the one who is racially "other" that opens up the narrative to the opportunity connoted in the final section of the novel. The significance of this shared identification will be considered in the next section of this chapter.

Coetzee introduces another, unknown narrator towards the end of the text to expand on this openness and receptivity to unimagined alternatives that lie beyond the gaze of Susan in the final section. The reader becomes an accomplice in the process of "s[OFSET]showing" in the multiple interpretations of the final section. There is a substantial body of criticism that provides a wide range of these. Some of this literature is well summarized by Sue Kossew (1996, p.172). Morson stresses that the importance in this open-ended time in "sideshowing", for Dostoevsky, is in the choice and responsibility which such a representation offers. Leading from this, I suggest that the alternatives which Coetzee flags require that the reader considers the ethico-political choices and the responsibilities inherent in the options beyond the apparent void of the reluctant colonizer.

The factual grounding of the novels, that is, their historicity and their fictional content as well as the real constraints on Coetzee's authorial freedom, are only transcended in the imaginary glimpses at which the author hints in the silent presence of the "barbarians" and Friday. The magistrate is unable to write a memorial of the town. He thinks: 'There has been something staring me in the face and still I do not see it' (WB, p.170). He is aware of the "sideshow" of the nomadic peoples but their alternative stories are beyond his gaze. In contrast, even though Friday is in full view of Susan, she says: 'The shadow whose lack you feel is there: it is the loss of Friday's tongue' (F, p.117). In spite of the shift in focus from beyond the horizon in Waiting for the Barbarians to the close perspective of a constant companion in Foe, there is no commensurate increase in understanding. The aporia in his narrative that leaves the magistrate feeling stupid, knowing no more than a babe in arms (WB, pp.169-170), is no
greater than the lacuna for Susan, which ‘seems stupid...because it so doggedly holds its silence’ (F, p.117).

It is the textual occupancy of those unknown others in territory, beyond the boundaries of logocentric containment, that offers the opportunities beyond the Manichean divide. These adumbrate a space for co-existence or shared belonging, which seems to require a transgression of these boundaries. While Coetzee continually achieves such transgression in the persistent, if largely silent, presence of the others, I would argue that it is in the form of the “sideshadowing” that his novels increasingly invite reading alternative narrative lines. In *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the magistrate has a number of dreams of an alternative imaginary scene. The final scene is one of reconstruction in which children, indistinctly reminiscent of the “barbarian” girl, are building a snowman. In *Foe*, the final dreamlike sequence includes the touch of the bubbles of air that emanate from Friday’s mouth on the eyelids of the narrator (F, p.157). The insistent corporeography of these others represents a different paradigm of discourse, as defined by Masolo.

4.2. SUBVERTING FAMILIAR PARADIGMS

In both novels, Coetzee repeatedly challenges familiar paradigms by subverting them. The positions of both narrators offer interrogation from within. The official imperial law enforcer critiques the justice of the system and the gaze of a woman provides a different perspective of the master narrative of colonization. Coetzee changes the sites of contestation by creating a play on the duality of centre and margin. This depends on the position of the gaze and the sense of belonging of the observer. The shifts in centreing unsettle a sense of belonging. The same boundaries that seem to divide space so clearly into margin and centre become eroded when considering the subjective sense of belonging of the participants.

The remote sites, where both narratives begin, resemble each other insofar as they are carefully constructed places that alter the configuration of the space by inscribing new meanings onto a “wilderness”. The landscape is changed to
accommodate the material survival and the psychological motivation of the occupants. Whereas the garrison town with its high walls and ramparts is an overt symbol of power and frontier defence in _Waiting for the Barbarians_, Cruso’s terraces in _Foe_ are a more obtuse sign. Even though the former site represents contestation more explicitly, the latter can also be read as establishing colonial domination. Carter explains that ‘Defoe’s insight is to understand that the colonizer produces the country he will inhabit out of his own imagining. The colonizer is also a novelist, making the lie of the land an index of his own fears and hopes’ (1996, p.10). It is this double feature of the nature of inscription on place and page upon which Coetzee expands in his reinscription of Crusoe’s story.

The power and pervasiveness of colonial myths is the common foundation of both texts. Barthes writes that myth ‘transforms history into nature’ (1957, p.129), hence myth distorts and immobilizes the fluid interplay between event and interpretation (1957, pp.109-159). The main narrators of both texts are caught up in such an immobilizing state of flux, although the dream sequences of the magistrate and the dreamlike final section of _Foe_, do present a flow of images that transgress the entrenchment of the myths, suggesting alternative “sideshadows”, in Morson’s terms.

A border settlement implies that the town is situated on the edge between that which is regarded as safe and the unsafe. From the imperial perspective, the outpost in _Waiting for the Barbarians_ is a marginal site and hence a place of danger and a crucial buffer. For the magistrate, the town is his home. The outpost seems to be an island separated from the centre and isolated in the heart of an unknown landscape. This isolation serves a dual function: it enhances the vulnerability of the townsfolk to the imagined threat of the “barbarians”, thereby confirming the defensive value of the garrison and it connotes an illusion of independence from the centre. The contradiction between these two purposes is the external situation that is internalized by the magistrate in his roles as government official and private individual.

Coetzee juxtaposes the cyclical time of nature with the linear time of Empire: ‘Empire has created the time of history. Empire has located its existence not in the smooth recurrent spinning time of the cycle of the seasons, but in the jagged time of rise and fall, of beginning and end, of catastrophe’ (_WB_, p.133). The magistrate is caught
between these temporal modalities. His fine lyrical comment on the fauna and flora and his detailed knowledge of seasonal changes reveal his strong sense of connectedness to the place. For him the walls of the town represent a permeable boundary because he knows the surrounding landscape. He is also familiar with the river folk who pose no threat but are, in fact, partially dependent on the town when the harsh environment becomes a mutual risk. He is also aware that the nomads are not deterred from their wanderings by the presence of the settlement. Each group accepts a distant co-existence with the other. His wish to ‘to live outside the history that Empire imposes on its subjects, even its lost subjects’ (WB, p.154), is unrealistic, for he cannot evade his historic positioning.

The presence of the troops can be seen as an attempt to shift the focal authority of the marginal town closer towards the centre of the Empire by reasserting the imperviousness of the boundary. It is the myth of an imminent “barbarian” attack and the visiting militia’s unwillingness to listen to alternative local versions of reality that entrenches their aggressive approach. The irony, however, is that this rigidity that increases the vulnerability of the border garrison originates within its walls rather than beyond the frontier. Edward Said argues that “[b]orders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons’ (September 1994, p.54). This paradox lies at the core of the violent confrontation between the self and the other. Colonel Joll orders the maiming of the “barbarian” girl’s feet and eyesight, thereby depriving her of her freedom. His colonial blindness is his inability to realize that domination will never result in the freedom which belonging affords. By depriving the other of her freedom, this colonialist has created his own prison.

Ndebele argues that English-speaking liberal South Africans have occupied a position ‘in the interstice between power and indifferent or supportive agency’ (1998, p.26) and that they have yet to acknowledge their willing compliance in the oppression of Black South Africans. I suggest Coetzee has provided a number of fictional examples of such complicity and self-scrutiny, beginning with the magistrate. These include Elizabeth Curren in Age of Iron and David Lurie in Disgrace. The question that Coetzee’s fiction repeatedly raises is: what will follow such a recognition of complicity, or, what are the ensuing responsibilities inherent in complicity?
After the hostile environment of the hinterland has defeated the troops and they return to the capital, the magistrate's official status and his sense of belonging in the town are restored. The narrative cycle is complete and natural time is again in focus. This loop may connote a pointless process of exclusion and torture that has had little effect on the path of history, with the magistrate understanding no more than a babe in arms (WB, p.155). But perhaps understanding is not a prerequisite of belonging. I suggest that belonging in these marginal zones, is not only about negotiating frontier crossings to expand understandings but is about residing with the unexplainable 'surprisedness' that Morson associates with open time with others (Morson 1994, p.9).

The final scene of the children building a snowman may signify another flimsy boundary, the line between dreams and future reality, a link between imagination and possibility, signifying hope for a reconstructed community in which all can share in a sense of belonging. Attwell describes this as 'a limited possibility, even though the novel has not invested its critical and fictive energies in its definition' (1993, p.87). This imaginary site does, however, foreshadow the final scene of Foe, and the potential for openness to others.

The real threat to the survival of the town is not the strangers out there but the environment. I contend that Coetzee inverts the positions of the remote colonial culture and the natural environment, thereby mimicking the development of a myth. References to weather are frequent. The implication is that the balance of the environment is precarious and often threateningly hostile to the settlement. The town is installed as the essential gauge against which the environment is measured. The protection that the town buildings provide is contrasted with the exposure to the elements of those beyond the walls. By establishing the town as the "natural" centre with the environment as another antagonistic threat, I maintain that Coetzee is demonstrating the pervasiveness and the blindness of modern Western assumptions.

The extreme climate, the remoteness of the location and the perceived danger of attack, requires that the town be self-sufficient. But this self-sufficiency is based on a European model of land cultivation, which, in turn, exacerbates the vulnerability of townsfolk, for the agricultural system of growing irrigated crops like wheat is not be sustainable in the local setting. The increasing salinity of the soil is evidence of its
degradation. Besides, the fields lie beyond the protection of the town walls, exposed to sabotage by outsiders. It is significant that the source of nourishment for the townsfolk is unprotected on two counts and, consequently, the future expectation of food provision from the garrison gardens is doubly uncertain. The dual vulnerability of the settlement contrasts with the implied harmony of the nomadic “barbarians” symbiotic relationship with the landscape.

This ambivalence can be read as a trope for colonial power that is vulnerable in its dominance. Perhaps the most significant feature of this vulnerability is the fragility of sustaining the imposed alien “structure” in the local environment, hence there is an implication that the town does not belong and, like the archaeological ruins outside, it, too, will succumb to the sands of time.

Unlike the novel of Defoe which Coetzee describes in Stranger Shores as ‘unabashed propaganda for the extension of British mercantile power in the New World and the establishment of new British colonies’ (2001, p.24), Foe presents an ironic interrogation of that colonizing impetus. Cruso pursues a seemingly meaningless task of building retaining walls to create terraces ready for planting, although he lacks seed. This may appear to be a futile exercise, but Cruso’s labours do signify a strong link to Western survival patterns and a determined future-oriented colonial inscription on the landscape. The irony lies in the fact that the prepared levels are barren, foreshadowing the unproductive yield of the imperial enterprise.

It seems to me that Cruso’s presumption that later occupants will share his vision suggests that he regards his as a dominant world order, hence an integral aspect of his identity derives from his confidence in belonging to this group. Marais refers to Cruso’s task as re-inscribing his familiar paradigms on the wild landscape so that he can secure his own sense of self (1996a, p.68). Also, I would add that the very labour of moving the thousands of rocks installs an attitudinal boundary aimed at warding off what Coetzee has referred to as the Western perception of the idleness of the other (1989), hence Cruso’s response to place seems to be deeply colonial. And yet, as David Medalie argues, the progressive values of the Enlightenment are inverted, thereby upsetting the Adamic legacy of pastoral romanticism of the original Robinson Crusoe (1997, pp.43-54).
I maintain that there is a progression across the two novels being considered here. This development can be seen to demonstrate an increasingly arrogant disregard for the two signs of weakness in the system, namely the reducing ability of the landscape to support a Western lifestyle and the unwillingness of colonizers to acknowledge their limitations in bending the environment to suit their will. Crusoe’s handiwork can be linked with the cultivated fields that lie outside the frontier town in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. His terraces can be read as a projected outcome of the continual degradation of the land in the earlier text. The damage to the environment that begins to show in the garrison gardens foreshadows the fallow fields in *Foe*. This reflects current ecological concerns. In spite of the infertility of Crusoe’s enterprise, he remains dogged in his belief that those that come to the island after him will benefit from his labours by planting crops. This refusal to relinquish the idea of controlling the natural environment, in spite of the increasing evidence of the futility of the task, displays the pervasive power of the colonial consciousness and extends Coetzee’s postcolonial debate on belonging, beyond the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized towards a recognition of ecological sustainability as a primary foundation for a sense of belonging in place. In my opinion, Coetzee is making a stand for the necessity of caring for the environment as a cornerstone of future belonging. The ethical significance of our responsibility towards future generations in nurturing a mutually supportive symbiotic relationship between man and nature is clear.

### 4.2.1. A PARODIC LOOP

Coetzee subverts another familiar Western paradigm of justice by installing the magistrate as a parodic “other” Christ-figure. The narrative scrambles the Christian message in a number of ironic entanglements. The care with which the magistrate washes and massages the damaged feet of the “barbarian” girl’s feet contains uneasy echoings of a scene in which Christ washes the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper. The magistrate defies the behavioural code of a “civilized” employee of the Empire towards a primitive captive in the same way that Jesus humbled himself to perform an act of servitude. In an ironic twist, though, this image suggests an inherent superiority of
the man over the girl. The actions of the Biblical character are symbolic of a cleansing from sin. This implication increases the hegemony of the magistrate by introducing a moral dimension in which he is compared with the Saviour. The magistrate does acknowledge, however, that his search for ‘an entry into the secret body of the other’ (\textit{WB}, p.43) resembles her torturers’ aggressive hunt for answers from her. He is acutely aware of his ambivalent or even failed role as the go-between of ‘the men of the future and the men of the past...a jackal of Empire in sheep’s clothing!’ (\textit{WB}, p.72). In yet another fold, this Biblical reference represents him as the antithesis of a saviour. This ambiguity is evidence of the dual potential of his marginality.

His failure is further reflected in the double turn to another religious connotation. As Christ was condemned by the authorities of Rome (one of the greatest empires of History) and crucified for the sins of mankind, so the magistrate is incarcerated. The magistrate’s imprisonment and torture are an allegory of the trap in which colonial identity is ensnared. Attwell explains that Coetzee is critiquing liberal humanism as an ‘essentially self-validating and dominating form of “soul formation”’ (1993, p.80). The magistrate is hanged from a tree in a parody of the Crucifixion but, unlike Christ, he does not die. Lacking the guarantee of a seat in Heaven, the magistrate ends up confronting the uncomfortable fact that any certainty is merely a life-giving illusion (\textit{WB};, p.143). This prefaces the central theme of Elizabeth Costello’s experience ‘At the Gates’, when she comes face to face with the possible emptiness of eschatological dictum. The magistrate has taken the girl up as the key to the labyrinth of understanding, yet he fails to unlock her meaning. As he says: ‘The knot loops in upon itself; I cannot find the end’ (\textit{WB}, p.21). He is caught in an endless, isolating and implicating explanation. Marais’s description of the double bind of imperialism in \textit{Dusklands} can also be applied to the magistrate’s sense of identity: ‘Just as the colonised is subject to and constituted by this discourse, so too is the coloniser’ (1996a, p.72). Without a transcendent purpose as the postcolonial hero of the narrative, the magistrate ‘presses on along a road that may lead nowhere’ (\textit{WB}, p.170).

It seems to me, however, that the magistrate’s abject complicity is laced with the “sideshadowed” dream that is linked to the absent “barbarian” woman. This “sideshadowing” includes the same unseen potential of Klein-Anna in \textit{In the Heart of the Country} and Petrus’s pregnant wife in \textit{Disgrace} and their associations of organic
rather than cerebral understandings that offer the possibility of future sharing beyond the parodic loop of colonial discourse.

4.2.2. IDENTIFYING OTHERNESS

Identifying the "barbarians" or foe is the problematic nub of each text, yet the initial expectations connoted in the titles are misleading, for in both novels the differences between the recording authority and the "dangerous other" disintegrate, highlighting the precarious borderland positions of the narrators, themselves. The distinctions between the identity of the protagonists, the colonized others, the colonizers and the colonizing traits within the reader also become perforated. This creates an expanded border territory where the fluid interchange between the marginal characters prompts a review of the rigid frontiers of colonial discourse that so restricts a sense of belonging.

Coetzee maintains a consistent interest in the ambivalent marginality of the doubting authority. The interplay between the real and the imagined exacerbates this blurring. The rumours of the threat from the nomadic tribes who move beyond the frontier are surpassed by the cruelty of the imperial police within the settlement in *Waiting for the Barbarians*. In *Foe* the compliant nature of Friday contradicts Susan's preconception of a cannibal. Such parallels confirm Coetzee's sustained scrutiny of the colonial condition and reinforce his commitment to transgress discursive frontiers in search of common ground or a place of shared belonging.

The shift from a horizon to a close-up gaze does, however, attest to a subtle development in Coetzee's representation of otherness. In both texts the damage done to the body of one of the others, in the name of the Empire, is finely examined. In the former novel, the "barbarian" girl returns to the tribes of the hinterland, leaving only the shadow memory of her impenetrability with the magistrate, whereas in the later novel Friday is always with Susan for the duration of her narrative and, in the final section, his nonverbal impact is omnipresent. By paying closer attention to the cross-border occupant, Coetzee increases the focus on the pervasive power of the physical presence.
of the other as representing a different paradigm of discourse (as Masolo advocates), and yet he still avoids appropriating the voice of the other.

Both narrators are keen to learn more about the damaging effect of colonization and yet they each avoid different opportunities that would enhance their understanding. The magistrate spends many hours pouring over the girl’s body in an attempt to “decipher” her scars (WB, p.31), but she remains ‘blank, like a fist beneath a black wig, the face grows out of the throat and out of the blank body beneath it, without aperture, without entry’ (WB, p.42). This nameless, damaged bystander is metonymic of the colonized other, who remains fascinating and yet closed to imperialist interrogation. Dovey states that ‘[w]hat he seeks is direct access to the girl’s past experiences and to the girl’s ‘being’, unmediated by his own situation in the present’ (1996, p.143). I disagree with Dovey because the magistrate seems to be blind to the possibility of moving beyond his own safe referential framework. He makes no attempt to learn the girl’s language and listen to her. He relies on English as the medium of communication, thereby denying the valency of her mother-tongue as well as her self-representation.

I maintain that this is the double dilemma faced by liberal humanists: the other cannot be fully known in terms of the self. Michael Wade explains: ‘Liberalism becomes imperialism at the point where its processes lead to a breakdown in the ability to distinguish between self and other’ (1993, p.143). In this definition the other is drawn into a referential orbit with the self as the colonizing centre. On the other hand, when the sense of self shifts to the border-zone and becomes permeable to the sense of self of the other, a new space is opened up for unexpected sharing. Susan seems intent on assisting Friday to communicate, and yet her unwillingness to look into his mouth to see the atrocity done to him becomes a trope for her reluctance to acknowledge her complicity in his silencing (F, p.150). Nevertheless, there are intimations of some fusion between the two marginal characters in the later text that provide the performative conditions for fresh listening.

In Foe Coetzee emphasizes the indeterminacy of a woman’s sense of self in her narrative within the patrifocal canon. In her consideration of Susan’s story, Katrin Wagner asserts that all autobiography is a mode of self-definition and of self-creation, which interrogates and subverts that construction (1989, pp.1-11). Susan’s grasp of her
identity is revealed in her sense of control over her narrative material, which is shown to be tentative in the novel. In contrast to her story, Mr Foe provides a convincing counter-history to prove that the young woman who appears near the end of the text is her daughter. Thus her story collapses into uncertainty (F, p.3). This could be interpreted as leaving the patrifocal colonial text of Defoe unchallenged, were it not for the undeniable presence of the female and black others.

It seems to me that the relationship between the self and the other suggests motion and resistance, construction and deconstruction, and there is an inherent risk that the one force will counteract the other and result in a state of flux in which belonging is suspended. Medalie asserts that *Foe* 'works to undermine both the authoritative method and the authoritative self [of the narrator-author, Susan] as it grants increasing centrality to Friday' (1997, p.50). Coetzee has said that the process of self-elaboration must 'be felt not as an act of creation but as an act of decration, a shedding of exhausted self-constructs, a peeling of walnut shells, in an endless search for the kernel' (quoted in Wagner 1989, p.7). I maintain that this critique unveils the problem that confronts many of Coetzee's characters, including the magistrate.

The opposition between patriarchal and feminist positions is most overtly represented in *Foe*. I contend that Coetzee undermines both conflicting theoretical stances. It is Susan's primary desire to belong. In paternalist discourse, the female subject is able to take up a most significant position as the object of desire. Susan demonstrates her willingness to embrace a traditional female role by sharing Cruso's bed. Within patriarchy, as the mistress of the island, she would be able to carve out a defined position for herself, even if it was only the position of "object of desire". Once nested as the object of Cruso's desire, she would have a culturally approved framework within which to secure her sense of belonging. Since Cruso fails to offer Susan such a counter-position as the object of his desire, she does not have a sense of connectedness and belonging, consequently she longs to leave the island (F, p.36).

In my opinion there is a shift in Susan's purpose back in England because she already has a history of belonging there. She changes from a concern with her present experience of trying to belong in a strange place to her authorial project of recording the past and hence securing her *narrative* belonging in the canon. Susan and Friday become
wanderers. Their sense of belonging is linked only with the elusive Mr Foe. This tenuous thread becomes the metaphoric lifeline for Susan’s textual construction. She entreats him: ‘return to me the substance I have lost’ (F, p.51).

In the third section the site of contestation is clear with Susan-as-narrator of Coetzee’s text entering into debate with the Foe-as-proposed-author of Susan’s narrative about the form of the text. Here again, Coetzee alters the “natural” gendered process of procreation by installing Susan as the father of her narrative, with Foe as the female muse. Susan straddles him to signify that she is the begetter of her autobiography. In an extension of this gender twist, she claims the power of a male muse, who must ‘do what ever lies in her power to father her offspring [her story]’ (F, p.140). This suggests that she is not the passive receiver or object of desire of the other, but rather the active creator or subject of her own story. She wishes to inscribe the feminine silence in the Defoe tale. Like the magistrate, who suffers for his challenge to the colonial order, Susan pays for her story with her blood: ‘In kissing [Foe] gave such a sharp bite to my lip that I cried out and drew away. But he held me close and I felt him suck the wound’ (F, p.139). The cost is vital, for it relates to the sacrifice or deconstruction of identity, as Coetzee describes. This can be seen as the “responsibility-in-complicity” required of the storyteller him/herself. It forms the nub of Coetzee’s later novel, The Master of Petersburg, which will be examined in chapter six.

It would seem as if Susan must give up her attachment to the dual patriarchal constraints of an authoritative mode of narrative as well as her sense of self as an author. Friday offers her this opportunity. Judie Newman uses Mary Douglas’s theories on margins as ambivalent sites of pollution and potential to suggest that, on the journey to return Friday to Africa, ‘the easy distinction between Susan and Friday’ is dissolved, with Susan also being regarded as dirty and an outsider (1994, p.7). It is in this close identification with Friday that Susan revises her view of his mutilation ‘not as a punishment for transgression, but as a source of future power’ (1994, p.8). It seems to me that Friday’s power does not arise in Western discursive frameworks, hence this can be read as a metaphor for Susan’s relinquishment of Western patrifocal structures.

Even though the narrator of the last pages is not named, the suggestion of dissolving boundaries between the Susan and Friday lingers. By creating the conditions
that allow for the letting go of the patriarchal order, Coetzee is freeing up a textual space for an independent agency to explore beyond the frontiers that divide. Referring to the parallels which Nina Auerbach draws between the final pages of Foe and Adrienne Rich’s poem of feminine creativity, ‘Diving into the Wreck’, Gallagher concludes that the final section of the novel ‘embodies the feminine imagination. The suggestion that the body - of Friday, of the wreck, of ‘the thing itself’ - can write invokes a language beyond difference’ (1991, p.190). This “voice”, beyond hegemonic understanding, is what Coetzee invites his readers to hear. It is also his ideal that this textual embodiment of otherness will be felt ‘northward and southward to the ends of the earth’ (F, p.157). In this project I maintain that Coetzee can be read as advancing the thinking of Mudimbe, Masolo and Ndebele beyond the shores of Africa.

Dunbar expresses disappointment in Coetzee’s feminist recuperation in Robinson Crusoe, because he subverts familiar gender placings from within the traditional structure of patriarchal centrality (1994, pp.101-110). In Dunbar’s opinion, Susan Barton should not merely submit to prevailing masculine attitudes, such as the use of the phallus of the pen to ‘father’ her text, but she should rather try to find new possibilities of identity (1994, pp.101-110). Dunbar suggests that this ‘fondness of hegemony implicates Coetzee also; in spite of the novel’s projected feminism, Foe (Defoe) - and, we understand, Coetzee also - seek to retain hold of the image of author’ (Boehmer, Chrisman & Parker 1994, p.xvi). In defence of Coetzee’s position, I quote his own later reference to Luce Irigaray’s theory that a woman cannot substitute feminine power for masculine power, for she would still be

cought up in the economy of the same...There is no simple manageable way to leap to the outside of phallogocentrism, nor any possible way to situate oneself there, [on the outside], that would result from the simple fact of being a woman [Coetzee’s italics]. Unless the woman’s utterances are to remain ‘unintelligible according to the code of force,’ they must be borrowed from a model that leaves [her] sex aside. (GO, p.27)

The editors of Altered State? Writing and South Africa also defend Coetzee’s method by stating that ‘the ‘language’ of the non-verbal body...the visual vocabulary of experience which is represented on mutilated flesh, the ‘text’ of those silenced...becomes a means of representation, the inscription of an as-yet-inarticulable-subjectivity’ (Boehmer,
Chrisman & Parker 1994, p.xvi). Once again, the body asserts its own position, a position that transcends familiar gender paradigms and installs its own claims to belonging.

I would add that, by retaining the hegemony of the paternal grand narrative, Coetzee has imploded Susan’s story. By occupying positions of both male and female genders, with herself as the subject of the narrative (a woman) and as the writer representing the masculine with Mr Foe as the female muse, Susan becomes both the subject and the object of desire. Here I suggest that Coetzee exposes a crack in the inviolability of discursive hegemony by making a woman the subject and the object of phallogenocentric desire, for Susan is able to subvert patriarchy from within her restricted female subject position. This is in keeping with Driver’s findings in the ‘Women Writing Africa’ project, where there was agreement that ‘gender is continually in process’ (2002, p.164). Thus Coetzee opens up feminist discourse to its own beyond. The political ramifications of this textual strategy to expose the limitations from within are as pervasive and elusive as the bubbles that issue from Friday’s mouth.

While the connotations of contestation may be more evident in *Waiting for the Barbarians*, the latter text, *Foe*, represents a more insidious interrogation of authority. Coetzee’s postcolonial concerns remain the same, although I posit that the differences between the two novels demonstrate the development of a more complex and subtle consideration of the pervasiveness of the colonial condition and the continuing consequences for postcolonial belonging for all participants.

### 4.3. RECORDED NARRATIVES

Thus far, this chapter has referred to belonging as concerned with a subject’s positionality in relation to place, time and people, however, by shifting the critical gaze to the narratives as the objects of belonging, a different aspect of subject positioning becomes visible. In both of the novels there are a number of narratives either proposed or realized, fragmented or completed. Each highlights aspects of the writer’s responsibility for constructing a textual site that invites or precludes a sense of
belonging. And the response of the reader installs a pattern of her/his hermeneutic relationship with the text or lack of text.

All of Coetzee’s novels can be read as metafictional, in that they self-consciously explore textuality and the process of writing. Girard has formulated a theory of mediated or triangular desire: the act of authoring involves a triangular structure of desire in which the writer (the subject) longs to communicate his/her story (the object) and the mediator is language (the text) (Girard 1961, p.52). Coetzee points out that triangular structures posited by Girard originate in a yearning for transcendence (DP, pp.127-138). The problem is that language is not transparent: ‘[p]ure textual meaning’ can never be diadically achieved, for language is always the ‘masked mediator’ in what is, indeed, a triangular structure of desire (DP, p.136).

Coetzee is most mindful of writing and reading being informed by the same ‘hegemonic cultural forces as imperialism’ (Marais 1996a, p.71). A primary theme in Waiting for the Barbarians is the tension between the discourses of history and fiction (DP, pp.94-133). The magistrate focuses on the dichotomy of the grand narrative of imperial history as a process of inclusions and exclusions. His failure to inscribe the silences reveals the dilemma of the postcolonial writer. As Dovey maintains, Coetzee has to deal with two histories: ‘The history of his own discourse, rooted in the discourse of imperialism and the suppressed history of the colonised, which has to be recuperated without being arrogated to colonial discourse’ (1996, p.139). In the end, the magistrate’s inability to write the history of the outpost becomes metonymic of Coetzee’s project to expose the unavoidable complicity of the author, himself included, of any memorial of the times with the imperial system.

Of all of Coetzee’s novels, Foe is the most overtly metafictional deliberation on authorship. Here Coetzee performs what Head calls a double operation in which he associates literary and historic colonialism where current academic interest in postcolonial issues engages with an eighteenth-century, English setting and colonial form (1997, pp.112-128). The author presents a metaphysical quandary in which he lacks the authority to ascribe either meaning or authenticity to the story. In Foe Coetzee installs the ideal of narrative to represent the truth and simultaneously critiques it. Like the magistrate, Susan also fails to record her narrative. She identifies a fallacy in her
authorial intention to tell Crusoe's story, since his identity remains closed to her (F, p.51). Acknowledging her failure, she turns instead to her own story. But she has still not understood the essential flaw in all storytelling, namely the lack of transparency of the self or another. How, therefore, can she expect Mr Foe to transcribe her own narrative?

To whom do these narratives belong? Susan demands that the truth be told but who is telling the "truth"? While we may want to be the authoring subjects of our own narratives, we are also the objects in the narratives of others. If Girard's dictum that 'objective and subjective fallacies are the same' (1961, p.16) is valid, then these various "truths" cannot be verified. Perhaps the focus of our scrutiny should rather shift to the concealed mediator, that Girard identifies as language, as Coetzee dramatizes it in Foe.

Girard confirms the ethical importance of uncovering masked mediators: 'The mediator's prestige is imparted to the object of desire and confers upon it an illusory value' (1961, p.17). Certainly, the authors of the texts of history have enhanced if not created such notions as 'the Chosen People' (A. Brink quoted in WW, p.18). This raises the question: can the value of the canon, as the object of desire, be illusory? Myths such as these have provided textual "evidence" to justify systems such as apartheid.

I think that Gallagher correctly summarizes Susan's metafictional role. She states: 'Susan demonstrates that social power can determine discourse, that in the politics of competing interpretations, the power given by gender, race, or class can determine what story is told' (1991, p.180). In the second section of the novel, Susan's struggle to find financial support for herself and Friday is evidence of their diminishing substance. This is a metaphor for their reducing value, both monetary and literary, as textual constructs. These two marginal characters lack the substance that Foe's canonical novels promise. I agree with Attridge who claims that Foe is an exploration of the fact that 'human experience seems lacking in substance and significance if it is not represented (to oneself and to others) in culturally validated narrative forms, but those narrative forms constantly threaten, by their exteriority and conventionality, the substantiality of that experience' (1996, p.178). He further maintains that, by questioning the process of canonization, Coetzee's works offer an opportunity for transforming the hierarchy of power that installs the canon (1996, p.186). Nevertheless, I contend that Attridge does not adequately interrogate the double bind of the commodity.
value that extends the exclusive and entrapping power of the canon and the silences that ensue.

The partial elision of Coetzee's fictional characters with those of Defoe, as well as the merging of the historic and the fictional authors, creates a blurring of the boundaries between the various narratives, suggesting some commonality and some differences. This reveals the complicity of the three authors, Barton, Foe and Coetzee in attempting to create a text that will recuperate some of the silences in Defoe's work and their failure. The text with which Susan requires Foe's assistance is not yet written and the narratives of Friday and Susan's daughter remain unheard. Here Coetzee is also highlighting the old literary controversy over the distinction between the narrator and the author and the implications of authorial responsibility. Of course, the interrogation of authority is at the heart of all of Coetzee's fiction.

Susan repeatedly attempts to teach Friday how to communicate in pictorial, musical and written forms so that she may learn about him, his past and his mutilation. Friday's refusal to comply with her demonstrates a resistance to her desire for hermeneutic hegemony. Here Coetzee is acknowledging a different paradigm of discourse, as defined by Masolo, in the man's silent presence throughout the novel. It is as a textual construct, rather than as a displaced African in England, that I suggest that Friday represents the most sustained belonging in the text, for his occupancy persists to the end, after the demise of all the other characters.

The final section is a dream-like, mythical mode in which some bodies, time and space mutate randomly. The centrality of Susan-as-narrator is subverted with the focus shifting to Friday, thus gender discourse is displaced by current postcolonial debate. The scars of slavery that are evident in the observation by the narrator of the chain or rope mark around Friday's neck confirm the historic significance of the Defoe text and the need to re-read the silences therein. The laminations of silencing in the unwritten narratives of Susan, her daughter and Friday attest to a multiplicity of "sideshadowed" voices.

The narrator discovers Susan's memoir and takes a metaphoric dive to undertake a postcolonial exploration of the wreck below the surface narrative. The wreck is 'the home of Friday' (F, p.157). This wreck can be read as a trope for colonial failure and the
starting point for a different form of listening and responding. It is in this space that the value of Friday's contribution can begin. The imagination of the reader is free from some constraints of competing discourses, including the authority vested in language and narrative form, free to explore the unfathomed depths where the mythic body of Friday invites engagement beyond text. The challenge of the unknown narrator is to explore the sunken wrecks of the defunct ships of grand narratives, be they the apartheid monolith, patriarchy, colonial supremacy among others.

4.4. CROSS-BORDER OPPORTUNITIES

In the present South African context, Ndebele contends that the restoration of narrative in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission is 'a living example of people reinventing themselves through narrative (1998, p.27). Brink adds to Ndebele's idea by arguing that, unless these stories 'are extended, complicated, and intensified in the imaginings of literature, society cannot sufficiently come to terms with its past to face the future' (1998b, p.30). Michiel Heyns concurs with Brink but he identifies a problem for the white South African writer, namely, 'how to find a perspective on South Africa that is not merely abject' and he concludes that the challenge 'will be to erect habitable structures on the foundations of remorse' (2000, p.63). I suggest Heyns is clearly flagging the issue of future belonging for all those who have been complicit in a system that has excluded others from full rights of participation and coexistence. Among these are the 'little perpetrators' (Sanders 2000, p.3), like intellectuals, authors and readers. Coetzee's fiction certainly encourages close scrutiny of the role of the 'little perpetrators' and their tools of trade.

Critics generally recognize the contextual value of Coetzee's novels. Attwell claims that 'Coetzee's figuring of the tension between text and history is itself an historical act, one that must be read back into the discourses of South Africa where one can discern its illuminating power'(1993, p.3). I would add that the different paradigms of discourse that Coetzee installs in both novels being considered in this chapter signify alignments with unexplored potential for belonging, even though they do not erect the habitable structures that Heyns anticipates. It seems to me that these structures require
mutual understanding. The viability of English in this process is questionable, given its functionality in earlier territorial expansionism and later global marketing. This will become a pressing concern in relation to reconstruction in post-apartheid South Africa and it is a central theme in Disgrace.

Coetzee invites the reader to observe the transient presence of the "barbarian" girl and the more persistent presence of Friday, for out of their textual performances and the inaudible, emission from Friday will emerge the airy blocks with which new structures can be built. Dunbar points out that 'any constructive way ahead for the political agenda may lie in the discovery of new, presumably non-confrontational, modes of discourse. The true way ahead, according to Foe, would appear to be one of words rather than violent action' (1994, p.109). While I agree with Dunbar's sentiment, I suggest that the value that she places in language is unquestioned. It seems to me that Dunbar is subscribing to the very assumption that Coetzee is exposing, if Beitessem's analysis of the presumed correlation of culture and text is correct (1990, p.117). I believe that words can be a most violent source of confrontation, hence the censorship of hate speech against specific groups, even in the new legislation in South Africa (R. Louw 1996, p.28). I would rather argue that Coetzee is calling for a sharing between the self and the other that lies beyond the domain of reason, which can also be the domain of words. Coetzee himself explains that Susan's story reveals a 'hidden yearning - for an unmediated world, that is, a world without language' (DP, p.138).

I suggest that Coetzee represents a bifurcated challenge to the reader in both the magistrate and Susan's stories. It is as both subjects and objects of desire that we install and subvert the myths of history. It is as subjects or active agents of desire that we can support Coetzee's project to 'demythologize history' (Attwell 1993, p.3; Parry 1998, p.149). However, as objects of the desire of others, we are also participants in the myths of our times. Perhaps it is Coetzee's sole wish to inspire the reader to scrutinize her/his own desires so that s/he will be an agent who accepts responsibility for complicity in the broader historic picture, knowing that s/he is also the object or powerless recipient of the times, and remaining ever vigilant to the mediating and confronting power of language.

This bears strong implications for Coetzee's fellow white and black South Africans in this time of transition, in which the past encoding of the region is being re-
written and re-evaluated. This vigilance will never establish a final truth about the past, nor will it ensure a fair system in the present, but commitment to other ways of relating may assist with ongoing reconciliation so that the future can be embarked upon, unencumbered by some of the damaging myths from the past. I am of the opinion that transcultural dialogue in which the previously silenced others are listened to will surely open up as yet unknown sites for sharing in a spirit of ubuntu. Such an example would provide a vital precedent in global politics as I shall explain in chapter 8.
5. A SEGREGATED SOCIETY

In this chapter I extend my argument that Coetzee offers a dual focus in his novels. He continues to depict the ambivalent position of the postcolonizer as he did in his writing of the 1970's, while, simultaneously, providing a fictional response to the changing world in which he writes. This includes replying to his critics, who admonish him for avoiding local issues, representing some of the harsh realities of the living in South Africa during the 1980's and contributing to postcolonial dialogue.

I will examine how Coetzee represents the frontiers to belonging experienced by all those subjected to the divisions imposed by the official policy of racial segregation in a study of his two novels set in apartheid South Africa, Life and Times of Michael K and Age of Iron. There are a number of parallels between the two texts that prompt a comparative reading in order to highlight the pervasiveness of the crisis of belonging for all who lived under the system that Coetzee is adumbrating. I maintain that the instability of a sense of belonging in both texts calls for a rethinking of postcolonial theory in terms that address the needs, the complicities and the responsibilities of all participants, including the author and the reader. In this examination of the similarities and the differences in the two texts, I will demonstrate that Coetzee maintains his postcolonial focus on the ambivalence of the narrating subject, while he develops a relevant postcolonial response to the changing times. I will also consider how Coetzee uses reflexive narrative modes to transgress the boundaries to a shared sense of belonging.

In my opinion it is in the presence of the characters of somewhat uncertain racial identity in each novel, Michael K and Vercueil, that Coetzee is signalling a way of being that cannot be contained by prevailing national legislation and critical thinking of the times when Coetzee was writing. Michael envisions a future place of belonging for himself and a companion who also seems to lack a legal place to belong as a person classified as a “non” identity. Vercueil is a tramp and does not have a place of belonging. Instead, he is the challenging embodiment and the facilitator of dissolving the boundaries that separate people from belonging with each other. As Mrs Curren’s angel of death, he is her dubious guide to relinquishing judgements and life and the courier of
her narrative. I assert that it is in the lives of both of these men, that Coetzee is installing a clear developmental linkage with place and a sense of shared belonging with others that lies beyond the confines imposed by immediate institutionalized rules and the broader laws of the Western philosophical tradition. In these two men the border-zone is widened to allow for new performances of difference. As marginal characters their differences are elusive, hence they are resistant to containment as fetishes.

The connotations of frontier have been considered in the earlier chapters. Notions of entrapment within the frontier of a rebellious body, a colonial system and the patrifocal structure of language are evident in all of Coetzee's writing, as are the dangers from beyond the frontiers in the form of the "savages" or "barbarians", the inhospitable "wilderness" and the multiple silences effected by all forms of authority including canonicity. The simple division between inner confinements and external threats is scrambled. This leads to a sense of ambivalence and a pervasive lack of a sense of belonging. In each of Coetzee's earlier novels, the concept of an expanded frontier territory allows for a creative space in which incomplete identities can be seen to be receptive to otherness at a most immediate physical level. This provides a glimpse of intimate experience of otherness. In this chapter, the two marginal characters create a hazy impression of bridging an alienating past to the potential of a future sense of belonging for all.

I suggest that Coetzee's hint of an in-between African and Western ontology in Michael and Vercueil in these locally situated novels has been a powerful political action that has presented a trans-national vision, albeit scant, beyond the isolationist impasse of confrontation. Coetzee certainly acknowledges the oppositional discourses that history has entrenched in his use of dialogic modalities in the two texts. Nevertheless, I would argue that he is not wishing to perpetuate polarizing discussion between postcolonizers and colonized. Rather, he is providing fictional examples to encourage the seeking of common ground.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, every aspect of the Michael's narrative hinges on his racial classification as "non-white", living in an undefined future temporality but still within the apartheid era. Here Coetzee offers a retrospective critical gaze on the structure of the latter years of apartheid. He sets up a metafictional three-way dialogue
between himself, as the white South African author, and his two narrators: Michael, the narrator of the first and third sections of the novel and the medical officer, the narrator of the second section. Michael is searching for a place of belonging that is not “fenced off” by the discriminatory laws of the country. The white medical officer attempts to fabricate a story for his patient, whom he insists on calling ‘Michaels’, in the hope that he will be able to create for Michael (and himself) a place beyond any that is available in their current historical setting, a fetishized mythical site, a ‘sacred and alluring garden that blooms in the heart of the desert and produces the food of life’ (MK, p.166). The tension between these two narratives demonstrates the difficulty Coetzee has in writing a narrative about a borderland “non-white” resident in a land of multiple frontiers, without prescribing a place of belonging for him. By the end of the novel, Michael has not been confined to one of the many literal or ideational camps. Those organizers of the camps, like the military camp commander and the medical officer, who would set Michael up as the embodiment of a new order, a signifier of transgressiveness, are gone, leaving Michael to contemplate his uncertain future, alone.

*Age of Iron* is a fictional account of confrontation precipitated by the states of emergency that were declared during the 1980’s in order to prop up a political hierarchy that was steadily being eroded by the subversive actions of the “non-white” dissidents upon whom the whole apartheid government depended. This novel is a polyphonic interaction between people of different race, gender and generation, recorded by a dying old white woman, Mrs Curren. Her response to the atrocities that she witnesses exposes the instability of white liberal-humanist legitimacy. There is a shift in her sense of belonging, away from the white myths of a safeguarded morally superior ideology towards the need to connect with others. She fails to achieve this outcome, however. By the end of the novel, Mrs Curren, has taken her last breath, leaving Vercueil, an itinerant, who does not seem to belong anywhere, either in racial, geographical or social terms. The delivery of her letter - the substance of this novel - to her daughter in America is now up to him.

By considering the different patterns of belonging in *Life and Times of Michael K* and in *Age of Iron*, I will argue that Coetzee provides some perspective on the shifting frontiers that remain in South Africa, including those boundaries imposed in the past and those that continue to be erected in these post-apartheid times. This approach
concentrates on the lived experiences referred to by Attwell, in his analysis of *Age of Iron*, as the social density of the text (1998, pp.166-179). There is a metaphoric subtext in Coetzee’s work which is more directly defined in *Foe* as a space ‘where bodies are their own signs’ (p.157). This was considered in chapter four. Here I am suggesting that Coetzee’s placing of the characters in a specific setting and their immediate experiences, rather than their allegorical significance as textual constructs needs to be the starting point of my study, because the spatial positioning of each character in this fictional exposition offers an important commentary on the real and epidemic fractures that existed in apartheid South Africa.

In fact, there is substantial critical comment on the power that Coetzee grants to the historically positioned subject and the specifics of the narrative, rather than the meta-narrative, in *Age of Iron* (Attwell 1998; Marais 1996a & 1996c; Clayton 1994). Taking the cue of these critics, I suggest that such criticisms of the later novel can be read back to inform readings of *Life and Times of Michael K*. Regardless of the theoretical ramifications, the occasions of narrative in both novels demonstrate aspects of each character’s sense of belonging or exclusion in a complex geopolitical grille.

A brief outline of the specific strategies that the Nationalist government adopted to implement the apartheid grid and some explanation of these spatial parameters, and the consequent tensions during the latter years of their enforcement, will provide the necessary background against which these novels need to be read. I will examine Coetzee’s representation of the pervasiveness of the population’s alienation either from place or people and I will explain the vital transitional function of Michael and Vercueil between a divisive past and a future possibility of shared belonging.

Their textual performances reveal a responsiveness, on the part of the author, to the discursive-political realities of the times that is highly relevant to the progression of postcolonial debate. This is one of the thrusts of Coetzee’s dual trajectory. While he develops a relevant postcolonial response to the changing times, he maintains his focus on the ambivalence of the narrating subject. Coetzee’s ongoing postcolonial interrogation of the ambiguity of his narrators, the other focus in his two-pronged approach, is demonstrated in the modes of address of the two novels.
The different modes of address of the texts reveal Coetzee’s metafictional enquiry into issues of discourse, textuality and narrative authority. *Life and Times of Michael K* is constructed as two narratives. The first is ostensibly Michael’s own account of his departure from Cape Town, his sojourn in the country and his return to Cape Town. The failure of the second narrator, the medical officer, to invent a significant history for his uncommunicative patient installs a dialogue with the earlier record as it casts the validity of the former narrative into questionable relief. *Age of Iron* presents a diachronic narrative plait of the physical progression of Mrs Curren’s disease, her outer confrontation with the state of emergency in the deaths of the boys, Bheki and his friend, identified only as ‘John’, (his given African name ignored), and her inner efforts to reconcile this public reality with her personal position.

My overarching aim is to examine the disabling effects of a policy of segregation and to explore the opportunities of connecting to place and to other people that lie beyond the boundaries of local legislation and Western discursive laws in these two novels. Michael and Vercueil embody such different forms of belonging. Each of them is able to transgress the restrictions of their society. I would argue that such a study is an extension of the postcolonial. I would further suggest that my project addresses aspects of the continual recentring of postcolonial thinking in response to specific situations, which Head identifies as highly significant in Coetzee’s work (1997, p.160).

This sense of belonging that Coetzee is flagging also has wider implications than a mere exposition of the inequity of the South African policy of segregation and the violent consequences that resulted from attempts to bolster a crumbling political structure. I shall explain how both marginal characters not only defy the spatial barriers that are erected in their society but also transgress the frontiers that have been established in Western thinking and identification. In this, Coetzee seems to be calling for an openness to new ways of being. I believe that a revived or postcolonial “Africanness” or *ubuntu* that many African philosophers from countries further North as well as his own homeland have articulated (Es’kia Mphahlele 1974; Nise Malange 1996; Miriam Tlali 1996; Masolo, 1994 & 1997; Eze 1997; Jen-Marie Makang 1997 among others) can be seen as an alternative, with enormous regenerative potential to an inherited Western logical tradition of binary inclusions and exclusions.
This act of reconnecting with a fundamental humanistic approach that is shared by so many people on the wider African continent is particularly significant for its timing. When Coetzee was writing both of these novels, the tensions between different racial groups in South Africa were high and there was very little sign of collaboration across the lines to reduce the escalating violence. The changes that were to take place with the release of Nelson Mandela from prison and his negotiations for a peaceful resolution to the conflict with Prime Minister, F.W. de Klerk, were still unseen, in the future. A sharp separation existed between thinkers in South Africa and the rest of the continent as a result of extensive preoccupation with pressing local issues for both black and white writers and academics in the beleaguered country. The strict censorship that the Nationalist government exercised also inhibited the free flow of ideas across the border.

Both texts being compared in this chapter conclude with the vision of the reader being directed towards the future, a future dependent on someone from the edges of the society. This responsibility for the future is awesome. I contend that it is both characters’ very existence on the margins that allows for the interrogation and erasure of those frontiers. Their boundary position is very important, given current local and international theoretical debate.

A number of critics have considered the recent South African past to be too complex for theorizing on polar opposition between the colonizer and colonized. Given local socio-historical differences, some theorists, like Carusi (1991) and Christy Collis (1994), have expressed caution about incorporating local South African socio-historical analyses into comparative postcolonial studies. Such warnings need to be heeded if due respect is to be accorded to the specific histories of the place and its peoples.

Appiah’s observation is particularly pertinent here: ‘there is a clear sense in some postcolonial writing that the postulation of a unitary African over against a monolithic West – the binarism of Self and Other – is the last of the shibboleths of the modernizers that we must learn to live without’ (quoted in Bell 1997, p.206). This duality of self and other is certainly pervasive in representations of subject formation, although the suggestion here is that such notions confine current thinking to past conceptual modalities. Theory can only be relevant if it is in dialogue with what is happening in the
world. In the introduction I drew attention to Sole’s concern that the material realities of economically marginalized “others” might be at risk of being ignored in the ‘sophisticated conversations’ within the academy that may inadvertently be rephrasing ‘old themes’ (1997, pp.147-148). Clearly it is being suggested by critics, such as Appiah and Sole, that discourse that is founded on binary oppositions is inadequate for responding to present complex postcolonial needs.

Coetzee’s two novels provide valuable extensions to this ongoing postcolonial discussion. Coetzee, himself, has long been uncomfortable with polarized thinking. In his recent work, Youth, the protagonist is ‘pursuing an intuition that logic is a human invention, not part of the fabric of being … There are many alternative logics, he is convinced (but how many?), each just as good as the logic of either-or’ (2002, p.160). Some of the border-zones that worry the neat demarcation lines in binary theory are the very sites of interrogation in the texts being considered here. In her contemplation of future directions, Carusi has also anticipated ‘a plural and hybrid subject straddling a plurality of discursive positions’ (1991, pp.95-108). It is my thesis that Michael and Vercueil occupy such borderland positions and are, therefore, most relevant players in postcolonial negotiations. They can be seen as literal and theoretical transitional figures between a troubled past and an unknown future.

5.1. PATTERNS OF BELONGING WITHIN AN APARTHEID GRID

In both Life and Times of Michael K and Age of Iron, Coetzee focuses on the local political reality and he represents the social consequences of the complicated rules of segregation. The geo-political topography in South Africa in the 1980’s needs to be understood, if the spatial positioning of the characters in the two novels under consideration here, the constraints on their movements and the affiliations and tensions in their interactions and their sense of belonging are to be appreciated. A description of the systematic spatial parameters of apartheid in South Africa during the seventies and eighties will provide the contextual background to the society that Coetzee is interrogating. In this section I will be explaining this system of segregation and relating
it to the social density in the two texts. This will highlight the frontiers to belonging that each character experiences as a result of the restrictive laws.

The apartheid system was established to ensure white supremacy in every sphere of life. Said’s description of the myth of colonialism and its spatial implications demonstrates many of the outcomes of the specific example in South Africa:

Imperialism was the theory, colonialism the practice of changing the uselessly unoccupied territories of the world into useful new versions of the European metropolitan society…You get rid of most of the offending human and animal blight — whether because it simply sprawls about untidily all over the place or because it roams around unproductively and uncounted — and you confine the rest to reservations, compounds, native homelands, where you can count, tax, use them profitably, and you build a new society on the vacated space…The result was a widely varied group of little Europes scattered. (quoted in Serequeberhan 1997, p.144)

Coetzee represents, in the two novels, the scars of this history in the local context.

He opens up a vista onto some of the darker aspects associated with the enforcement of apartheid that drives the subsequent deeds of the observing white narrators: the medical officer in Life and Times of Michael K and Mrs Curren in Age of Iron. It is my contention that Coetzee’s own task of writing the novels and the way in which he presents the different reactions of these white narrators in the two texts demands an active response from the reader. This is a call to ethical action in which Coetzee offers Michael as an example of a person who is able to evade being trapped in the confines of all official and ideological camps, while still presenting a hopeful vision for the future, and Vercueil as a guide to dissolving personal barriers of judgement that reinforce external divisions and internal isolation. I will be considering the performative functions of Michael and Vercueil and their potential for opening up a discursive space for shared belonging later in this section. The comparison of these two characters demonstrates a developmental strand in Coetzee’s trajectory.

Rita Barnard explains:

Apartheid, as Coetzee so clearly understands, operates from day to day as a means of distributing people in space and, in the process, of controlling the way they see the world. The system perpetuates itself by decreeing that certain spaces be invisible:
homelands, prisons, torture chambers, and black cities are deliberately hidden, removed from view. (1994, p.35)

Barnard is explaining the gulf that existed between white and black people and their experiences and perceptions of the world that they inhabit. The question to be asked, though, is surely: whose ‘view’ is being considered here? Significantly, the perspective of the inhabitants of those hidden places is denied, thus Barnard is privileging the gaze of the white person.

Instead, I suggest that Coetzee tries to bridge this chasm between the different race groups, but he does not have access to the vantage point of a person who is not white. He acknowledges this difficulty in Life and Times of Michael K. When read in conjunction with the earlier novel, Age of Iron represents some progression in Coetzee’s approach to overcoming that gap. In the later text, Coetzee continues to recognize the ambivalent role as a white South African, in the character of Mrs Curren and her attempts to transcend her own limitations of seeing and listening, although he also moves beyond his tentative, self-scrutinizing inscription of the life of a “person of colour”. Here the voices of Florence Mkubukeli and Mr Thabane are quite confidently included as powerful, independent agents. This duality of a sustained focus as well as a developmental aspect to his work will expanded upon when the structure of the novels is discussed in the next section of this chapter.

Throughout his oeuvre Coetzee has made visible that which colonial authorities have shamefully hidden. In Dusklands the photographs of atrocities committed by American soldiers in Vietnam prompt Eugene Dawn to reconsider the self-serving mythology of war. From his office window, the magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians sees the pitiful victims of Col. Joll’s campaign of terror brought into the town square. What is Coetzee’s purpose in rendering the shadow side of colonial control visible? The narrative events that occur after these discoveries demonstrate the forceful impression that these disclosures have on the observers. Eugene becomes emotionally disturbed and the magistrate revolts against the indiscriminate brutality of the military and he suffers severely as a result. These strong reactions compel the reader to respond.
In the two novels being considered here, Coetzee exposes some of the spaces that Barnard describes as 'invisible'. These include the labour camp of Jakkalsdrif to which Michael is sent (MK, pp.73-96). Those in the camp are at the economic mercy of employers and retailers in the local town of Prince Albert. The white townsfolk, on the other hand, are vulnerable to attack by disgruntled interns. These labour camps erect frontiers of fear and physical threat on both sides of the fence. Michael manages to slip away from these defining lines literally, when he escapes, and figuratively in his textual representation. In *Age of Iron* Mrs Curren's attempt to connect with and understand the world of her domestic servant requires more than merely seeing the multiple contrasts between her comfortable life in the well-maintained white suburbs and the poverty, squalor, municipal neglect and police brutality in an obscure black township. When she takes Florence to find her son in Ghuguletlu, the horror of witnessing the dead bodies of Bheki and his compatriots is overwhelming (*AI*, pp.81-99). This is the pivotal event that forces the old white woman to re-assess her own world and where she belongs and the moral validity of her liberal-humanist position. What will she do with her horrible new knowledge? This becomes the substance of her narrative.

Before an analysis of the spatial positioning of characters in the two fictions can be undertaken, it is necessary to explain how these artificial divisions between people came about in South Africa. A brief history of the sequence of legislation that was instituted to achieve white domination attests to the highly methodical approach that the government took to ensure the segregation of the whole population. The segregation of different race groups was official policy prior to 1948. Then the white Nationalist government came into power and remained in power for the next forty years, during which they formulated and continued to refine the discourse of apartheid. A series of legislative acts was passed. These were intended to separate and control different ethnic groupings. This developed into a fine grid of control that dictated all political, social and economic life in the country. The Population Registration Act required that everyone be registered according to their racial identity, although occasional re-classifications indicate the arbitrariness of the definitions of the groups.

The racial identities of most characters in *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Age of Iron* can be gleaned from their position in the society, although the precise racial classifications of Michael and Vercueil are unclear. Michael's racial identity is deduced
from every aspect of his life, from his job to his internment for merely being unemployed. Vercueil, however, cannot be classified. His itinerant life-style and his evasion of the law prevent the reader from framing him.

Classification resulted in far-reaching consequences that affected every aspect of a person’s life. The Group Areas Act imposed suburban segregation according to the race group to which an individual belonged. Blacks, Indians and “Coloureds” (people of mixed racial origins) were restricted to live in dormitory locations to keep them apart from the white suburbs but close enough to provide labour for the cities. Again, in yet another self-serving aberration, the lawmakers allowed an exception to the rule: black domestic servants were permitted to live in separate accommodation on the property of their white employers.

In _Age of Iron_, the disjointed reality for most domestic workers and their families is poignantly portrayed in a description of Florence’s weekend visit to her husband in his living quarters at the chicken factory where he works and their journey to Ghuguletu to see their son who lodges with Florence’s sister (AI, pp.38-41). It is important that Mrs Curren is pondering this dilemma of her maid across the racial barrier, but perhaps it is even more relevant that she seems to be powerless to do anything about it. Thus she can be seen as both a collaborator, as one who benefits from the system, and a pawn in the wider state design. Only when she comes face to face with the brutal underbelly of the system is she pressed to ethical action, regardless or, perhaps, because of her lack of authority. This will be considered in the next section.

In another real anomaly, some prime areas, which “Coloured” and Malay communities had previously inhabited, were evacuated and razed, simply because they were located within white designated areas. For example, District Six in Cape Town was a vibrant and stable multi-cultural hub, when it was arbitrarily claimed for redevelopment as a white suburb. Ironically, it remained a wasteland for the duration of Nationalist government and, in a final twist, it is again becoming a thriving cultural centre with the return of some key players in these post-apartheid times.

The racial divisions affected every aspect of life. The Mixed Amenities Act imposed racial conditions on the use of public facilities. Amenities from buses to public
conveniences were segregated. The sign 'Slegs Blankes/ Whites only' was a common warning on facilities from park benches to beaches to bank counters. As mentioned previously, The Immorality Act prohibited mixed marriages between Blacks and Whites, in an artificial attempt to preserve 'racial purity' (Ashcroft Griffiths & Tiffin 1998, p.18). Black people were even restricted from entering the trades, lest their numbers threatened the employment opportunities of white artisans, hence many were confined to labouring jobs. The Pass Laws required that all "Non-whites" carry an identity document bearing their racial classification. This pass also restricted their access to white areas, unless it was stamped with a work permit. The racially based laws determined all interaction:

Apartheid became a pervasive and effective government machine of racial discrimination and separation, in which only a small percentage of the population, the white minority, had a political voice. Black people had always been denied the vote. Further laws passed in the 1950's 'curtailed the legal space for non-violent extra-parliamentary political activity by the ANC [African National Congress]...against race discrimination, pass-law curbs on black mobility, and low wages. And the extent to which the courts could intercede for black rights had been seriously eroded by laws that gave the state arbitrary powers and often ruled out judicial intervention. (Barrell 1990, p.2)

A law passed in 1963 prevented Blacks from owning land, except for degraded allotments in remote and overcrowded homelands or "dumping grounds", to which many urban Blacks were forcibly removed as a part of the plan to divide and rule. In the 1960's, nearly two million Blacks were re-located. It was the Nationalists' intention to remove those Blacks who were not expedient to the national economy to independent, ethnically constituted Bantustans. These areas were designated as homelands for the majority of the population and as an outlet for their political aspirations. But this engineering was socially, economically and politically flawed. Urbanized people were forcibly separated from their families and relocated to remote rural, often ecologically degraded, areas. The Bantustans were to support the majority of the population on a meagre 13% of the land. Some industry was created to provide employment, but this proved to be inadequate and unviable. As artificial, separate developments, these Bantustans were wholly dependent on South Africa for their economic survival, hence they were merely political puppet states of the Nationalist government. As Peter Joyce states:
The South African chequerboard had been laid out, and the Nationalist politicians, hidebound by the inflexible doctrine of separate development, were committed to shifting the human counters to fit a pre-determined pattern. (1990, p.45)

Thus the Nationalist government succeeded in institutionalising racial discrimination over three decades, with a huge administrative structure to regulate the “rights” of Blacks to live or work in “white” cities. The social consequences were dire. Colin Murray identifies three outcomes of this ‘displaced urbanization’ which were: overcrowding on the rural slums; diversion of the limited state housing funds from urban “locations” to the Bantustans, and widespread commuting from the rural sites to the cities for work (1995, pp.231-355). This system of control was fraught with tensions within and between groups.

It is these tensions that form the backdrop of both novels. The war that seems to hover on the edges of Michael’s experience, sometimes disrupting his solitary existence, is a projected outcome of these tensions. The confrontation in Age of Iron is evidence of the cracks beginning to show in the rigid structure of apartheid repression.

In both novels being compared, Coetzee uses the spatial metaphors of officially separated places of belonging to juxtapose the positions of members of different racial groups. I concur with Carolyn Baker, who suggests that there is collusion in the deployment of ‘membership categorisation’ (2000, p.111). In the two Coetzee texts there are numerous membership categories, from naming to employment, that define the racial identity of the characters, but the clearest indicator of their membership is their spatial positioning on the apartheid map. From this, the reader is able to confirm their racial classification.

Ironically, Coetzee is colluding with the official position by demonstrating that the control of space is fundamental to colonial authority. Most of the characters in both texts clearly belong to one of the classified groups. Their race is implied in numerous signals from their names, socio-economic status and spatial positioning. By representing the discriminatory categorization of people, I suggest that Coetzee is demonstrating the pervasiveness of the process of arbitrary classification in a country where most social interaction is premised upon racial grounds. Nevertheless, Coetzee is not merely
exposing the complicity of all participants, including himself, in that system. He is also extending a challenge to readers by presenting the two characters who manage to evade such easy classification.

5.1.1. TWO MARGINAL TRANSGRESSORS

The extensive critical comment on where Michael and Vercueil fit in the apartheid scheme attests to the haziness of their identities, the hegemonic impetus of the reader to secure meaning and Coetzee’s ironic collusion and resistance to apartheid classifications. Together, these two men represent some idea of Coetzee’s projected sense of belonging in place and in coexistence with others.

Michael is a shadowy character who lives on the edges of society. His initials could stand for Manlike Kleurling meaning “Coloured” man. They could also represent an acronym for the armed branch of the African National Congress, Mkonte we Sizwe (MK), translated as Spear of the Nation. Such naming would serve a dual purpose. As members of all racial groups have been free to belong to the ANC, this association would merely extend the uncertainty of his racial identity. It may also be an ironic yet oblique link between a man who, in all aspects of his life, avoided confrontation, and the driving force of the ANC towards a non-racially based government.

A consequence of his “Coloured” identity is that Michael does not fit into any category. This is materialized in his resistance to spatial control. He slips over the barbed wire frontiers of all containment, whether as a living being, or as a signifier in other people’s systems of meaning. Michael’s dwelling place with his mother in the space under the stairs of her employer’s block of flats, his menial job as a council gardener, his need of a permit to leave the city, and his incarceration in numerous camps all imply that his racial classification is “non-white”, and yet he would also appear to be “non-black” from his initials. He evades the ontologies that are framed by past white and black thinking, both of which are constrained by their respective experiences of colonialism. This will be discussed shortly.
Vercueil is an even more shadowy and ambivalent character who defies classification. His name resembles the Afrikaans term *verskuil*, meaning to conceal and *verkui*, meaning to cheat (Head 1997, p.140). His former job as a mariner does not help to define who he is and he has no fixed address as a cross-reference. There are similarities between Michael and Vercueil, in that there is a fuzziness around their racial identity, and both are itinerant. For Michael, however, his spatial positioning casts him as a “non-white”, but for Vercueil there is no such evidence.

Even though Vercueil does not appear to belong to any group, he is the catalyst that causes the other characters in the text to declare their own affiliations. The young black comrades are angry with the older generation, blaming alcohol for having numbed their parents into acquiescence. Identifying with these sentiments. Bheki and ‘John’ vent their frustration on Vercueil (*AF*:42-3). As the sounding board for Mrs Curren’s uncertain sense of identification and as the unaligned witness to many of the events of the novel, Vercueil can be seen as the facilitator of Mrs Curren’s unfolding response to her encounters.

Commenting on Coetzee’s concern with place and how people occupy, imagine and represent the space which they inhabit, Barnard maintains that Coetzee renders those places usually kept out of sight visible, including an automatic response to place that is, in fact, a social and material construct (1994, pp.36-46). I agree with Barnard insofar as an examination of spatiality reveals a duality in an automatic response. I further maintain that this relates to a sense of belonging or not belonging to both place and people. Coetzee represents these ambivalences in the lives of a number of characters in the two novels.

It seems to me that there is one primary omission in Said’s description of the spatial implications of colonial mythology given at the beginning of this section, namely the universal human need to belong. For both colonizers and the colonized, such divisive strategies as those legislated in South Africa have resulted in a damaged sense of belonging for all participants.

While the segregation laws were an official attempt to contain and manage the Black and “Coloured” population in order to carve out a space of belonging for Whites,
they can also be read as a most overt metaphoric enactment of colonial anxiety. Upon choosing to settle, the question for the colonizer becomes: where does he belong among the indigenous people and in a foreign landscape?

Before this can be answered, it is necessary to recognize that many of the neat categories that divide societies are troublesome. For example, within the South African context, who is indigenous? The Bantu tribes were originally migrants from further North. There are now even questions about whether the San peoples are indigenous to the region. By implication, then, all inhabitants of the land may, at some stage, have been newcomers, arriving with various claims of belonging, some of land ownership, in commodified terms, others with transient user tenure as nomadic herdsmen or foragers. This raises the issue of rights of belonging. Such a consideration is further confounded by the different laws that were formulated to apply to “Coloureds”. Of course, the complications with classifying these people added another knot to the maze of laws. Debates over prior occupancy, ancestral connectedness and economic sustainability may challenge colonial dominance, but such discourse may merely highlight the insecurity of all claimants about belonging in place. Or is this only a Western phobia? How do people experience the landscape or place?

I suggest that, in the two novels being considered here, Coetzee is using the specific local context to flag a universal desire to belong; this sense of belonging is, however, thwarted by the very barriers that the colonizer erects to secure his place on foreign territory. Coetzee has said that he prefers to view the South African situation ‘as only one manifestation of a wider historical situation to do with colonialism’ (cited in Attwell 1990, p.98). These two narrative performances contribute to dynamic local and international postcolonial debate.

Michael’s story might be described as his search for freedom, consciously and unconsciously, as Post intimates (1986, p.75). But what does this imply? Coetzee says:

I am someone who has intimations of freedom (as every chained prisoner has) from which he constructs shadow representations - which are shadows themselves - of people slipping their chains and turning their faces to the light. I do not imagine freedom, freedom an sich; I do not represent it. Freedom is another name for the unimaginable, says Kant, and he is right. (DP, p.341)
It seems to me, then, that Michael’s narrative represents only an ‘intimation of freedom’ by Coetzee or an idyllic yearning that cannot be represented. Could this be because Michael cannot escape from the times in which he lives? The same can be said for all people, including, the author and the reader. In other words, each of us is bound by the conditions of the time and place in which we live. This includes not only the material conditions of our existence but also the discursive stance that we take up in relation to the positions of others.

Most critics emphasize the importance of the wider context of Coetzee’s work. This refers to the society in which he lives as well as the intellectual environment. Attwell comments on the necessity of reading Coetzee within the context of the academic debates of the times in which he is writing (1993, pp.94-133). Attwell identifies a clash of opposing systems: liberalism, which was strongly supported by English-speaking Whites, advances the idea of capitalism as a progressive and transforming force for the development of all classes and races; and revisionism which promoted the resistance of under classes to the disabling drive of capitalism which was linked to economic imperialism (1993, p.123). Attwell concludes that Coetzee is cautious about conceptual allegiances, for the author keenly participates in opening up new discursive possibilities and communities-to-be-created (1993, pp.126-128). I agree with Attwell and I further maintain that these new opportunities can be found in the examples of Michael and Vercueil, neither of whom fits into any established discursive schema.

On the one hand, Western colonial tradition can be defined as liberal, in that it brings with it many of the values associated with the rise of capitalism in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe, including the division and private ownership of land. In South Africa this European heritage was consolidated by the attachment of Whites to an idealized farm landscape. Coetzee has called this long-held tradition *plaasroman* (*WW*). The white myth of the *plaasroman* was discussed in chapter three. For Coetzee, this romanticized notion of the local African landscape that is “tamed” to fit into a European farm paradigm is, significantly, empty of people. The plaasroman, therefore, entrenches frontiers of place and people. The boundaries of land ownership, rights of access and exclusion of outsiders are confirmed. The consequences of these fences for all participants are finely detailed in the two novels being examined here.
On the other hand, African theory, supported by the revisionists, is in the process of separating the thinking of the African people from some of their colonial shackles. While much of the theory of African philosophers from further North has not, until recently, been widely disseminated in South Africa because of past censorship laws, many of their ideas bear clear relevance for the South African people who are now attempting to reconstruct their sense of self and their society. Local academics like Attwell, Leon de Kock and Maje Serudu (Solberg & Hacksley 1996), Michael Chapman (1998) and Johan Jacobs (1999), among them, are eager to share in cross-border transcultural dialogue. Johan Jacobs highlights the possibilities of rich cultural interchange when South African literature is re-situated in the larger context of African writing (1999, pp.i-x).

Eze claims that ‘[c]ontemporary African philosophy raises questions about the ambiguous and enduring legacies of modern Europe to Africa’ (1997, p.15). The primary dubious effect of European colonization of the African continent has been explained by Franz Fanon, one of the first postcolonial thinkers, who maintains that Western discourse invented the term ‘the Africans’ in order to establish the supremacy of the West in the dialectical process of the politics of otherness (Masolo 1994, p.9). Using Fanon’s theory as a starting point, Masolo examines the way in which the ‘politics of otherness’ has impacted on the floundering sense of identity that many people in Africa are experiencing (1994). Masolo’s ideas were introduced in chapter four. The African concept of ubuntu, which is a long established tradition that is widely valued, was precisely articulated by Placide Tempels, a Belgian priest in his 1945 work entitled, La Philosophie Bantoue. The words muntu (singular) and bantu (plural) refer to the condition of being human. According to Masolo, the problem with Tempels’s use of the term is that it defines an essentializing bantu identity that is alienating because it is frozen in a idealized past of primitive tribal communities (1994, p.159). Masolo argues that the ethnosophiology of Tempels has resulted in a deep social, political and cultural crisis for the people of Africa today (1994, p.147).

Reclaiming an ontology of participation in nature rather than domination over nature, Makang points out the moral and epistemological implications of a tradition in which being or:
fnjtu is a world which admits no dichotomy in terms of matter and spirit, good and evil, or life and death, for in this world interact sympathetically the living and the dead, and all the elements of the universe, meaning the humans, things, words and modalities ... where being is identical with force. (1997, p.326)

Here I suggest that Makang is reaffirming Appiah’s argument about the limitations of binary thinking in postcolonial understandings for the future, referred to earlier in this chapter. This concept of ubuntu as a sense of shared humanity, in spite of differences between people, is familiar ideational currency among many local black writers in South Africa (Kunene, Mphahele, Malange and Tlali among others).

As I explained in the introduction, ubuntu has become ‘a key word in post-apartheid politics and in Thabo Mbeki’s “African Renaissance”’ (Sanders 2002b, p.119). For Sanders, ubuntu brings together an ‘invented memory’ that appeals to ‘the explanatory resources of particular indigenous cultural formulations’ and a time that only ‘exists at the level of possibility’ (2002b, p.120). In other words, ubuntu is a ‘way of managing the transition from one era to another and of effecting reconciliation between people and groups’ (2002b, p.120), for it requires ongoing responsibility of all participants (2002b, p.127). I maintain that Coetzee’s characters, Michael and Vercueil, can be seen as such transitional figures between an ambivalent past of idealized coexistence and actual confrontation, and future hope.

This future hope is certainly crucial to the newly emerging sense of a national social identity in South Africa. And perhaps it is of even greater relevance, as Chapman suggests, ‘[w]ith ubuntu recognised as a principle of conduct, we are forced to consider the concepts of Africa and the West ... and engage in a fresh – post-apartheid, probably post-Cold War – dialectic of the local and the universal’ (1998, pp.96-97).

I contend that it is important that Coetzee’s audacious representation of a “non-white”, in a time when so many postcolonial theorists have frowned upon such an appropriation of the voice of the other by a Eurocentric writer, should take the form of a “Coloured” person, precisely because Michael may be able to transcend some of the limitations of black/white or liberal/revisionist oppositions. I suggest that it is these human knots, like Michael and Vercueil, who dwell on the fine lines that were installed
to divide people, that allow Coetzee to explore the implications of belonging in relation to other people and to place, while still refusing sectarian affiliation.

It is interesting to note that Michael does not have a sense of belonging with others. He leads a most solitary existence and is, in fact, resistant to most contact with others. He is only content when he is alone, living in harmony with the land. Here Michael can be seen as subscribing to one aspect of the white myth of a landscape, the *plaasroman*, that is empty of people, but he also represents an African belonging with the landscape.

Marais presents a fine examination of the shift in Michael’s attachment to the landscape from a position of wishing to secure his independence in Hegelian terms of dominating nature and an oppositional relationship with others, whereby their negation secures the subject’s identity, to an a-linguistic mode of being-with-the-land, in which ‘his consciousness no longer mediates things: it does not produce objects for experience through a labour of negation’ (2001a, pp.107-125). I contend that this can be equated with Makang’s recuperation of *ntu*, in which case Michael may be representing a shift from a Western to an African teleology.

The only problem with such an interpretation is that a relationship with others cannot be excluded when referring to the notion of *ubuntu* or being human in African terms. In an interview with Rolf Solberg, the black South African writer, Kunene, explained that *ubuntu* is not an abstraction ... a person is not born human, you do not grow up human. You grow up with the potential of being human ... You can only safeguard this quality by your actions -by the things you do for other people’ (1996, p.16). In the light of this, Michael might be regarded as moving into a transitional position between the two ontologies. Besides his categorical marginality, metaphorically, he does not belong in either camp. But the question remains: where does he belong?

Michael’s vision is clearly grounded in his maternal heartland. The farm is the place of origin of his own mother and the earth has been interpreted by Derek Wright as his surrogate mother (1991). This clearly grounds Michael’s projected sense of belonging in a specific and historically significant place, thus reaffirming or, to use
Head's term, *revitalising* realism: Michael's 'silence and his elusiveness ultimately give way to an authentic philosophy of subsistence, a projected celebration of being which is also a recuperation of personal history' (1997, p.110). The man's idea of home is grounded in place, yet it lies beyond the competing mythologies of his times.

Michael's narrative continually projects towards a future, but elusive, possibility of belonging. Initially, he is drawn to reconnect with his maternal homeland. He enjoys two sojourns on the farm, where he lives 'by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time' (*MK*, p.60). But the world of politics cannot be escaped and twice his reverie is disrupted by the intrusion of the outer world, in the arrival of the Visagie boy and then the military. Even in the final image, the history of confrontation intrudes, reducing the idea of a peaceful coexistence with an imaginary friend to a difficult and meagre survival because of previous damage done to the water pump by the soldiers. Michael's dream of a place of belonging is tainted. Even such a future site cannot be freed from the past.

Coetzee has said that Michael's way is of being rather than of becoming (cited in Head 1997, p.109). Certainly the minimalism and simplicity of Michael's bare survival, his being-with-the-land, are clearly evident. The presence of a companion who shares his vision at the end of the novel, however, does not square with Michael's representation throughout the text. He shuns contact with others and much of his energy is spent avoiding the desires of others, whether the state officials, the medical officer or the prostitute. Even in his relationship with his mother, Michael seems, initially, to be performing a duty rather than sharing her dream of life back on the farm.

At times, Michael does demonstrate brief connectedness with others. These incidents merely offer a glimpse of another possible way of being to him. At Jakkalsdrif camp he enjoys the little children frolicking over his body: 'They clambered over him and fell upon him as if he were part of the earth. He found unexpected pleasure in these games. It felt to him that he was drawing health from the children's touch' (*MK*, p.84). Here he is the passive receiver of this connectedness and not an active participant in a shared space.
In his final musings, Michael exhibits a chink of longing for shared companionship. These plans are so tentative that they are written in the subjunctive voice, which barely gives them the substance of being. This vision, therefore, does not represent Michael as a figure of being. It is, rather, the narrator’s projection of himself *becoming* a man of belonging in place and with others. It is an acknowledgement of the lacuna in Michael’s sense of complete belonging, while recognising that the current geopolitical space does not allow for such wholeness. I propose that this flicker towards a community of belonging anticipates further exploration in Michael’s textual kinsman, Vercueil.

Unlike Michael, Vercueil demonstrates no connectedness to place. He is even more elusive than Michael, for he does not appear to be subjected to the constraints of the system that impede Michael’s movement. It would appear that his repeated return to Mrs Curren’s house is merely to satisfy his need to fund his drinking. Vercueil does not appear to belong anywhere.

While recognising the significance of Vercueil as an enabling device, Attwell dismisses the value of his presence as an historical being as merely ‘a recognizable tramp surviving in the crannies of the suburbs’ (1998, p.174). I, on the other hand, believe that Vercueil’s participation in the social density or reality of the narrative is most important. His actions in relation to others are fundamental to his textual role. Besides his dog, he has no attachments to possessions, places, people or professed ideology by which he can be known. Mrs Curren may describe him as ‘*stoksielalleen*: a stick in an empty field, a soul alone, sole’ (*AI*, p.172) but, unlike Michael, who felt at home only when he was alone on the land, Vercueil is comfortable in the company of others. He does not appear to belong to others but he certainly belongs with them. Here I suggest that Coetzee is highlighting the distinction between a shared space of belonging that allows for spontaneous connectedness, rather than a prescribed relationship which belonging to others such as a family group might entail. In contrast Michael displays a sense of obligation in taking his mother to the farm.

Since he does not conform to any structures of belonging, Vercueil is free to choose his connections. His easy ability to connect with a whole range of people provides an example of belonging that transcends the rules that keep people defensive,
suspicious, judgemental and divided. The delight that Florence’s children take in his play attests to his ability to engender trust, even though the children’s mother is disgusted by his dirty habits. His unconditional belonging with others shows up these limitations in others, hence he is a catalyst that exposes the frontiers that others erect. He may not have a place of belonging, but he always seems to be there when Mrs Curren needs him. And she needs him increasingly as the cancer take over her body: for physical support, psychological comfort and as a guide of relinquishment, even into the great white glare of death (AI, p.160).

Coetzee sets up the presence of the man and his way of life rather than his verbal self-representation as the example. Vercueil is a man of few words. He makes no commitment, either to post Mrs Curren’s letter or of supporting her through her suffering. He offers no promises of release from the physical and attitudinal malignancies that contaminate her life. Nevertheless, his actions demonstrate his care, whether it is to take her home when he finds her under the bridge or to nurse her in her last days. His example is grounded in the present. By his actions alone he demonstrates the power of freely choosing belonging with another. In this I suggest that Vercueil represents a living example of Michael’s “intimation of freedom” that was discussed earlier, although this is only in relation to others not to place. To this extent I would agree with Attwell that Vercueil’s key textual role is as the enabler of Mrs Curren’s transformation. I would also suggest that Attwell might be flagging the absence of any glimpse into the private life of Vercueil and his personal estrangements that have led to his debilitating alcoholism.

Vercueil is the catalyst that exposes the cracks in Mrs Curren’s liberal-humanist identity. By being present, listening to her self-justifications and providing an alternative example of being, he opens up an opportunity for her to scrutinize her own position and explore new options. She says: ‘My mind is like a pool, which his finger enters and stirs. Without that finger stillness, stagnation. A way of indirection. By indirection I find out direction’ (AI, p.74). He can be read as an opaque aporia that defies her nice rational construction of herself and the world that she inhabits. The abject is materialized in his person. Kristeva has said that the abject is lined with the sublime (1982, p.12). Using the abject Vercueil as a guide, her angel of death, Mrs Curren hopes to relinquish her flawed attachments and slip over the edge of life, into a sublime afterlife. As a textual construct,
Vercueil offers a guide to surrendering. The literal and metaphoric implications of his function will be analysed in the next section of this chapter.

Coetzee uses the unlikely character of Vercueil as the ambivalent facilitator of Mrs Curren’s revision of her traditional worldview, based on her professional knowledge of ancient classical values. Vercueil embodies the characteristics of the alcohol that he imbibes. Alcohol dissolves iron, the rigid substance of fences that entrench rules of division and enforcement. Mrs Curren muses: ‘Alcohol that softens preserves. Mollificans. That helps us to forgive’ (*AI*, p.75). Ironically, alcohol was condemned as the anaesthetic of their parents by the black children of the revolution. They believed that alcohol was to blame for the acquiescence of the older generation in their own oppression. Vercueil embodies the contradictory elements that his drinking implies. He is both the releaser (from intransigent iron laws) and the imprisoner (in apolitical torpor). His life is the *chora* of possibilities and nullity. In Vercueil, Coetzee is giving an example of living action, albeit ambivalent, rather than a discursive position that would continue debate between competing teleological systems. Like Michael, Vercueil’s textual performance transcends the divisions that alienate people.

Apartheid laws reinforced colonial divisions between people of different racial classification in South Africa. By describing Michael and Vercueil on the very margins of apartheid divisions, Coetzee has offered two complementary examples that transcend the boundaries of the prevailing local politics and wider Western thinking. Michael represents a way of being that is firmly grounded on a Southern African landscape, suggesting that the site of past colonial and neo-colonial domination is also a place of future shared belonging. Vercueil represents a textual guide to the postcolonizer for the surrendering of authority so that the barriers that separate people can be removed. How belonging in place and with others can be achieved, however, remains unclear. The possibility and yet the elusiveness of belonging is evident in the modes of address of the two novels.
5.2. MODES OF ADDRESS MIRRORED

In this section I will examine the different modes of address in *Life and Times of Michael K* and *Age of Iron* to support my argument that the responses of the medical officer and Mrs Curren to the characters that they encounter and the events that they witness show up their own collusion in extending the barriers that divide their society. The ways in which Coetzee structures the two novels provide a metafictional commentary that reveals his on-going concern with the ways in which colonial discrimination is perpetuated. By exploring the intertextual dialogue between the different modes of address in the two novels, I will demonstrate Coetzee two-pronged approach. There is some development in his use of textual strategies that reflects a direct response to the geocultural and critical environments in which he writes. He also continues to focus on the issues that entrap the postcolonizer and his/her duplicitous role as both the evader and the reinforcer of colonial domination. A comparison of the textual function of the two characters, Michael and Vercueil, and their effect on the white narrators, the medical officer and Mrs Curren, will illuminate the development in Coetzee's fictional enterprise.

The way in which Coetzee presents the setting of each novel reflects similarities and differences between the two texts. In both texts the lives of the narrators diminish as the times in which they live come to dominate the text. As the war intrudes on Michael's life, so the effect becomes visible in his diminishing need for nourishment. Mrs Curren's concern with wider issues of the times escalates as she is repeatedly confronted with the brutality of the police. At the same time, the malignancy inside her grows and her life reduces. In both texts the private lives of the two main narrators are increasingly overshadowed by crises in the public domain as their physical hold on life shrinks.

The juxtaposition of the responses of the three narrators to the troubled times in which they live demonstrates some development in Coetzee's focus. The conflict remains indistinct and distant in the earlier novel. This may have been a deliberate ploy on the part of Coetzee to avoid the censor. In contrast, the confrontations are foregrounded in the later text and the rationale of those who oppose the apartheid system is clearly articulated. Thus Coetzee demonstrates increasing willingness to participate in the debate about the ethical limitations of different discursive positions.
Before the tensions that occur in the two novels can be fully understood, the escalating racial conflagration that the laws of apartheid precipitated and the actual events that led up to the declaration of the States of Emergency during the 1980’s in South Africa need to be outlined. Black people protested against the range of discriminatory laws that restricted their movements, their employment opportunities and their legal rights. Howard Barrell explains:

On 21 March 1960, 69 unarmed anti-pass law protesters were shot down in Sharpeville, a state of emergency was declared and the ANC (a multi-racial political organization committed to the democratic rights of all citizens) and the PAC (The Pan-African Congress) were outlawed. (1990, pp.2-3)

Within the next four months, more than 11,000 people had been detained or arrested. In the face of this plan to silence and marginalize the majority of the population, the armed wing of the ANC was formed, with Nelson Mandela being given the task to install the high command of the organization (1990, pp.2-7). Until the next major crisis, the school riots in 1976, the two forces in South Africa, the legal government of the white minority and the illegal voice of the ANC continued a simmering confrontation as the apartheid laws were enforced and extended.

On 16 June 1976 10,000 schoolchildren marched in Soweto, a township near Johannesburg, in protest. The issue at hand was their objection to the government decision that they were to be taught some of their subjects in the medium of Afrikaans, the language of their oppressors. At the heart of their rage was anger with their own elders who had accepted the yoke of subjugation and with the apartheid state for its injustices. Violence erupted and spread to other centres. This solidarity marked the beginning of an enduring campaign by the disenfranchised majority to ‘render the country ungovernable’, as Joyce explains (1990, p.73).

The demanding and exacting task of enforcing the maze of apartheid laws was everywhere undermined by the corporeality of the pawns, the voiceless majority. This monolith was beginning to crumble. The Nationalist government had largely succeeded in its comprehensive task of silencing all black political utterances, and yet the power of the collective voice of the disaffected generation of youth broke through. The authority of that collective call gained momentum from the violence that was inflicted on the
rebels. The government retaliated by attempting to beat back the wave for self-determination with punishment and torture. According to Barrell, conservative official figures record that 575 people died, 3,907 were injured and 5,980 were arrested for participation in the unrest (1990, p.31). The thousands of suffering bodies became a ghastly testimony, more eloquent than words, to the voice of the people.

The seventies and eighties were years in which evidence of gross physical conflict was either concealed or misrepresented by the political order in power. The Nationalist government contrived an elaborate network of media and political players to re-present events in order to defend and entrench their governing structure. For decades censorship restricted all forms of communication in South Africa. The SABC (South African Broadcasting Corporation) was controlled by members of the élite and secret Afrikaner Group, the Broederbond, who were the primary architects of apartheid (de Klerk 1975, p.199). All news was given the propagandist slant of the ruling establishment. In the information scandal in 1978, the covert use of national funds to silence dissenting editorial comment led to the resignation of the Prime Minister, B. J. Vorster, only to have his successor, P. W. Botha, tighten the muzzle on all oppositional voices by proclaiming “total onslaught” against what he termed “the enemies of the state”. Any breaking of rank with the authorities was represented as a communist-supported threat to the internal security of the country.

While so much was made of these so-called “enemies of the state”, the subversive activities of the police and military, aimed at destabilising black opposition, were largely overlooked by the media. The death in custody of the black activist leader, Steve Biko, in 1977 and the subsequent inquiry are well-known examples of the charade of deception and collusion that was required to bolster this regime. Raymond Louw comments that censorship results in ‘a huge gap in one’s knowledge of what is going on in one’s community or society generally’ (1996, p.17). This manipulation of the news meant that the population had little idea of what was happening. Personal witness, rumour and distorted representations all contributed to a very muddled picture.

In Giving Offense, Coetzee investigates the ‘myth of the writer as a hero of resistance’ (Barnett quoted in GO, p.148), in which the writer occupies the moral high ground over politics. He is intent upon finding a position from which to speak and be
heard, 'which does not get assimilated by the destructive political dynamic of rivalry and denunciation' (GO, p.149). His aim is to moot an ethical response which is beyond any narrow political assessment. While he acknowledges that all writing plays on and around the limits of discourses, he also perceives a similarity between the censor and the writer, with both sharing the same evaluative process (GO, p.151). Like the censor, the writer would wish to situate his own position as mediator beyond the confrontational dynamic of accusation and counter-accusation. But he cannot. Both the censor and the writer are complicit in the debate. They each focus their gaze on seeking out that which transgresses boundaries.

In a game of oppositional politics between the state censor and the hegemonic claims of protest writers, I would argue that the physical proof of injured or missing bodies has declared, and continues to declare, their transgressive existence, in overt defiance of the meticulous binary constructs of apartheid and its critics. It is this physical evidence, which lies across the boundaries of rationality, that Coetzee adumbrates. The suffering bodies provide a model which his fiction emulates. Consequently, Coetzee has created a body of work which challenges the very space which all discourse occupies. He employs the physical and the fictional to represent his metaphysical and metafictional task.

Any transgression of state-determined frontiers of where people ought to belong is the presence to which Coetzee seems to respond in these two novels. It is the physical presence or absence of these pawns and, more particularly, the suffering bodies, that is the nexus in which the system, as itself and as metonymy of all structures of enforced belonging within rigid boundaries disintegrates. Michael’s life can be seen as a metaphor or a textual “body” or enactment that transgresses imposed lines of classification. In *Age of Iron* Coetzee sets out the plight of these pawns without appropriating their voices, focussing instead on the spatial metaphors within which their identities are adumbrated. Mr Thabane and Florence rarely speak, but when they do, they provide vital verbal counterbalance to the carefully formulated logic with which Mrs Curren justifies the superiority of her belief system.

By considering the intertextual links between the two novels, Coetzee’s perennial interests are highlighted. As I have shown, the narrative about Michael’s in-between
ontology signals a clear need for belonging to be grounded in place. This landscape, as the primary source of survival and historical connectedness, forms a distant shadow consciousness for Mrs Curren who thinks of a site on Prince Alfred's Pass as 'the starting-place, the place of the navel, the place where I join the world....This is my mother [Coetzee's italics]' (AI, pp.110-111). Similarly, commentaries on the later text can be read back to inform readings of the earlier work. It seems to me that a number of critics consider that the specific occurrences in Age of Iron prompt the reader to examine his/her own life and the ways in which he/she contributes to the myths of colonization (Attwell 1998; Marais 1993a & 1996c; Clayton 1994). By heeding this critical focus on the narrative events themselves, rather than the critical meta-construction that the reader and others have added, I suggest going back to the narrative occasions of Michael's story.

Such a retrospective reading encourages me to challenge the strong hegemonic impetus among readers to secure meaning and, hence, a place of belonging for themselves in the next sub-section. I further contend that this contradiction between the attempt to fix meaning and thereby gain a sense of belonging and the achievement of this outcome is another demonstration of the ambivalence of the postcolonizer-as-narrator. This impasse is evident in the narrative of the medical officer.

5.2.1. THE WHITE WRITER IN AFRICA

I agree with Kossew (1996, p.23) that Coetzee displays an acute awareness of the paradoxical position of the white writer in South Africa, yet I would add that he is also highlighting universal anxieties about belonging in place and with others, in the questions that his work prompts. The medical officer in Life and Times of Michael K represents such an unsettled position. He diarises his own version of Michael's story in an attempt to secure a place of belonging for himself as a white person in Africa. His narrative is contrasted with the first section of the novel in which Michael's own narrative of "longing" is presented.
By examining the function of the medical officer’s narrative, I am spurred to ask
the questions: What game is Coetzee playing in mirroring the narratives of Michael and
that of the medical officer? Where does Michael’s meaning reside? How can a meaning
exist independently of the system or, to put it another way, what gives something
meaning in a contextual vacuum? Without a shared structural framework, how can
subjects and ideas be classified or organized in order that they are understood? And,
ironically, is it not the issues around classification according to race that have done such
pervasive harm to a shared sense of belonging? It is these questions that I will be
addressing here.

I contend that the medical officer’s attempts to define an allegorical place of
belonging, albeit beyond the boundaries of familiar paradigms, and local political
geography, are an attempt to articulate new myths of origin and a denial of who Michael
is. The doctor tries to understand Michael and where he fits in the complex society. He
concludes that Michael’s ‘stay in the camp was merely an allegory...of how
scandalously, how outrageously a meaning can take up residence in a system without
becoming a term in it’ (MK, p.166). By creating Michael as an in-between or borderland
identity, Coetzee has disrupted the neat binary classifications that entrench colonial
thinking. Baker maintains that ‘[r]earranging categories and associated activities is
difficult excavation work because one encounters a history of sedimentation of usage
and, therefore, of commonsense and logic’ (2000, pp.111-112). Considering this notion,
I intend to demonstrate the compelling drive on the part of all participants, including the
medical officer and the reader, to use their ‘common sense and logic’ to stabilize the
meaning of Michael life and his place of belonging and, therefore, their own sense of
order and understanding of their worlds.

A review of the critical literature on this novel demonstrates the ineluctable drive
to explain the meaning of Michael’s life. I suggest that the hope of using a teaspoon and
a ball of string to retrieve water from the damaged well in order to survive is certainly a
tenuous thread that defies commonsense, yet does it scratch at sedimented cultural maps,
to use Baker’s metaphor, or does it merely endorse a prelapsarian existence? Michael’s
author and the critics certainly have an idea of him having a “home”, even though it may
lie beyond the frontiers of the political and theoretical climate within the text and at the
time of writing. Gordimer (1984, pp.3-6) and Dovey (1988, p.323) resemble the medical
officer in that they both try to fix Michael’s essential meaning as an allegorical gardener who can produce the ‘food of life’ (MK, p.166). According to Gordimer, Michael can be seen as keeping the idea of the healing regeneration inherent in nature alive during the interregnum (1984, pp.2-3). The interregnum is a term taken from Gramsci and, in this context it can be defined as the time of crisis when the fault lines in the apartheid system were being bolstered by excessive contingency laws.

Many later critics of the text emphasize the hegemonies involved in the interpretive process. Gallagher sees Michael’s narrative as an alternative that subverts the cultural domination of Afrikaner myths of heroic suffering in Boer War camps (1994, pp.144-158). Kossew argues that this dialogic mode acknowledges the authenticity and independence of Michael’s voice, without colonizing it, by stressing that all narrations are unreliable (1996, p.143). Head suggests that Coetzee is resuscitating a kind of realism in the materiality of Michael’s life, while trying to keep away from the numerous academic camps of the times, which is an ‘attempt to retain something of [an interpretive vantage-point], whilst simultaneously questioning its validity’ (1997, p.100). I concur with the analyses that imply a resistance to critical domination in Michael’s textual performance, yet even these critics, like the author, are bound to the tools of their trade.

Coetzee, himself, cannot transcend his own Western consciousness and his mediation in writing. I agree with Wright who describes Michael as ‘Chthonic Man [Wright’s italics], outside of language and history, as inarticulate as the seeds, plants and humus of the earth-cycle into which he is locked and also, by definition, outside the range of understanding encompassed by the white writer’ (1991, p.12). This can be extended to include the understanding of most of Coetzee’s critics. Marais supports Wright’s argument (2001a). He suggests that the diary of the medical officer is a dramatisation of the fact that the writing subject cannot control that which s/he aims to represent. Nevertheless, for Marais, both the medical officer and Coetzee can be seen to inscribe the faint existence of Michael with a notion of where he belongs, beyond their grasp, in a liminal survival mode on the land. In spite of the suggestion that Michael is beyond the understanding of the writer and his critics, attempts to inscribe a place of belonging for the character seem to be unavoidable.
The question of Michael’s motivation arises here. I suggest that a judgement is being made when a purpose is ascribed to Michael’s last wish. Michael Valdez-Moses concurs with Head insofar as Michael’s life is seen to be inimical to Marxist and liberal ethos and that the power of the protagonist’s physical presence is central to Coetzee’s novel (1994). Valdez-Moses does, however, present Michael’s dream as a strategy with social and political implications, rather than as a simple, apolitical need to survive (1994, p.151). The problem with all such conclusions is that they set the pronouncer up in a position of authority. Whether Michael’s projected sense of belonging with others is viewed as an organic imperative as Valdez-Moses asserts, or as an ethical choice as suggested by Marais and Head, all interpretations are attempts to establish critical hegemony, but, it seems to me that this would be against the example set by Coetzee in the novel.

Head maintains that Coetzee also uses Derrida’s deconstruction principle to create a second level of metafictionality, which ‘implies a reversion to a simpler idea of reference where the presence of K represents the existence of the people he symbolises’ (1997, p.109). I question whether regarding Michael K as a symbol for ‘a people’ is not also hegemonic in its claim for the attendant implications of community? Is the representation of Michael K not merely a representation of an ontology, a man who defies classification? Is an attempt to discern his motive for wanting a companion when he returns to the land possible? I also contend that this acknowledgement creates a sense of floundering in a no-man’s land of non-interpretation. Thus the reader’s own sense of belonging is thwarted in a textual replay of the colonialist’s failure to belong. Hence, it seems as if Coetzee’s game in this novel is to involve all the players, the author himself, the characters and the critics in re-enacting this self-defeating exercise in order to demonstrate the pervasiveness of the colonial drive to establish rational dominance.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, Coetzee is exposing a powerful and inescapable desire to belong on the part of all participants: this reader, other critics, and the characters in the novel, and yet I would argue that Coetzee is not clearing an empty space onto which future belonging can be carved. In an analysis of *Foe*, Jane Bennett suggests that imagining a utopian space outside of the world and of text is a classical colonial action of projecting ‘a space of desire from the metropolitan culture (in which that space cannot be found) onto the colonizing culture, a fantasy/projection that
ultimately becomes one more ploy in the panoply of instruments of oppression' (1994, p.193). Heeding Bennett's point, I maintain that Coetzee is signalling a genuinely postcolonial world in which the space is not a colonial utopia that is constructed outside of previously colonized territory. Rather, I think that Coetzee is arguing that the intellectual and physical landscape of the former colony itself has the potential for shared belonging, but only on condition that postcolonizers surrender their urge for mastery. As he illustrates in the effort of the medical officer and the anticipated response of the critics, this surrender is, indeed, a difficult achievement.

In *Life and Times of Michael K*, Coetzee does create a textual enactment of surrender to place. The tracings of Michael's consciousness and his minimal survival that includes a wisp of hope for the future provide a fictional model of belonging on the landscape. The value of this borderland existence lies in both Michael's ability to slip beneath the political and ideological fences of division and exclusion and in his belief that the place of his origins will sustain him, in spite of the damage done by history. In my opinion, he represents an in-between ontology that can be seen as opening a way towards belonging that is grounded in the African philosophy of being or *ubuntu*. Bearing in mind Coetzee's warning that '[w]e name in order to subjugate' (*DP*, p.342), this postcolonial place of shared belonging 'remains, at present, an idea we only grope towards, a space without a name' (Gabriel Okara quoted in Korang & Slemon 1997, p.260).

Belonging implies a sense of habitation in place and with other people. While Michael's confidence in his belonging on his African motherland is without doubt, his projection of sharing this space with a companion is less certain, for Michael has demonstrated very limited connectedness with others throughout the text and his plan would depend upon the willingness of the other person. Reflecting back from the analyses of *Age of Iron*, the non-reciprocal nature of his companion in this final vision is elucidated, demonstrating again the lack of a shared sense of belonging in times of enforced segregation. With the possibility of a regenerative belonging on the same landscape that has been ravaged by the war in *Life and Times of Michael K*, the quest for belonging shifts to a desire to belong with others in *Age of Iron*. How can the wounds in the relationships between people who have been segregated by inhumane laws be redressed?
The difficulty of relinquishing the position at the centre becomes the focus of the later novel. The medical officer merely shows how pervasive the practice of colonial myth-making is. The blatant flaws in the medical officer’s narrative expose the gap between Michael’s own experience and the medic’s observations. His refusal to listen, even to hear the man’s proper name, and his inability to understand his patient connote colonial arrogance and a desire to retain control over the patterns of signification. The development in Coetzee’s work becomes evident in the narrative of Mrs Curren. Hers is the story of a double yielding to the life-sapping malignancy that is growing within her and of her numerous authorities. With the guidance of her shadow husband, Vercueil, Mrs Curren’s narrative demonstrates that belonging requires that the frontiers that divide people need to be overcome.

5.2.2. A NARRATIVE OF RELINQUISHMENT

Coetzee has pointed to the potential for postcolonial coexistence, using Africa as the figurative and literal soil for future shared belonging in Life and Times of Michael K. In Age of Iron he concentrates on the position of the postcolonizer during a period of cataclysmic violence in South Africa, when the “total onslaught” of the government to control all dissenting elements in the country met with a nation-wide wave of black resistance. Coetzee has suggested that ‘[i]f we want to understand [apartheid], we cannot ignore those passages of its testament that reach us in the heart-speech of autobiography and confession’ (GO, p.164). Mrs Curren’s confession is such an explicit and personal engagement with the deformities of the times. Huggan explains that Coetzee’s private and public worlds interfuse in this apocalyptic parable, which ‘recounts in graphic detail both the horrors of living under apartheid and the shame of living with it’ (1996, p.192).

On one level, the protagonist and narrator, Mrs Curren, undertakes an elaborate and well-informed reflection on the atrocities of the age in justification of her own ambivalent theoretical position, while, on another level, the damaged bodies inscribe their transgressive purpose, undermining the protagonist’s authority. The emotional anguish which throbs through the text is centred on the physical trauma which is exposed. Mrs Curren’s diseased body is a physical transcription of her psychological
condition. Her diminishing sense of belonging to place, in her home and country can be equated with her contracting life. As she becomes estranged from the world around her because of the violence that she witnesses, so her actual hold on life becomes increasingly tenuous.

Here, I suggest, Coetzee moves to the core of his ethical challenge, the “responsibility-in-complicity” (again using Sanders’s terminology) of the postcolonizer. Mrs Curren’s sense of belonging is scrutinized and found wanting. In this section I will be considering the way in which Coetzee depicts Mrs Curren’s relinquishment of past attachments as a fictional performance of colonial surrender. I will examine her spatial positioning in relation to her home as a metaphor of her postcolonial ambivalence and her shifting sense of belonging. Her transition is facilitated by the linkage between her own diseased body, the malignancy of the apartheid system and its horrible effects on the bodies of the two black youths, Bheki and ‘John’ (I have used single inverted commas to signify that this was not the given name of the boy, but rather the name by which he is known by Mrs Curren). The function of Vercueil as a shadow catalyst in Mrs Curren’s yielding will also be considered. Attwell suggests that the colonial nature of the South African society has resulted in a lack of a shared, culturally embedded ethical code, and that the ethical propositions which Coetzee presents in this novel are ‘grounded - so to speak - only in its textual performance’ (1998, pp.176-178). Using this proposition as a starting point, I will consider the implications of Mrs Curren’s performance in terms of the group which she represents and their responsibility for the creating a new future.

Coetzee has said that ‘[a]t the heart of the unfreedom of the hereditary masters of South Africa is a failure of love...Fraternity ineluctably comes in a package with liberty and equality’ (DP, p.97). Parry criticizes Age of Iron for being a monologue of Mrs Curren (1998, p.152). Attwell contests this, claiming a rich polyphony of voices (1998, p.168). Mrs Curren represents the colonial centre. She has a thick lamination of authority as a white person, a classical scholar and a liberal humanist, yet the events that she witnesses drive her to the margins, with the black characters taking over as a competing centre. Attwell contends that Parry’s demand would be valid if this narrative depicted a simple correspondence between the fiction and reality, but he argues that the text invites the reader to consider the mode of address in which ‘the work thematizes,
performs and thus reflects on, various modes of alterity...The novel recognizes that there is polyphony, but not enough reciprocity [Atwell’s italics]’ (1998, p.167-168). It is this lack that I will examine in Mrs Curren’s mode of address.

Said maintains that ‘[i]n a secular and contingent world, homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory can also become prisons, and are often defended beyond reason or necessity’ (1984, p.54). Mrs Curren’s home is the evidence of her place in the society. It confirms her colonial privilege and her isolation. It becomes the place where all past certainties are disrupted. Initially, she has a strong sense of belonging in her home, in a “white” suburb, which is clearly endorsed by the laws permitting only a white person to own land. In spite of the absence of her own people, whether as family, past colleagues or even friends, her home is her haven from the world outside until a sequence of events causes a shift in her sense of belonging.

On a literal level, her home is the venue where the reality of her disease and the effects of the outside world coincide to unsettle her private refuge. At the beginning of the novel she returns home with the news of her terminal cancer. Her home is the site of a number of acts of police brutality: ‘John’ has an accident outside her house that seems to be deliberately caused by the police and he is later ambushed by them in Florence’s room. Her home becomes the stage where her inner and outer worlds collide. As her health is declining, so her sense of moral superiority is eroded and her inadvertent collusion in an unjust system is laid bare.

On an ideological level, Mrs Curren’s sense of belonging shifts. Her response to her place of belonging becomes an external expression of her inner sense of disruption. She no longer has a sense of being centred within a safe zone of historical, academic and state endorsement. In his critique of this novel (1996c), Marais uses a similar focus on the oppositional relationship between the subject and others to the one that he employed to explain Michael’s avoidance of others as an attempt to evade negation by the other, which was examined in the previous section (2001a). Marais argues that Mrs Curren enlists the dyadic structure of the Western ethical system to reify and therefore objectify or negate the comrades with her judgement (1996c, p.87). I agree with Marais’s argument and I would add that this negation of the other is an essential colonial act. The
authority that supported her place at the centre, intellectually and legally, crumbles in the face of the sacrifice of ‘John’.

Mrs Curren simultaneously occupies positions at the centre and on the edge, depending on the angle of the gaze. There are, in effect, two centres in this text. The obvious one is the dominating hub of the white government. The other “centre” is the competing black resistance which confronts the authority in power. Mrs Curren does not belong to either. Although her racial identity classifies her as a member of the ruling white group, she does not concur with the ideology of the state. She condemns the injustices of police actions. She empathizes with the suffering victims, yet she does not identify with them for two reasons. She is not one of their racial group and she is adamantly opposed to violence as a resolution to the conflict, hence she is marginal to the activities of both groups. Hers is an ambivalent position that refuses to align itself with either pole in prevailing political, discursive or literary oppositions. She, therefore, represents a ‘duty (an ethical duty? - perhaps) not to submit to powers of discourse without question’ (Coetzee quoted in Colleran 1994, p.582).

In this novel Coetzee suggests that there is no shared code of ethics that transcends the conflict. Mrs Curren’s home, as an allegory of her liberal humanist position, is no longer safe. In the face of the challenges of the times her classical scholarship proves to be wanting. Her home becomes ‘a late bourgeois tomb’ (*AI*, p.137). Dovey points out that Mrs Curren’s destabilized ethical posturing resembles that of Nadine Gordimer, which Coetzee describes as ‘the site of a struggle between a towering European tradition and the whirlwind of the New Africa’ (Coetzee quoted in Dovey 1996, p.48).

Coetzee has said that the power of the suffering body is ‘undeniable’ (*DP*, p.248). In the critical void that results from this conflagration of opposing forces, the density of the physical reality transcends Mrs Curren’s theoretical game work. The threat to the cornered young man demands her attention. She identifies with him and the imminence of his death and she tries to protect the boy (*AI*, pp.140-142). This action signifies a change in her position. She discovers that the damage wrought by the state policy of “divide and rule” is a lack of reciprocity by all of those who are segregated.
She understands that, in order to belong, she needs to transgress this official boundary and her personal resistance by learning to love ‘John’.

By shifting the spatial positioning of Mrs Curren, Coetzee adds textual reinforcement to her attitudinal change. She declares: ‘It’s not my home any more’ (AI, p.143). The night she spends under a bridge after ‘John’s’ murder demonstrates a cathartic shift in her attachment to a structure of outmoded classical discursive principles that are inadequate for the needs of the times. Her move represents her abandonment of any claim she may have made to legitimate authority as she becomes ‘just a part of the urban shadowland’ (AI, p.143). Emptying her bladder where she lies symbolizes her surrender, the dissolution of her rigid boundaries of judgement, division and exclusion. Thus she foregoes her position of belonging at the centre. She realizes that a sense of secured belonging that is validated by colonial authority is, in fact, a myth. Her physical location signifies her mental decision to relinquish her place of belonging in order to belong with others. She is no longer deluded by the myth of moral authority, the magnanimous voice of liberal charity. This is, I suggest, an acknowledgement that belonging needs to be grounded in active commitment to community life, the ubuntu that Makang advocates that is ‘neither a repetition of practices and customs of the past, nor a dream of ‘the lost origin’ or of a ‘lost paradise’, but is meant to provide a utopian model of action, a mobilizing ideal (1997, p.336). Like the medical officer who chooses Michael, she selects a marginal person as her guide towards fuller belonging, but, unlike her predecessor, she cannot but follow her guide into the ‘great white glare’ as she is dying. I suggest that this demonstrates some progression in the way in which Coetzee’s narrators respond to the world that they encounter.

Huggan skilfully reveals a flaw in Mrs Curren’s intellectual game of personal myth-making, in which she is attempting to justify her position as a liberal humanist (1996, pp.190-212). He suggests that ‘a bizarre metamorphosis takes place in Coetzee’s novel: the yoking of one paradigm of historical development, Hesiod’s entropic Myth of Five Ages, to another, Spencer’s Myth of Progress’, in which he argues that the irony of pitting the entropic metaphor of progressive disintegration against the evolutionary metaphor of arrested development creates an unwitting trap for the narrator because there is contradiction between these two principles (1996, p.199). I agree with Huggan that Coetzee has created a profound irony by embodying the disease of the society in the
cancerous nub which multiplies inside the body of a white English-speaking liberal South African woman. By making her physical state metonymic of the monstrous growth of apartheid and her intellectual state apparently metonymic of opposition to that malignant mushroom, Coetzee is tracing the crack which runs through the white South African liberal identity. Where do the loyalties of this group lie? Where do they belong in changing times? With rapidly mutating patterns, this crack widens into a gaping crisis of identity to which Wade has alluded (1993, p.150). Mrs Curren lacks any position of authority from which to speak, because her careful construction of an intellectual position is eroded away by inconsistencies in her logic, as Huggan has explained. The theoretical justification of her position is untenable.

Coetzee has said that ‘[a]s the unframed framer, reason is a form of power with no in-built sense of what the experience of powerlessness might be’ (GO, p.4). In the representation of Mrs Curren’s final moments, Coetzee disempowers reason as the ‘unframed framer’, leaving only the powerless shell of her ailing body remaining. In the final lines, Vercueil holds her with such a force that the breath rushes out of her (AI, p.181). She no longer has the breath with which to utter words. Her voice, the medium with which she can represent her reasoning, becomes quiet.

I suggest that her body becomes the only source and vehicle of authority that transcends the dualities of speech and silence. Perhaps because she is stripped of all power, even the power of language, her scarred and suffering body is able to “speak” for itself. This authority is so immediate, so articulate, and so uncluttered by competing agendas between identities, precisely because her time is so short and she has nothing to lose, that it demands to be noticed. Thus, in her textual performance, Mrs Curren presents a break away from the binary thinking that holds prevailing discourses in bondage, and, as Colleran argues, her role serves to open up ‘intimations of freedom’ (Colleran 1994, pp.578-592).

By paralleling Mrs Curren’s imminent death and the deaths of Bheki and ‘John’, Coetzee is connecting her malignancy to the damage done to the bodies of all those who have been killed in the name of apartheid. The sequence of ferrous images throughout the text suggests that the blood of Blacks spilled across the country has encrusted the landscape with iron (AI, p.114). In this linkage, there is a notion of shared alienation, for
it connotes tarnishing of all identities and "rusting" of any sense of belonging for everyone who lives there. Here I suggest that the strength of this representation lies in the fact that the comparison is never articulated. If she had given voice to identifying with the black victims, the authority of her dominant narratorial voice would negate the transgressive power of her corporeal performance. Instead, Coetzee allows her mode of address to enact a partial crossing of the barrier between herself and the young comrades. This is incomplete, however, because Mrs Curren’s blood is not spilled and she is not yet dead by the end of the text.

The question to be asked now might be: how can all witnesses, Mrs Curren and the readers, to these atrocities be released from this injured corpus of writing? How can this extensive suffering be healed in order to restore a sense of belonging? Again the impetus is to secure a sense of belonging. In Life and Times of Michael K, that drive to belong was embedded in understanding the meaning of Michael’s life. Now, Coetzee offers an example of belonging that is directly responsive to the age of iron in the real historical being as well as in the textual performance of Vercueil. The narrative specifics of his presence have already been discussed in an earlier section of this chapter.

Using the example of Mrs Curren learning to love ‘John’, Marais suggests that love subverts the boundaries between subject and object, thus ‘holding out the hope of constructing an ethical system which is grounded not in a subject-centred consciousness, but in intersubjectivity’ (1996c, p.90). I maintain that such a ‘dissolving’ of the division between Mrs Curren and Vercueil also occurs and results in a melding of their identities. Vercueil’s textual occupancy increases as Mrs Curren’s body weakens. As Peter Reading explains, their roles become ‘slyly reversed’ with the protector becoming the protected as the presence of the tramp gradually increases in importance (1990, p.373).

As the story progresses and her demise looms, so Vercueil occupies more space in the text and in her home, until, in the end, he shares her bed. Concurrent with his expanding occupation, Mrs Curren’s sense of a stable, meaningful self diminishes. His vagrancy provides the example of non-alliance (A1, p.147). Mr Curren’s increasing acceptance of Vercueil is symbolic of her shifting attitudes. After her catharsis under the bridge that signifies her relinquishment of the colonial order, she embraces him. She
calls him her ‘shadow husband’ and signs herself Mrs V. He takes on the role of carer, cooking and washing for her. Thus the conjugal relationship is secured.

In the last two sentences she breaks free from the bondage of reason, when she is rendered breathless and the mediating power of her words is relinquished. Here, I assert that Mrs Curren’s identity merges with that of Vercueil. For the first time, she does not smell him, nor does she feel his warmth as another, because they have become one. Her union with her unlikely partner is complete. Her early wisdom that ‘what we marry we become’ (AI, p.64) is realized. In this union, she hopes to release her soul from the bondage of a body which is scarred by its heritage of racial segregation and domination. She has, in fact, united with the abject aporia that is Vercueil. This silent union also signifies the relinquishment of a primary tool of colonial domination, language.

But redemption is not achieved. The hope of a sublime release in this abject surrender is suspended for her death is only imminent at the end of the narrative. Any fulfilment of that hope lies in the future, beyond the text, for both the narrator and her ailing people, the liberal white South Africans, for whom she is metonymic.

Just as the medical officer and the reader attempt to assign their own pattern of significance to Michael in order to secure a place of belonging, so too, there is an impetus on the part of Mrs Curren and the reader to excavate beneath the numbing haze of Vercueil’s intoxication to trace a clearer outline of his identity and his affiliations. In each case, such meaning remains beyond reach. However, Coetzee does seem to endow these two characters with an intangible, unknown, yet lingering, value at the end of the texts, leaving them responsible for an unseen future.

Reflecting on the future of post-apartheid South Africa, the poet, Mongane Wally Serote identifies two prerequisites for shared belonging: rather than dividing people into racial groups, he prefers to speak about the human race and he points out that white South Africans will need to recognize that they do not they have the monopoly of knowledge (1996, pp.63-71). It is most significant that, in the midst of the civil conflict that has done so much damage to the sense of belonging of all South Africans, Coetzee seems to have anticipated these two requirements for postcolonial coexistence. He has presented two complementary marginal characters who transgress the official spatial,
and philosophical boundaries of exclusion and offer examples of belonging in place and with others. Coetzee interrogates the geocultural context in search of an elusive transcendental site of belonging. In the process, however, he acknowledges the provisional and ambivalent authority of the narrator-writer while exploring ‘fiction’s capacity to reconfigure the rules of discourse, to find a position outside [Attwell’s italics] current power relations from which to speak’ (DP, pp.11-12) which anticipates a properly ethical reciprocity at some as-yet-unimagined historical moment.
6. THE AGE OF DISGUISE

6.1. ESTABLISHING PROVISIONALITY

The novels of John Coetzee are not sectarian in their commitment to the local political situation, but they are deeply pledged to the ideal of justice in South Africa and beyond. His wish for the people of South Africa is for a common pool ‘in which differences wash away’ (DP, p.342). He has also said that ‘likeness and difference were meanings that we did not find but created’ (quoted in Parker 1996, p.102). If we have been responsible for formulating these oppositional frameworks, surely we are capable of reconfiguring them? I suggest that this is the nexus of Coetzee’s on-going imaginative project.

In the preceding chapters the notion of a frontier as the impervious divide between oppositional forces has been found to be inadequate for an analysis of Coetzee’s novels because the identity of the characters shows up a porousness and a developing consciousness that attests to an incompleteness of identity and a shifting sense of self in relation to the world around. There are two aspects to this focus, namely the interrogation of confrontational discourse and a mobile response to changing geocultural realities. Boundary existence connotes ambivalence, transgression and absorption of difference. Representation of these marginal traits forms the first of Coetzee’s bifold trajectory, whilst a shifting gaze that is responsive to changes in local and the international environments forms the second. The broadening of the concept of frontier has opened it up into a shifting site of creativity and ethical potential.

In this chapter I extend the examination of frontiers and the ethical responsibilities that are implied in the reader’s complicity in the signifying process in a study of The Master of Petersburg. Again Coetzee establishes a provisionality that refuses to be caught in any of the competing theoretical camps. He ensures that his subjects are not closed or finite by establishing their permeability to otherness. The shifting, blurring and distorting of the distinctions between different identities is an overriding theme in The Master of Petersburg. Coetzee insinuates his own imaginative narrative into the life of the Russian author, Fyodor Dostoevsky. (I will distinguish
between the historic author and the protagonist of the novel by using single inverted commas for the fictional character thus: ‘Dostoevsky’). The numerous discrepancies between the factual biography of the famous Russian and this narrative account are only the start of the many erosions of boundaries between characters within and without the text. It is these multiple mergings that create the pervasive provisionality. I trace some of the fault lines between characters within this text, between this and other texts, and between this text, its author and his late twentieth-century South African reality and Dostoevsky and his nineteenth-century Russian world.

I wish to contribute to existing criticism of the text by considering how the diachronic and synchronic form of The Master of Petersburg presents an aesthetic opportunity which goes beyond the boundaries of established thinking and individual identities and offers new opportunities for negotiating the parameters of belonging. I use a critical method that does not attempt to dissect the separate worlds of the various authors, their writing and the intertextual influences upon them. These authors include the novelists, Dostoevsky, as historic and fictional figure, and Coetzee himself, as well as ‘Dostoevsky’s’ stepson, Pavel, and the revolutionary leader, Nechaev, because some of the writings of these two are implicated in the narrative.

I examine the double performative mode of the text in which an unknown third person narrator intersects a record of the emotional turmoil of ‘Dostoevsky’ with his external encounters. His moments of distress lead to a confused perception in which there is some haziness between identities. This is exacerbated by the repeated pattern of disguise, with a number of characters, like Nechaev dressing up in order to conceal his true identity. The protagonist’s inner and outer experience of blurred boundaries between identities creates a pastiche of partial fusions between authors and characters in which difference and otherness come together in a wider philosophical contemplation of the intersections between history and fiction and the notions of alienation, complicity and ethical obligation for the future in Coetzee’s novel. The final Biblical references reaffirm the classical paradox of failure and hope. My purpose is to reflect on Coetzee’s novel adumbration of the politics of representation and the responsibilities of the writer and the reader. Specific cultural outcomes lie beyond Coetzee’s fictional framework and are hence not within the scope of this study.
The binarism of Europe and “its others” can create restrictive camps that overemphasize difference. Alan Lawson asserts that this Eurocentric perception of the world is an ‘investment of interest and it is time to call for epistemological deregulation’ (1994, p.69). Many postcolonial critics, such as Bhabha, have noted that to invert the binaries of colonialism and “its others” is only to perpetuate oppositional duality (1995, pp.206-209). Nevertheless, as the editors of Literature and Opposition argue, postcolonial theory is still of value because it is endlessly problematized, with each critical position being reinvigorated by oppositional critique (C. Worth, P. Nestor & M. Pavlyshyn 1994, p.xiii).

Attridge and Jolly maintain that much postcolonial writing is essentialist in its antipathy towards the colonizer, for it makes the recognition of difference the final purpose of the writing and they conclude that authors of such works can fail to respect the subjects of their scrutiny (1998, pp.7-11). I would add that this lack of respect can exacerbate confrontation between identities and can lead to a reluctance to engage in conversation to seek some shared understandings and, therefore, the continuing exclusion of all participants from a sense of belonging. While these limitations might be particularly significant in the local South African context, they are also globally relevant in these times when divisions between people are threatening even the most settled among us. I believe that a resistance to such finality is perhaps the most fundamental ethical obligation of all writers today.

In a general reflection on the post-apartheid debates about South African culture, Jolly and Attridge consider the role of ethics in critical judgement. They state that judgemental writing fails in the sense that ‘it has produced a paucity of options for creative responses to post-apartheid freedoms and their attendant challenges’ (1998, p.7). According to these critics, if judgement is to be ethical, it can only ever be a provisional and precarious balance between the two extremities of response to the other (1998, pp.1-13). On the one hand, the call is ‘ for the always imperfect attempt to understand the other without turning the other into a version of the self’ (1998, p.6). On the other hand, the warning is against fetishizing difference (1998, p.3).

By referring to Coetzee’s own commentary on ‘a middle voice poetics’, Colleran affirms Attwell’s stance that Coetzee has founded a reconstructed ethical position in
fiction with which to encounter the political (1994, pp.579-583). Brian Macaskill charts this third position in Coetzee’s novels in which the middle voice struggles to exercise its own agency, while avoiding both negation and concordance with ideological determinisms (1994, pp.441-475). Most significantly, Macaskill argues that the fiction of Coetzee offers the opportunity for us to read and use our existing socio-historical maps in order to make new ones (1994, pp.471-473). I agree that Coetzee continually evades the confines of binarism in an attempt to find a third voice that may mediate a new position, not through confrontation but through a convergence of goals. This idea of some common purpose is the tiny seed of hope from which Coetzee’s writing germinates. Macaskill concludes that Coetzee’s method invites engagement by all participants in the new government of South Africa ‘to listen as well as to act in order to bring about a new topopolitics, but also more generally on behalf of the topopolitical sight, or insight, of critical theory world-wide’ (1994, p.472). Here Macaskill is clearly linking the objectives of theory with socio-political outcomes on the eve of the new South Africa. Four years later, Sole’s admonition of some postcolonial theorising as elitist and detached from the material circumstances of many (1997) brings a timely reminder that theory only becomes relevant to the real world when it is in close communication with lived experience.

In this analysis of The Master of Petersburg I demonstrate how Coetzee represents existing cultural constructions and identities in such a way as to allow innovative ideas to emerge, while also offering a note of caution about the ethical implications of such ventures.

Coetzee’s work can be seen as a fictional enactment of some of the prevailing concerns with theoretical posturing and the cultural and political ramifications that might be implied. The possibilities and problems associated with the balance, which Attridge and Jolly describe, between reducing the other to a reflection of the self and perceiving the other as incomprehensible, are finely represented throughout Coetzee’s oeuvre. Every subject position which Coetzee creates is incomplete or in an on-going condition of becoming. He uncovers the cracks in the foundations of all fixed positions of judgement occupied by his characters. These cracks are exposed in their encounters with others. One can trace such cracks in attempts by the main characters to merge with other identities in the texts. Their reasons for this desire, their findings and the consequences
of their discoveries can be read as having a fourfold effect: within their own situational orbits of personal narrative; in the metafictional context of authorial and reader responsibility, in wider political spheres and in relation to theoretical understandings. In his earlier novels there are moments when identities seem to merge. This may be a physical sense of commonality, as has been demonstrated in *In the Heart of the Country*, with Magda imagining a momentary elision with the essential femaleness of Klein-Anna. It may also be a metaphysical conjoining. In *Age of Iron*, the union between Mrs Curren and her angel of death, Vercueil, occurs as she takes her last breath. The merging between identities does not turn the other into a version of the self because these moments are fleeting, rather than fixed and static states of being. Instead, the brief fusing of identities erases the binary divisions and opens up dialogue and the potential interchange, understanding and acceptance of otherness and recognition of the otherness within the self.

In *The Master of Petersburg*, the merging of identities becomes a focal device to extend some of the ideas that are represented in earlier works. Coetzee erases all “safe” positions of authority from which judgements can be made with impunity. Each of his main characters exhibits a flaw or crack in their carefully constructed sense of self, thereby undermining their own stability and self-justification. This weakness can be the point at which the defining and separating boundaries of the self dissolve and characteristics of the other flow in, while aspects of the self disperse. The magistrate in *Waiting for the Barbarians* is incarcerated by his own people for his suspicious relationship with the “barbarians”. He has relinquished his self-image as colonial servant and embraced the position of the foreign other. Ironically, his imprisonment is both a sign of his inability to be free from his historical bindings and of his thwarted merging with the other, for the “barbarian” girl has not opened to him. He is caught in the gap between the two positions. Similarly, Mrs Curren, in *Age of Iron*, comes to align herself with a vagrant who belongs nowhere. Michael K, in *Life and Times of Michael K*, and Friday, in *Foe*, also inhabit this dialogical no-man’s land. The main character in *The Master of Petersburg*, ‘Dostoevsky’, comes to be defined by the same political, philosophical and even social homelessness. Like Mrs Curren’s cancer, Michael K’s hair-lip and Friday’s mutilated mouth, ‘Dostoevsky’s disability (epilepsy, in his case) is a physical expression of the pathology in his society and his own sense of exclusion and alienation.
Diachronically, this novel can be considered to be a self-contained detective story. Barry Unsworth calls it a classical quest novel, which contains the sequence of arrival, labyrinthine search and revelation (1994, p.31). Yes, it is certainly an investigation of the possible motives that may have led to the murder or suicide of Pavel. And Coetzee’s metafictional project may well be to trace the path that the novelist follows, with the emerging piece of writing that ‘Dostoevsky’ takes over from Pavel and starts to develop at the end of the work, which represents a classical paradox rather than an enlightening revelation.

This contemplation of the process of fiction writing is metaphorically displayed in the inner and outer experiences of the master; in his epileptic turns and in the complex father-son relationship, with the motifs of parenthood, patriarchal colonialism, Freudian rivalry, revolution and betrayal. The private, internal suffering of a man grieving the death of a son and his desire to reconnect with him becomes entangled with the external intrigue of rival political manipulations, in which the young man had become embroiled and which, now, also implicates the step-father. So, too, the identities of the father and the son seem to merge briefly, with ‘Dostoevsky’ becoming, to some extent, an embodiment of Pavel by wearing the boy’s white suit and writing in his diary. Thus the father takes on the responsibilities of the rebellious son and he also betrays the youth by falsely taking on his persona. For “fathering” the text he has betrayed everyone, including himself. Watson describes a deep ambivalence in ‘Dostoevsky’, as ‘a soul in mourning, a soul avid for metamorphosis, yet courting darkness, a more absolute knowledge of its own evil, even as it seeks omnivorously, compulsively, for that which will serve its own creative purposes’ (1994, pp.58-59).

The narrative seems to be opening up an imaginary site for reconfiguring all frontiers, including notions of belonging in which the divisions between identities remain fluid. On one level, ‘Dostoevsky’ the character fails to resurrect Pavel (MP, pp.237-238) and his alienation is pervasive, but he does acknowledge the schism in his own psyche and the revelation that he must pay for his betrayal with his own soul (MP, p.250). On another level, the narrative presents a merged identity: ‘And he is himself no longer...He is, to a degree, Pavel Isaev, though Pavel Isaev is not the name he is going to give himself’ (MP, p.242).
Synchronically, *The Master of Petersburg* also extends the idea of remapping the boundaries between representations. It can be described as a maze of intertextual knots, with the novel being an intricate blend of fact and fiction. These include ancient mythological and Christian allusions, historic details about the nineteenth-century Russian author and national revolutionary figures of the time and themes and characters that resemble that famous writer’s own imaginary creations. Aspects of the life and times of the famous Russian are intermingled with details from a few of his textual plots and some shadings of his imaginary characters. These are woven together with Coetzee’s own textual fabrications. Boundaries in this hybrid construction are deliberately indistinct. The divide between the real and the imaginary, the historic and the current, the textual and the actual, the public and the private, the famous and the insignificant, even the self and the other are intertwined in this tale of discovery, in which ‘Dostoevsky’ sets out to learn the truth about what happened to Pavel, but ends up glimpsing some painful “truths” about himself and his craft.

The key to appreciating this narrative, it seems to me, is not to be found in futile attempts to unravel the many mysteries in the text. Rather than taking on the impossible task of methodically separating individual motives, differentiating the many layers of facts and fictions and distinguishing between identities, I respond to the direction that the intricately blended fibre of multiple voices reveals, namely, a non-oppositional space for negotiating new and changing patterns in society. This is an area of dynamic experimentalism that challenges all premises upon which systems of meaning are based.

*The Master of Petersburg* maps this fluid site in which the understanding of otherness is unsettled and continually mutating. The metafictional implications of this shifting representation includes unhinging established or “traditional” Western perceptions of belonging and allowing both the writer and the reader to create the “world” or environment of signification, while not forgetting the ethical implications of their words and interpretations. I examine how these mobile configurations of meaning are not passively received but are actively co-created, using some of ideas of Bakhtin (1984) and Kristeva (1992). Similarly Bhabha’s thoughts on the opportunities of eluding the politics of polarity inherent in hybridity are useful (1995).
Coetzee’s work offers a vital literary hallmark at this time of transition in his country when the old is not yet put to rest and the new not fully emerged. His example is also of global relevance in this era of attempts at reconciliation between the colonized and the colonizers and with the need for open dialogue between people who are ideologically divided now more visible than ever. Brink suggests that there are a number of fertile silences that are primarily the outcome of the dominant discourse of white historiography and also the possible result of a counter-discourse of black historiography (1998a, pp.14-28). Brink argues that silence is not to be considered to be the opponent or ‘other’ of language but he rather advocates the dialogic ‘co-existence of silence and the word...[with each] as end points on a sliding scale’ (1998a, p.14). I maintain that Coetzee’s fiction presents such a continuum. De Jong says that Coetzee’s very acknowledgement of the restrictions and relativity of discursive positionality opens up discourse to an awareness of what that discourse excludes and silences (1994, pp.234-236).

By exploring the flow between identities, Coetzee is tilling and transcending these fertile silences, while being acutely aware of the risks involved in taking up both existing and new critical positions. In White Writing he says: ‘Our ears today are finely attuned to the modes of silence...It is a mode of reading which, subverting the dominant, is in peril, like all triumphant subversion, of becoming the dominant in turn’ (1988, p.81). It is my purpose to explain how Coetzee avoids the dominant and its triumphant subversion, while still challenging himself and his readers to ethical action in this review of The Master of Petersburg.

6.2. A DOUBLED PERFORMATIVE MODE

6.2.1. RESPONDING TO THE CRITICS

Intertextuality is a key focus of The Master of Petersburg and, consequently, the connections that this text initiates between a number of narratives and written works is of keen interest to most critics. In this section, I first consider the different and complementary contributions of a few of these commentators and I then extend existing
criticism by examining how the narrative form of this novel might have led these critics to their similar conclusions about the text. I also present a new perspective of Coetzee’s ethical intimation. I claim that it is in Coetzee’s representation of intersubjective margins and the ambivalent value of the Christian religion that he is prompting readers to reconsider the multiple ways in which the fixed judgements often associated with oppositional positions reinforce the frontiers to belonging.

The parallels between Bakhtin’s Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics and The Master of Petersburg are widely acknowledged. Many of the intertextual dialogues that Coetzee sets up are very well addressed by Kossew. She suggests that ‘[p]erhaps the most interesting and complex intertextual function is the exploration of the nature of Dostoevsky’s own “poetics” and the intersection between his conception of the novel, both as a form in itself and within Russian society, and that of Coetzee himself’ (1996, p.222). Using Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky’s fiction as polyphonic, she provides a perceptive comparison of the Russian novelist’s multivocal approach with Coetzee’s pluralizing style that emphasizes both the contradictions and ambiguities involved in the writing process and the self-reflexiveness of their responses to the cultural and political environments in which they each have written (1996, p.222). Kossew identifies when ‘Dostoevsky’ takes on the ambiguous identity of Pavel by wearing his clothes and begins to write a continuation of the young man’s story in that man’s diary as the ‘point in the text that the intertextuality operates in its most complex way ... [for] the writing of the Dostoevsky/Pavel figure itself becomes a crossing of the threshold, a gamble on the intervention of God’ (1996, p.221). Yet Kossew does not explore the further implications of the merged father-son identity as another pretender in a game of multiple disguises or the price the protagonist must pay for his betrayal, although she does comment on the responsibility of the reader-as-confessor.

It is the gap in Kossew’s study that this study addresses. First, I look more closely at the self-conscious attempts by the protagonist and other characters to represent themselves as others and then I examine the character-writer’s challenge of God, which includes the Biblical connotations of betrayal, condemnation and redemption. Finally, I consider the significance for a sense of belonging of the merged identities and the ‘trap to catch God’ (MP, p.249).
Pechey (1998), Marais (1995, 1996c) and Head (1997) pay closer attention to the contextual connections between South Africa and Russia on the eve of political and social change. Each of these critics concludes that this novel presents a blend of diverse allusions that offers fresh potential to established cultural and political patterns, although I argue that they present limited evidence of how Coetzee achieves this. Attempting to fill this critical aporia, I examine the performative mode of the text to demonstrate how Coetzee displays this creative space. He does so in the representation of ‘Dostoevsky’ as a character whose eroded sense of self attempts to fuse with images of Pavel in order to dissolve the alienating opposition between the father-son dichotomies and to create a sense of wholeness and belonging. I also trace the thread of hope in the Christian metaphors, culminating in the final contradiction of sacrifice and salvation implicit in the crucifixion.

Pechey draws an interesting parallel between Bakhtin and Coetzee, that presents some fine insights, along with recognising the restrictions of supplanting one neocolonial order with another (1998, pp.57-74). Pechey suggests that, although Bakhtin wrote at the beginning of twentieth century and Coetzee straddles the twentieth and the twenty-first centuries, both thinkers wrote at similar times when ‘[o]pportunities for re-imagining community without setting up the false gods of an overarching politics open at sundry moments in history’ (1998, p.60). According to Pechey, Bakhtin views the novel as ‘a talisman we may wear against the temptations of our late-modern world’ (1998, p.61). By this I take him to mean that Bakhtin regards the modern, multivocal novel as representing more than merely a reproduction of disorienting relativism to be contrasted with the partisan claims of the monological narrative, for it also opens up a site of ‘unexpectedness’, of ‘absolute innovation, miracle’ (Bakhtin, quoted in Pechey 1998, p.74). Pechey concludes that Bakhtin’s concept of the surprisedness of the aesthetic allows for a creative space in which to adumbrate new options (1998, p.74), but he does not develop the idea by explaining how Coetzee achieves this in his novel.

In an early review of the novel, Marais argues that The Master of Petersburg examines the failure of the ethical imagination to re-write self and history because of ‘an inability [Marais’s italics] to transform an archaic ethical system in order to meet the exigencies of a changing historical situation ...[and] the implications of this failure on the activities of writing and reading literature’ (1995, pp.147-148). His argument seems
to align with that of Kossew and Pechey to the extent that this failure is certainly evident in the tensions between the many voices in the novel. Where Marais’s initial opinion seems to differ from theirs is in the hint of hopeful projection that the other two observe in Coetzee’s text.

In a later article, Marais provides an intertextual comparison of the interregnum in the late 1980’s South African world as re-produced in *Age of Iron* with that of Dostoevsky’s Russia in the 1860’s, with both societies on the cusp between the dying old order and an emerging system (1996c, pp.83-95). Again he confirms his argument that the protagonist in *The Master of Petersburg* cannot transcend the dehumanising oppositional world of state power structures and is, in fact, responsible for re-producing it (1996c, pp.83-95). Interestingly, Marais contrasts Mrs Curren’s salvation in her ability to learn to love ‘John’ with ‘Dostoevsky’s’ inability to resurrect his son, with Mrs Curren displaying ‘the hope of constructing an ethical system which is grounded, not in subject-centred consciousness, but in intersubjectivity...[whereas in rewriting Pavel’s text ‘Dostoevsky’] endorses those very hegemonic strategies which caused his son’s death’ (1996c, pp.90-93). Certainly, as Marais suggests, the writer-character, ‘Dostoevsky’, is caught in a paradox for he cannot transcend his world yet he also represents intimations of an intersubjective space that transcends the world of contestory relations.

Marais does concede, however, that ‘Dostoevsky’ experiences some transitory sense of this connectedness when he has visions of communicating with his son underwater, although he considers that this glimmer of a shared bond is ‘progressively blocked out by the exigencies of the dynamics of power in Russian society’ (1998, p.93). I agree with Marais’s assertion that ‘Dostoevsky’ does not demonstrate any sign that he adapts his responses to the changes that are taking place around him. Even though ‘Dostoevsky’s’ self-representation may seem to remain intransigent or trapped in the old cultural structures, I would add that there is some sign of transformation in the performative mode of the third person narrative that follows both the epileptic whorl of his consciousness and his engagement with others in St Petersburg. This trajectory will be developed in the next section of this chapter.
Marais focuses on the sophisticated intertextuality of Coetzee’s text (1996c, pp.91-94). By referring to Coetzee’s own comments on the novel as a rival rather than merely a supplement to history and Coetzee’s understanding of the vital importance of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism to living, Marais appears to be endorsing the transcendental value of Coetzee’s novel as a source of creative hope, but again he is not explicit about how Coetzee achieves this in *The Master of Petersburg* (1996c, pp.91-94).

Marais maintains a consistent position regarding his interpretation of ‘Dostoevsky’ as unchanging, although he may have revised his interpretation of the failure of ethical imagination in his first review of 1995. I agree with the distinction that Cary Hanson has subsequently identified, with the sign of change not being evident in the character of ‘Dostoevsky’, but in his writing, for, as she suggests, we see ‘Dostoevsky’ ‘transforming his demons into fiction’ (1998, p.4). I suggest that Coetzee sets up this fine discrimination in the narrative form of the novel that traces the gaps between the protagonist’s inner gaze and his outer representation. This provides evidence of a life defined by the specific political and cultural circumstances of his time, but struggling to move beyond those constraints. Finally, it is his writing that challenges his confines and hints at some transcendence.

Head argues for the intermediary nature of Coetzee’s postcolonialism (1997, pp.156-157). For Head, the ambivalent position that the postcolonizer occupies is able to offer an alternative site of creativity, beyond the endless opposition inherent in all theoretical debates (1997, p.156). Head also stresses the ethical nature of Coetzee’s work, where the emphasis on textuality involves the need to renegotiate the identities of both the self and the other (1997, p.156). Head describes the site, occupied by the post-colonizer-as-writer, as

[the familiar postmodernist dissolution of the subject-position [which] is rooted here in the moment in which the colonised recognises being contaminated by the coloniser who is simultaneously confronted. It is a moment of doubling which is essential in the process of decolonisation, because the given of colonial history can be arrested, as the materials for its supplanting are assembled: this, it seems, is the transcendence of which Coetzee speaks. (1997, p.149)
It is from this transitional site that ‘Coetzee gestures continually towards newly conceived political identities, through fictions which are themselves pointed acts of hybridity’ (Head 1997, p.20).

It appears, then, that the four critics being considered here would concur that, in spite of the bleakness of the plot and the failure to achieve any clear understandings of events or the subject’s ideological positions, The Master of Petersburg does offer a suggestion of potential beyond the impasse of the status quo. My contribution is a more detailed examination of how Coetzee represents this creative intimation and the implications for expanding a sense of belonging. I suggest that he does this in two ways. First, he presents multiple mergings of different identities in this novel, particularly between ‘Dostoevsky’ and Pavel and in extending the idea of indistinct boundaries to include identities beyond the text in a rich blend of wider allusions that encourages the reader to see differences and similarities as dynamic, intersubjective swirls that can, to some extent, dissolve oppositional discourse. Secondly, Coetzee draws upon ambivalent Biblical imagery to represent a space that transcends our epistemological framework and yet is embedded in the ethical foundation of Judeo-Christian morality, which is both a strength for the common understandings, which are engendered, and a weakness for the exclusions that are implicit. I conclude by considering the implications of this watery tapestry for the sense of belonging of all participants, for the field of local political and cultural change and for the writers and readers of fiction in general.

6.2.2. THE DIACHRONIC FORM

6.2.2.1. MIRROR IMAGES: A CONCEPTUAL SPACE

Bhabha maintains that cultural identity is a social function that is not sufficient unto itself and that it is rather a construct of language that is never merely transparent or mimetic of that which it represents (1995, p.207). He redefines Fanon’s description of:

the zone of occult instability where the people dwell [as] that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that
ensure that the meanings and symbols of culture [and identity] have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew. (1995, pp.207-208)

While Bhabha clears this conceptual space, Coetzee creates the fictional identity of 'Dostoevsky' in that void. The implications and responsibilities of this shared theoretical and imaginary location are enormous.

Bhabha concludes that this energetic and hybrid space creates an opportunity in which binary confrontation is disempowered and the identity of the self can allow the otherness within the self to emerge (1995, p.209). I suggest that this otherness includes an acknowledgment of the shameful, dark side of the self or the inner "devil" which 'Dostoevsky' encounters. This is a confession of complicity with "conflictual otherness". It is this disclosure that appears, on first glance, to betray the other but that, in fact, disarms the dualities, which perpetuate the politics of polarity. Kristeva articulates this possibility as the foreigner living within us: 'He is the hidden face of our identity, the space that wrecks our abode, the time in which understanding and affinity flounder. By recognizing him within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself" (1991, p.1).

I believe that Coetzee is flagging the foundation upon which shared belonging might be conceived. It is in such an unsettled and indeterminate space that I understand Jean-Philippe Wade to be suggesting that South African literary history can be rethought in order to create new, less rigid tracings of past representations that may be more open to future co-existence of all people (1996, pp.1-9). In his creative re-reading of the history of the Russian master and some of his writing, Coetzee opens up dialectical opportunities for cultural invention, while establishing that the freedom to imagine such a new shared conceptual site also requires the personal commitment and sense of responsibility of each agent, whether as a writer or reader to the other. Coetzee's text provides a vital example of the way in which fiction can offer a re-reading of past representations of literature and history that opens a space for re-envisioning the future. His insights are particularly important to South Africa in these early years of political innovation, yet they are equally relevant in the context of a global diaspora and the universal desire to belong.
The third person narrative adumbrates the double performance of the protagonist of *The Master of Petersburg*, with his disruptive and confused inner world confronting the contestory outer world of St Petersburg in 1869. Much of the novel follows the flow of ‘Dostoevsky’s’ consciousness, in which his physical sensations are closely entwined with his mental condition. Simultaneously, in his attempt to understand how his stepson died, he uncovers numerous contradictory accounts and he encounters a number of people whose identity is unclear. This confluence of his inner and outer realities creates a *mise-en-abyme* effect.

One of Coetzee’s core focuses in all of his novels has been the permeability of the self or the protean dynamic in which identity is continually being created in the flow between the self and the other. The implications that a blurring of the edges between identities may have upon those specific characters and the world around them have been explored in earlier chapters. Now, by focusing on the performative mode of this novel, I will demonstrate how the diffuse inner thought processes of ‘Dostoevsky’ intersect with the multiple external disguises and re-presentations of the same people to create a vertiginous third space where the other, in a sense, becomes a part of the self.

In his non-fictional text, *Giving Offense* (1996) Coetzee uses the example of a poem written by Breyten Breytenbach soon after he was released from prison to illustrate that interchange between the self and the other can be continuous, to the point that the separate identities cannot be differentiated (*GO*, pp.223-231). This is a translation of part of the poem entitled ‘n Spieëlvers’ or ‘a Mirror poem’:

Must I wait still longer?
my snow-white shadow Death
my own secret police
I will be yours forever
and you are
mine mine mine (quoted in *GO*, p.227)

Breytenbach has called this poem ‘the exteriorization of his imprisonment’ (quoted in *GO*, p.228). Facing the reflection in the mirror is like facing his jailers. Coetzee describes this as ‘a poem of accelerated dialogical frenzy in which it is not clear what is self and what is image’ (*GO*, p.228). He observes that Breyten’s daemon and his demons confront each other, for the boundary between the self and the other in the image has
become erased and the identity of the poet absorbs all (GO, p.228). In the same way, the narrator in *The Master of Petersburg* articulates the fusion between the self and the other in ‘Dostoevsky’ by the double representation of his inner sensations and his outer experiences.

6.2.2.2. WHO IS THE MASTER?

In *The Master of Petersburg*, Coetzee is again trying to extend the boundaries of self-knowledge. According to Watson, ‘Dostoevsky’s’ ‘trail of shame - [reaches a kind of] critical mass...where the weight of his transgressions is such that they come to form something of an autonomous complex - which then proceeds to split off, establishing a separate self, an anti-self, a double, a devil’ (1994, p.52). This splitting off is the source of the writer’s creative energy that reveals itself when the master begins to write at the end of Coetzee’s novel and he is possessed by a demon. Watson asks: ‘It is to know that his ‘I’ is broken and that there is a stranger who has usurped his voice. Is that stranger the Devil or himself?’ (1994, p.53). The self and a mirroring other have become merged. This leads to a never-ending self-reflection. In an article on Joseph Frank’s biography of the real Dostoevsky in *Stranger Shores*, Coetzee asks: ‘If the devil in Dostoevsky was not his own, if he was not responsible for it, who was?’ (2001, p.118). The same question can be asked of Coetzee’s character.

The narrative form of the novel dramatizes the schism that separates the protagonist from a sense of connectedness and belonging. ‘Dostoevsky’s’ inner sense of exclusion is repeated in his outer trail of shame. Within himself, his disorienting physical sensations display his emotional vertigo. At times his mourning is so intense that he gets lost in an epileptic whorl. He is separated from those around him by his grief.

Coetzee situates ‘Dostoevsky’ in an alienated and oppositional position to the other characters in the text and to the reader. This protagonist is continually reminded that he does not belong in the world around him. It is ironic that the novel should connect him with St Petersburg when he is not even a resident there. Even when he
attempts to restore his sense of belonging by returning to his wife, Anna Grigoryevna, and home in Dresden, he is barred from leaving the city by Maximov confiscating his passport. His fame sets him apart. Because he is not the real father of Pavel, he may be denied the sympathies accorded to a father. Some of the condemning writings of his stepson induce criticism of his methods of raising the boy that are further estranging, as is his neglect of his hygiene. Finally, his own unsettling attraction to his landlady’s daughter, Matryosha, and the paedophilic allusions in the stories that he composes at the end of the text are repulsive to the reader.

Coetzee installs incongruencies between the different representations of ‘Dostoevsky’. The other characters are troubled by the discrepancies between the harsh words of Pavel, the established reputation of the great novelist and the real man in their presence. In his own writing, the nineteenth-century author appears to be compassionate and understanding and yet Pavel has described him as a mean, uncompromising authoritarian. Who is right? Anna Sergeyevna, Nechaev and even little Matryosha set up a dialogue in their own minds between Pavel and ‘Dostoevsky’. Even he is aware of this, for he says ‘I am far from being a master... There is a crack running through me’ (MP, p.141).

It is as if these discrepancies are perforations in his outline through which the madness of his distress seeps and threatens to escape and contaminate them. Other characters in the text have a vital self-interest in getting to know ‘Dostoevsky’ better, so that they can preserve their own identity from contamination by his disease. This is an ambivalent response because they have to engage with him in order to learn about him, and yet they also want to avoid contact with him for fear that their own identities will become infected by his touch, the hand of grief or worse, the hand of the defiler and a man willing to risk losing his soul. Anna Sergeyevna is drawn to intimacy with the man and yet she later avoids contact with him. This reaction reinforces the man’s sense of isolation. But what are the implications of his separation for those that condemn him? In the final section of this chapter I consider that price paid by the excluders.
6.2.2.3. THE CRACK RUNNING THOUGH HIM

The work of Bakhtin, on the dialogue between the self and the other, provides an excellent theoretical lead into the many competing representations and voices in *The Master of Petersburg*. A number of critics have used Bakhtin's writing as a starting point to their commentary on Coetzee's text (Watson, Head, Kossew, Pechey and Marais). I have already presented some brief comments on how other critics have used Bakhtin's work. Now I wish to reiterate the significance of his writings. According to Wayne Booth, the reason that the modern polyphonic novel represents Bakhtin's vision for the world is that it portrays a chorus of voices in a vital state of flux and there is no authoritative authorial commentary (1984, p.xxii).

For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky was the only polyphonic author but his theory is relevant to other polyphonic writers. Bakhtin's theory is based on the metalinguistic assumption that words are always mobile and never free, for they are imbued with past and present intentions and values of the whole society and the individual user (1984, p.201). He stresses the continual movement of identity formation where "[a] man never coincides with himself", for each subject has a sense of his 'inner unfinalizability' and is continually re-forming his/her "I" in dialogue with others (1984, p.59). Receptivity to the words and self-representation of the other require a process of mutual openness in which moments of merging afford each "I" insight into the gaze of the other. It is here that dialogic sharing occurs. Bakhtin places the 'idea' at the intersection between consciousnesses (1984, pp.88-93).

I suggest that it is in this inter-subjective space that identities merge. But this merging does not imply closure into a unified, monological stance. Rather, the merging is brief and in continual motion. Kristeva has expanded on Bakhtin's theory and has formulated the idea that identity is not fixed but is rather continually in a process of being formed in confrontation with the other (1992, pp.128-129). Her theory was introduced in chapter two. For her, the gap between two speakers is the site of creative ambivalence with the potential of both obliteration and generation of identity (1992, pp.128-129). This is closely linked with Kristeva's thinking on the sublime (1982, p.12). Of course, reference to the sublime implies a transcendental condition of indefinable
possibility. This is certainly the domain of the imagination. It is into such an unframed space that Coetzee inscribes the character of ‘Dostoevsky’.

In *The Master of Petersburg*, ‘Dostoevsky’s’ authority is largely stripped from him, leaving him without his authoritative authorial voice. As a parent and as the voice of the famous novelist, he is exposed as a charlatan. He falsifies his identity by using the name of his stepson’s natural father, Isaev, in order to claim Pavel’s papers. Thus the character relinquishes his established podium of recognition. By changing his name, he also abandons the reputation of the historical author as an ethical person. Through the text, his actual and imaginary sexual encounters reduce him to the status of wife betrayer and child abuser. There is a continual re-weighing of his position of authority. As other characters learn that he is really the famous literary master, one would expect his prestige to increase, but his questionable morality and his refusal to concur with the methods of either the bureaucrats or the revolutionaries reduce the influence of his words. Like Mrs Curren in *Age of Iron*, he bears no authority of knowledge or social status but is merely a psychologically and physically damaged person who is desperately trying to make sense of what is happening around him so that he can restore his inner equilibrium and feel a sense of connectedness with that world.

Coetzee views the suffering body as a powerful authority (*DP*, p.248). He has delved into the physical sensations that exist at the limit between the vital but suffering physical presence of ‘Dostoevsky’ and the counter-position of nullity of Pavel in *The Master of Petersburg*. In this way, he has created a positive and a negative template of his ongoing premise that corporeality can make a powerful political statement. The absence of Pavel is the navel around which the body of this text is constructed. ‘Dostoevsky’s’ attempts to enter into dialogue are futile because the boy is dead. He is, however, able to engage with the writings of his stepson and with the recollections of those who knew him, his own memories and even with the smells of the boy’s possessions and places that he frequented. The patterns that the “other” (Pavel) presents are not open to redefinition.

Coetzee traces the crack in ‘Dostoevky’s’ identity to show that he vulnerable to absorbing the emptiness that the final absence of Pavel exposes. It is the vortex, ‘the approach to the edge, the glance downward, the lurch of the soul’ (*MP*, p.118), which
the epileptic stepfather senses, that Pavel’s death bares. ‘Dostoevsky’s’ incoherent mumblings reveal his unstable condition. For Kristeva this is a semiotic flow that is the source of creativity (1992, p.133). Like Eugene Dawn in *Dusklnds*, this protagonist’s fitful body expresses his emotional distress. The precise descriptions of the narrator assert the centrality of ‘Dostoevsky’s’ physical trauma in the face of the void that was Pavel over the words of the famous Russian author.

Throughout his fiction, Coetzee has expanded and refined the representation of confrontation between identities and avoidance of such confrontation. The primary confrontation, which underlies all other encounters that Coetzee has consistently traced, is the encounter of the self and the mirror image of the self. I suggest that confrontation with others in all the novels is a mere representation of what Coetzee calls ‘self’s presence to the self’ (*DP*, p.243). In *The Master of Petersburg* Coetzee establishes that a mirroring of the self lies at the heart of alienation.

Throughout the text, there is a blurring of the outline of identities that heralds a yearning for connectedness. There is smudging in the representation of a number of characters, although it is manifested in greatest detail in the protagonist. ‘Dostoevsky’ has a perceptual shift with the boundaries of his sense of self seeming to disappear. He notes that ‘something has been ebbing out of him that he thinks of as firmness’ (*MP*, p.19). With this disintegration of his margins, he attempts to become one with Pavel. Essentially, he wants to revive the spirit of the dead young man by using his own corporeality to fill Pavel’s clothes with life. His sense of self becomes overwhelmed by his obsession to become whole by connecting with the deceased boy. He says: ‘...his ghost is entering me’ (*MP*, p. 4).

This attempt at a novelistic rebirth performs a bifurcated function. It reflects ‘Dostoevsky’s’ inner exploration and desire for self-forgiveness and his inability to restore a relationship and a sense of belonging with his stepson. Also, the narrator offers another angle of interpretation of past events for dialogue with the “master’s” own memory. ‘Dostoevsky’ states:

From somewhere to somewhere I am in retreat; when the retreat is completed, what will be left of me? He thinks of himself as going back into the egg, or at least into something
smooth and cool and grey. Perhaps it is not just an egg: perhaps it is the soul, perhaps that is how the soul looks. (*MP*, p.19)

The narrator’s words present the re-creation of the protagonist-writer in text.

This novel is an extended excavation of otherness that ends up exposing the otherness of the self. The different narrative threads in the text are entangled in a labyrinth of intrigue and motive, which becomes knotted and confused in much the same way as the separation of individual identities becomes smudged. These mirrorings create a sense of doubleness, ambivalence and disorientation. The fluid merging and separating of the identities of ‘Dostoevsky’ and Pavel is repeated in other dynamic erasures and restorations of boundaries that ‘Dostoevsky’ observes between identities in the novel. At times, he conjures up the image of Nechaev when he tries to summon up the face of Pavel (*MP*, p.49, p.60). Pavel is also brought to life in the odd gesture or movement of another (*MP*, p.152). When he first reads Pavel’s Siberian story, he comments on the similarity between the Maximov and the old landowner in the story. Later in the text, he reads the story again and observes that the character of Sergei is an imitation of Jesus Christ. By slippage, he extends the comparison to include the atheist Nechaev.

The volatile boundaries between the “I” and the “you” continually shift so that differences become similarities, opponents become accomplices, and identity dissolves into the cracks between the self as the subject and the self as the object of scrutiny. This impression of some intersection of identities is not restricted to the gaze of the master. The other characters also display such outward changes in identity. ‘Dostoevsky’ observes that this is ‘an age of acting, this, an age of disguise’ (*MP*, p.195). Nechaev appears first in the disguise of a woman. Later he dons the white suit of Pavel in order to evade the notice of the authorities. The tramp who is murdered is actually Ivanov, an under-cover police agent. Disguise, inter-textual allusions and intra-textual linkages between identities are repeated throughout the text. This prevents the representation of any distinct, impervious position. The boundaries between binary oppositions fade and the likeness between disparate, often conflicting characters emerge.

The pervasive merging of identities and shifting ideological positions and motives subvert any idea of a stable arena within which a contest between different
positions can be staged. Actually, ‘Dostoevsky’s’ investigation fails. He does not track down a succinct motive for suicide, nor does he single out a murderer. All he succeeds in discovering is a confusing maze of mutations, which all implicate himself. The self and the mirroring other fuse and become one.

I contend that this repeated evasion or excavation of a secure site of authority, the position of a fixed identity from which to speak represents a deliberate, public refusal on the part of the author, Coetzee, to submit to the violence of polemical confrontation. Such discord might be political, as in the clash of ideologies, or academic, as in the conflict between discourses. Nevertheless, the focus remains a struggle for supremacy, with the “I” seeking mastery over the “you”.

The diachronic form of the narrative presents the dual inner and outer perspectives of ‘Dostoevsky’s’ failure. ‘Dostoevsky’ is unsuccessful in his double quest to restore his psychological well-being in a metaphoric connectedness with Pavel or to learn who killed his stepson. As Watson (1994) and Marais (1998) have suggested, he is even implicated in fathering ‘the devils’ responsible for the boy’s death. ‘Dostoevsky’ is shown to have been complicit in the formation of a stunted and deforming society.

The synchronic mode of the novel extends these notions of intersubjectivity and complicity to include a wider sweep of fictional and historical identities in Russia and South Africa in a rich hybridity of intertextual insinuations. While this shared responsibility is certainly damning for the damage that is wrought on individuals and the two societies, it does, however, include some intimation of hope in the open intersubjective potential for new “ideas” beyond the status quo, in Bakhtinian terms.

6.2.3. SOME INTERTEXTUAL ALLUSIONS

Coetzee can be seen to respond to Foucault’s argument that it is the role of the intellectual to re-examine rules and evidences and ways of applying these in order to influence the political will of his audience. Foucault maintains that the intellectual cannot expect resolutions or victories, for his task is perpetual resistance (quoted in
Racevskis 1988, pp.30-32). According to Rajehman, it is via historical analysis that Foucault undertakes his project of scepticism (1985, p.8). Coetzee follows Foucault's example but he goes further than this. He embraces the idea of the endless questioning of constituted experience but he adds the spiritual element of grace. Subsequent to writing an essay on Tolstoy, Dostoevsky and Rousseau in 1985, the central concern for Coetzee has become 'a debate between cynicism and grace. Cynicism: the denial of any ultimate basis for values. Grace: a condition in which the truth can be told clearly, without blindness' (DP, p.392). It seems to me that Coetzee is not speaking here of an absolute Truth, but rather of a personal authenticity and he is seeking to represent a position that transcends binary resistance, a position of committed self-scrutiny, self-disclosure and unknown ethical risk-taking.

Each of Coetzee's novels written after his 1985 essay is the site of a never-ending struggle to represent confessional honesty. In this, I maintain that these novels provide a valuable precedent as well as a subsequent comment for the "New South Africa". The African National Congress Party was elected in the first ever general election in which all adults voted on the 27-30 April 1994. One of the most important tasks facing the new multi-racial government has been to provide an opportunity for the diverse groups to come to terms with a very troubled past, so that they can build a more tolerable future for the nation. To this end, the Government of National Unity installed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, chaired by Desmond Tutu in 1995.

In much the same way that Coetzee's novelistic confessions have made the readers focus on the physical and psychological injuries that deform characters, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has given public attention to the damage done to individuals in the name of apartheid. The Commission aimed to create a safe podium of representation for those who were silenced by their active complicity, their fear of retribution or by their final annihilation. This quasi-judicial body performed a dual function. It bore the responsibility of providing a forum where the harm, which was wrought upon those who challenged the authority of the Nationalist government and upon unwitting victims who got in the way of the state machine, could be revealed. It also aimed to help the people to accept the harsh realities of their history, so that they could move on. As Attridge and Jolly have said: 'The Commission highlights the need to
narrativize the past in such a way that the future becomes - unlike the past - bearable’ (1998, p.3).

The milieu in which the Russian master author wrote bears significant similarities to Coetzee’s own historic placing, thereby providing a mirror to the South African writer’s on-going interests in the role and responsibility of the author and the relationship between fiction and history. The grim poverty of the underclass in Tsarist Russia, censorship and the power of the bureaucrats resemble the context in which the culture of apartheid bloomed. Russia has also held a fascination for Coetzee since childhood. In Boyhood: Scenes from Provincial Life, he comments that his interest may have begun as mere perversity to choose differently from everyone else when they sided with the Americans in 1947 (p.18-19). There was a strong underground movement in both societies. The Russian political activist, Nechaev, who has influenced both the Russian and the South African authors and is fictionalized in Coetzee’s novel, has been a source of inspiration to many revolutionaries, including some members of the ANC (Zinik 1994, p.19).

Coetzee’s continuing interest in Dostoevsky lies in the fact that he was one of those ‘who not only lived through [Coetzee’s italics] the philosophical debates of their day with the intensity characteristic of an intelligentsia held down under censorship, but also were the heirs of a Christian tradition more vital, in some respects, than Western Christianity’ (DP, p.244). J. Frank stresses that Dostoevsky dearly wished that his country would be healed from the self-destructive conflicts in which it was embroiled (1995, p.412). He claims that Dostoevsky always tried to maintain a balance between the ideals of the revolutionaries and the agitation that they stirred up (1995, p.500). I contend that Coetzee has similar commitments to reconciliation in his own country.

Much of the content of The Master of Petersburg is gleaned from a controversial chapter, entitled ‘At Tikhon’s’ in the novel, The Possessed (also called The Devils), by Dostoevsky. The publisher, Katkov, censored this chapter on the grounds that the contents relating to Stavrogin’s suggested rape of his landlady’s fourteen-year-old daughter, Matryosha, were pornographic. Two versions of this chapter IX were finally published in 1922-23 (Lord 1971, pp.102-104). Konstantin Mochulsky describes this nineteenth-century novel as ‘one of the greatest artistic works in world literature’, the
omitted chapter as Dostoevsky’s ‘loftiest artistic creation’ (1967, p. 459), and Nicholai Stavrogin as one of his strongest characters (1967, p.463). It is into this outstanding example of literary creativity and transgressiveness that Coetzee inscribes his own fictional tale about the master and his art.

Coetzee has responded to the Russian author’s cue and woven skeins of Stavrogin’s identity and the nineteenth-century author’s own focus on self-scrutiny and confession into his (Coetzee’s) own fictional character of ‘Dostoevsky’. In The Possessed, Stavrogin tells Tikhon: 'I believe, as in the scriptures, in a personal devil, not an allegorical one' (from a translation of chapter IX of The Possessed in Lord 1970, p.113). Mochulsky elaborates on this text: ‘Yes, this is the whole thing: Stavrogin canonically believes in the devil, without believing in God; the proud and strong spirit, God-like in his grandeur, has renounced the Creator and closed himself off in selfness’ (1967, p.459). The tragic embodiment of the Anti-Christ was very important to Dostoevsky. In a letter to his publisher, Katkov, Dostoevsky said: ‘I have taken him [Stavrogin] from my heart’ (quoted in Mochulsky 1967, p.409).

In his essay, ‘Confession and Double thoughts: Tolstoy, Rousseau and Dostoevsky’, Coetzee undertakes an analysis of Stavrogin’s confession to the monk, Tikhon, in the controversial chapter of Dostoevsky’s novel, The Possessed (DP, p.251-293). At the core of his argument is an interest in ‘the self’s presence to the self’ (DP, p.243), in other words, the extent to which the self recognizes the truth about the self. Coetzee observes that the spiral of self-accusation can continue forever, because as soon as self-forgiveness is scrutinized to assess the possibility of self-delusion, the game begins again. As he says, ‘Dostoevsky indicates that the self cannot tell the truth of itself to itself and come to rest without the possibility of self deception’ and Coetzee concludes that, through Stavrogin’s confession, Dostoevsky is establishing the point that the Christian sacrament of confession is the only means of coming to rest, because it is followed by absolution (DP, p.291). Dostoevsky himself commented on his own text as offering ‘the unique freedom is conquering oneself’ (Mochulsky 1967, p.426).

Head asserts that there is a sustained, inter-textual confrontation of the limits in The Master of Petersburg (1997, p.149). As in Coetzee’s other novels, transgressions of the limits pervade the text. In fact, this novel can be read as a pastiche of ignored,
violated and erased boundaries between identities. The division between accurate historic representation and imaginative fabrication is unclear. Some of the historic "facts" of the story have been changed. Dostoevsky’s son, Pavel, outlived him and was reputed to have been a financial leech, too lazy to have even dabbled in political activism (Solotoroff 1995, p.170). Bakunin and Nechaev were revolutionaries in Dostoevsky’s time. Their ideas are represented in Dostoevsky’s work and in the embodiment of the character of Nechaev, the nihilist in Coetzee’s novel. Even the actual historic incident of the murder of Ivanov by Nechaev is woven into the recent novel. Raskolnikov from Crime and Punishment, by Dostoevsky, is also misrepresented by ‘Nechaev’ in The Master of Petersburg (MP, p.201). Thus the master author’s own creation is misappropriated and used against him. Solotaroff points out that the deliberate distortions of the historic and fictional backgrounds create cognitive dissonance in this apparently realistic novel (1995, p.19).

The merging of the Russian author’s biography and fictional works blends with the factual biographical details and fictional constructions of Coetzee himself. Coetzee is interested in the Russian Orthodox Church’s process of confession, reconciliation and absolution, which resembles the similar pattern in the Roman Catholic church, with which he was familiar from his secondary school days at a Marist Brother’s college, St Joseph’s, in Cape Town. He has said that he is not yet a Christian (DP, p.250) and yet he believes that the presence of the body of Christ on the Cross ‘overwhelms’ all theoretical reduction (DP, p.337). It would seem, therefore, as if Coetzee is, in some respects, a kindred spirit of the Dostoevskian character, Stavrogin. Tikhon says that the confessor, Stavrogin, ‘reminds one of a man…seeking after a cross [which] seems incongruous in a man who does not believe in the Cross’ (quoted in Lord 1971, p.117). In spite of his non-belief, Coetzee’s fascination with religious absolution prompts him to attempt to create a form of secular confession in fictional text. Head points this out in a discussion of Age of Iron (1997, pp.129-143). I contend that The Master of Petersburg is an attempt to extend secular confession.
6.3. ‘DOSTOEVSKY’S’ TRAIL OF SHAME

‘Dostoevsky’s’ trail of shame is only open to the scrutiny of the anonymous narrator and reader, because he already resides on the abject margins, like his fictional predecessor, Vercueil in *Age of Iron*, between that which is redeemable and the damned, where shame has no currency: ‘First in his writing and now in his life, shame seems to have lost its power, its place taken by a blank and amoral passivity that shrinks from no extreme’ (*MP*, p.24). In these words, ‘Dostoevsky’ is strikingly similar to the sinner, Stavrogin in *The Possessed*, who says: ‘I suddenly thought of a Jewish proverb: ‘One’s own excretions do not smell…I came to the startling realisation that I was not aware of the difference between good and evil’ (quoted in Lord 1971, p.126).

Writing is, as ‘Dostoevsky’ says to Councillor Maximov, ‘a private matter, an utterly private matter, private to the writer, till it is given to the world’ (*MP*, p.40). In this novel writing can be seen as a trap. ‘Dostoevsky’ comes to realize that Nechaev has set ‘a devilish trap’ when he attaches the famous author’s name to his own revolutionary propaganda (*MP*, p.203). Just as the character ‘Dostoevsky’ tests God by writing ‘an assault upon the innocence of a child’ (*MP*, p.249), so the writer, Coetzee, challenges the reader with this text. Michael Dirda subverts Coetzee’s image of ‘Dostoevsky’ writing a transgressive textual trap to catch God when he summarizes the disorienting effect as ‘a trap to catch readers’ (1994, p.48). But what is the point of these repeated, surreptitious traps?

Writing that crosses thresholds opens up new paradigms for exposure and belonging. At times, such writing is exposed, as in the deceit of ‘Dostoevsky’ by Nechaev or the obscene writing of the protagonist. Yet, at other times, the author provides a precious contribution by offering options beyond what is already known. So, I suggest that Coetzee is representing the writer as challenging boundaries and exploring unknown conceptual territory. Religious connotations of judgement are implicit in the final Christian imagery. These suggest that the author has an ethical responsibility in the frontiers that he chooses to transgress in his writing and in acknowledging the inherent dangers of such a colonial thrust. But there is more to this ‘trap to catch God’ (*MP*, p.249).
Could it be that Coetzee is presenting a textual goad to the reader to respond so that some boundaries can be re-negotiated? As I have shown, in the many textual mergings of different identities in the novel, the differences between the self and the other disperse. Within this shared third space there are new opportunities to imagine belonging, without domination. This is evident from a close reading of the final pages of the novel.

There is great risk involved in the public reckoning of ‘Dostoevsky’. First in his investigation of Pavel’s death, he puts himself in physical danger. Yet, his bravest act is his writing, for he risks being condemned by representing his work to the viewing and judgement of others. This is a high price to pay. Coetzee notes a vital omission in Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky’s fiction that dialogism ‘is a matter not of ideological position, still less of novelistic technique, but of the most radical intellectual and even spiritual courage’ (SS, p.123). It is this radical courage that he is representing in his novel. As an extended enactment of the process of writing, this novel demonstrates that, in losing the disguise of a completed, famous personage, ‘Dostoevsky’ surrenders himself to the real and the fictional others, thereby continually opening himself to the threat of losing himself as he is known and to rebirth as potentially different. I agree with Marais’s contention that ‘Dostoevsky’ does not change in this novel. Furthermore, I suggest that his openness and courage to disclose the evil within himself in his writing are the seeds from which ‘Dostoevsky’’s” redemption might sprout. But this possibility lies beyond the text.

Here I contend that Coetzee is establishing that it is in active on-going disclosure and engagement with others that colonization of the other can be averted. ‘Dostoevsky’ says ‘I have lost my place in my soul’ (MP, p.249). I maintain that the imaginary assault on the child is a metaphor for condemnation. The perpetrator is banished to a dark vault of separation from others to avoid being contaminated by his hopelessness. This is an area of exclusion and emptiness, for there is no other against which the self can be created. The identity of the master has dissolved into the tomb. ‘Am I dead already?’ he asks (MP, p.250). Thus he has betrayed everyone because, by his absence, he removes the other against which the identities of his accusers can be forged and he has banished himself to isolation.
Artfully, Coetzee has implicated himself as a writer, like ‘Dostoevsky’. Both he and the reader are also involved in the game of judgement, for abuse of an innocent is universally damnable. As fellow players, the author of this novel, Coetzee, and the reader are also betrayed, for they share in the condemnation of the abuser and hence the removal of the other. Their sense of self, like the other characters in the novel, also becomes threatened with the meaninglessness of being a soul alone, undefined. Since definition can only occur in encountering the other, the risk of spillage from the other is the very price of self-validation and belonging. The pervasive contamination by the other is both the threat and the transitional opportunity for creative transcendence, beyond the endless opposition between the self and the other.

The Christian inference in the query whether betrayal tastes more like vinegar or gall is interesting (MP, p.250). Christ was crucified because he was betrayed to the Roman soldiers by one of his Apostles, Peter. On the cross he asked for water but a sponge soaked in vinegar was offered to him. Jesus was, in a sense, betraying his people by absentee himself as the other against which they could define themselves. This latter betrayal may taste of gall, for it occurs from within. Perhaps in all sacrifice there is the double bind of the betrayal by the other, which tastes like vinegar and the betrayal of oneself, which tastes of gall. At the end of the novel the bitter bile of complicity in the game of betrayal has also welled up in the reader. Coetzee manages to include himself and the reader in the precarious hermeneutic contest between the self and the other, for which the prize and the price is each of our souls. Perhaps he is proposing ‘a zone of occult instability’, as defined by Bhabha (1995, p.207), which requires that we remain open to continual negotiations with others on the frontiers of shared belonging.

Coetzee sees ‘the Crucifixion as a refusal and an introversion of retributive violence, a refusal so deliberate, so conscious, and so powerful that it overwhelms any reinterpretation, Freudian, Marxian, or what ever, that we can give to it’ (DP, p.337). No theory or legal structure, whether intellectual, religious or governmental, can match the power of the suffering body of Christ on the cross. This image is most familiar to the Western World. It represents the willing sacrifice of a public life or an established identity, like ‘Dostoevsky’ in order to open up possibilities for the future. This signification is located in the almost silent presence of the body of Jesus. The value that Coetzee attributes to Christ on the Cross is not religious. It is, rather, the transgressive
significance of the icon that offers a position that commands attention and yet transcends traditional discursive methodology. The paradox of this image lies in the intimation of opening up negotiations on inclusivity and belonging for both the self and the other and the idea of ethical boundaries in Manichean morality that Marais identifies (1998).

Coetzee has confessed that he is troubled by violence. He has stated that any trace of violence in himself becomes introverted, as violence against himself (DP, p.337). This was considered in chapter two. He sees the Crucifixion as a refusal to participate in retributive violence that can also be described as violent confrontation with the other (DP, p.337). I would even go so far as to argue that all of his writing is a form of “secular crucifixion” for Coetzee - for two reasons: he persistently seeks ways to represent alternatives that resist confrontation with the other; and he regards all writing as autobiographical (DP, p.391). Hence he is creating a space for himself from which he can refuse to participate in conflict with the other. For believers, the Crucifixion is the moment of absolution, the reconciliation between the self and the other. In The Master of Petersburg, Coetzee is attempting to secure a textual, secular absolution. By absolution, I mean a cathartic release for all cultural and political theoreticians and practitioners, himself included, from the traps of our flawed and divisive Western heritage and the rigid historic maps that prescribe how we make meaning and whom we exclude in the process.

So Coetzee has created a position from which fiction can speak to other discourses on its own terms, without claiming the moral high ground in a binary confrontation. He has created a new intermediary space for the novel in which the fiction is able to engage with other discourses such as theory, history and politics, not in confrontation but in concert, to acknowledge the aporias that are mutually reflected and to negotiate possibilities of reconstruction together. Head’s commentary can be read as an extension of this idea that Coetzee has opened up an intermediary space. He claims that Coetzee has created a new subject position in the character of ‘Dostoevsky’. He says:

The censor/writer confrontation, which includes a self-confrontation with the internalised demon-voices, is thus a new figure for the moment of postcolonial writing as it is manifested in Coetzee’s work. Significantly, it also elides the resisting writer (white or black) with the oppressed other more generally. (1997, p.149)
Again, Coetzee asserts his resistance to confrontation with the other, while opening up an internalized site for the limitations and exclusions and finally the accountability of conflictual discourses to be accommodated. I suggest that this is an exciting contribution to postcolonial theory. This is not only an opportunity for renewed theoretical discussion. The whole sense of self of each of the players is also implicated. By this, I mean that Coetzee does not merely stimulate academic debate about this new subject position. Instead, the internalized demon-voices of the character of ‘Dostoevsky’ reflect similar demons in the identities of the debaters, the writer and the reader. Acknowledging these inner devils may continue to unsettle and provoke admissions of culpability and a desire for reconciliation and a renegotiated approach to belonging. While the idea of recognising our complicity in entrenching the frontiers that divide the world we live in seems noble, the experience of shifting inner obstacles to coexistence proves to be a challenging task for David Lurie, the disgraced protagonist in Coetzee’s post-apartheid novel of that name.
7. THE CLASSICAL PARADOX: CALL NO MAN HAPPY UNTIL HE IS DEAD

There has been keen interest in Coetzee’s novel, *Disgrace*, set in post-apartheid South Africa. The editorial of one journal featuring a symposium on this text, claims to bear ‘witness to an extraordinary phenomenon – a ‘spontaneous overflow of powerful emotions’ (*Scrutiny* 2. 7 (1) 2002, p.3). In another, Attridge states that ‘few novels in recent decades have generated as much serious debate (in addition to media attention)’ (*Interventions*. 4 (3) 2002, p.315). Why has there been such vociferous engagement with this novel? Attwell explains that the controversy surrounding this novel and the various accusations of racism relate to the function of the novel as simple mimesis of post-apartheid society but without due consideration of the wider historical and ethical context (2002, pp.331-341).

In this broader framework, I suggest that Coetzee strikes at a condition of unease at the heart of all of his readers, a crisis that seems to pervade Western consciousness. Grave uncertainty about where and with whom we belong touches each one of us. In the local setting, the traumatic history of racial discrimination and the recent political restructuring of the whole society into a modern democracy have reconfigured many existing maps of belonging. In the global arena insecurities abound. All value systems, not just those of the West, are being challenged on a number of fronts. Rapidly changing technologies and networks flatten out communication into generic formulae and exacerbate late modernist doubt about a sense of individuality and agency.

In this chapter I shall examine a most pervasive theme in the search for a sense of belonging, namely, the palimpsestic process of negotiating old and new frontiers in the many parallels in the novel. Coetzee examines the barriers that limit new understandings. These include a closed attitude and a rigid, impervious sense of identity as well as the constraints of language. He represents the arduous process of relinquishing an established mind-set in the example of the protagonist, David Lurie. He also offers Petrus’s African ontology as a more flexible and inclusive patriarchal domain than that of the colonial predecessors. Similarly, the four women represent textual instances of literal, imaginative and metaphysical opportunities to experience unknown ways of being that are more embrace of others. According to Attwell and Barbara Harlow,
among the tasks facing writers of fiction in post-apartheid South Africa is 'the refashioning of identities caught between stasis and change, and the role of culture – or representation - in limiting or enabling new forms of understanding' (2000, p.3). It is my intention to consider how Coetzee creates new transitional possibilities for coexistence in Disgrace. I further propose that these potential metafictional sites can be seen as adding to current theory on postcolonial hybridity. Most importantly, the metafictional ethics of expanding the conceptual frontiers of belonging are highly relevant in these unsettled times when some established frontiers are being removed while other ideological frontiers are being reinforced.

My purpose in this chapter is threefold. First, I shall consider the ambivalence of Western patterns of thought. Coetzee traces the shifting position of the protagonist, David Lurie, from the centre to the margins. His personal circumstances mirror the societal changes in the new South Africa in which many previous structures have become obsolete while the emerging orders are still unfamiliar, confronting and inexplicable. The main premise of my argument is that the moralizing demand for the abasement of the colonizer that is inherent in resistance theory and criticism is an idea that may merely re-inscribe a neo-colonial hierarchy of domination by perpetuating notions of enclosure and judgement. It is my contention that that the lived experience of relinquishing set paradigms of identity and belonging, as a part of a wider grille of fences, allows for a transformed place for the postcolonizer from which surprise songlines of shared belonging can be composed. This existential mode of relinquishment clears a conceptual space for innovative thinking on inclusiveness and the theoretical and ethical implications thereof.

Secondly, I propose that the neo-colonial structure of the new order resembles but is not the same as the old pattern of domination. The frontiers that define Petrus's place may still be based on a Western model of landownership, but his extended African family structure and sense of community is shown to be more accommodating of others.

Thirdly, it is my argument that Coetzee includes a number of women characters as examples of a range of creative options that invite the protagonist and the reader to reappraise existing boundaries to belonging. David confronts the limitations of his own attitudinal framework: his sexual mores are picked apart in his intimate encounter with
the unlikely dog-woman, Bev Shaw; and his preconceived expectations of canonical value are called into question in his creative musings about Byron’s plaintive lover, Teresa, Contessa Guiccioli. On a metaphysical plane, the two pregnant women form a parallel site of potential ideological regeneration that is of far greater ethical significance, in my opinion, than the parallel rapes that only seem to perpetuate the entrapping loop of condemnation and disablement in the critical responses to this novel. The shared condition of the two women, Petrus’s unnamed wife and his future wife, Lucy, together present a position in which the hope of the future may be vested, for themselves, their families, the nation and the continent. This site of potential coexistence does, however, require that the confining past patterns of belonging be renounced. The final act of David’s surrender of all attachments occurs at the very end of the novel when he gives up the dog. For him, therefore, acknowledgement of alternative prospects of belonging would only be beyond the text. The author’s responsibility for clearing a space for the expectant mothers’ voices amidst the cacophony of competing claims is clear. Whether they will be heard and responded to is left up to the reader.

The relevance of fiction in making a difference in the real world is central to Coetzee’s work. Daniel Valentine and Jeffrey Peck put forward the notion that the writer and the reader are engaged in an activity that can generate considerable ethical consequences. According to these commentators, a significant focus of literary studies at present is to include not only a dynamic consideration of the political, social and gendered network of relations in which the writing is embedded, but also ‘to make a place for counter-hegemonic concerns and in many cases to translate their theoretical reflections into social and political practice...They are seeking...access and connection to the clichéd ‘real world’ of the anthropologist’ (1996, pp.13-20). It seems to me that Valentine and Peck are flagging the participation of literary critics in cultural debate and their active contribution to change in the world. It must be borne in mind, however, that Coetzee offers no comfortable advice on how to behave ethically, as Attridge notes (2002, p.318). Instead, I contend that Coetzee provides a link between current theoretical studies and the possibility of transforming ethical action in the real world by spurring the reader to participate beyond *Disgrace*.

I maintain that Coetzee addresses the complicity of the writer and the reader in installing the multiple frontiers of judgement that permeate the novel. I shall examine
the responsibilities of the writer and the reader for interrogating these processes and for shifting the frontiers by their ethical actions. Marais claims that in writing and reading 'the subject's 'ontological solitude' may be disturbed by intimations of an alterity that cannot be contained (2000, p.59). In its articulation of such a view of writing and reading, Disgrace moots the possibility of ethical action (2000, p.59). I agree with Marais that the 'text's failure to instantiate the other is also a failure to eliminate [Marais’s italics] the other’ (2000, p.61). It seems to me, though, that Marais’s excellent analysis can be elaborated upon.

I suggest that the paradoxical failure of the text that Marais identifies creates an empty conceptual space that awaits fresh inscription. I propose that it is Coetzee’s metafictional task to prompt action from such a position from which all meaning has been excavated. I maintain that this can be seen as the point of origin of ethics. By removing all frameworks of identification and attachment for the protagonist, Coetzee opens up a site for new thinking to begin, thus his fiction again complements and extends the relevance of theory in the real world. Joseph McElroy says that, in Disgrace, Coetzee asks the secular and political question 'What is to be done?' and answers it in such meagre choices that the reader may 'mistake the ceremony emerging' (2000, p.1). This focus on a responsibility towards the future in actions is, I suggest, at the heart of Coetzee’s entire body of fiction. But the ceremony is meagre because it lies beyond the text, in the hands of the reader.

Opinions on Disgrace differ widely and yet for all critics there is at least a tacit acknowledgement of the porous boundary between the fictional and the real. Some see the novel as a dismal portrayal of white marginalisation as a consequence of their historic guilt (Roodt cited in Marais, 2001b, p.32), while others identify a sense of bleak disillusionment, moral abjection and resignation with the current situation (Farred 2002). Other critics observe a range of opportunities for self-reflection and proactive community collaboration; Jane Poyner perceives a confessional mode that mirrors the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2000); Marais interprets David’s behaviour as increasingly acknowledging the need to respect others, even if they are not understood (Marais 2000 & 2001b). Among the feminist readings there are concerns about the persistence of patriarchal attitudes that silence and objectify women (Boehmer 2002) and perspectives that view the woman’s body as a site of struggle and renewal (Horrell
2002). These intersections of theory, fiction and an actual geopolitical setting form a plaied skein in Coetzee’s purpose.

Much of Coetzee’s work engages with spatial and temporal realities in his own country at the time of writing. The changing national organisational structure and sequence of events that have drafted the history of South Africa have been the foundational focus, if only obliquely at times, of his imaginative gaze. I propose that the continuing relevance of Coetzee’s writing lies in his ability to represent fine theoretical debate interwoven with the immediacy of the imaginary “lived experience” and embedded in the changing complexities of the real world close at hand and further afield.

By his representation of the uneasy boundary between the real and the imagined, understanding and the unknown, the self and the other, authority and powerlessness, Coetzee is making a self-conscious and urgent call for provisionality. On observing the writing of others, Coetzee has said that the problem has been:

trying to move from a stage of ‘objectively realistic representation’ to a stage of reading the significations that lie behind or within reality, so that reality will not merely be itself but become an order of significations.’ The novel’s action ‘comes to a resolution as the hero attains the power of reading, and hence the power of truly understanding the world. (quoted in Bill Reichblum 1996, p.5)

While this might be the impetus that moves the writer to put pen to paper, I would argue that Coetzee’s consistent self-reflexive task has been to interrogate this urge to secure meaning and its achievability. The journal entries of Magda in In the Heart of the Country blur the line between actual narrative events and her paranoid dreaming and thus destabilize all meaning in that text. The extensive intertextual merging of different narratives in The Master of Petersburg reveals numerous “truths”. Coetzee’s fictional game shows up the fallacy of all absolutist thinking.

In his metafictional scheme, Coetzee situates the writer and the reader as central players, along with the text. A distinction can be made between those who prefer to remain distanced from the object of scrutiny and those who acknowledge their complicity in the hermeneutic process. I agree with Marais that a few of the critical negotiators are competing in an exercise that is merely perpetuating polarities, which the novel itself is subverting (2002, p.38). I propose to consider some of the vigorous
discussion about the novel as a form of *mise en abyme* within a wider postmodern narrative about belonging that collapses the margins between the text and the responses to the text. The function of each participant in this triune hermeneutic process is, I suggest, crucial to Coetzee’s ethical purpose, which is that literature should make a difference in the real world.

In this chapter, I focus on the role of the reader and her/his complicity in the process of working the narrative threads into a discernible pattern and her/his responsibility for the meanings that ensue. I concur with Peter McDonald who points out that this novel is also about the ethics of reading (2002). It is my thesis that this responsibility extends beyond the written words. The role of the writer can be seen as finite, for his contribution to on-going debate is completed in the text. This is particularly so, for Coetzee does not often enter into discussions about his fiction and he frequently chooses to distance himself from the narratorial position by selecting a free indirect form as the preferred voice for most of his novels, even including the more autobiographical works: *Boyhood* and *Youth*. He adopts the same performative mode in *Disgrace*. His own position can, therefore, only be gleaned from this removed position. Notwithstanding the responsibility of the author, the final responsibility rests with the reader for it is the reader who carries the sequences of significations outwards from the writer and the novel into her/his life.

This is not to confuse my task in this chapter with an enterprise that focuses on the similarities between the novel and South African society where ‘[w]hat is at stake is how far authorial and narratorial voices are distanced within the text, and who Coetzee’s imagined readership is?’ (Poyner 2000, p.71). In my opinion, wondering about the author’s private achievement of ‘truth and reconciliation in his (postcolonial) writing’, as Poyner does (2000, p.75), is not only gratuitous but also presumptuous that these abstractions can accurately define a state of consciousness for the writer, particularly a writer who repeatedly represents the unknowable knots of life, let alone an onlooker. As Boehmer accurately observes, throughout Coetzee’s work it is not clear if his characters come to terms with their past faults and achieve even secular atonement (2002, pp.342-351). Surely the same can be said for the author? In a similar vein, Lucy, David Lurie’s daughter in *Disgrace*, rejects her father’s interpretation of her decision not to report the rape, using notions of ‘guilt and salvation’ when she declares ‘I don’t act in terms of
abstractions’ (*Dg*, p.112). Lucy’s indignation strikes at the heart of ethical discourse. It seems to me that all theoretical refinements of the concept of ethics count for naught without action. I contend that the value of Coetzee’s writing lies in the capacity of the writer to inspire ethical behaviour, without prescribing the details of what is to be done, in his readership beyond the text, regardless of who or where they may be.

Coetzee displays a sustained interest in resistance as a modality that is caught in a debilitating self-perpetuating loop. He continues to show up the difficulty of shifting perceptual frontiers associated with fixed judgements. In my opinion, the main theme in *Age of Iron* anticipates and is repeated in *Disgrace*. There is a shift in the positions of both protagonists from the centre to the edges of society. Both Mrs Curren and David have much in common, from their academic backgrounds to their reluctance to forego their set ideas about social justice. Even though there is very clear change in the external circumstances of the times from the late apartheid era to post-apartheid South Africa, their stories mirror a similar struggle to come to terms with the dominant political order of the day, be it the white Nationalist or the non-racial ANC government. Both tales enact the hard process of giving up rigid preconceptions and end with the protagonists’ surrender. The difference between the two, however, is that Mrs Curren’s surrender is of life itself, whereas David is left facing the future and the possibility of reconfiguring a worldview that might accommodate his daughter and her choices.

*Disgrace* also continues to demonstrate a diachronic development in Coetzee’s writing in response to the changing milieu in which he writes. This is most evident in the increasing presence and power of the other in the novels. Whereas the significant others are removed from view prior to the end of the text in the earlier novels of *Dusklands*, *In the Heart of the Country* and *Waiting for the Barbarians*, their textual presence rises in the later works. A marginal “Coloured” man is the protagonist of *The Life and Times of Michael K*. Friday takes over from Susan as the focal character in the final scene of *Foe*. Impending transition is foreshadowed but suspended in *Age of Iron* but the black others, Florence Mkubukeli and Mr Thabane among them, hover on the unseen edge of the text. *The Master of Petersburg* presents a detailed study of the unavoidable convergence between the self and the other, thus bringing the other very close. In *Disgrace*, the old order is inverted and the former black labourer Petrus becomes the new landowner and patriarch at the centre.
It is my contention that this dual thrust that sustains the same focus on reflexivity and provisionality but is also continually changing in response to the socio-political realities and evolving ideas confirms the transitional status of Coetzee’s postcolonial ethics as identified by Head (1997, p.160). Head sees Coetzee’s work as creating ‘a model of a recentred postcolonialism [that] takes its real significance by virtue of its specificity and its sense of impermanence: in the case of Coetzee, we can see what the otherwise abstract model of literary decolonisation means for one historical and political nexus.’ (1997, p.160). While Coetzee’s writing is now more pertinent than ever to the changing dynamics in his motherland, it is also highly relevant in a wider global setting, where the basic pattern of colonials and others continues to mutate and become ever more complex with various assimilations and erosions.

Coetzee’s work does offer excellent postcolonial literary material but I assert that Coetzee also contributes to the theory by providing fictional structures that extend current debate. Acknowledging the past reticence of some theorists, to consider the writings of white South African authors as postcolonial, Gillian Whitlock affirms the value of the South African example ‘as a kind of ‘limit’ case, a reminder of how what gets read or viewed or heard, by whom, where and when are vital, politically important components of post-colonial analysis’ (1996, p.69). Coetzee’s writing certainly fulfils Whitlock’s claims as a local case study. I propose, however, that that Coetzee fiction achieves so much more.

I maintain that Coetzee’s fiction presents the scaffolding for broad inter-national discussion that links postcolonial analyses of different regions and the shifting implications of worldwide economic and cultural alignments. In the continuing dialogue on the relevance of postcolonial scholarship, Said argues for a reconsideration of historical experiences that have, until recently, been based on shared geographic location (1995, pp.3-6). There is currently some interesting interdisciplinary work being done on the two separate ‘southern spaces’ of South Africa and Australia (K. Darian-Smith L. Gunner & S. Nuttall (Eds.) 1996) that recognizes the worth of comparative study. Margaret Lenta draws attention to the increased dialogue that is now possible between South Africa and the rest of the world when she states that ‘the claim that we can inform each other, that there is profit in sharing our experience, can, of course, only be made in the post-apartheid period’ (1997, p.151). The Australian home context of Coetzee’s
latest character, *Elizabeth Costello*, adds to this trans-national exchange. The resonances between South Africa and the rest of Africa are clearly noted by Pechey in his writing on *Disgrace* (2002). So too, this novel has been read into issues relating to Israeli settlement (H. Hever 2002; A. Azoulay 2002). A long history of patriarchal structures in innumerable sites and the concurrent Zimbabwean example cast shadows of anxiety that exacerbate the tensions relating to the specific setting of the novel. This dialectic raises some of the problems inherent in simplistic interpretations of Manichean resistances to colonial domination. By troubling these multiple boundaries, Coetzee is continually seeking to open up new perspectives of belonging within a global context.

I suggest that David Lurie’s journey can be read as metonymic of a map of current critical thinking. In the “New South Africa” many past patterns of identification are cast adrift, with changing, unfamiliar structures unsettling the authority and sense of belonging of David. He is a white male intellectual, living in a country in which there is a wide range of political, economic, social and philosophical efforts being made to undo the stronghold of a colonial legacy. He undertakes an epic quest to find a place to belong. His journey resounds with overarching intertextual enrichment that spans the history of his Western cultural tradition across the globe, from classical times to the twentieth century, from mythology, to literature, music and visual art and from his own more immediate lineage of fictional characters in the earlier works of Coetzee, to an engagement with current local and international issues and theory.

Recent postcolonial debate has reached consensus on the hegemonic drive of the Western discursive process and it seems to me that cultural theory is now at the crossroads of acknowledging this, while seeking alternatives to polarising resistance that will allow for the shifting allegiances and the co-existence of different ways of being. I maintain that this theoretical development is traced in *Disgrace*. David’s narrative provides both a representation and interrogation of the Western cultural tradition and it offers alternatives for shared belonging of hybridized identities who embody ambiguous aspects of both the postcolonizer and postcolonized. David takes over the subservient function of ‘dog-man’ from Petrus willingly, as a sign of his own abasement, but he has difficulty accepting the accompanying implications in Lucy’s relinquishment of all past patterns of attachment ‘[t]o start at ground level…With nothing…Yes, like a dog’ (*Dg*, p.205). I disagree with Shane Moran who argues that, ‘since there is little hope of
salvaging a responsible or ethical implied author in the wake of this text, it is surely time to relinquish yet another consoling fetish of criticism’ (2001, p.226). Rather, it seems to me that Coetzee is drawing attention to the need for a fresh starting point, free from the multiple shackles of history.

Frontiers are a fundamental focus of postcolonial criticism and the defining parameters of a sense of belonging. Boundaries establish the difference between the self and the other, the known and the unknown, the cultivated landscape and the wilderness, the safe and the unsafe. They can also be regarded as sites of resistance, potential transgression and transformation. Key critics have noted the cultural significance of boundaries as the borderlines between that which is enclosed and that which remains outside (Minh-ha 1991; Said 1993; Huggan 1995; Henderson 1995; among others). According to Bill Ashcroft, Western epistemology is essentially imperial for it is based on the organisational control of space (1997, pp.31-34). Citing Locke’s philosophy of enclosure as the basis of the Western concept of property, he maintains that boundaries are a central trope for organising spatial knowledge and hence power relations and they are most evident in the colonizing process (1997, pp.27-41).

It is my intention to use Ashcroft’s theory as the basis of my analysis of Disgrace, because it offers an expansive definition of the colonial enterprise that encompasses territorial, racial, gender and discursive domination, all of which are interrogated in the text. Ashcroft further suggests that, ‘[r]ather than simply rejecting boundaries, perceiving their provisionality may be the key to a more subtle dismantling’ (1997, p.36). His notion of the practice of “habitation” describes a ‘way of being which itself defines and transforms place’ (1997, p.27). He sees spatiality as a discourse of power and the provisional boundary becomes a focal metaphor in postcolonial negotiations because the way that spatiality is inhabited demonstrates how power itself is inhabited (1997, pp.27-41). It would seem as if Ashcroft’s aim is to subvert the colonial possession of place by installing the presence of the dispossessed as a transforming signifier, the place becoming an extension of the identity of the person. This represents an ideological reclaiming of territory by the previously dispossessed.

While Ashcroft’s proposition is particularly helpful in addressing the transition from colonial to postcolonial, where the equitable redistribution of power is troublesome
as exemplified in *Disgrace*, I suggest that his argument does not adequately address the place of the colonizer, nor does it consider a sharing of place by people who are antagonistic. It seems to me that the character, Lucy, does achieve mutual *coexistence* that acknowledges difference without asserting dominant occupancy. Her continuing presence, as the newly dispossessed, transforms the country fields into a site of shared value for herself, as a cultivator of daffodils, a product of aesthetics and the poetic rather than physical nourishment and for Petrus as a farmer of maze, the staple diet of the nation. The shadow presence of Petrus’s other wife links Lucy to an extended collective of women whose voices are only beginning to be heard. Driver’s discussion of the new vistas that are emerging was considered in chapter three.

The two concurrent foci that have been consistently entwined into the broader idea of individual positioning and belonging with others in this project are: the presence of the body as being-in-itself, a signifier that belies analysis; and the merging of identities that produces surprising sharings and opportunities of being-for-others. Both of these themes contribute to the central tenet of coexistence around which all other shadings of belonging coalesce.

### 7.1. THE UNSETTLING: THE IDEA AND THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

In this section I shall trace the parallel changes in the social order and David’s shift from a position at the centre to the margins. I shall examine the changing contexture of the novel; ‘contexture’ being the term Hobbes used to connote both the texture that surrounds and the texture that constitutes’ (cited in Valentine & Peck 1996, p.1). Within the narrative, the interwoven outlines of the authority and dominion of the public persona are frayed. These include his employment, intellectual authority, property ownership, and sexual presumptions. So too, David’s private sense of identity seems to be destabilized by the gaps that are exposed between his belief in his essential, fixed nature and his mobile existential experience. This becomes increasingly evident in the disjuncture between David’s discursively-constrained experience of people and situations and what they, in fact, are. At the same time his sense of isolation is increased.
It is my contention that the discrepancy between the idea David has of his essential identity and his existential engagement with the world is accentuated in the narrative form of the novel and Coetzee’s language usage. The distinctions between the theoretical idea and the lived experience can be seen as an aporia between a static and a provisional sense of self that is always in the process of being formed in an ever-changing external environment. The perpetual effort to align the idea with the lived experience is, I believe, synonymous with the desire to belong.

It seems to me that our Western expectation seeks static certainty that belies the reality of our ever-changing existence. Paul Carter puts forward the idea that our scientific tradition is based on a spatial metaphor that conceptualizes a levelled ground that is fully visible for analytical enclosure and mapping (1996). He says that Westerners delight in ‘stripping away appearances to uncover a firmer bedrock of reality’ (1996, p.3). He further argues that writing that reflects ‘the unevenly folded nature of the environment that we inhabit ... must, presumably also accept its implications. It will not be panoptic, not attempt to see through the ‘cloudy’ passages where linear lines of descent are obscured’ (1996, p.366). While Carter focuses on the spatial metaphor of the lie of the land, it seems to me that he is employing a temporal medium, for the undulations of the landscape shift with the movement of the narrator’s gaze.

This disparity between our expectations of stability and the mobility of our reality which Carter identifies provides a useful theoretical starting point from which to consider the tension between the protagonist and his experiences, his fixed position and the challenging times in Disgrace. Many of the aspects of David’s life to which he has secured his sense of identity fall apart. He no longer has a sense of belonging, for his position of authority is withdrawn when he is dismissed from the university for misconduct with a student. His physical safety is threatened when he is set alight by his daughter’s attackers. His belief in his masculine sexual prowess is steadily stripped away. Even his creative productivity flounders.

Coetzee shows that David’s inner sense of displacement is exacerbated by the external realities of moving social and legal boundaries. The increasing physical signs of Petrus’s expanding occupancy of the land attest to the changing times. In Salem Lucy’s
choices flag a different social and moral order that contrasts with the conservative environment that David is forced to give up in Cape Town. Both Lucy’s involuntary and chosen relationships with Petrus and his family install new barriers that extend her father’s sense of exclusion.

In my opinion Coetzee’s metafictional task and the purpose of David’s fictional journey of discovery are expressed in a lecture that he gives on a Wordsworth poem in which the view of Mont Blanc turns out to be a disappointment: ‘The great archetypes of the mind, pure ideas, find themselves usurped by mere sense images. ... The quest is not, how can we keep the imagination pure, protected from the onslaught of reality? The question has to be, Can we find a way for the two to co-exist?’ (Dg, p.22).

By raising this philosophical question, Coetzee is foregrounding the inherent difficulty in achieving this co-existence of the idea and reality. Here I suggest that Coetzee can be read as extending Carter’s theory of the spatial paradox between the notional and the real in his writing. In acknowledging this difficulty, it seems to me that Coetzee may be identifying the elusiveness of a final sense of belonging. Coetzee’s writing certainly seems to be true to the undulations of the changing cultural landscape with the numerous incomprehensible crevices and shadows that David experiences. By focussing in on the disparity between the static idea and the mobile encounter with the ever-changing times, Coetzee seems to be tracing the essential frontier to belonging.

Both the narrative form of Disgrace and the language usage highlight the gap between an established sense of self and a fluid sense of becoming. According to Carter, our Western system of reference does not easily allow for co-existence of the idea and the lived experience. It is this uncertain duality that Coetzee adumbrates in the style of writing which he employs in Disgrace. Movement is a central trope, with David’s changing spatial occupancy representing a physical mapping of the transitional times. This continual shifting exposes the gaps in Western epistemology.

Coetzee shadows the unclear, varying boundary between thinking and immediate experience in the free indirect narrative form in the present tense. David’s attitudinal framework, which includes his sexual, racial, judicial and moral codes, is increasingly at odds with the new world that he encounters. David’s preferences and concerns are
included throughout the text, thereby suggesting an intimate disclosure of the man, and yet there are moments when his gaze is out of focus. These represent the hidden undulations in Carter’s terms. In a scene that is reminiscent of David’s academic expertise in the romantic poets, he observes his daughter (Dg, p.218). Initially, David is at the centre with his own sensate experience of wind and sun. His visual focus seems to recede as the narratorial perspective moves to the frozen scene of Lucy in the field. The scene is removed yet further from the South African location, in the reference to the classical English and French painters, Sargent and Bonnard. This cinematic technique traces the disjuncture between David’s theoretical knowledge and his experiential reality.

It seems to me that the continual movement of the narrating gaze in relation to David’s sense of self has a double effect. It parallels the shifts between David’s existential life, his physical and emotional response to his surroundings and his intellectualising about his situation. It also adds an independent confirmation of the unintelligible aspects of his life, both to others and to himself. Remembering that David’s worldview is predicated on knowledge and logic, the opaque shadows that lie over some of his actions, intentions and responses destabilise David’s sense of where he belongs. In spite of providing another speaking position, the narrator’s inability to provide an alternative lens that might refine the explanations, and shrink unknown areas of David’s story, merely accentuates the insecurity of David’s position and disorients the reader sense of stable rational reference markers.

Linguistic studies on the deferred meaning of language have established that reality cannot be directly represented. All languages are oppositional in structure. Moreover, the incongruity between the medium of English and the African terrain emphasizes the crack between a character’s reality and its articulation. One focus of postcolonial debate has been the colonizing impetus of the language of the imperial centre. This emphasizes the displacement of the postcolonizing subject, whose symbolic identity is colonial, while his experiential drift is towards the margins of postcolonial relevance. Magda in In the Heart of the Country displays this ambivalence.

I maintain that the primary means of representation, the language, itself, is troublesome. James Wood states that the reduced precision of Coetzee’s prose becomes
an impoverishment, and an unnatural containment...in which fiction is no longer presenting complexity but is in fact converting complexity into its own too-certain language’ (2000, p.3). While I agree with Wood that the prose used is an ‘unnatural containment’, I suggest that his assessment fails to acknowledge that the ‘too-certain language’ may be a deliberate authorial ploy to demonstrate the limitations of the language. I prefer Carol Iannone’s observation that the skeletal prose demonstrates Coetzee’s belief, a belief that is shared by his character, David, that ‘English is an unfit medium for the truth of South Africa. Like a dinosaur expiring and settling in the mud, the language has stiffened’ (2000, p.117). I maintain that a ‘too-certain language’ that has ‘stiffened’ connotes a brittleness that is insufficient to the demands of the times. David’s perspective is thought-provoking. His colonial language certainly bears the weight of a history that is scarred by confrontation, but the question remains: is any language able to transcend the oppositional strictures of symbolic representation?

Horrell may be accurate in her assessment that the ‘archaic strictures of European language’ are inadequate to convey the depth of contrition required by white South Africans for the atrocities of the past, yet I disagree with her conclusion that ‘a violent un-settling and ultimate subjugation and reversal of hegemony are all, it would seem, that is offered to Coetzee’s white nation’ (2002, p.31). In my opinion, Horrell’s argument is caught up in the same immobilising trap of oppositional thinking that has stultified the language. In contrast, Pechey notes an ‘antinomian dimension’ that frees up judgements and operates beyond the linearity of rational thinking when David learns the meaning of ‘love’, ‘the strongest of all monosyllables in the English lexicon’ in the act of showing care to unwanted animals (2002, p.382). It seems to me that Pechey is correct in identifying action and not words as the means by which the spatial and temporal frontiers of David’s positioning can be overcome. Rather than an alternative African language, it is the incongruous reality of South Africa at this time of transition and reconfiguration of the notion of belonging for everyone that offers David new opportunities.

For both Sanders and Michael Holland it would appear that the problem of shared belonging begins in Coetzee’s address of the limitations of the language. I agree with Sanders who suggests that English usage as a globalizing tool is inadequate to end the ongoing condition of imperial disgrace and he regards a shift to shared ownership of
the language to be the fundamental starting point for coexistence (2002, pp.363-373). Holland demonstrates the limitations of discursive structures (2002, pp.395-404). He argues that David increasingly slips into a marginal spatial and temporal dimension where ‘the signifying function [of language] is suspended’ in the climax of the whole novel, the plink-plunk of the banjo, and so Coetzee presents a different form of writing that gives the reader ‘direct contact with the immediate present of material existence’ (2002, p.404). To Holland’s excellent appraisal I would add that the ‘single note of immortal longing’ of the banjo (Dg, p.214) transcends differences in understandings, for it strikes a chord that reverberates across time, reviving the song of Teresa, and even across the species barrier to raise the howling response of the dog. This resonance connotes a common space of identification beyond the frontiers of symbolic containment and it might be seen as the basis for the sharing that Sanders proposes.

While David is the character around whom the narrative is developed, the implications of the simultaneous clarity and muddiness of his purpose are significant in unsettling any omniscient analysis of wider events in the novel or the current situation in South Africa. Carter maintains that ‘[i]n its simplest terms, the challenge that confronts us...is to move differently, to learn to dissolve the emotionally-catatonic and historically-destructive opposition between mobility and stasis...writers need to imagine their ‘field’ of endeavour differently’ (1996, p.5). The mode of narrative representation in Disgrace is true to the shifting cultural landscape that David follows. Coetzee records the irregular and mobile lie of the land, with its comprehensible open spaces and its hidden gullies. I would add that this metafictional enterprise may be simultaneously re-considering the adversarial process of ideological exclusivity inherent in Western forms of discourse and opening an imaginative opportunity for co-existence that lies beyond critical scrutiny.

It is interesting to note that the term ‘ethics’ comes from the Greek word ethos which Heidegger translates as being not so much ‘the character that belongs to man’, but as ‘lodging’, ‘the place where one lives’, ‘the open region in which man dwells’ (quoted in Iain Chambers 1993, p.190). This emphasizes that ethics is not just an idea about living but also includes living. It connotes a receptive attitude to place that is open to change, to future and to embracing otherness. Hence, by attempting to align the idea with the experience of living, I maintain that Coetzee is calling for action, but with the
clear acknowledgement of the impossibility to bridge the gap between the two. Rather, it seems to me that the narrative calls for the continual negotiation for the two to co-exist in a dynamic relationship, starting with shared ownership of language, that strives towards an ethical example.

7.1.1. THE EXTRA-TEXTUAL STAIN OF DISGRACE

I shall now show that the boundary between text and reader is porous, for the reader is implicated in the construction of narrative meaning and is hence complicit in installing or reinforcing frontiers that exclude and estrange.

The essential shame in the novel is sexual, yet disgrace pervades the text, affecting most of the characters and even the writer and the reader. In her analysis of sexual transgression, Tanya Krzywinksa uses Bataille’s theory that it is transgression that defines the structure and shape of a cultural system to demonstrate that “[t]he paradoxical double-bind of transgression is that we are impelled to transgress the limits of self and culture but, at the same time, also impelled to conserve and maintain these limits” (1999, p.188). She stresses that shame and anguish are experienced when the cultural frontiers are ignored. Krzywinka is suggesting that sexual transgression is an attempt to test the boundaries between individual behaviour and the expectations of society. To this I would add that sexual transgression and its censure are merely one overt manifestation of a striving to establish a community. In chapter three I examined Coetzee’s precocious use of sexual transgression as a subversive tool to shift the rigid entrapment of a daughter of the colonies.

Many of the cultural parameters in the novel are confronting for they are transgressive. The representation of the villains as Blacks is disconcerting for two reasons. It may be regarded as a harking back to the myth-making stereotypes that bolstered so much apartheid paranoia and the historical determinism of that epoch (Attwell 2002, pp.331-341). Lucy’s silence can be read as not only disempowering for women but also defeating for participants (Boehmer 2002, pp.342-351). The horror of the violence and the ongoing risk of repeat attacks are equally shocking to all readers.
Lucy’s decisions to keep a child conceived during a rape and her marriage of convenience to a polygamist who is possibly the uncle of her rapist are highly controversial choices for a Western society.

What can Coetzee’s intention be in striking so harshly at the sensibilities of his audience? In my opinion, this is no mere gratuitous exploration of subversion. The affront is abrasive and relentless, exacerbated by the urgent pace of the narrative. Each shameful act is followed by another until, in the end, disgrace has permeated the entire narrative. It cannot be avoided. Even those who have not perpetrated such acts, like Lucy, are tainted with the consequences. Here the reader cannot escape. Any protective distancing from the text is eroded by the strong response that such confrontation elicits and s/he is vulnerable to the consequences, the seepage of the stain.

This is, I suggest, a finely crafted challenge to the presumptions that underlie some of those very sensitivities that we develop in order to secure a zone in which we can feel safe, enclosed, and at home. I maintain that Coetzee is prompting his readers to interrogate the ideological frameworks to which we belong and to examine what frontiers we erect in the process and what price we have to pay for these boundaries. He is questioning the entire foundation upon which we have constructed our sense of belonging, starting with our ownership of language, to our individual sense of connectedness to place and our membership of groups, regardless of where we might live.

The twofold complicity of the reader is a key to the extra-textual spillage of shame. By identifying with some of the thinking of the main character, the reader has to admit to agreeing with some of David’s reasoning. Here Coetzee’s method appears to imitate that of Dostoevsky in *Crime and Punishment*, for the associations of complicity are similar. The reader also shares responsibility for constructing the signification of *Disgrace*.

Wood criticizes some of Coetzee’s language usage as the ‘sheerest conventionality’ that ‘would not be out of place in a mass-market thriller’ (2000, p.3). I do agree that some of his passages present conventional, even stale, overused metaphors to describe certain culturally entrenched patterns of behaviour, such as the seduction of a
woman. I suggest, however, that this popular style only confirms the familiarity of the rituals for the reader, and so Coetzee beguiles the reader into easy identification with the process of domination, if not the character. Other Western patriarchal structures are also echoed here.

It seems to me that Coetzee has deliberately created a haziness around the racial identity of some of his characters such as Michael K in *The Life and Times of Michael K*, and Vercueil in *Age of Iron*, in order to challenge the very specific set of parameters whereby racial identity was evaluated by the former South African government. Such careful formulae were essential as the entire social, political and economic structure of the society was predicated upon racial classifications. By avoiding such definitive signs of identification, Coetzee has prompted keen critical debate on the importance of understanding where the character fitted in the apartheid hierarchy and inflexibility of the system.

Now, with a change in government policy since 1994, the purpose of this complex pattern of classification has shifted. Formerly it was used for demographic policing and restricting the movement of Blacks but now it has become the source of the ANC led government's strategies of affirmative action and black empowerment. Some of the commentary on *Disgrace* considers the racial grouping of the characters. Ionnone considers that the surnames of David Lurie and Melanie Isaac might be Jewish (2000, p.1). The historic loading of group identification includes connotations of a shared identity or exile from "the promised land". It would seem as if these commentators have become stuck in the trap of externally imposed racial categorising, the very action for which the former Nationalist government was condemned. In this curious postmodern twist, it is the critic who becomes the perpetrator and the perpetrator of a defunct colonial process.

But are such critics the only ones to be so "disgraced"? In my opinion, the habit of racial categorisation is not so easily kept at bay. The collusive taint cannot be avoided. It might be argued that the history of the old bureaucratic architecture continues to leave its stamp on the present, an imprint that cannot be left out if the interactions between characters are to be understood.
Coetzee does not articulate the racial grouping of any characters directly, but the reader assumes that the social structure confirms the racial identity of most characters. These assumptions form the basis of the narrative tension. According to Glen Elder, the socio-spatial relations were reconfigured in the apartheid era such that ‘racial identities [were] invented by inscribing them in space’ (1998, p.154). The structure of the society is most evident in the socio-economic dynamics of Salem. Lucy’s property is the setting in which the reader meets Lucy. In contrast, Petrus is introduced to the text in the doorway of her home, dressed as a labourer. His role is confirmed when he adds: ‘I am the gardener and the dog-man’ (Dg, p.64). Their respective racial identities are automatically deduced from their inscription in space and their economic circumstances. As yet, this practice is not defunct, although the signs that these outdated foundations are beginning to crumble are quite evident in Petrus increasing status and property ownership. At last Petrus declares: ‘No more dogs. I am not any more the dog-man’ (Dg, p.129). Similarly, the planned family organization, with Petrus as head of the household and Lucy as one of his wives with her mixed race child, will disrupt the old patterns, rendering them unrecognisable.

Coetzee accentuates the limited time available to adjust to the changing order in the use of the present tense and the sparse and efficient prose that emphasizes an accelerated pace in the plot development. This creates a feeling of pressure for the reader to secure meaning before the social configuration changes and the boundaries of identification become too murky. Nevertheless, the text remains resistant to closure and this, in turn, exacerbates reader anxiety.

In the replication of some of the atrocities that have occurred within his own country and beyond, I contend that Coetzee is offering no neat compensatory “aesthetic” value in his work for the stain of disgrace spills beyond the text in the relentless interrogation of legitimisation by all players, including the readers. Leo Bersani is concerned that:

[a] crucial assumption in the culture of redemption is that a certain type of repetition of experience in art repairs inherently damaged or valueless experience...The catastrophes of history matter much less if they are somehow compensated for in art, and art itself gets reduced to a kind of superior patching function, is enslaved to those very materials to which it presumably imparts value. (1990, p.1)
It seems to me that Coetzee avoids such a risk by drawing attention to the complicity of the reader in establishing meaning and in connecting the narrative threads in the novel to specific real circumstances. Coetzee is highlighting the reader’s hermeneutic responsibility for the close scrutiny of the demarcation lines by which we define our place in the world. In the introduction I have shown that the aesthetics of *ubuntu* as a signifier of desire for connectedness, as explained by Titlestad and Sanders, requires that the reader take responsibility. As the three-way parallels between the fictional, the real and the critical commentary would suggest, the implications of those markers for our own and others’s sense of belonging in the future are of great ethical relevance in the present.

### 7.2. THE QUEST TO BELONG

In this section, I shall trace the mutating patterns of territorial, sexual, and artistic hegemony. The landscape, the sexual body and imaginative inventions are the spaces on which Coetzee draws this palimpsest. By considering these overlapping areas, I propose to demonstrate how Coetzee interrogates the shifting boundaries of colonial and neo-colonial property, male sexual domination and the supremacy of the canonical form over the aesthetic vision.

I will explore David Lurie’s quest to belong by tracing his relationship to place, to others, specifically three women, and his creative pursuit. Whereas, in the past, David may have had a fixed sense of who he was and where he fitted in society, in the present all certainty is unsettled. A number of personal and collective myths that used to reinforce his identity prove to be inadequate. The changes that occur during the course of the narrative destabilize these and allow for alternative ways of coexistence with others and a freedom to explore unfamiliar strains of creative longing.

Belonging can be defined as a state of connectedness to place and to other people based on shared identification from the past or a common worldview. Pamela Shurmer-Smith and Kevin Hannam maintain that most Western people tend to merge ideas of people, place, belonging and stability into one unified concept and they further imply
that a separation of the different components is necessary, if an analysis of each is to be effective (1994, p.30).

The spatial concept of centre is at the heart of colonial identity. Tuan argues that ‘[m]ythical space is an intellectual construct ...[which] is also a response of feeling and imagination to fundamental human needs’ (1977, p.99). Paradoxically, the myth of the centre is an attempt to find a position of belonging in an insecure environment, although the spatial myth perpetuates the polar vulnerability of the subject as the boundaries then represent the threat of exclusion. Because the concept of centre is not bound to a specific site but is simply an idea, it can be rethought.

By following the David’s physical, relational and creative journey, I shall examine Coetzee’s re-visioning of spatiality, in which Ashcroft’s notion of “habitation” and the extension of coexistence also offers the possibility of release for the postcolonizing subject from the mythic confines of enclosure. It is my argument that David does glean glimpses of sharing with Bev and Teresa when he gives up the solitary orbit of his self-centredness, yet these are only brief intimations. He only surrenders completely on the last page of the novel. I maintain, therefore, that it is for the reader that Coetzee is making the potential for coexistence available. Of course, how the reader makes use of the insight that Coetzee provides, is up to each one of us.

7.2.1. SURRENDERING COLONIAL CLAIMS

I shall now explore some implications of colonial inscription, erasure and neo-colonial re-inscription of spatiality. The narrative follows the circular route of David’s geographic journey, from Cape Town to Salem and around again. Coetzee adumbrates the socio-political re-configurations of colonial power in the changes in the character’s personal circumstances. This map is metonymic of the shift in David’s historic position of superiority. As the old patterns of domination diminish, so the territorial occupancy of Petrus expands. Along David’s journey, his patrifocal, deductive method of evaluating the changes is shown up to be deficient for many of the affiliations and choices that he encounters defy critical assessment. Nevertheless, the very presence of these re-
alignments offers a different order of challenge to the discursive formulae upon which his justifications depend. The narrative shifts away from the initial preoccupation with David’s egocentric ways in Cape Town as wider socio-cultural realities in Salem take over. His increasing marginalisation becomes a trope for the increasing irrelevance of his closed racist attitudes. These changes are metaphorically represented in his marginal, abased position.

It seems to me that David’s shame becomes more than a mere judicial admission of disgrace, a theoretical balance to offset the heckling of a self-righteous Cape Town public. Rather, David experiences the full reality of abasement in the steady erosion of his sense of belonging. The impact of living in a state of abasement in Salem is enacted in the rest of the novel and far outweighs the myth of a fixed identity suggested at the start.

I assert that some of the fundamental myths attached to place are debunked in Coetzee’s text. Tuan maintains that ‘[p]ermanence is an important element in the idea of place. Things and objects endure and are dependable in ways that human beings, with their biological weaknesses and shifting moods, do not endure and are not dependable’ (1977, p.140). It seems to me that Tuan is not taking the effect of time upon spatiality into account. Similarly, I maintain that S. Bordo, B. Klein and M.K. Silverman present “home” as an unproblematic and constant site of belonging that belies the shifting condition of reality (1998, pp.72-92). They state that ‘[h]ome as a truly safe place, the container and springboard for integrated living, is the foundation of an ontologically secure existence’ (1998, p.90). I prefer Henri Lefèvre’s approach, which asserts that places may have a multiplicity of shifting meanings (1991).

As I have discussed earlier in this chapter, the notion of change certainly impacts on static spatial theory. In Disgrace David finds that his home has been vandalized when he returns to Cape Town. The boundaries that previously secured his protection have changed and now present barriers to his settling back. Having come full circle geographically, he does not belong anywhere. His spatial displacement is metonymic of the complete marginality of his ideative base in the current social flux. The discovery he makes on completing the circle is the very antithesis of completion: he starts to
relinquish the notion of a destination with its associations of closure and solutions, and instead he embraces the heart and the open-endedness of the present.

In my opinion, Coetzee revises the notion of home as a place of provisional belonging in the present. Back in Salem, David finds a temporary place to belong in the bare compound behind the clinic, where unwanted dogs are incinerated. He re-envisions the parameters that define his sense of belonging. His presence transforms the yard with cages of abandoned dogs into the venue where his composition comes alive. In Ashcroft’s terms, David’s “habitation” changes a humble fringe place of shame into a site of energetic creativity.

I propose that Coetzee opens up this space for coexistence when he casts David in the role of the “unintelligible other”. Three little boys scale the wall and peer down at him. The boys’ disregard for the boundary implies that it is a unilateral frontier signifying David’s enclosure or entrapment. The narrator comments: ‘What a tale to tell back home: a mad old man who sits among the dogs singing to himself?’ (Dg, p.212). Assuming that David shares this perspective of the narrator, this is a very important indication of the protagonist’s willingness to recognize himself as the other in the prevailing system. This shift connotes the beginning of an openness to sharing.

I suggest that Coetzee shows a parallel shift between David’s external environment and his internal perspective. Initially, David attempts to regulate the configuration of his belonging, but, from the start, Coetzee shows that others are required to collaborate in establishing that belonging. It is the failure of others to comply with David’s expectations that exposes his vulnerabilities. The withdrawal of Soraya from their Thursday arrangement and economic rationalism at the university where he works challenge David’s hegemony. These examples are evidence of a widening gap between David’s sense of self and the world in which he lives. This echoes similar disparities in the self-perception of Coetzee’s first fictional characters in Dusklands.

The developmental aspect of Coetzee’s work comes to the fore here. Unlike those first protagonists who show no signs of changing, David does let go of some of his fixed ideas when he accepts a simple existential being-in-the-world (the Sartrean être-en-soi) of “habitation”. Ironically, when he starts to relinquish control by not trying to
understand and rationalize, surprise opportunities open for him in three areas: he finds a place of provisional belonging with the dogs, he reconciles his idea of his masculine sexuality with the reality of his own aging body and his creative energy surges. Nevertheless, the overriding frontier to his sense of belonging, his refusal to accept the new order to which Lucy aligns herself, persists.

Coetzee juxtaposes the shifting positions of authority of the two patriarchs, David and Petrus. Petrus’s expanding land ownership might be read as neo-colonial. I would add, however, that Petrus may have adopted a European property model, yet his willingness to include Lucy and her attacker under his protective umbrella signifies a different form of tenure. I believe that this inclusivity demonstrates ubuntu, the notion of a deep African humanism which Mazisi Kunene describes as ‘the essence of being human’ (1996, pp.16-38). This African concept of identity was traced in chapter five. The feast which Petrus organizes is evidence of the African social organization that Kunene describes as an opportunity ‘to celebrate life for all people’ (1996, p.36). Petrus’s actions attest to his confident “habitation” of the previously colonial territory that includes a willingness to embrace the notion of coexistence with diverse others. There is more than a sense of shared purpose by a number of individuals in ubuntu. Rather, the connotations of commonality imply a more essential unity, a merged identity. The twin notions of pervasive shared complicity and responsibility in such mergings that have been installed in earlier works (In the Heart of the Country and The Master of Petersburg) are reiterated here.

It is not my intention to represent the new African hierarchy as an unproblematic alternative to colonial structures - for two reasons. First, to do so would be merely to contribute to the Manichean dualities that Coetzee is seeking to revise. Secondly, I suggest that there are significant issues of social justice that remain unresolved in the text. These relate to the criminal abuse of Lucy and the ongoing threat to her safety by one of the perpetrators. There is also an absence of African women’s voices that raises unanswered questions. I do think, however, that the African ontology of ubuntu presents a more inclusive starting point of renegotiating the frontiers of belonging.

I contend that Coetzee is explaining that these alternative possibilities inherent in Petrus’s patriarchal structure cannot be accommodated within an oppositional discursive
framework where the lines of confrontation are unyielding, hence they are not acknowledged by David. He refuses to review his racist attitudes to his black opponent, because of his overriding sense of violation and challenge. It seems to me that David’s defensive mode reinforces the barrier that excludes him from a sense of belonging, even with his daughter, although he does show some sign of wanting to reconnect with her: ‘Visitorship, visitation: as new footing, a new start’ (Dg, p.218).

In contrast, Coetzee installs a new paradigm of belonging in the example of Lucy. Her choice to stay on the farm represents an alternative to the hegemonic domination associated with her cultural background and yet I would also argue that hers is not a subservient position that extends binary thinking. She can be seen as the colonialist who is seeking a way out of a historical enclosure by choosing a postcolonial reinscription of place as “habitation”, in Ashcroft’s terms. In fact her example goes even further to include some aspects of coexistence. Her sense of empowerment seems clear enough, and yet there are doubts about her safety and her subjugation under the new rule of law. Critical debate about the contradictions between Lucy as violated body, silent victim, restricted agent, inviolate other and transforming signifier of place will be more closely examined in a later section of this chapter.

I read the end scene as a metaphoric enactment of colonial surrender. It is the dissolution of the last vestiges of Western epistemological hegemony. David’s attachment to the crippled dog and the possible wish to save it from the lethal shot signifies the final trace of rational justification which is the very substance of oppositional discursive closure. In the Christian imagery of a lamb being brought to its slaughter, David sacrifices the animal. Here Coetzee is drawing on the familiar Western religious symbol of redemption that connotes release from an entrapping past pattern, the fixed idea that man’s sinful nature excludes him from coexistence with God. Christ, the lamb, was sacrificed on the cross to atone for the sins of mankind. But does David achieve atonement?

There has been eager critical debate on this question. Most see feint hints of hope but no clear signs of the protagonist’s release from his state of abasement. Boehmer concludes that he does arrive at ‘a kind of an unconscious redemption’ (2002, p.349). For Holland, all discourse is suspended, but not in nihilism (2002, p.404). Pechev
perceives the inversion of *god* and *dog* as the meeting of equal and opposite others from which grace can be conceived but whether or not the protagonist achieves atonement he chooses not to say (2002, p.383). Sanders identifies a progressive state rather than a completed condition in David’s final statement: ‘[y]es, I am giving him up’ (quoted in Sanders 2002, p.368). I agree with these critics that atonement is uncertain and I maintain that David’s yielding up of the last point of meaning, his attachment to the dog, is a trope for the origin of ethical action. I, therefore, suggest that redemption, as a state that occurs after the completion of a process (absolution in religious terms, or relinquishment in secular terms), for both David and the reader lies in action beyond the text.

Coetzee certainly presents a novel form of the process of relinquishing meaning that may, indeed, represent a reduction to emptiness, nevertheless, I maintain that this is not a condition of stasis requiring ongoing resistance, but rather a moment from which new, previously unconsidered opportunities of coexistence with otherness can emerge. Commenting on the new imperialism of Western culture, Ziauddin Sardar argues that:

> [w]hen it looks out of the dark enclosure of its soul, western civilisation now perceives nothing but the echo of its inner emptiness. Unless it is consciously resisted, this dismal emptiness will envelope all that is distinctive about Other cultures and makes them genuinely Other: alternatives to the west. (1998, p.16)

I would argue that an ethical reading of the text does require resistance in Sagar’s terms, yet this resistance is limited for it ends with the novel. It seems to me that, beyond the text, it is up to the reader to take up the small examples of coexistence in the novel and to extend them in collaborative action in the real world.

### 7.2.2. MIRRORED VIOLATIONS

In this section I shall examine the overarching comparison between David’s sexual transgression of his student, Melanie, and the rape of his daughter. I suggest that Coetzee stirs up the muddiness of the boundaries that separate socially accepted sexual relationships from those that are generally thought to be transgressive in order to
interrogate their function. Coetzee shows not only the extensive marginalisation of women’s desires but also the vulnerability of men, the protagonist and the shadow other attackers. Again the question of belonging in an oppositional situation arises.

Boundaries serve the purpose of controlling the behaviour of those who belong to the society, which, in turn, reinforces the dominance of the cultural code. But, as Bataille (cited in Krzywinksa 1999, p.188) suggests, sexual transgression also defines boundaries, hence, David’s infringement can be seen as paradoxical for it both affirms and erodes moral codes. Is it only by his reform or expulsion that the society can restore the parameters of its order? By examining the impact of ‘the rights of desire’ (Dg, p.89) that Coetzee is tracing, I shall consider the extent of masculine sexual domination and the cost involved. It seems to me that a sense of belonging is at stake.

The male colonization of the female body is a theme that Coetzee employs to interrogate the shifting boundaries of identity, transgression and belonging in a number of his novels such as Dusklands, In the Heart of the Country and Waiting for the Barbarians. Elder has said that, in the process of ensuring a racially segregated society in the apartheid system, ‘South African bodies were also subjected to exceptionally violent and destructive forces’ (1998, p.154). The burden of this dreadful legacy is recounted in Disgrace. A number of feminists concur that the body is positioned geopolitically and hence it represents a site of struggle (Nast & Pile 1998, pp.2-3). For Elizabeth Grosz, the body is not finalized but is in a continual state of becoming (1994). Lori Lefkowitz maintains that ‘the body is alternately inviolate, vulnerable, and violated, a construct never fully itself’ (1997, p.1). As such, the body can be read as a porous metaphor upon which other meanings can be inscribed.

I contend that David’s relationship with Melanie is a transgression not only of Melanie’s body but also of his own integrity. The unsolicited force of his actions connotes violence. His overt violence against the girl becomes covert violence against himself. Here Coetzee’s perennial interest in the anxiety to secure identity is repeated. Just as Jacobus is the colonizing subject who transgresses the cultural boundaries of the Khoisan in a futile attempt to define his own identity in Dusklands, so David’s transgressive claims to Melanie’s body erode the structure of his own sense of self.
Coetzee draws attention to the dominant mores that prevail in the absence of any claim to the contrary. Melanie does not articulate her position and her name, meaning the dark one (Dg, p.18), implies both inscrutability and foreboding. The laminations of outrage of those around her seem to add to her perceived injury. This includes her boyfriend’s rage, her father’s distress, the university hearing and the public outcry. Consequently, David is doubly damned: by his guilt for his sexual domination and by the societal judgement of his transgression.

Coetzee uses the mirroring of the two acts of violence as a signifier of the ambiguous dominance of masculine sexuality and an intimate indicator of a wider patrifocal colonial dilemma. One of the attackers is named Pollux, a twin in Greek mythology, connoting shadings of sexual brotherhood with David. On the one hand, there is disparity between David’s egocentric sexual gaze and his harsh criticism of Lucy’s offenders. On the other hand, the disquieting similarities between the two storylines suggest subterranean linkages between David and the others that challenge the visible boundaries that he so adamantly defends between his well-articulated self-righteous position and that of the other violators.

Coetzee sets up a few differences between the two sexual transgressions. The finely wrought formal judicial process, whereby the university admonishes David, is juxtaposed with the lack of information about any punishment of Lucy’s attackers and their apparent acceptance and protection by Petrus. The African system of justice remains impenetrable to the scrutiny that is founded on Western juridical principles. I maintain that this comparison confirms and extends the idea of the limitations of rational understanding and judgements.

In my opinion, the toilet in which David is locked for the duration of the attack on Lucy is metonymic of his uncomfortable position on the edge between victim and perpetrator. The ambivalent implications of this tiny site are later repeated when Elizabeth Costello withdraws to a toilet cubicle, thus demonstrating the pervasive taint of evil and its isolating effect in Coetzee’s latest work. In Kristevan terms, this can be defined as an abject place, a transitional site. As such, it is metonymic of the most significant shift in the text, the moment at which all that went before becomes altered, a prolonged moment of meaningless horror out of which will emerge a wisp of hope at the
end of the novel. David is imprisoned by his inability to help the dogs or his daughter and his observations form a grid through which he sifts all later experience. Ironically, his prison is also his retreat. When he is locked up, he is safe from attack.

This ambivalence can be read as a metaphor for the paradox of the Western discursive process. Boundaries that contain our field of understanding might protect us from the threat of what we do not know but they also confine us. Huggan argues that ‘the role of cartography...in post-colonial writing in general, cannot be solely envisaged as the reworking of a particular spatial paradigm but consists rather in the implementation of a series of creative revisions’ (1995, p.411). In my opinion, a spatial paradigm of frontiers that divide people can be rethought to include shared space, where different individuals can work together towards a common goal. So, while Ashcroft’s notion of “habitation” does provide a useful theoretical tool for defining place in terms of the occupancy of the dispossessed, the horror chamber in which Coetzee’s character is trapped seems to require a different “creative revision” that includes a site of coexistence.

It is my contention that Lucy provides this opportunity. Literally, it is she who has access to the key on the other side of the lavatory door. This is, indeed, a shift. The primary victim now has the power to release a secondary victim from his cell. Perhaps this is a harbinger of things to come. Metaphysically, the daughter’s choices contain the means to her father’s release from an entombing past and his fixed temperament.

7.2.3. SITES OF TRANSFORMATION

Coetzee presents three women, Bev Shaw, Teresa, and Lucy, as complementary transformational opportunities for the protagonist. I shall demonstrate that their ways of being-in-the-world offer a range of different creative re-visions on belonging. Bev offers a fresh perspective on intimate relations between the genders. In Teresa, David finds an authentic creative voice that does not conform to canonical prescription. Lucy provides the most enduring, modelling a different form of existential “habitation”. The place of
the silent other wife is certainly present but not yet visible. Perhaps a further clearing in the real world is needed for this to occur.

Instead of offering only the binary choices of inclusion or exclusion that seem to be available to David in his sexual relationships, Coetzee installs another more subtle undoing of this power base in David’s last intimate relationship, the one incongruous coupling with Bev Shaw. In my opinion, there is a subtle shift in the power relations. It is still transgressive of popular sexual mythology and of social laws, in the sense that Bev is married, middle-aged and unattractive, although now it is the woman who initiates the proposal. David is ‘suckoured’ by her in the clinic (Dg, p.150). This is her territory. His bodily drives remain the same, but he now relinquishes his analytical domination and concedes that he is bereft of authority, including the authority of understanding. It is noteworthy that this occurs after the attack on Lucy, when the devastating power of male domination is brought home to him. Here, I suggest that Coetzee uses this communion with Bev as an enactment of David’s most abject acknowledgement of his abasement as a sexual colonizer.

In David’s surprise discovery of Teresa’s song of longing, it seems to me that Coetzee not only subverts some of the patriarchal myths that have contributed to the hegemony of the canon but he also offers the different form of representation as an example with some wider implications for coexistence. Barthes suggests that ‘[t]he very end of myths is to immobilize the world’ (1957, p.155). Throughout the novel David has been trying to write an opera about the love affair between Lord Byron and Teresa, based on his extensive knowledge of the Romantic poets and the Romance languages. After a circuitous route to bridge the gap between his expectations and his failure to deliver, David begins to listen to Teresa in his imagination. His rich background in artistic and cultural studies have not prepared him for her unexpected voice. The static time of the romantic myth of the beautiful young lovers is contrasted with the voice of an ageing Contessa, pining for her absent love.

Again there is a shift from a patrifocal gaze in which Teresa is defined as a woman who is nothing without Byron (Dg, p.182) to a matrifocal view of the woman as the source of life, for it is she who echoes Byron’s faint strains from the underworld and brings his voice back to life. In the ‘Orphic descent’ that Marais (2000) and Pechey
(2002) identify, Coetzee is again challenging the static temporality of both representation and expectation in his focus on reality as a mobile process. Here Coetzee is recomposing the site of creative enterprise, by replacing a hierarchical measure of objective worth with a simple desire for a shared response. He not only deconstructs the colonial authority that canonicity installs but he also opens up opportunity within the space for creative coexistence, thereby extending Ashcroft’s theory in his praxis.

I propose that Coetzee sets up Lucy’s physical presence on the landscape as the textual evidence of a way of being that is metalingual (Dg, pp.216-217). The opportunity, which Lucy presents, is not one that is easily defined in language, for it is not articulated in her defence of her choices. Adrienne Rich identifies the inventive value of both the positioning of the body within the landscape and the female body itself in her analysis: ‘This cartography of places through her body reveals the ways in which she is positioned through her body, but also how her body becomes capable of imagining these connections and territories differently’ (Nast & Pile 1998, p.3). It seems to me that Lucy’s textual significance lies in her “habitation” of the space as a field that provides her living, her life, rather than as a place of ownership or domination. Her pregnant body is also a trope for anticipating a different, shared future.

As a metafictional device, Coetzee’s protagonist demonstrates the uneasy complicity of the writer in tracing the frontiers of a world beyond moral reasoning. In an article entitled ‘Into the Dark Chamber’ that Coetzee wrote in 1986, he examines the novelist’s fascination with the torture chamber and he asks how the author is to represent the torturer (1994, p.364). He draws upon a scene in Nadine Gordimer’s novel, Burger’s Daughter, to explain the moral dilemma of representing an act of cruelty where the torturer and the tortured lie ‘beyond the scope of morality. For morality is human, whereas the two figures locked to the cart [in Gordimer’s text] belong to a damned, dehumanized world’. (1994, p.367). To argue, as David does in the novel, that the rape of Lucy is retributive, does not take into consideration the very high incidence of rape within the black community; besides, is sexual violation morally justifiable as an act of racial retribution? Surely, as Coetzee himself implies, the act is beyond moral negotiation? Again, Coetzee stresses the ethical responsibility of the author as he did in his earlier novel, The Master of Petersburg.
In my opinion, Lucy is not silenced but she chooses to remain silent because the violence that she has experienced is outside the realm of moral reasoning. Besides, to explain what happened would merely be subjecting herself to a repeat performance that would reinforce her violation with another patrifocal process, the language of domination. There has been strong debate about Lucy’s silence regarding her rape and her willingness to surrender her independent agency to Petrus. Marais explains: ‘Lucy’s passivity may be seen as a refusal to remain in the oppositional position relative to the rapists’ (2001b, p.37). I do agree with Marais and I would add that such an oppositional position includes her father, even though his position becomes increasingly borderline throughout the text. He is a patriarchal figure in terms of his sexual attitudes and his communication skills, hence he fits into the confrontational modality that Lucy is seeking to avoid. As I have shown, her father is also a violator like her rapists.

I assert that Coetzee shows how expansive the web of the patrifocal value-system is in the example of Lucy. Even though Lucy’s homosexuality ‘also exceeds and thereby refuses the structures of patriarchal colonialism’, as Horrell points out (2002, p.27), I suggest that she cannot avoid becoming entangled, when the net of violation is cast over her. Boehmer argues that Lucy ‘embeds in herself, her body, the stereotype of the wronged and muted woman, the abused and to-be-again-abused of history...the figure of a double silence...In highly traditional terms, do silent women-in-pain remain the ground on which a new society is brought into being?’ (2002, p.349). Boehmer is certainly flagging the pervasiveness of the patriarchy but it seems to me that she does not give Coetzee credit for his gesture, beyond the very real discursive frontiers that currently exist. Whereas Boehmer emphasizes the suffering in silence of the two women, Lucy and Petrus’s wife, she does not develop the potential of the reconciled space that these two pregnant women occupy. Bearing in mind the intersection of Coetzee’s inventive task and the realities from which they are sourced, I rather contend that Coetzee is emphasizing the responsibility of the readers beyond the writing. It is up to the readers to take the potential that is only intimated in the dual pregnancies of Lucy and Petrus’s wife and to make a shared sense of belonging a reality.

Also, I propose that Ashcroft’s notion of “habitation” allows for existing meanings to be transformed. Whereas silent women-in-pain may be customarily viewed as subservient victims, they can be reviewed as powerful agents of change. Using
Ashcroft’s theory, Lucy’s “habitation” as the dispossessed other not only subverts the established colonial pattern, but can also be seen as a signifier that is transforming. Lucy Graham questions the ethical assumptions associated with theories of radical alterity and she adds that Lucy’s passivity, as defined by Marais, is not the same as ethical responsiveness and it can even resemble apathy (2001, p.11). It seems to me that Graham has conflated two aspects of the character Lucy’s performance. Yes, she is passive in her refusal to participate in oppositional discourse and this may, indeed, be read as apathy, although I prefer to interpret her silence as an empowered choice. I do, however, maintain that Lucy’s decision to stay in Salem is definitely not passive. It is quite evidently a very courageous action. She has a range of easier options that include leaving the country and aborting the child. Lucy may be keen to belong to the umbrella of Petrus’s protection, but the prospect of another attack looms, hence Lucy’s choice is ambivalent. Her shift towards coexistence is enormous yet the risks of a new form of “habitation” within a prevailing social framework cannot be discounted. I think that it is this example of courage to change attitudinal frontiers within existing cultural maps that Coetzee uses to inspire a similar ethical response in the world.

It seems to me that it is here that the regenerative force of coexistence comes into full view in the link between the two expectant mothers. Marais points out that Lucy displays a ‘desire to transcend the cycle of domination and counter-domination that determines the course of history’ in her relationship with Petrus (2001b, p.35). I suggest that Petrus’s wife provides this opportunity. In keeping with Marais’s thesis on the ‘impossibility of representing the other’ (2000, pp.57-63), her identity can only be gleaned. Whereas she may be seen as the silent and subservient spouse, she can also be reviewed as an essential source of legitimacy as the first wife, and by her very presence, in Ashcroft’s terms of “habitation”.

Her legitimacy builds upon the more unconventional legitimacy of a predecessor in Coetzee’s fiction, Klein-Anna, in In the Heart of the Country. The earlier character was a wife but she was not expecting a child and she departed from the scene of the narrative, leaving only a mirage of her metaphoric role, in her wake. There is significant development in the representation of the other woman in the later text. Magda chooses to remain locked in her petrified garden, but Lucy opts to embrace change and all of the uncertainties relating to joining Petrus’s black family. The momentary merging of the
two women in the earlier novel presents a chord of shared identification between women that bears a note of hope for the future. In Disgrace this possibility seems to be imminently achievable. The example of coexistence of these two mothers-to-be together offers a site of great relevance in these times of anxiety about the toll that the AIDS virus is taking in Africa. It is now of crucial importance that the voices of the women of Africa be heard to contribute to alternative modes of being that might address the spread of the disease.

No, the ethical implications are not realized in the novel. As I have shown, the two women can be seen as silent objects in a continuing cycle of patriarchal control, but, as Marais points out, this novel ‘requires the reader to imagine possibilities of being and belonging with difference that are excluded from these dualisms’ (2001b, p.38). Lucy sets the example of seeking to belong in the African family. Her commitment is clear. How these women might open up new ways of coexistence that can extend existing patterns of belonging remains to be seen. Coetzee is inviting the reader to peg the site that they occupy and to listen keenly.

In this chapter, I have shown that Coetzee presents a metaphoric exploration of the parameters of guilt in David Lurie’s abasement. Coetzee demonstrates that disgrace precludes a sense of belonging and yet David’s narrative also signifies a quest to move on from a static state of separation towards belonging in changing times. It is only when the protagonist relinquishes his attachments to the past that he can begin to observe the actions of others and to listen to their voices. At about the same time as the first fully democratic elections in South Africa, Ndebele asked: ‘What is the reality so steadfastly hidden by the rhetoric of hope and anxiety?’ (1994, p.152). And he further posited that it may be good that the oppressors feel guilty as this is an acknowledgement of responsibility for misdeeds of the past (1994, p.152). But, like Carter, who notes that self-condemnation is detrimental to collaboration (1996, p.365), Ndebele argues that ‘guilt on a massive scale is unhealthy’ and he adds that ‘justice not guilt must be demanded’ (1994, p.155). In the novel, the issue of justice remains problematic. Nevertheless Coetzee does provide glimpses of other ways of being. The potential inherent in the parallel positions of Lucy and Petrus’s first wife is yet to be realized. It is now up to the reader to respond.
The pervasiveness of disgrace within the novel and the extra-textual spillage onto the reader attest to widespread shared colonial guilt, way beyond the boundaries of the South African context. Coetzee opens up a fictional space that is both constrained and informed by, but not bound to, the past and from which ethical action can ensue. This particular space is a call for careful listening to the voices that are starting to emerge and for a new form of global response. His latest protagonist, Elizabeth Costello, extends the global implications of David Lurie’s particular disgrace and the range of inadvertent complicity that contribute to the world as it is. Coetzee has demonstrated his responsibility by exploring the many shifting frontiers of belonging in the novel. His call for the reader to extend the fictional glimmers of transformation in action is affirmed.
8. THE CRISIS OF MODERNITY: A GLOBAL NARRATIVE

8.1. COMPLICITY AND RESPONSIBILITY IN THE ELIZABETH COSTELLO LESSONS

The two-pronged approach that Coetzee has presented throughout his *oeuvre* is maintained in *Elizabeth Costello*. He continues his sustained interest in marginal ambiguities. Once again he dramatizes the importance of the lived event and the presence of the body as a signifier that transgresses the neat demarcations of rational thinking and the voice of authority and opens up opportunities of connecting with others. The developmental strand of his trajectory includes a range of emerging horizons, which attest to his keen responsiveness to the world around him. On the most immediate level, this relates to his public and personal situation: as an acclaimed writer, whose fiction and critical commentary has extended cultural discourse on many fronts, and as a new immigrant to Australia. In the wider socio-political environment, the polarization of the West and its others persists, in spite of some eager efforts to extend postcolonial dialogue. There has also been a dramatic increase in a sense of vulnerability among many in Western societies, as a result of the felling of the twin towers in New York on 11 September 2001, although this attack may merely have uncovered the intensity of the vulnerabilities of some less visible “non-Western” others. These current matters are all encompassed in Coetzee’s sights in this text. The result is a highly relevant collection of lessons that encourage debate and a self-contained work of art that offers more than material for intellectual discussion.

In this chapter, I argue that the relevance and ethical substance of Coetzee’s writing lie in the reciprocal contributions of his double stance as an academic and a novelist. Both positions are represented in the collection of narratives about a fictional character, an ageing Australian novelist, Elizabeth Costello. The discursive content and the textual shadings of various representations of corporeality together attest to this duality. It is my thesis that Coetzee installs the body as the focal multivalent signifier through which he maps the mutating instability of the modern crisis of belonging and, more importantly, he showcases the vital merit of the novel as an originary ethical site where established patterns of thought can be appraised and re-imagined freely.
In my opinion, the ethical implications extend beyond the text. There is an interesting dialectic between reality and fiction. This has been exemplified in the interplay between some of the critical responses to Coetzee’s writing in the past, particularly to *Disgrace*, and the interaction between the fictional author-character and her audience in the text. I also consider how Coetzee sharpens the reader’s individual sense of complicity in the world as it is and her/his responsibility for collective re- visioning.

It is my intention to read this work of fiction as a synopsis of Coetzee’s ongoing interest in reviewing the many frontiers that have led to a widespread sense of isolation in the West. The range of Elizabeth’s fleeting public interactions with others around the globe and her private sense of self reveal her uncertainty about where she fits in the world. I agree with Shurmer-Smith and Hannam who maintain that ‘the end of the second millennium has just witnessed the deconstruction of all legitimating centres’, resulting in an atmosphere of hesitancy and disruption in the intellectual climate worldwide (1994, pp.2-4). Like Shurmer-Smith and Hannam, I note that so many of the national and ideological bases of the past are being challenged and found wanting. Our institutionalized selection maps have often failed to secure a sense of belonging and are, in fact, often the cause of the pervasive anxiety and alienation today. Coetzee offers fine sketches of aspects of this malaise in the Lessons. But what can his purpose be?

It seems to me that Lenta is correct in identifying the vital dialogue that Coetzee sets up between South Africa and ‘luckier countries’, like Australia (2003, pp.1-16). Lenta argues that Coetzee stages opportunities for the readers to exercise their sympathetic imaginations in most of the Lessons (2003, p.4), but she contrasts the restriction of a sympathetic response to the great cause of the innocent and suffering in a land of AIDS and poverty, and the freedom of response possible in a luckier country (2003, p.13). She concludes thus: ‘And what is Coetzee saying about the obligations of people in luckier countries?’ (2003, p.14). This chapter is a response to Lenta’s question.

I consider that it is necessary to distinguish between Elizabeth’s perspective and the outlook of Coetzee himself. David Lodge identifies a tone of ‘disillusionment with the value our culture attributes to literature,’ in the text’s implied author as well as its ‘heroine’ (2003, p.11). I do agree that one can sense the disillusionment in the text but it
seems to me that Lodge has not adequately considered Coetzee’s own belief in the influence that the novel can have over our culture. I assert that it is from this position of steadfast commitment to the value of the novel as a vital medium of self-scrutiny and transformation that Coetzee writes.

I contend that Coetzee offers innovative ways of shifting the frontiers that define our understandings, in a series of embodiments that urge a re-reading of traditional conceptual structures. I concur with Richard Barney that Coetzee documents human alienation in order to sponsor ‘a state of mind or psychic posture relatively undefined by conventionally available vocabularies, yet one also capable of generating palpable personal, social, or even political change’ (2004, p.20). I shall, however, extend Barney’s thesis by arguing for an ethical motivation in Coetzee’s inventiveness. I contend that Coetzee is inviting the readers to start making a difference by re-thinking the existing parameters of belonging so that we can work towards a more inclusive future in which we are each receptive to the voices of others and responsive to the needs of others, and, indeed, ourselves.

I suggest that these stories and their exposure of the current state of flux reveal a crisis of belonging that is of global significance. There is a pervasive tension between the array of colonial associations of land occupation, cultural hegemony and economic aggrandizement, religious certainties and postcolonial critique. The ambivalence that follows is, I believe, a condition of all Western subjects, not only white postcolonial writers and those who reside in postcolonizer societies, like Australia and South Africa, although the evidence in these places may sometimes be more overt. From his perspective in Warwick, England, Jonathan Willers reflects on the literature of post-apartheid South Africa and on the political cycle of blame and guilt by black and white writers respectively (2002). While I am uncomfortable with such a simplistic assessment, I do concur with his conclusion that all in the West are complicit inheritors of a dubious imperial legacy, a legacy that has displaced the colonized and, inadvertently, the colonizers.

In the embedded lectures and narratives of Elizabeth, Coetzee presents a new fictional voice to track current cultural horizons. These include a broad scan of continuing interests in representation, including oral and written performance, temporal-
spatial configurations, the body and its function as a metaphysical signifier and colonization in all its forms. Topical theoretical trends are reflected in the themes of what constitutes consciousness, gender difference, the questionable boundaries between species and the ethical implications of these uncertain divides such as animal rights, ecotourism and ecological sensitivity, cultural diaspora and academic, linguistic, economic and artistic hegemonies. These expanding parameters of globalization create an ambiguous dispersed centre that is at once foreign and familiar, a site of simultaneous erosions and hybrid potential.

I propose that Coetzee is adumbrating the gap between the present condition of being and the future-oriented desire or “longing” for connectedness in his latest work. It seems to me that the desire to belong is universal, although a secured sense of belonging remains elusive. Coetzee sustains his interest in the ambiguities of marginal existence and the transgressive value of the body, while he charts a range of escalating anxieties of the times. His double focus on present circumstances and future projection draws attention to the paradox inherent in “belonging”. There is a distinction between “be” and “longing” that is temporal. “Be” implies a present state of consciousness, whereas “longing” connotes a yearning for that which is out of reach and it can, therefore, be seen to project momentum forwards, into a future prospect of being fulfilled. This theme harks back to the discrepancy between the static idea and mobile lived experience that were examined in the previous chapter on *Disgrace*. That is not to suggest that Coetzee is inscribing this space. It is rather to argue that, in tracing the crisis of identity and consequent insecurities about belonging, primarily in Elizabeth’s own experience, but also in the mirrored representations of others, like her son, John, Emmanuel Egudu, a fictional African novelist and her sibling, Sister Bridget, Coetzee is exploring the individual’s complicity in constructing the reality that they occupy.

Coetzee plots the interdependence of collective and personal responsibility for the world that we inhabit in the present in these lessons. I also think that he is directing the gaze of his readers towards the immediate future, and the responsibility of each individual to act ethically in the present in order to create a shared design of that future. He does this without prescribing any features of that unseen landscape.
Coetzee exposes the essential logical flaw in faith systems, which is that they can offer no guarantees. Elizabeth’s example attests to a widespread modern insecurity of identity and belief. In the final tale, ‘At the Gate’, Elizabeth awaits judgement in the hope that she will qualify to proceed through her own portal to the space beyond, a space unmarked by the author. Elizabeth imagines a view through her own gateway to reveal ‘a desert of sand and stone, to infinity’ (EC, p.224). While this is hardly the classical inscription of a verdant paradise, it does hark back to Michael’s scant dream of survival at the end of Life and Times of Michael K. Michael’s intimation of a future community is also repeated in the judge’s claim that there are others in the same position as Elizabeth (EC, p.225). Here Coetzee is again stressing the worth of common understandings, the power of shared identification. He also seems to be drawing attention to the present as the only certainty available. This emphasizes the urgency of his ethical call to action so that the perceptual barriers that entrench our fears can be shifted.

I am not suggesting, however, that Coetzee is advocating a heavy ethical burden of responsibility. In my opinion, Coetzee balances his address of major global issues with a note of fun in order to highlight the value of the novel as a mobile genre that is able to engage rigorously in critical dialogue and also wander freely beyond rational boundaries into the field of pure conjecture. He, like his protagonist, certainly takes the problems of the world seriously. This is palpable in Lesson 6 ‘The Problem of Evil’. Yet the dramatic form of each lesson and the work as a whole increasingly presents a note of playfulness as counterpoint to the scholarly concerns. In humorous detail Coetzee skilfully rearranges the traditional perspective of man’s dependence upon the gods in Lesson 7, ‘Eros’. He proposes, instead, that the gods need humans to provide what they, themselves, lack, namely the ‘frisson [Coetzee’s italics] of death’ (EC, p.189) because they do not have mortal bodies. While this transgressive sexual theme is certainly amusing, it does reinforce the cosmic significance of human desire and the universal drive to belong. This balance between academic engagement and creative games underlines the unique importance of the novel as a site where ideas can be explored and extended beyond discursive frontiers. This is, I assert, central to his fictional task.

There has been some debate around whether this work is a sequence of critical essays or a novel. Andrew Riemer argues that ‘Elizabeth Costello reveals what happens when Coetzee’s two faces [of the novelist and the scholar] turn to gaze at one another’
(2003, p.1). The distinction between these two forms is, I believe, crucial to Coetzee’s project. He says that ‘[t]he feeling of writing fiction is one of freedom, of irresponsibility, or better, of responsibility towards something that has not yet emerged’ (from an interview with Attwell quoted by Nicholas Dawes, 2003). While he incorporates his critical thinking into the embedded narratives, the value of his project here, and of the novel in general, lies in the “state of play” that this modality allows. In an interview with Joanna Scott, Coetzee says: ‘Play is, to me, one of the defining characteristics of human beings...I’m suspicious of formulas of language that have hardened and set, that people believe in without question. I am not aware that this settling of opinion has happened to the concept of play’ (1993, pp.84-85).

It is my contention that Coetzee invents new perspectives from which to critique and rearrange established patterns of thinking. Starting with language, in Disgrace he demonstrates the inadequacy of words to move beyond difference to a field of coexistence. In Elizabeth Costello, he introduces some discursive rules in the formal presentations, debates and archetypal Western belief models that he inscribes, only to flout them in the eventfulness of the narratives that foreground the body as a boundary site, with some surprising outcomes. At times these are funny, as in the rendition of intercourse between humans and gods (Lesson 7). At other times, they are shocking like Elizabeth’s horror at her own inadvertent role in the spread of evil (Lesson 6). Each innovative view encourages the reader to re-evaluate the boundaries of our perception and our role in reinforcing these.

I maintain that the shared responsibility of the co-creators of textual meaning, the writer and the reader, demonstrates “responsibility-in-complicity” in Sanders’s terms, as well as the notion of ‘the basic folded-togetherness of being, of human-being, of self and other’ (2002, p.11). Coetzee addresses the role of the author in this fictional representation of the novelist-character, Elizabeth. Here Coetzee is continuing to interrogate textual authority, as he has done in all his earlier fiction. He is again using the foil of his protagonist to set a primary example of the author accepting responsibility for the textual milieu that is formed. He is also confirming the responsibility of the reader in ascribing meaning. This is evident in the secondary example of Elizabeth as the reader of West’s record of the ‘Nazi forest of horrors’ in Lesson 6, ‘The Problem of Evil’ (EC, p.161). She acknowledges her duplicity as the reader when she admits that ‘it
might as well be I as Mr West who hold the pen and trace the words [w]ord by word, step by step, heartbeat by heartbeat, I accompany him into the darkness' (EC, p.174).

There is, I think, an ironic postmodern twist that is vital to the ethical crux of Coetzee’s fiction and the potential regenerative energy of the novel in general. The example of Coetzee as a real author, whose writing has elicited a range of strong reactions from so many readers, extends the notion of “responsibility-in-complicity” beyond the invented stories of his make-believe textual scenarios into the real world. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the post-apartheid South African setting of Disgrace has prompted keen debate on the local political implications of his writing, often, I think, to the detriment of his broader metaphysical engagement. The mimetic associations and the various critical assessments of the former novel frequently repeat the judgements that are enacted in that work, as I briefly remarked in the earlier chapter. In other words, some of the criticism of that novel reiterates the same attitude of barricaded self-defence that a number of the characters in the fiction display. In this highly controversial example, life appears to be imitating art.

It is my assessment that, in these instances, the critics do not acknowledge that Coetzee is, in fact, subverting these fixed worldviews in order to expose how confining the frontiers that they install can be. Now, it seems to me that this very process of adding another lamination to the judgemental frontiers that already exist, be they actual or fictional, comes under closer scrutiny in Elizabeth Costello. In fact, this latest novel can be read as a highly articulate reply to these critics, even as it sketches a space for play outside the rules of oppositional dialogue.

Coetzee represents the protagonist as a discursive and a literary construct. By this I mean that Elizabeth occupies a transitional position between the rational and the creative. I further maintain that Coetzee uses this duality to tease open the frontiers between the academic and the fictional in order to expand the range of possibilities. The notion of a widened border-zone, which prompts the reader to review the frontiers that inhibit a sense of belonging was identified in Dusklands and has been an ongoing theme in all of his writing. The shift in the frontiers in Elizabeth Costello spurs the reader to refocus on global significances of personal responsibility in a spirit of ubuntu or collective care for humanity.
Coetzee has consistently created protagonists who represent an intermediary, borderline, even abject position, in Kristeovan terms. That frontier varies, depending on the angle of the narrator’s view or the temporal juxtapositioning of fictional and “real” historic situations. So many of his novels have engaged, either directly or obliquely, with his homeland, yet are also concerned with the multiple notions of territorial, cultural, textual, economic and environmental colonization, disruption and neo-colonial reconstruction. Because of this, the role of the writer and the reader extend the sweep of his gaze to include global significance. Coetzee has traced some of the margins of definition that provide the template for these maps to proliferate. Among these are the definition of the self and the other, the boundaries of belonging and exclusion, and the overarching Western epistemological framework, originating in classical Greek mythology and spanning the Judaic/Christian tradition. He has also felt the porosity of these border-zones and offered imaginative shadings for their dissolution and re-assembly as intersubjective constructs for a shared sense of belonging.

The diverse representations of Elizabeth raise interesting questions concerning current cultural and literary debates and the implications of belonging that extend from Elizabeth to those with whom she is associated and beyond to a general reflection on the ways in which we demarcate and divide our world. I examine the meaning of belonging for Elizabeth and her shifting sense of her place in the world as a physical presence that transcends language. These tales also provide imaginative shadings that inspire, rather than prescribe, the re-viewing of the frontiers that separate and exclude.

As I explained in the introduction, I am adopting a transitional critical approach in tracing the modern crisis of belonging in Coetzee’s fiction. It is my purpose to move beyond postcolonial criticism of past practice. By using the hermeneutical concept of “critical globality” posited by Weinbaum and Edwards (2000, p.271), it is my intention to discern the ethical shadings in Coetzee’s writing that draw attention to the possibility of reducing alienation in the world. I examine the insecure sense of belonging in place and with others that is experienced by Elizabeth, John, and Emmanuel. Then, using an approach of “critical globality”, I outline the potential for ethical action that Coetzee is adumbrating.
8.2. THE DISCURSIVE FRAMEWORK

8.2.1. THE ARBITRARY MEANING OF BELONGING

I suggest that the crisis of modernity is a crisis of identity and association that can be traced in Elizabeth’s own ephemeral attachments and shifting connections and disengagements. It can also be defined as a crisis of belief, which is manifest in an anxiety about belonging. The gap between “being” and the desire for connectedness is acute. From the number of “causes” or positions that are espoused, contested and re-negotiated in the lessons it could be concluded that belonging seems to be about everything and nothing, about a sense of participation in all the latest issues being debated and the changing alignments that follow for each of the characters. For example, ‘Uncleanliness can be a very handy device for deciding who belongs and who doesn’t, who is in and who is out’ (EC, p.85). In the end this appears to be about choosing where one wishes to belong in a transitory and capricious way, with “belonging” meaning whatever the individual wants it to mean in the swirl of intermingling patterns in the globalization process.

This would be a fairly amorphous conclusion that would belie Coetzee’s impact. The large body of criticism on his writing and his impressive list of literary awards is evidence of his influence. I am interested in why his fiction elicits such passionate responses from his critics. Why is it that readers, both within South Africa and elsewhere, find themselves fascinated, intrigued and bewildered by his work?

Our affiliations and the meanings that we assign to situations can be seen to be most arbitrary. This is hinted at by the narrator of Youth when he concludes that Ganapathy is ‘starving not because he is cut off from Mother India but because he doesn’t eat properly’ (Y, p.168). I suggest that Coetzee develops this notion in plenty of examples in Elizabeth Costello: Eight Lessons. Slipped in, between the eight lessons and the postscript, with no reference in the table of contents, is a paragraph from a letter from Lord Chandos to Lord Bacon by the German poet Hugo von Hoffmannsthal (EC,
p.226). This apparently unconnected quotation provides a useful ‘similitude’, to use Costello’s preferred way of thinking rather than to ‘reason things out’ (EC, p.167). ‘It is as if everything, everything that exists, everything I can recall, everything my confused thinking touches on, means something’ (von Hoffmannsthal quoted in EC, p.226). The metaphor of the hologram that Adams advocates (1990) vivifies this pervasive embeddedness.

Coetzee creates a continual stream of associations that reflects the ambivalence of globalization. Coker identifies both opportunities and risks in this emerging phenomenon and he adds that, as yet, ‘[w]e are not sure whether globalisation is ‘enabling’ or ‘disempowering’ (2002, p.21). Certainly, Elizabeth displays a reluctance to forego her Anglocentric position. Her resistance flags an attachment to past practice and vulnerability in the face of an uncertain future that can be viewed as a disempowering effect of globalization. Nevertheless, the “creative play” of Coetzee’s text can be seen as enabling, for it encourages the reader to seek creative options for belonging in a changing world.

In this dense network of connections, I suggest that Coetzee is challenging the readers to interrogate their own ascription of meaning and to reassess their position in relation to colonization and its successor, globalization, and to consider how this establishes or inhibits a sense of belonging. Such scrutiny is usually quite unsettling, although I maintain that Coetzee has not merely set out to disrupt, deconstruct and destabilize the familiar, but he has also consistently infused his novels with a gossamer ribbon of hopeful vision beyond the confronting disquiet that he spins. A broadened border region for renegotiating confrontation can be noted from his first novel, Dusklands. For relinquishing her rigid judgements, Mrs Curren is about to be released from the burden of her fixed intellectual perspective and her physical disease at the end of Age of Iron. The examples of letting go of past attachments intensify in Disgrace.

Coetzee does not only chart the anxieties of the current uncertain times but he also sets up the stream of associations to show that each one of us is complicit in creating these circumstances. In the first of the stories, ‘Realism’, Elizabeth states:
There used to be a time, we believe, when we could say who we were. Now we are just performers, speaking our parts. The bottom has dropped out. We could think of this as a tragic turn of events, were it not that it is hard to have respect for whatever the bottom was that dropped out — it looks to us like an illusion now, one of those illusions sustained only by the concentrated gaze of everyone in the room. As soon as you look away, the mirror falls to the floor and shatters. (EC, p.19)

I think that she is giving voice to a persistent concern, namely the unsettling of any stable sense of identity within numerous shifting frameworks of belonging from changing family relations to interlocking international tensions and global dynamics. And yet, inherent in Elizabeth’s suggestion that our fragile collective image of the world is in pieces is a second connotation of a potential “new vision”. While the image of shattered illusions and fragmented identities might detract from any sense of common understanding, I would argue that the shared purpose of ‘the concentrated gaze of everyone in the room’ is repeatable but it requires that each participant, each referend invoked by the term ‘you’, not look away. Here Coetzee is stressing the crucial contribution of each one of us to the big picture. The certainty of institutionalized belief systems is over, but there is a slim chance that faith in the ethical actions of individuals will revitalize a more inclusive sense of world community.

Coetzee uses the format of the fictional lecture to raise questions about the margins of representation. Perhaps the most innovative aspect of most of the Elizabeth stories is the genre with which they are formulated. In my view, he is using the embedded dialectic to trouble the edges between the oral and the written word, the academic performance and the creative narrative in order to highlight the entwined effect of each mode of representation upon the others. In the fictional lectures, he problematizes the idea of a sharp division between the written and the spoken word. Their initial delivery reflects Coetzee’s use of the same literary form, the fictional lecture. He first recited most of the narratives orally, with subsequent written texts being produced. There is a layering of the dramatic effect of the formal oral presentations of the author, Coetzee, and the three characters that present lectures, Elizabeth Costello, Emmanuel and Bridget. The enduring resonance of their words is further reinforced by the knowledge that they are each writers who have produced written scores. This still seems to foreground the dominance of the written word, and yet the impact of the oral delivery of the embedded lectures upon the audience enhances the performative power of Coetzee’s “real” lectures. This double play upon the boundaries of the oral and the
written word, and intellectual discourse and novel form encourages rethinking of the interconnectedness of life and art. I maintain that this play on boundaries of representation is crucial to Coetzee’s ethics.

Similarly, Coetzee extends the notion of erasing frontiers to include the many distinctions between fact and fiction. He renders the margins between actual and fabricated authors and their various forms of writing indistinct: from the real authors, Coetzee, Paul West and Hugo von Hoffmannsthal and the other two fictional novelists and their work, to the sociological study of Bridget, the letters of her Elizabeth to her sister and those of Lord and Lady Chandos to Lord Bacon. These mergings echo examples in earlier texts, culminating in the disorienting twirl of the actual and the real and the imaginary in The Master of Petersburg. The extensive blurring between different forms of representation highlights the notion of experience as one whole, rather than a number of disparate segments. All modes of representation interfuse to create a cultural milieu within which we each form our view of the world and where we might see ourselves belonging. Of course the ethical implications of such close associations are noteworthy.

8.2.2. A MUTATING PATTERN

Coetzee shows a gradual change in Elizabeth’s confidence about who she is in relation to others and her position in the world, which seems to attest to an increasing angst about belonging in the wash of shifting local and global frontiers. Belief is the yardstick by which her sense of belonging is measured but she comes to realize that this is an arbitrary tool. In the first six lessons her experience of her “responsibility-in-complicity” grows and becomes overwhelming when she is faced with ‘The Problem of Evil’ in Lesson 6. But this is where the fiction allows invention to cross over any semblance of scholarly discursive framework. In the next two lessons Elizabeth takes up the notion of belief and toys with some traditional Western metaphysical ideas on sexual relations with deities and Elizabeth’s final reckoning. While the levity of these last tales does not diminish the gravity of the range of concerns or the demand for ethical projection into an unknown future, it does present “creative play” (to use Coetzee’s
terminology quoted in Scott 1993, pp.84-85) as a way out of a seemingly inescapable impasse. The rigid stipulations of established patterns of thought are opened up by such playful speculation.

Coetzee maps the shifts in the protagonist’s sense of belonging in the sequence of the lessons. Elizabeth’s first assertion that ‘[t]here used to be a time, we believe, when we could say who we were’ (EC, p.19), suggests that there were more definite guidelines for identification in the past, although the use of ‘we’ still connotes a shared perception in the present. In Lesson 2, ‘The Novel in Africa’, Elizabeth not only publicly doubts the constructivist power of the past, but she privately also ‘no longer believes very strongly in belief’ (EC, p.39). It is as if being out at sea reflects her sense of being adrift in a disorienting and disabling crisis of where she belongs. In Lessons 3 and 4, ‘Lives of Animals’, she seems so intent upon presenting her case for animal rights that the value of her connectedness to place and people, including her own family, appears to recede. She confesses to her son: ‘I no longer know where I am’ (EC, p.114).

It seems to me that Lesson 5, ‘The Humanities in Africa’, is the pivotal tale in the collection, for it is here that Elizabeth’s sense of disorientation in relation to her outer situation penetrates her inner sense of self. She shifts from uncertainty about her location in the world: ‘[w]here am I?’ to existential anxiety: ‘[w]ho am I?’ (EC, p.117). Her sense of isolation and abandonment is complete at the end of the chapter (EC, p.155). Ironically this occurs when she is alone, back home in Melbourne for the first time in the lessons.

In the next two lessons, Coetzee explores Elizabeth’s ambivalent sense of estrangement and connectedness, using the dual concepts of evil and love. This illuminates the essential paradox of identity that is inherent in the word “be-longing”, reflecting the dual conditions of being and the longing. Finally, this mutating pattern stops ‘At the Gates’, an ambiguous place of closure, new beginnings, accountability, and waiting. The unknown narrator asks: ‘What is her situation? The situation of someone who does not know her own mind?’ (EC, p.224). What can Coetzee’s game be?

I maintain that Coetzee presents a triple trajectory: in the layered fictional lectures he uses the platform for espousing a theoretical understanding, the academic
forum at which he and some of the characters present their own intellectual formulations; he also demonstrates the limitations of conceptual thinking that are unattached to specific, tangible examples; and he offers the presence of the body as a form of “creative play” to transcend both generalizing theory and discrete experiences. In other words, the Elizabeth Costello tales include both the individual *embodiment* of ideas and the *embeddedness* of specific lived experiences in a wider temporo-spatial tapestry of association. Here the Bakhtinian “idea” is again brought to mind. This co-creative “idea” is progressively developed across the range of these stories.

In the next section, I shall examine the ways in which Coetzee executes border-crossings in some of the narratives and the ethical implications of these marginal discourses, making use of Mae Henderson’s re-formulation of Du Bois’s “double vision” (1995, p.27). Henderson suggests that ‘[b]order crossing yields what W.E.B. Du Bois calls ‘double vision’ – it expands our field of vision without being expansionist; it includes without consuming; it appreciates without appropriating; and it seeks to temper politics with ethics’ (1995, p.27). I shall consider how Coetzee repeatedly sets up novel sites that transcend the boundaries of discursive practice and are, at once, resistant and receptive to cross-border influences. The mutations that ensue can be traced in the changes that occur in Elizabeth’s own sense of belonging, the impact of her presence on others and the potential for revising existing maps of identification.

It seems to me that Coetzee installs the body as the starting point for his motivation to ethical action in this novel. It is my contention that the enfolding narratives of *Elizabeth Costello* are the vehicle for Coetzee to convey his fundamental conviction that theory only becomes relevant in the world when it is linked to the specific behaviour of an individual. In other words, action is the only living evidence of a person’s worldview, even though deeds are frequently unplanned and inexplicable. Coetzee states:

Realism has never been comfortable with ideas....The notion of embodying turns out to be pivotal. In such debates ideas do not and indeed cannot float free: they are tied to the speakers by whom they are enounced, are generated from the matrix of individual interests out of which their speakers act in the world. (*EC*, p.9)
I propose to review the performative value of the body as a frontier site that enables the “double vision” postulated by Henderson, precisely because the body resists being completely contained by reason. Brian May suggests that ‘Coetzee offers us bodies that contain more than simply the means of critique; they also contain the raw materials for transformative visionary experience: symbols or; rather, moments of symbolic potential’ (2001, p.394). While I support the notion of symbolic potential in Coetzee’s representation of the body, I disagree with the sentiment of May’s statement that ‘Coetzee is attacking the entire complex Western tradition of transcendent vision that would deny these material facts [of the body]’ (2001, p.408). Yes, Coetzee certainly does install the ineluctability of the body, although the connotations of confrontation in ‘attacking’ are excessive, given Coetzee’s own declared aversion to such conflict (DP, p.248) and the transgressive frontier presence of the body. In my opinion May is still subscribing to an oppositional approach that recognizes the impenetrability of discursive boundaries. I prefer the perspective of “double vision” that expands the notion of frontier into a creative field that can incorporate both critical scrutiny and a visceral reality that refuses cognitive assessment.

I maintain that it is out of a lack of a sense of belonging that Coetzee is able to expand the frontier that defines identity into a broadened zone where the body is a transitional site that remains closed to analysis and is also the chora of the sympathetic imagination. For Coetzee, physical presence or absence is, at times, a louder signifier than the voice. This has been demonstrated in discussion of earlier works. The strongest herald issues from the silent, submerged presence of Friday in the last scene in Foe.

I shall study three representations of the body as the seat of emotion, creative identity and action. I shall also contemplate the effectiveness of these signifiers in shifting the boundaries of belonging and the ethical implications of such expanded vision for individual and collective responsibility. In Lesson 2 Elizabeth’s memory of feeling the physical impact of Emmanuel causes a shift in her superior colonial attitude and moves the reader to re-evaluate Anglocentrism in the light of global change. Elizabeth’s own body provides further evidence of the significance of creativity that challenges existing structures and transcends the limitations of rational discourse in Lesson 1, 3 and 4. John reflects upon her dual meaning to him as a mother and source of inspiration. In Lesson 5 Coetzee sets up a dialogue between the sisters, Bridget and
Elizabeth, and their parallel realities of showing care to the dying. The Christian concept of Pauline love as active and dynamic involvement with others, rather than a series of static images, vivifies Coetzee’s ethical drive. These three different forms of corporeality can be seen to create an incomplete border space that affords each of us the opportunity to rethink our relationship with others in the wider world and our complicity and responsibilities for the frontiers that ensue.

8.3. EMBODIED BORDER-CROSSINGS

8.3.1. A GLOBAL DIALOGUE

Coetzee sets up a dialogue between two novelists in Lesson 2, ‘The Novel in Africa’. In this section I shall consider the retrospective effect of the body of Emmanuel upon Elizabeth’s sense of identity and the ramifications of this memory upon the maps that have validated her Anglocentric sense of belonging in the world. Emmanuel’s African presence as a powerful way of being-in-the-world renders the colonial patterns of the past defunct. It also offers the chance to reinvigorate postcolonial thinking about the authority of the written word and the hegemony of English as the language of global economics. The possibility for “dual vision”, in Henderson’s terms, derives from the moment of remembered connection between the African oralist’s creative energy and Elizabeth’s present receptivity to him. The past parameters of identification have shifted, and the question of where each of these characters now belongs remains unanswered. I suggest that Coetzee casts ‘all legitimating centres’ afloat and this reflects the prevailing intellectual insecurities that Shurmer-Smith and Hannam observe (1994). He then presents Emmanuel, someone who has ‘not lost touch with the body’ (EC, p.45), to invite the reader to look outside existing frameworks for potent new forms of relating within a more diffused global community.

Coetzee sets up a familiar Western pattern of overt oppositional dialectic between the two fictional novelists that he then, quite clearly, undermines. On first glance there is vociferous confrontation in the almost comical posturing between the two writers. On closer scrutiny, however, the similarities between the two are substantial.
Finally, it is another unlikely parallel similarity with a “foreign other” that opens up Elizabeth’s attitude. Just as Emmanuel makes the Russian woman shudder, so it is Elizabeth’s recollection of his literal impact upon her own body that makes her receptive to other ways of being outside confrontational discursive structures.

Using the metaphor of a voyage and the assumptions of a classical journey of discovery, Coetzee addresses the metafictional implications of the novel as a relevant example of cultural scrutiny and as a vital prompt for imagining the future. He sets adrift the foundational parameters of a whole spectrum of current cultural discourses and exposes the gap between the ideological assumptions of a fixed and unchanging centre and the ever-shifting experience of reality. This includes the neo-colonial expectations of the privileged travellers to know the world and the notion of an inherent contradiction in eco-tourism. P.J. Simmons and Chantal de Jonge Oudraat maintain that ‘[i]n the midst of charting a passage into globalisation, still treading shaky ground, the world’s nations and their citizens can no longer take ideological certainties as their guide’ (2001, p.719). In my opinion, this suggestion that existing conceptual compasses are inadequate for the way ahead is reiterated in Elizabeth’s defensive position. Emmanuel’s embodiment of an indefinable energy that is less attached to entrenched cognitive habits provides a way out of the disorienting swirl caused by globalization.

I maintain that Coetzee embeds the engagement between the two novelist-character in an overarching narrative of an overt oppositional duality. Thus he reinforces the notion that binary thinking is incapable of altering existing frontiers, even though these may be restrictive or, at worst, obsolete. Coetzee juxtaposes the changing geographic coordinates of the cruise ship and the collective identity of the cosmopolitan company on board. In contrast to the remote and shifting location of the ocean liner as it sails to the Ross Ice Shelf in Antarctica, a global scan operates across a wide network of connections from the owners of Scandia Ocean Liners in Stockholm, to the guests and entertainers from around the world. English is the language of communication. These allusions of universality affirm the perception that all who are associated with the cruise belong to the centre of current thinking. Of course the imperial implications are clear. This generalizing appraisal acknowledges the similarities between the colonial and neo-colonial stances of Elizabeth and Emmanuel.
The ambiguous colonial position that is, at once, medial and marginal is shared by both Elizabeth and Emmanuel. Throughout his fiction, Coetzee has created characters who demonstrate this kind of ambivalence, from the magistrate in Waiting for the Barbarians, who opposed the mechanics of the regime that he represented, to Mrs Curren, the white liberal woman, torn between her classical learning and her defence of a revolutionary black youth in Age of Iron. Both of the characters in this lesson are situated in the mainstream. Emmanuel speaks of the two of them as ‘colleagues, fellow writers. Part of the great, worldwide writing fraternity’ (EC, p.52). Elizabeth’s central position is largely inherited, but for him, this interconnectedness confirms his new and empowering international affiliations. Nevertheless, each of them is also marginal in the changing times. Being merely paid entertainers emphasizes their displacement. I would argue that it is in the ironic similarities in the two characters, rather than in the obvious differences between them, that border-crossings are mooted.

It is my thesis, however, that these similarities only become meaningful when Elizabeth lets go of her closed judgemental stance and recognizes the transformative value of Emmanuel’s physical example. Just as Elizabeth ‘no longer believes very strongly in belief’ (EC, p.39), so her present experience might also be identified as a time of floundering with any sense of shared belonging literally “going to sea”. It seems to me that the deferred timing from Elizabeth’s intimate encounter with Emmanuel when she was younger to her fresh insight at the end of the tale highlights this existential uncertainty.

Coetzee invokes linear temporality to show that opportunities for addressing issues about belonging in the current worldwide state of instability are within the individual’s reach. In fact, the possibility of belonging lies within each person’s own orbit of experience. Coetzee provides evidence from Elizabeth’s own past to open up her present state of resignation to other approaches in the future. He does this by playing on the marginal duality of the two main characters.

On a metafictional level, I contend that Coetzee is arguing that colonial thinking in all its forms can be seen as adopting a defensive stance that is closed to the dynamic contributions of other worldviews. The same themes that Coetzee returns to in all his writing are repeated. These call attention to the body as the site that transcends
oppositional discourse, where consciousness, temporo-spatial location and interconnections with others occur. Once again, he is installing the body as the vital medium for experiencing the world, in terms that can extend a sense of belonging.

Coetzee represents Elizabeth’s sense of isolation and self-righteousness as the disabling effect of her colonial identity. Besides her close identification with most of the privileged clientele on board in her age, interests and language, Elizabeth’s fixed attitude is quite evident in her response to place and people. During her visit to Macquarie Island, she displays a naïve, prelapsarian colonizing consciousness, when she says: ‘This is how it was before the fall. I could miss the boat, stay here. Ask God to take care of me’ (EC, p.56). While there, Elizabeth ignores the boundaries of polite discourse in her explicit questioning of the Russian singer and she even admits that her transgression is ‘presumptuous in its intimacy, even rude’ (EC, p.56). By creating her own rules of what is permissible on the island, she demonstrates colonial arrogance that is compounded in her dismissive assumptions about the other woman (EC, p.57). Elizabeth draws her confidence from her Anglo-centricity. After all, the very language of globalization in all forms is English (Gary Teeple 2000, p.21). For Elizabeth, then, a sense of belonging does not seem attached to a home site or a national identity but it is, rather, a buoyant faith in her worldwide right of occupancy.

In my opinion, Elizabeth’s resistant ideological stance is a sign of the disempowering effects of globalization. Even though she is a marginal entertainer herself, she remains rigidly impervious to the influence of others. She erects a prickly barrier between herself and Emmanuel, in her scathing commentary on his lifestyle and his work. Simmons and de Jonge Oudraat warn of the risk of complacency in mobilizing global connections (2001, p.690). Elizabeth’s reluctance to engage in open dialogue might suggest the complacency of a dominant global position, but I would add that it might also flag a vulnerability in the face of changing world orders in accordance with Simon During’s extension of the notion of complacency that foregrounds the immobilising effect of alienation (1993, p.20).

It seems to me, however, that it is only with acknowledgement of similarities that the barriers of established perceptions might be shifted. Rory Ryan argues that:
The move to regard identity as constituted by opposition ... may have more political currency than descriptive power, in that identity relations between ‘dominant’ and ‘other’ are already deeply intertwined prior to the assertion of otherness. Mutual invasion has already occurred when otherness is recognized. Moreover, there are indications that stressing difference may not be perceived as the most appropriate investigative strategy. (1996, p.159)

Ryan’s thinking invites a reconsideration of Elizabeth’s oppositional attitude to others. Ironically, it is Emmanuel’s effect upon the body of the Russian singer that reminds Elizabeth of her own response to his physical presence. Her recall of a similar encounter to that of the other woman breaks through her brittle sense of self. Here the notion of shared corporeal experience that was first introduced in Magda’s identification with Klein-Anna In the Heart of the Country is repeated. The connotations of merging identities have been a continuing thread through the rest of Coetzee’s oeuvre.

I maintain that Emmanuel’s breath in Elizabeth’s ear can be seen as a literal sign of his capacity to move her emotionally. This further signifies a conceptual shift away from her debilitating self-protective condition towards a receptive state of mind. In confrontational terms, her recollection would merely represent another black cliché and contribute to the comic irony of Elizabeth’s stereotypical assessment of the African novelist, but in terms of metalinguial sharing it is an event of enormous significance.

For the reader, this narrative has the effect of shifting the parameters of belonging away from the binary modalities that can be associated with colonial and postcolonial judgements towards a stronger appreciation of otherness and a more collaborative sense of play. In spatial terms, this can be seen as a broadened marginal area. In temporal terms, this state of play is an ongoing, unfinalized process.

I propose that Coetzee is suggesting that the stalemate at which we, in the West, may find ourselves amidst the cacophony of competing voices and the crises of identification might be transformed if we look beyond our own rigid frameworks that seem to have coalesced around textual authority, disembodied theorizing and an Anglocentric worldview. In this evocation of physical vitality Coetzee is installing the body as the starting point where all energy is generated and all connectedness with others commences. Even though he may be an opportunist who is capitalising his exotic value, I think that Emmanuel can also be seen to represent the African spirit of ubuntu,
or the notion a common humanity that has been evident in earlier Coetzee characters. These associations provide a tinge of hope for all of us in the West to reconnect with the world. In the ironic representation of Emmanuel, I maintain that Coetzee is offering the African perspective of foregrounding the body. In my opinion this can be seen as an opportunity to restore the relevance of sensate experience and to prioritize the need for community.

The moral lesson from Africa seems to be so clear, and yet questions about where Emmanuel belongs remain unanswered. Is he merely another textual construct to serve the purpose of Western self-analysis? As an economic exile from Africa and an exotic source of amusement elsewhere, does he signify a more disturbing presence that might more accurately adumbrate the crux of Coetzee’s ethics?

It seems to me that Coetzee is arguing for more than intellectual enlightenment. He is calling for the global issues that are the product of historic frontiers to be addressed. I have identified examples of ubuntu in his novels that might be inspiring, but what about the realities that they uncover? Some of the realities of belonging in Africa and the implications for the belonging of others, like Elizabeth, in the rest of the world come into closer view in Lesson 5, ‘The Humanities in Africa’.

8.3.2. EMBODYING THE IDEA

The performative significance of Elizabeth’s body will be examined in this section. In Lesson 1, she fails to provide an essential foundation for her son’s existence and identity, although her body is literally his first obvious link with life and figuratively the point of origin of his own sympathetic imagination. I shall demonstrate a shift in focus in Lessons 3 and 4, when Elizabeth embodies a state of consciousness that portrays a trans-boundary position between the academy of philosophers and the fellowship of the poets. Her intellectual presentation falls short of achieving what she physically enacts. Her corporeality provides the visible textual sign of being-in-the-world as an understanding of otherness, which transcends cerebral meaning.
The narrative form of the text situates the unknown third person gaze in apposition to the mother and the son, thus balancing their respective experiences of belonging. Coetzee seems to be suggesting that the "dual vision" exemplified in Elizabeth's challenge of institutionalized processes comes at a cost. This is evident in her own marginal sense of belonging and her son's failure to stabilize a hub of orientation in the first tale and his divided sense of loyalty between his wife and his mother in the later twin lessons.

I suggest that, in addition to Elizabeth's voice, Coetzee uses her physicality as a feminine narrative strategy to transcend the limitations of her rational self. Besides her words that seek to bridge the gap between existence and representation, her corporeality is a visible sign of her mode of being that is resistant to discursive containment and proof of her unstable sense of belonging with others. I agree with Probyn that Coetzee uses the 'difference feminism' with bodies being signs that do not conform to '(phal)logocentric' laws, to suggest a space that lies beyond language (20002, para 113-14). The body of Elizabeth becomes a site of boundary transgression, or dual vision, in terms of Henderson's notion of a cross-border gaze. It is her physical presence that resists rational containment and is, in fact, evidence of disruption to our Western approach, which is grounded in the cognitive. And I would add that her corporeality also offers a fresh perspective for reviewing a sense of belonging.

Clearly Coetzee presents Elizabeth as occupying a transitional position between the mind and the body, although it seems to me that he is asserting the merit of the body as a site of creative opportunity that extends beyond the stalemate of competing hegemonic agendas. Just as the discrepancies in this dichotomy were exposed in *Dusklands*, so the disjuncture between the two is repeated in this latest text. The difference, as I see it, is that Elizabeth is not trapped by the same self-defeating delusion of a rigid and impervious sense of self like the first protagonists, Eugene and Jacobus. Even though she still occupies an ambivalent position, she is more aware of her own alienation in an environment where rationality is the dominant mode of being.
8.3.2.1. WHO IS THE REAL ELIZABETH COSTELLO?

In this section, I shall show how Coetzee uses the body of Elizabeth as a dual signifier of a maternal metaphor and the embodiment of a literary mind. He flags the importance of the sympathetic imagination in creating the stream of associations that can facilitate a sense of connectedness that extends beyond organic functions.

The lives of both Elizabeth and John signify a disjointed and displaced sense of belonging that suggests an unsettling of patterns of reference in these times of globalization. According to Albert Cook, ‘[l]iterature engages space not atemporally, pace Bachelard, but with deep reference to the coordinates of its own time’ (1998, p.554). The contradictory representations of Elizabeth in the present and in the past demonstrate a fragmented identity and sense of belonging that really only seems to cohere around her unseen writing, not her transient presence. Similarly, John’s hankering to fix the axis of his identity to stable external points of reference in his mother proves to be illusory. They both experience a mobile and insecure sense of belonging. I maintain that this attests to the fluidity of the present times.

Coetzee skilfully uses fused temporo-spatial co-ordinates to mirror the respective orbits of Elizabeth and John. This creates a “dual vision” that juxtaposes and links their respective experiences of belonging. According to Coker, the globalization process ‘changes not only material structures like states and security communities, but also the structure of time and space, and thus the way we conceive of both and our place in them’ (2002, p.95). In my opinion, this relates directly to our shifting and insecure sense of belonging. Elizabeth is represented in terms of her authorial identity rather than her ephemeral attachment to people or place. Her literary world seems to provide the initial hinge from which her son seeks to describe his own axis of identification.

Using some key spatial and temporal markers, Coetzee contrasts John’s lingering memories from childhood with the hectic agenda of Elizabeth’s celebrity performances in the first part of Lesson 1. In the second half, the present co-ordinates of his own life cast an immediate alternative relief against which his story about his mother can be measured. John’s own indistinct sense of belonging exposes the opaqueness surrounding his mother’s attachments.
The spatial and temporal modalities of the first narrative sets up a number of neat pockets to define who Elizabeth is, as the public literary figure, in contrast with the undefined silence about her private sense of relatedness to the world. She harks back to a Eurocentric background, in her references to Franz Kafka and her English/Irish literary heritage in allusions to the canon of Virginia Woolf, James Joyce and D. H. Lawrence among others. Her association with ‘the Mother country’ (EC, p.35) and London, as a collective site of memory and symbolic significance, secures the claims of this daughter of the colonies to the source of international communication and domination, an English identity. The contradictory representations of Elizabeth now, and when she was younger, reaffirm the ambivalence surrounding her identity and the difficulty in defining the “real” Elizabeth. This contrasts Elizabeth’s current public image and her earlier, unseen struggle. It is as if her sense of belonging in a world revolves around literary recognition. So, who is the “real” Elizabeth Costello?

Coetzee presents the body of Elizabeth as a twofold opportunity for John to reconnect with his own origins as a stabilizing starting point from which to orient his sense of self as an organic existence and as the inheritor of a novelist’s appreciation of the sympathetic imagination. John’s quest ends with him peering into the mouth of his sleeping mother, seeking to know the core where his life began. His umbilical attachment to his motherland, Australia, is duplicated in the narrative chord in which he contemplates the literal and the literary reality of his mother:

He can see up her nostrils into her mouth, down the back of her throat. And what he cannot see he can imagine: the gullet, pink and ugly, contracting as it swallows, like a python, drawing things down to the pear-shaped belly-sac...No, he tells himself, that is not where I come from, that is not it. (EC, p.34)

This final scene presents a wonderful implied juxtapositioning of Elizabeth’s bodily systems that signifies the borderland duality of giving life to the self and to the other. John traces an imaginary view down the digestive route through which his mother’s life is sustained. This contrasts with his denial of this woman’s body as the essential source of his own life, although there is also a tacit acknowledgement of the other channel through which he was delivered into the world. John’s search reveals the ambivalent relationship of bonding/belonging and expulsion/exclusion between a child
and his or her mother. Here the stream of associations in her physical presence affirms the link between the literal birthmother and the literary procreator of her son’s sympathetic imagination.

Coetzee contrasts the ambivalent roles of Elizabeth, her flimsy maternal role in her son’s sense of identity with her notable capacity to affect the lives of others in her writing. In her speech she suggests limiting the burden of remembering that is imposed on the next generations (EC, p.20) and yet, using the example of Kafka’s ape, she argues for a relevant contextual framework for shared understandings (EC, pp.18-19), thereby recognizing that ‘[i]t is the embeddedness that is important, not the life itself’ (EC, p.32). And for her that embeddedness is realized in her writing. It is in the realm of her works that Elizabeth’s sense of connectedness with others resides.

We learn more of John’s yearning to belong than we do about Elizabeth’s, and yet the impact of her writing on John’s life is tangible. Her sense of belonging in terms of connectedness to place and people is so faint that it seems to be a default condition of materiality rather than a conscious choice. For John, the desire to understand his source and establish a background sense of family bonding with his mother to complement his attachment to his home base in Melbourne is not fulfilled. The relationship between John and his mother is interesting because his attachment to her is not the consequence of her maternal care. Rather, it is the effect of her writing, although his actual mother proves to be a slippery anchor for a sense of belonging.

Coetzee combines the duality of Elizabeth as a mother and a novelist in a physical metaphor that opens up the boundaries of her son’s own sense of identity to the transforming power of the sympathetic imagination. Certainly, the sympathetic imagination can increase a sense of interconnectedness, but Coetzee also shows that it can disrupt existing affiliations. I will elaborate on this in the next section.
8.3.2.2. DISRUPTING THE RATIONAL

Coetzee expands upon the duality of Elizabeth as a reasonable thinker and a corporeal existence in Lessons 3 and 4. He further explores her theoretical stance in her lectures and discussions with university staff. Her physical reality is set in contrast to her intellectual performance. It is my argument that this dual representation of her intricate arguments about the rights of animals and her embodiment of an animal-like consciousness can be seen to extend Coetzee’s persistent interrogation of the hegemonic drive of rational discourse and the boundaries that arise.

I maintain that Coetzee is sketching the risks to a sense of belonging in taking up a marginal position. Even though Coetzee presents a trans-boundary vision that promotes self-scrutiny and a wider view of the world, he is also clearly pointing out that questioning the status quo comes at a price. The cost of taking a stand astride the frontier between cognitive and sympathetic understanding is explicit in Elizabeth’s solitary life. In contrast, John avoids choosing, although he acquiesces in his mother’s imminent departure when his life at home and university will ‘return to normal’ (EC, p.114). What, then, is at stake for John? Coetzee seems to remain silent on this. Or does he?

I propose that the implications of Coetzee’s reluctance to commit to shifting the frontiers that define Western thinking can be seen to extend way beyond his individual sphere. I contend that John can be viewed as an example of a conforming Western identity. His own uncertainty about the issues that his mother raises unsettles his own sense of belonging. The global penalty of such assumed compliance with the dominant culture is enormous. These will be examined in the next section of this chapter.

I argue that Coetzee is highlighting the price of belonging within the boundaries of the academy. I agree with Martin Rowe that this text can be seen as one of the ‘damning indictments of the self-delusion of The Academy and the anxious professionals who live in it and from it’ (2002, p.1), but I suggest that Rowe fails to appreciate the internal dialogue in which Coetzee includes his own as well as Elizabeth Costello’s intellectual and authorial positions in the challenge, with each of them doubling back on their own authority, thereby setting an example of academic rigour that not only refutes Rowe’s criticism but also turns it back upon itself in a continuing
game of interrogation. Coetzee’s metafictional exercise urges his readers to try to step outside their own world and to examine their positions and the way that their ideas foster affiliations with like-minded people, while those who have alternative views are kept apart.

There has been some criticism of the absence of direct experience with animals in Elizabeth’s lecture. Barbara Smuts first notes this omission in her inclusion in the novella, *The Lives of Animals* (LA, pp.107-120). Other animal liberationist critics also regret this weakness in Costello’s position (Helen Kaye 1999; Keith Akers 1999). Of course it is Coetzee’s very point in Lesson 1 that, living vicariously through literature, one can become detached from the “real” world. All of Elizabeth’s references to animals relate to the imaginative creations of others, like Ted Hughes, that are merely critically appraised by Elizabeth.

It seems to me, however, that Coetzee does not need to cross the species boundary to demonstrate the transcendent value of being beyond the rational. Instead of using her relationship with animals to demonstrate understanding of another consciousness, I suggest that Coetzee uses Elizabeth’s own life, her physical presence in the midst of the learned company, as the evidence of being-in-the-world. It is as if Elizabeth *is* the animal other. The repetition of ‘flesh’ to describe her deteriorating appearance (*EC*, p.59; p.115) echoes the uneasy associations of animal meat. Her close identification with Kafka’s Red Peter hints at her twofold function as both lecturer and token or “specimen” stranger to the world of Socratic knowledge in Coetzee’s lecture.

It is my contention that Coetzee uses Elizabeth’s presence to the end as an ongoing reminder of the continuing failure of some of our traditional patterns of thought to address the ethical needs of our times, and to urge us to re-think the consequences of the frontiers that we erect. I suggest that Coetzee installs Elizabeth’s brief visit to Waltham as a more abiding disruption to the entire structure of our Western way of thinking that extends from The Academy to our individual daily choices. At the end of the text, Elizabeth is still there as persistent evidence of a borderland existence where belonging is destabilized. This is reminiscent of the final lines of *Age of Iron*, in which Mrs Curren remains on the cusp between life and death, surrendered to the silence of being beyond understanding but still a living sign of marginality. The example of
Elizabeth in these two lessons not only showcases the effect of our ideological allegiances and where we, ourselves, might fit in the world, but it also hints at the great toll that our selections may take upon the rest of the planet. This foreshadows Lesson 5, 'The Humanities in Africa', and Lesson 6, 'The Problem of Evil'.

The disruption to John’s sense of belonging that Elizabeth symbolizes, is, I suggest, the shadow unsettling of a secure sense of belonging that is being experienced pervasively in the West, particularly in these days of threatening confrontation and confusing shifts in alignments. John is caught between loyalty to his mother and commitment to his wife. His present position is one of privilege as a male scientist and citizen of the most powerful nation. Nevertheless, some of the fibres of his maternal bond remain intact, upsetting his newly claimed identity, even though he does not understand his mother’s stance. The disturbance which his mother brings with her reminds John of his own origins: the pre-rational semiotic chord with feminine creativity of which Kristeva speaks (1992, pp.128-134), the incongruities of his boyhood and youth in a colonial state, and the contradictions of being the son of a woman colonialist and writer.

I have shown that Coetzee not only expands the frontier between rationality and novelistic imagination but he also highlights the unavoidable isolation of those who try to break out of the Western epistemological tradition and the insecurity about belonging for those who subscribe to the dominant worldview. This attests to an extensive sense of alienation in the West today. Yet this cost is miniscule in comparison with the price that is paid globally for our current attitudes and habits, as I shall explain in the next section of this chapter.

8.3.3. HUMANITY IN AFRICA

In the two previous sections of this chapter I considered the performative function of Emmanuel and Elizabeth as catalysts at the intersecting lines between Western and African philosophy, cerebral and visceral experiences, rational discourse and the sympathetic imagination. I showed how Coetzee represents the body as a
frontier site that exceeds hegemonic containment. He uses these characters’ corporeality to open up emotional and creative frontiers of belonging, although each of these characters remains somewhat isolated and displaced at the end of those narratives. This suggests that other frontiers still need to be shifted if the sense of alienation that they epitomize is to be addressed.

For Coetzee, the fictional form affords him the opportunity to reach beyond the boundaries of intellectual debate on ‘The Humanities in Africa’ towards a more vital sense of humanity and the need for contact between people. Of course, the most significant exchange that Coetzee is exploring in Elizabeth Costello is between the fictional and the real. It would seem as if Coetzee is appealing to his readership to participate in the process of shifting the barriers to belonging, beyond the text. This relationship between the novel and the actual world comes into closer focus in this section.

I shall again consider Coetzee’s use of the body to transcend theoretical construction and to provide textual evidence of active attempts to shift the frontiers to belonging in Lesson 5. He sets up a dialogue between classical Greek and Christian iconography that mirrors the parallel realities of the two sisters, Elizabeth and Bridget. It is my contention that the dialectic between these twin belief systems and the different environments of the sisters engages the entire historical Western tradition in the complex range of individual and collective needs and responsibilities across the globe in the present.

Bodies are represented in two ways, as discreet symbols of belief and as the basis of narrative events. I shall examine how Coetzee installs the dialectic between the static conceptual structures, associated with some classical Greek and Christian images and other more fluid images of interaction, that are ever-responsive to the world in order to uphold the value of the body not as being-in-itself but rather as being-for-the-world.

The title of the lesson clearly establishes the double focus, which Coetzee negotiates, namely contemplation on the humanities as an academic field and the human reality of Africa where multitudes are dying from AIDS. The narrative accentuates the gap between the two. On a theoretical level, this overriding frontier between discourse
and reality seems to be forgotten amidst the maze of neat analytical juxtapositionings and satisfying theoretical discussions among the staff at the university in Southern Africa and between the sisters. On an experiential level, Elizabeth is isolated from a sense of belonging with her sibling, Bridget. The physical distance and psychological bar that separates her from her sister is metonymic of the barrier between Africa and the West, a division that most of us, in the West, seem to reinforce. Could it be that we, like Elizabeth, cannot face our complicity in neglecting the problem of AIDS? It seems to me that Coetzee is drawing a comparison between the lesson of inadvertent shared responsibility for the spread of evil that he proposes in ‘The Problem of Evil’ and our avoidance of global arenas of greatest need.

Coetzee sets up a dialectic engagement between the two sisters and their respective worlds, with Elizabeth’s tale representing a puny shadow performance that inadvertently adumbrates the unspoken and vast real area of concern. Elizabeth resists confronting the overwhelming trauma in the hospital, seeking instead to protect her own sense of identity in her place of belonging in Melbourne. In contrast to the intellectual debate that centres on symbolic objects, Elizabeth presents an event-based counter-story to that of her sister’s missionary life, from a distance.

I maintain that Coetzee compares and contrasts the physical acts of the two sisters in order to highlight the interconnectedness of the world and the implications for inhabitants of distinct global regions. They each care for the bodies of the dying, even though their physical deeds are quite different. I suggest that Coetzee uses Elizabeth’s bizarre contact with a dying old man in Melbourne to emphasize the displacement of individuals in the face of corporate global control. I further argue that Coetzee installs the parallel between her responsiveness to Mr Phillips and Bridget’s work among the masses of African children dying from AIDS to accentuate the metacognitive value of specific acts of caritas in dismantling the frontiers that incapacitate and divide us.

The overarching theme of all of Coetzee’s narratives has been between Western rational tradition and the ineluctable presence of the body as a site of border-crossing with enormous transformative potential. In all of his writing, but perhaps most self-consciously in the format of the lectures embedding the fictional narratives about Elizabeth Costello, the potential of the body to shift frontiers of belonging is realized in
the form in which corporeality is represented. In ‘The Humanities in Africa’ it is as if the two sisters, Elizabeth and Bridget, together represent the boundaries that define Western consciousness. The narrative mirrors their respective places of belonging and traces Elizabeth’s immediate and retrospective response to her visit to Africa. In the various iconic and narrative representations of embodiment, Coetzee contemplates not only the corporeal form of being-in-itself and being-for-others, but also the changes that narrative events can bring about in our thinking and in the way that we relate to others and the implications for an individual and collective sense of belonging.

I maintain that Coetzee is calling the readers’ attention to our complicity in the current crisis of belonging. It seems as if it is our own attachment to past patterns of validation, even though their relevance is diminishing, that has led to this alienation.

For Coetzee, the body is more than a mere passive symbol of frontier transgression. It is as a repository of action. The different actions of the two sisters link their diverse lives, but it is their continuing need for justification that prevents them from a sense of belonging with each other. Bridget is doubly validated by her faith and the universal respect for aide workers. In contrast, Elizabeth’s behaviour is less obviously an act of charity and there is no historic authorization. Any evaluation of her intimate contact with the dying man is difficult for there is no reference guide. I propose that Coetzee is endorsing personal acts of caritas as a way to shift the multiple institutionalized frontiers of belonging.

In my opinion, the pivotal discussion is between static, discreet and established conceptual constructs and the dynamic flow of the act of caring for others. Some critics, like Lodge (2003) and Anthony Uhlmann (2004), have identified the main thrust in this text as a debate between belief and the prevailing crisis of belief and the consequent floundering for ‘tokens of identification’ (Uhlmann, 2004). I concur that institutionalized certainties have failed but I do not think that Coetzee is pitting belief against a lack of faith. Instead, I maintain that Coetzee perceives religion to be merely another ‘token of identification’. He exposes the hollowness of eschatological certainty in Lesson 8 and he shows that, even though traditional belief systems bring with them the weight of the past, the promise of future reward cannot be guaranteed. The barren view, ‘At The Gate’, does not resemble familiar expectations of either heaven or hell. I
maintain that, for Coetzee, the search for the fixed assurance of all tokens of identification, including belief, is doomed because all such tokens present only an illusion of stability. All that remains to provide a sense of belonging, that is at best provisional, must lie in the actions of the individual in the present.

Paralleling the crisis in belief, Coetzee adumbrates a fundamental risk of the process of globalization, namely the disempowerment of the private individual and her/his alienation from the rest of the world in this lesson. I suggest that he goads the reader to resist the disabling force of globalization and to take up her/his responsibilities as a citizen of the world in this confronting tale. For Noreena Hertz, the silent takeover of governmental responsibility for the welfare of the people by international corporations brings benefits for local communities, but is also fraught with problems stemming from arbitrary management that is undemocratic and over-dependent on the creation of profit (2001). Coetzee’s lesson can be seen as an elaboration of Hertz’s warning. Certainly the benefits of globalization are mooted in the international funding for the Marianhill hospital that Bridget’s book generates. The question to be asked is: what are the implications of corporate foreign aide for Elizabeth’s sense of belonging?

In my opinion, the threat to the individual’s sense of belonging and to her/his capacity for ethical action lies in the wake of the silent takeover by multinationals that is identified by Hertz. I think that the globalization process presents an insidious risk that extends unnoticed beyond the borders of the developing world where poverty and social injustices are greatest. Most people feel a lack of ownership of giant corporate operations. Elizabeth reflects this experience of detachment. In Africa she cannot cope with the close contact with others in the church and she passes out. Back in Melbourne she longs for a stronger link with her sibling in Africa. Her sense of disconnectedness pervades.

By juxtaposing the lives of the sisters, Coetzee is showing that the crisis of belief has resulted in a crisis of belonging. Bridget can be seen to bridge the gap between scholarship of the Humanities and care for humanity. She represents the link between ethical propositions and ethical action, between knowledge of the ancient origins of our Western culture and the central tenet of Christian action, Pauline love. Her way of life is firmly grounded in a belief system that validates her actions, however. Lacking the
legitimacy of such a traditional framework, Elizabeth feels segregated. She asks: ‘Why is there this bar between us?’ (EC, p.155). While Elizabeth comes to share much of Bridget’s thinking on ethical care, as the ideal, first her withdrawal and then her withholding of the final unexplainable event signifies her reluctance to relinquish the rational mould of her Western heritage in which her sense of self is defined. Like her sister, she is equally attached to the same process of self-justification.

It is my contention that Elizabeth’s odd gesture of charity towards the impotent, voiceless Mr Phillips on his death-bed (EC, p.154) signifies failure of individual accountability at a time of changing world orders and the need to look beyond our current theoretical approaches to find new ways of connecting. I agree with Uhlmann who notes that a consequence of the crisis of belief is that, ‘in the absence of [religious] certainty, we feign it’ and that there is an intuitive anxiety about this pretence (2004, pp.10-11). I would add that this anxiety is manifest in Elizabeth’s ambivalence between measured self-rationalization and the need to relinquish such rigid control in order to foster a sense of belonging. I would further argue that Bridget also fails to provide a contrasting model of teasing open the discursive frontiers of belonging, for she remains fully committed to her rational stance, as I have explained.

It seems to me that Coetzee is not merely upholding the static body as a symbol that resists analysis but he is rather promoting the actions of the body as the means by which discursive boundaries can be shifted. The narrative gleans its initial meaning from the complementary connotations that are embodied in marble Hellenic statues and wooden crucifixes but these fixed images prove to be inadequate in the exchange of ideas between the two women. Alternative icons with permeable margins that allow for a sense of interaction are chosen by both sisters to better represent the notion of flexibility and sharing between identities. The example of Orpheus epitomizes movement between the human and the godly domains. Similarly, the Correggio painting of Mary of Nazareth depicts the mother ‘exuding’ milk to nourish the Christ child (EC, p.149). Of course, the eventfulness of these images of activity includes opportunities of creating new bonds of care and coexistence as well as the threat of losing an established or solidified sense of identity.
In my opinion, the debate on the dual iconic images of the body that are the anchoring sites of Western discourse on identity frames the problem of theoretical distancing from reality. Intellectualising can be seen as evidence of reluctance to engage with the real world. The enormity of the suffering in the mission hospital is unbearable at close range. Elizabeth attempts to protect herself by erecting a wall of resistance. Academic discussion with her sister allows her to ignore the physical confrontation of the diseased bodies and more personal sharing with her sibling. She prefers to deal indirectly through lifeless symbols rather than real lives. She favours stable constructs like the different reproductions of the human form of the divine because they are more manageable and because she is better able to control her own responses. Elizabeth maintains her sense of rational equilibrium by staying aloof. Ironically, her self-control inhibits her sense of belonging. To the end she restricts her written disclosures to her sister, preferring to remain silent on her inexplicable actions at Mr Phillips’ death-bed.

I think that Coetzee presents Elizabeth’s parallel tale of care as a transgressive act that crosses the boundary between cautious rational self-construction and the absurd. From a distance, Elizabeth is confident to inform her sister of her first act of baring her own breasts while modelling for Mr Phillips because she can justify her actions in the name of art (EC, p.148). Her second act of intimacy with the dying man lies beyond reasonable interpretation, hence Elizabeth refuses to be the recording agent of a process that may destabilize her rational sense of self. With her final act comes a form of insight that is different from cognitive understanding. It is the knowing of the heart, an act of empathy that is unintelligible. This resembles the shudder caused by Emmanuel’s breath in Lesson 2. Again Coetzee is enacting the surrender of meaning.

Coetzee seems to be suggesting that ethical action transcends the boundaries of identity. Elizabeth’s final episode with Mr Phillips upsets the balance of her well-regulated and careful self-construction. It is an outpouring of caritas that lies beyond the limits of rational understanding. This surrender resembles the final action of David in Disgrace, when he gives up the lame dog, his last attachment to self-validation, thereby allowing for the clearing of a space that is empty of meaning and open to otherness. For Coetzee, it is this space from which ethical action emanates. Even though the last episode defies rational explanation, it does provide a dim and distant reflection of her sister’s outpouring of Christian charity. The smallness of Elizabeth’s visible ethical
charge highlights the magnitude of the unseen millions across the continent of Africa, where AIDS is endemic. Elizabeth’s odd action shifts the frontiers of institutionalized thinking and creates an expanded boundary place where the individual can make a difference. I believe that this reiterates the international obligations of people in ‘luckier countries’ that Lenta flags (2003).

_Elizabeth Costello_ brings together Coetzee’s rigorous discourse on the extensive sense of estrangement that is being experienced in the world today and the unexpected options that the game of fiction creates. Coetzee crafts a multifaceted account of our “responsibility-in-complicity” for the global state of affairs. So too, he offers the representation of bodies as sites of transitional potential. Corporeality provides opportunities that exceed the parameters of rationality with which to review frontiers and re-imagine belonging-in-the-world.
9. CONCLUSION

In this thesis I have examined the shifting frontiers of belonging in J.M. Coetzee's fiction. This brings together a range of current theoretical interests from identity formation, to postcolonial negotiations, to concerns with globalization and cultural diaspora, all of which seem to demonstrate a similar focus on the universal desire for connectedness between people and with place.

My method has been threefold. First, I have tracked Coetzee's fastidious metafictional engagement with the overt and the covert complicities of the author in the signifying process that attest to his keen sense of responsibility. Secondly, I have noted a consistent challenge to the reader to acknowledge shared complicity and responsibility in the game of discerning meaning and the implications thereof. Rather, Coetzee seems to be suggesting, there is a price to be paid for our selection maps. The frontiers that we erect in an attempt to secure belonging can also entrap and exclude ourselves as well as others. At the heart of the matter, I have identified a fundamental ethical motivation in Coetzee's work that is to prompt vigilant scrutiny of the patterns of signification that define our perceptions and attachments. Finally, I have identified two concurrent strands in Coetzee's trajectory. He maintains a consistent focus on frontiers and the ambiguity of residing on the margins and he is responsive to the changes and concurrent critical thinking that take place in the world around him. Within a diachronic examination of the novels I have considered both the repetition of similar themes throughout his oeuvre as well as the development within his writing that increasingly presents textual strategies that disturb the lines of division and erode the imperviousness of fixed frontiers.

In the course of following Coetzee's body of work, I have found that he represents belonging as either rooted in historic socio-political structures of identification and belief systems or loosely linked to provisional and arbitrary affiliations. The former are resistant to revision, whereas the latter mutate freely. In the process of tracking the frontiers of belonging I have observed this contradiction between belonging within existing conceptual frameworks and the mobile desire to belong that eagerly seeks out new forms of connectedness.
In this study of belonging rather than identity, the external factors of individual circumstances and the wider milieux are brought into closer focus as a mirror that affects ongoing internal identity formation. Identity is a strongly debated concept, with most recent theorists and critics concluding that the perception of self is open-ended and in a continual state of becoming. A sense of belonging is closely affiliated to a sense of self, even though it is not synonymous with identity. A sense of self only seems to occur in relation to the natural and human environment, and yet a sense of belonging also involves connotations of complicity and responsibility towards that which lies beyond the self, the culture and the many associations of society. By concentrating on the immediate proximity of the individual characters and world that they encounter, I have discerned what I consider to be the nexus of Coetzee’s ethical project.

It seems to me that belonging implies a reciprocal relationship that requires collective collaboration to drawn up the requirements to which a sense of identification is pinned. In other words, belonging requires complicity in the setting up of boundaries. The responsibility for these demarcation lines lies with the individuals who contribute to their construction, but this is so often thwarted by the rigidity of established structures and leads to a disabling sense of ambivalence by most of Coetzee’s characters. These frontiers include all aspects of colonial consciousness, from land ownership to global marketing, linguistic hegemony and critical confrontation.

I have concluded that the yearning for connectedness is not fulfilled in Coetzee’s novels. As an example of this pervasive modern crisis, Elizabeth Costello exposes the gap between a solitary existence that includes only fleeting associations with others and the illusion of securing a sense of community. The overriding impression at the end of narrative is one of failure to belong. It is, however, in this very failure that Coetzee is acknowledging the price that we must pay for the frontiers that we install. And he is conceiving anew.

It is here that I have noted that the two aspects of Coetzee’s double position converge. Unlike discursive practices that are grounded in a well-established Western epistemological tradition of rational explanation, the novel allows for “creative play” in which existing rules can be transgressed or ignored and new ways of thinking can be
invented. Across the sequence of Coetzee’s novels I have discerned increasing play around the fixed frontiers that define the conditions of our belonging and our exclusion.

In the diachronic development of Coetzee’s writing in response to the changing world that he encounters, I have distinguished concurrent growth in Coetzee’s willingness to engage with the central issues of the day without perpetuating confrontation. Instead he toys with various methods of re-imagining oppositions.

Time renders fixed frontiers friable. Narrative presents a sequence of lived events in which changes in external situations and internal experiences make boundaries more malleable. I have also discovered that, on one level, the frontiers that appear to be entrapping and excluding to most of the characters are contained in the language, while, on another level, Coetzee uses the performative mode of the narratives, the sequence of events and selection of the angles of perception, the silences and the physical experiences that characters embody to offer a porous marginal zone beyond the representation of the characters in language, where divisions between people are eroded and opportunities for shared belonging can be increased.

I have observed that Coetzee consistently represents the margins in his novels and he expands the range of textual devices that he uses to subvert, transgress and perforate restrictive barriers in order to render them more absorptive and pliable. In the first novel, Dusklands, Coetzee presents an expanded border-zone that is open to both sides of the frontier. This concept of an expanded margin is permeable and allows for laminations of inscriptions (Waiting for the Barbarians, Foe and The Master of Petersburg) and increasing merging of identities, from the momentary glimpse in In the Heart of the Country, to the pervasive blurring of identities in The Master of Petersburg. Shifts from centre to margin are evident in the protagonists of Age of Iron and Disgrace, while the “in-between ontology” of those who reside on the edges of conflictual societies is represented in the examples of Michael K and Vercueil in Age of Iron. The silent presence of others such as Klein-Anna, Friday and Petrus wife connotes the vital potential of future contribution. In all of the novels the body is also a frontier that defies discursive laws and offers its own transgressive value. At last, Elizabeth Costello is a holographic enactment of these multiple erasures of the signifying process.
In this game of interrogating and manipulating frontiers, I contend that Coetzee has opened up a space for innovative negotiations on a number of fronts, including the relationship between Africa and the West, the regenerative focus of religious teaching, the ethical obligations of the individual within a global culture of corporate take-over and the confrontational discord between the Western way of life and the Muslim value system.

I have also discovered, what I believe to be, the core of Coetzee’s ethics at the intersection between his twin foci. In surrendering all attachments to established meaning we are released from the confines of frontiers and free to engage in creating anew. This is merely a starting point from which all ethical action emerges. Nevertheless it is a moment that demands taking on the pressing issues that need addressing in the world today. On an institutional level Peter Singer postulates: ‘How to prevent global bodies becoming either dangerous tyrannies or self-aggrandising bureaucracies, and instead make them effective and responsible to the people whose lives they affect, is something that we still need to learn’ (2002, p.218). It seems to me that Coetzee demonstrates the first steps in such a vital lesson.

For Coetzee continual self-scrutiny, coupled with the audacity to take ethical action in the face of traditional oppositions is the way towards a greater sense of belonging for all. As the imaginary character of Coetzee’s latest protagonist says, ‘we forget what kind of valour was called on to confront the plague’ (2003, p.7). Coetzee certainly excavates a site from which ethical action can ensue and he also spurs his readers to respond, although he does not ever prescribe what that action should be, for that would be imposing his own imprint onto a space that he has so painstakingly cleared.

There are some areas of interest that might continue this negotiation on belonging in Coetzee’s oeuvre. One such arena is the care for the natural environment and the co-existence of humans and animals in an ecologically sustainable environment. Coetzee has frequently included non-human species in his writing. Similarly, he is, at times critical of Western farming habits and the damage that results. A psychoanalytical study of his representation of family relationships could yield some thought-provoking insights for he usually does not write about partnerships, let alone whole families. He
largely avoids extended direct engagements, choosing instead to limit communication and he frequently sets up complex parent-child relationships, often with the one party removed from the scene. In this thesis I have noted that Coetzee employs Christian allusions without subscribing to the faith, although he does acknowledge the transcendent value of the religious concept of grace. I suggest that a more detailed study of his use of religious imagery, and his metaphysical and spiritual sources would be well worth closer scrutiny.

Linda Hutcheon declares: ‘To read is to act; to act is to interpret and to create anew - to be revolutionary, perhaps in political as well as literary terms’ (1984, p.161). But for Coetzee this is only the start. His call is to move beyond language and text. Now let the real action begin.
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