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But even in that house blackness was a sensuous-redemptive means of perception. Through blackness is revealed the way to the future. The descendants of Chaka, Dingane, Hintsa, Sandile, Moshesh, Cetewayo, Msilekazi and Sekukuni are the only ones who can get us there.

Nadine Gordimer, *Burger's Daughter*. 
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List of Abbreviations:

_Iron:_  _Age of Iron._

_Michael K:_  _Life & Times of Michael K._

_Foe:_  _Foe._

_BD:_  _Burger's Daughter._
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Introduction.

With full democratic elections granted to both white and black South Africans for April 1994, the next four months are going to be crucial in deciding who will hold the balance of power in the South African Parliament. Despite the internal opposition to South Africa's move towards democracy, it is predicted that Nelson Mandela will be South Africa's first black President. With an interim bipartisan constitution in place, the elections of 1994 will officially mark the abolition of Apartheid: a system that has denied black South Africans an active role in their country.

The ramifications of the election will, I believe, be important to the way in which we interpret the role of the Other in South African literature. At any rate, we must ask ourselves whether South Africa, emerging from the interregnum, is ready to accept the presence of the black consciousness. Nelson Mandela is obviously a hero in black eyes, a hero who has endured twenty seven years of enforced silence, cut off from mainstream South African history. Since his release, a strong black voice has been emerging in South Africa and it has already entrenched itself within society. Under the aegis of Mandela, black South Africans will most certainly regain the voice that has been denied them for three hundred years.
J.M. Coetzee's fiction spanning the period between 1983-1990 conveys the emerging black consciousness in as much as we can follow the ways in which a white author/story-teller responds to the contracting and expanding black presence. The dominant motif that arises from Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*, *Foe*, and *Age of Iron* is one focusing on the matter of silence. Susan VanZanten Gallagher and David Attwell provide an interesting coverage on Coetzee's fiction in that silence is seen to be an enigmatic "mystery" resisting interpretation. Both of these critics focus on Coetzee's problems as a white South African writer who is trying to come to terms with the black consciousness. Coetzee is more than aware of the problems confronting him as a South African author and we find that his dilemmas gain their most powerful expression in the fiction spanning 1983-1990. While this paper is not concerned with Coetzee's writing problems, it does take into consideration the role of these dilemmas in his fiction.

Moreover, this paper seeks to define the context in which the black consciousness is seen to emerge. We should be alert of Coetzee's attempts to create an archetypal black South African hero, who, on the one hand, serves the black consciousness, and who, on the other hand, struggles against the omnipotence of white authority. In the course of examining the fiction of this period, we realize that Coetzee is focusing on the evolution of the black consciousness; taking us through
its period of infancy, into its period of "enforced silence", and finally into the state that we see it in *Age of Iron*. What we have, in the end, is a collection of novels conveying the social and artistic problems inherent in the portrayal of black consciousness.
J.M. Coetzee's novel *The Life & Times of Michael K* is implicitly concerned with earth mythology and the "bread of freedom" that all black South Africans are struggling to taste. Michael K, the novel's animalistic, amoebic-like protagonist, is, like Vercueil from *Iron*, a racially misleading and indeterminate character who, in Kelly Hewson's words, chooses to "ignore" history rather than "make it". Moreover, by ignoring history, Michael K is declaring himself to be an invalid, unwilling participant in South African history: he eludes classification on both a physical and linguistic level. The literature of White Pastoral", argues Coetzee, "marks off for itself, and defends, a territory "outside" history where the disturbing realities of land and labour can be bracketed off, and questions of justice and power translated into questions of legal succession and personal relations between masters and servants"(*White Writing*: 11). In the light of this observation, Michael K's relationship with the earth shows how is he "bracketed off" in a territory existing outside of history.

Michael K is a victim of South Africa's evil system of Apartheid. This system, as we shall see in Coetzee's most recent book *Age of Iron*, reduces people, black people, to categories: it "deindividualizes".

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*Life & Times of Michael K*

The Earth Hero: The Case of Michael K.
"deterritorializes" and "dehumanizes" them to the point of virtual extinction. In the light of this racial "reductionist" policy, Coetzee's Michael K becomes, as some critics have argued, an ahistorical being existing outside the "intestines" of history. He is that "stone" who "dozes" in the gut of South African history, willing to expel himself from the colonial reality.

Michael K's "life and times" are lived in cages: cages that separate and confine the subject in as much as critics, like Stephen Watson, have argued that "Michael K only escapes the camps by escaping history altogether"(Watson:389). "Everywhere I go", Michael thinks, "they want me to open my heart and tell them the story of a life lived in cages. They want to hear about all the cages I have lived in, as if I were a budgie or a white mouse, or a monkey"(181). Michael is forced to "live a life in cages" not because he is different but because he is "but one of a multitude in the second class" who lives in a "pocket outside time". Dick Penner endorses Michael's ahistorical position by saying that "of the protagonists in Coetzee's first four novels, only Michael K can be said to have escaped historical event to enter a realm of being outside of linear time"(Penner:98-99). The paradox is that the medical officer knows that Michael, existing outside of history, "means" something. He tells us that "I was the only one who saw that you were more than you seemed to be"(164).
Michael K's existence outside the South African time frame suggests that he is an individual, solitary character turning to mother earth for security. Referring to the earth-mythology abundant in *Michael K*, Derek Wright believes that Michael K has all the trappings of a creature of the earth, invested with an obvert "chthonian mythology". That K does escape history, and therefore classification, suggests that he is a limited, provisionally equipped character eluding the most strident attempts of colonial definition. David Attwel believes that

K remains his own person: in refusing to be imprisoned in any way, either in the literal camps or in the nets of meaning cast by those who follow after him, he becomes - in the socially symbolic field of the novel's engagement with South Africa, that is, in the field of reading and interpretation - a principle of limited, provisional freedom, a freedom located in the act of writing (Attwell:92).

It seems that David Attwell has the authority to cast Michael as "a principle of Freedom", yet the irony is that Coetzee does and will not assume to speak for the Other - Michael K. This becomes an intense artistic and creative problem for Coetzee in his novels that follow *Michael K* to the point where the white authors own attempts of writing are undermined by the presence of an expanding black consciousness. The medical officer tells us that he felt with "Michaels" "a concentration of darkness, a black whirlwind roaring in utter silence"(164).
Michael K believes, at the end of his remarkable journey across a bleak and harsh Karoo, that "one can live". Michael K is constructed and distinguished by the environment around him. He can live because landscape, gardening, planting and, to a lesser degree, history are integral parts of his existence, they give him "substantiality". Michael's penchant for gardening becomes more than a career or hobby: gardening is Michael's only means of identity and selfhood. Moreover, Michael's interest in gardening and earth-related occupations shows us that he uses the earth, in this case landscape, as a referent for his own existence. Any "heroic" qualities that are invested in Michael obviously come from his relationship with the environment and the way in which this environment moulds and influences him. Clearly, the hero that Coetzee is defining here is one that relates to a mythology or mystique of the land. Michael K is a protean figure, and not unlike Friday, is malleable and resists all attempts to coded. While the medical officer's interpretation of Michael is designed to illustrate a form of race consciousness, we find that K is the passive, inarticulate earth hero striving to resist history:

As time passed, however, I slowly began to see the originality of the resistance you offered. You were not a hero and did not pretend to be, not even a hero of fasting. In fact you did not resist at all. When we told you to jump, you jumped. When we told you to jump again, you jumped again. When we told you to jump a third time, however, you did not respond but collapsed in a heap; and we could
all see, even the most unwilling of us, that you had failed because you had exhausted your resources in obeying us(163).

Clearly expressing a similar kind of concern that we find Susan and Foe making of Friday, the medical officer, who in David Attwell's eyes is a "hermeneutical parasite", relies on Michael for meaning and substance. In the eyes of the Other, and here I am careful in not assuming too much in Coetzee's protagonist, Michael represents a break from authority: he is not violently authoritarian as are Bheki and John in *Age of Iron*, nor is he as mute and pathetic as Friday in *Foe*. In fact, Michael's heroic stature falls somewhere between the Other portrayed in the former book and of that in the latter. In fact, Michael's heroic stature derives from his ability to escape, and more importantly, to recognize that he has a conscience. Michael says that "if I had learned story-telling at Huis Norenius instead of potato-peeling and sums, if they had made me practice the story of my life every day, standing over me with a cane till I could perform without stumbling, I might know how I please them"(181).

Quick to point out Michael's literary ancestors, Derek Wright has pointed out that "Michael K is a creature not of human history but of earth, his true literary ancestors Lear's "naked unaccommodated man" and those rocklike, purely elemental Wordsworthian presences, the Leach-Gatherer and the Old Cumberland Beggar"(Wright:...). Yet it is inappropriate to base
Michael's heroic stature on the mishaps of his literary ancestors because the context in which Michael exists is different from the misfortunes of Shakespeare's Lear and Wordsworth's solitary itinerants. Michael is a product of his landscape, a landscape that makes up much of his substance and meaning. It is from an interaction with this landscape that Michael is able to derive some earth-heroic attribute.

There are two distinguishable landscapes in the novel that separate the two different Michael K's. Firstly, there is the lush and sub-tropical landscape of the Cape which, in Michael's words, is an environment "he preferred with tall pine trees and dim agapanthus walks"(4). From the outset, a strong, lucid impression is given of Michael's symbiotic link with nature. This relationship constitutes part of Michael's heroic quality in that he escapes the confusion of history only so he can bond with his earth mother. The landscape of the Cape is one in which Michael feels at home. He is content with his position as "gardener grade I" and feels no reluctance to leave his position. Yet K soon realizes, however, that his ideal life has been undermined by another, antithetical landscape.

Susan Vanzanten Gallagher has stated that "given the extensively military and guerrilla activity in the early eighties, it is not surprising that discourse in South Africa at this time became increasingly concerned with war, revolution, and apocalypse"(Gallagher:140).
Whether the war ravaging the periphery of Michael K's world is confined to one region or has spread to encompass many others is left undefined, but the impact that it has on Michael's existence is significant. David Attwell endorses Gallagher's apocalyptic vision of war saying that the scenario "anticipates accelerated militarization in response to sporadic but growing insurrection and guerrilla activity". Attwell's predilection for reading all of Coetzee's novel as an allegorical or figurative expression of colonial unrest in South Africa tends to adumbrates the importance of the novel's earth mythology. Michael becomes concerned that his world of shovels and wheelbarrows is being laid to waste by the war and he soon realizes that he has to escape the "reality" of the approaching violence. The "conviction" that grows in Michael's conscience reiterates the point that he is aware of what is happening around him. Kelly Hewson has interpreted Michael's method of evasion as an action undertaken by the dehumanized, deterritorialized and disenfranchized Other. Michael's evasion of history is far from heroic, in fact, it constitutes more a form of cowardice and unwillingness to face the white power head on. Michael, then, is forced to redirect his puny existence toward the earth, to things weaker and more delicate than himself (Hewson: 65).

The environment of the Karoo is an empty, dry earth scape where Michael lives "beyond the reach of calendar
and clock in a blessedly neglected corner, half awake, half asleep. Like a parasite dozing in the gut...like a lizard under a stone"(116). It is in this particular ecosystem that Michael is required to adopt a chthonic existence. The bond that Michael makes with the earth is so strong that he begins to think of himself in earth terms: he is an ant that has "lost its hole", and insect, a "naked mole". The most outstanding aspect of this region is its isolation and neutrality from the rest of South Africa. Michael roams from one landscape to another, searching for that "cord of tenderness" between him and his earth mother. Are the endless wanderings part of Michael's "heroic quest" for selfhood and identity, two attributes that he feels he lacks? In fact, Michael's peripatetic nature suggests that he lives an inconsistent life, roaming the Karoo like the cycle of seasons. The dry, inhospitable and lifeless characteristics of the Karoo are likened to Michael's physical appearance. Living in this habitat, Michael feels that he is "becoming a different kind of man...I am becoming smaller and harder and drier everyday"(67). Michael's body is weathered like the earth, thus becoming part of the dirt and sand that circumscribes his isolated burrow. "What a pity" says Michael, that to live in times like these a man must be ready to live like a beast. A man who wants to live cannot live in a house with lights in the windows. He must live in a hole and hide by day. A man must live so that he leaves no trace of his living. That is what it has come to(99).
Because K likens himself to his surroundings, he starts to realize that he "lived by the rising and setting of the sun, in a pocket outside time" (60).

The cremation of Michael's mother, and the ritual sowing of her ashes into the Karoo soil, is, understandably, an attempt to strengthen his relationship with his earth mother. Michael sows his mother's ashes into the earth, thus bringing his two mothers together. His natural mother is just as mysterious as Michael, all we learn of her is that she is sick and obviously dying. K's spiritual mother is the earth itself, so when K sows his mother into the soil he is, in fact, uniting the two mothers. Michael envisages his biological mother as enriching and fertilizing the earth; giving life to the "sister melons" and "brother pumpkins". When asked by the medical officer as to his mother's whereabouts he responds by saying: "she makes the plants grow" (130).

When K scatters his mother's ashes over the soil he is, in fact, returning her to her native land. Tilling the ashes into the soil anticipates a similar thought in Age of Iron when Elizabeth Curren reflects on those "black faces" that have been tilled into the earth, awaiting the return of the "age of iron". Anna and Michael K represent a minority group struggling to overcome the constraints and restrictions of the colonial system. Moreover, Anna K epitomizes a maternal figure who is symbolically returned to the earth so that "she grows for
all" the non-white people. Like those "pig-iron" faces that give inspiration and strength to the expanding black consciousness, Anna K gives life to the children of the earth. For Michael, his mother's ashes fertilize the hope and strength of future generations. Coetzee shows us that Anna K is an integral part of the earth mythology: she constitutes the natural and biological elements of Michael's life. Knowing that he was born to care for his "mother", K muses over the question of maternal love and its connection to the earth, asking himself:

What is it that binds me to this spot of earth as if to a home I cannot leave. We all must leave home, after all, we must all leave our mothers. Or am I such a child, such a child from such a line of children, that non of us can leave, but have to come back to die here with our heads upon our mothers' laps, I upon hers, she upon her mother's, and so back and back, generation upon generation(124).

Michael K's affinity with gardening and plants reveals his "human" vulnerability. "The impulse to plant", says the narrator, "had reawoken in him; now, in a manner of weeks, he found his waking life bound tightly to the patch of earth he had begun to cultivate and the seeds he had planted there"(59). The image of K planting and churning the earth's soil, for "those children, cousins, and second cousins behind the wire", is conveyed relentlessly throughout the novel. His obligation of seeding his mother into the earth suggests that Michael,
who imagines that he has literally immortalized his mother, feels that there is a "cord of tenderness" umbilically linking him to his earth mother. K's love and admiration for his "sister melons and brother pumpkins" allows him to overcome the hardship of his survival. The earth hero that Coetzee is creating in the course of his book is one who is able to coexist with nature. Being able to survive on vegetable matter, Michael begins to acknowledge the role that his earth mother plays in the creation of his "family":

> He had never tasted fruit so sweet. How much of that sweetness came from the seed, how much from the earth...From one seed a hole handful: that was what it meant to say the bounty of the earth (118, Coetzee's italics).

Michael's method of growing and nurturing his "family" endorses the idea that he is inherently bound with earth mythology. The bond is so strong that Michael becomes inseparable from the environment in which he lives. Like Kafka's Badger in "The Burrow", Michael is a beast who feels "as naked as a mole in daylight".

The idea of gardening and planting is contrasted to another idea that the Other, like Michael, are parasites "dozing in the gut" of South African history. The Police captain says that the detainees in Jakkalsdrif are "idle criminals" who "appreciate nothing". Michael provides us with another aspect of his inarticulate conscience when he says that:
If these people really wanted to be rid of us...if they really wanted to forget us forever, they would give us picks and spades and command us to dig; then, when we had exhausted ourselves digging, and had dug a great hole in the middle of the camp, they would have to order us to climb in and lay ourselves down, and when we were lying there, they would have to break down the huts and tents and tear down the fence and throw the huts and the fence as well as every last thing we had owned upon us, and cover us with earth, and flatten the earth. Then, perhaps, they might begin to forget about us(94).

The white authorities assume the blacks to be parasites simply because they are of a different colour. In a South African context, this suggests that it is a colonial view that labels the blacks as parasites. Once again, Michael demonstrates his awareness of events when asks the important question of whether parasites are victims of their own Otherness. Michael is not a victim of the state; he is more a casualty who is lost in a no-mans-land between two antithetical realities. These two worlds, according to Michael, have no meaning and substance in an ahistorical context. Michael imagines the host/parasite paradigm to be suggestive of some greater problem:

What if the hosts were outnumbered by the parasites, the parasites of idleness and the other secret parasites in the army and police force and the schools and factories and offices, the parasites of the heart. Parasites too had flesh and substance; parasites too could be preyed upon. Perhaps in truth whether the camp was declared a parasite on the town or the town a parasite on the camp depended on no more than on who made his voice heard loudest(116).
What Coetzee illustrates here is that humanity is, in some shape, a parasite living and sucking on the surface of South Africa.

Characterized according to their own histories, the other figures in the novel remain separate from K. At any rate, it is Michael who lives outside of time because he is envisaged by the medical officer to be "an unbearing, unborn creature...waving an arm like an insect's claw"(135). Michael's journey away from the Cape is, in view of his isolation, a journey out of history. For the medical officer, K represents "a creature from an earlier age". At any rate, the medical officer is the first articulate character who attempts to tell Michael's story. He sees Michael as

a genuine little man of the earth,...with fingers ready hooked and back ready bent for a life of borrowing, a creature that spends its waking life stooped over the soil, that when at last its time comes to dig its own grave and slips quietly in and draws the heavy earth over its head like a blanket and cracks a last smile and turns over and descends into sleep, home at last, while unnoticed as ever somewhere far away the grinding of the wheels of history continues(161).

Previously, Robert, in the camp, tells Michael that "You're a baby...You've been asleep all your life. It's time to wake up. Why do you think they give you charity, you and the children? Because they think you are harmless, your eyes aren't open, you don't see the truth around you"(88-89). Like Susan Barton in Foe, the medical officer depends on Michael for meaning and
substance. But Michael will not "yield" and tell his story, because Coetzee is cognizant that the black consciousness has no language through which it can convey its voice. After many attempts at communication and endless speculations about Michael's history, the medical officer can apotheosizes because he is the one to "show me the way"(162-63).

Removed from history, Michael shows us that he is trying to come to terms with his own being. Coetzee's shows us that Michael's "cord" history has been severed because he lacks the words to explain his existence: "I was", thinks Michael, "mute and stupid in the beginning, I will be mute and stupid in the end"(182). Michael himself discloses that "I am not clever with words". When he speculates about his existence he is confronted with a wide-mouthed hole waiting to envelop the remnants of his being. It is this hole into which history - Michael K's history - is sucked. "There remained a gap", thought K, "a hole, a darkness before which his understanding baulked, into which it was useless to pour words. The words were often eaten up, the gap remained. His was always a story with a hole in it: a wrong story, always wrong"(110). Like Friday's button hole presence in Foe, Michael's "hole" is one that has been created by the colonial power. He has no meaning because he is dismembered from history. Thus, in linear terms, he ceases to exist.
Removed, and "untouched by history", Michael becomes an anachronism in South African history. When he re-enters history he becomes confused and lost amongst mainstream society. Classified according to earth-mythology; the landscape, gardening and planting are, in addition, key components in Michael's chthonic existence. When he moves out of history Michael K is, in reality, reverting to an earlier period in time. The earth mythology, then, provides Michael with the same "substantiality" that Susan seeks in Foe. Michael, at the end of part I says that "I live nowhere". In fact, he lives outside of time, undamaged by those "grinding wheels of history". The emerging black consciousness is, ironically, contracted in Coetzee's next book Foe. Both Susan and Foe become obsessed with unravelling Friday's silence and, in so doing, unconsciously recognize the need to give voice to the black figure.
The creation of the semi-articulate, passive hero in the form of Michael K evolves into a silent, muted character in the form of a tongueless Friday. After the success of *Michael K*, Coetzee turned his attention to the ways in which narrative has the power to silence the "Other". Focusing on the reticent Friday and the history of how he lost his tongue, Coetzee creates, through the diverse narrative of Susan Barton, a story that breaks with conventional realism in as much as it becomes a self-reflexive portrayal on the art of fiction. While this chapter attempts to explain the mystery of Friday's unspoken presence, it will be necessary to say at least a few words on the novel's treatment of narrative and story-telling. Moreover, I intend on showing how Friday's silence represents the "meaning" and substance of Susan and Foe's existence. Like Elizabeth Curren and Michael K's medical officer, Foe and Susan's hermeneutical attempts at unravelling Friday's "silent history" results in a general break down in meaning.

Taking the *Robinson Crusoe* fable and having a female narrate the history of Crusoe and Friday, through a perspective that undermines many of the events in the original book, Coetzee shows us how narrative and
story-telling interacts with the predicaments of South African history. The fable lends itself to Coetzee's task in as much as he is able to illustrate the relationship between Oppressor and Oppressed. David Attwell and Derek Wright have argued that the novel is a brain twisting book involving a meditation on the art of fiction, an allegorical representation of South Africa's racial and cultural dilemmas and a slim theoretical narrative encompassing language as an agent of power.

If we briefly examine this latter proposal, we realize that Friday is an "empty space" waiting to be colonized by language. Moreover, the "empty space" is a condition that affects Susan and Foe, and later Elizabeth Curren, in that they feel it their "literary" duty to colonize Friday's empty space with words and meaning. Friday's silence makes him vulnerable to European myth, a myth that codes and re-codes Friday's existence. Both Susan and Foe use their own language and myths of the "Other" to "substantialize" Friday's existence. His silence, and hence his powerlessness, becomes the focus of contextualization. Foe and Susan posit Friday in a specific contextual frame where they can at least begin to interpret his "silent existence". "In every story", says Foe

there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken...Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story. I ask: Why was Friday drawn into such deadly peril, given that life on the island was without peril, and then saved(141).
Susan and Foe direct their energy to unravelling the "unspoken" story of Friday's silence. At any rate, Foe's observation concerning concealment and the unspoken word reiterates the idea that Friday's silence is the heart of Susan's story. More importantly, the "concealed sights" of Friday's story are the areas most vulnerable to interpretation. Foe recognizes that Friday's silence is the issue hampering the natural progression of the story. Apparently, no one knows what Friday is and why he lives in a world of silence. Susan tells us that the story of Friday is "properly not a story but a puzzle or a hole in the narrative (I picture it as a buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button)"(121). Foe is a story about enforced silence: the enforced silence of Friday, the silence that the colonial power exercises over the powerless, and the literary silence that was imposed on eighteenth century female writers. The inversion of the Crusoe fable allows Coetzee to illustrate the various forms of silence and expose, at the same time, the inexplicable spaces in Friday's history. In fact, it is these unknown, indescribable spaces that suggest Foe to be a story more about emptiness - physical, literary and linguistic - and not just a story about silence.

Having introduced these questions relating to the authority of writing and the power it has to render everything and everyone silent, it is necessary to answer them in the light of Friday's role in the novel. Susan
VanZanten Gallagher believes that "Susan and Friday's inability to tell their own stories demonstrates how the literary tradition has long silenced those defined as Other" (Gallagher: 186). Susan's inability to write her own story comes from the burden Friday imposes on her. For Foe and Susan, Friday's silence is an impenetrable mystery to them both: Susan attempts to interpret Friday's dilemma, and what she observes is that:

Friday has no command of words and therefore no defence against being re-shape day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal...What is the truth of Friday? You will respond: he is neither cannibal nor laundryman, these are mere names, they do not touch his essence, he is a substantial body, he is himself, Friday is Friday (121-22).

Clearly, no one knows what Friday is, yet he is a malleable, historically protean figure whose silence is shaped by authorial power: the author and the oppressor have the ability to create and destroy any interpretation of Friday and his silence. Friday's reticence is enigmatic and, for Susan and Foe, impalpable: no one knows how and why Friday's tongue was mutilated.

Friday's dilemma, we are told, "is a helpless silence. He is a child of silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born" (122). Michael K, Friday's predecessor, has partial use of language, though at times he does admit his failure to grasp the concept of words. In Friday we see a hero who is
incapable of verbally articulating himself and who readily reverts to visual forms of communication as a means of expression. Friday's heroic status derives from his silence: it is from his silence that he finds his identity.

Concentrating on Friday's silent world - a world that has an allegorical dimension - Coetzee shows us how Susan becomes preoccupied with unravelling Friday's mystery. Assuming the role of the muse, Susan attempts to give birth to Friday's silent state: she poses questions and seeks answers to Friday's inarticulate nature. Suggestive of the need to tell the story of the "Other", Susan becomes the procreative agent endeavouring to give voice to Friday's unsounded history. If Friday could speak, he would probably challenge, as does Bheki in Iron, the authority of white society. However to suggest such an idea is dangerous and unwarranted because what right do we have in speculating as to what Friday would say if he had a voice. Dick Penner says that "Friday's muteness can be read as a symbol of the inexpressible psychic damage absorbed by blacks under racist conditions" (Penner: 124). If Friday's muteness represents an "inexpressible psychic damage", then, his flute melody and dancing suggest an attempt at communication. But what is Friday conveying in his music and dancing?
The six note melody that Friday plays on Foe's flute symbolizes the limited, peripheral life that Friday has been forced to endure. Knowing that African music is both diverse and ritualistic, we realize that Friday's truncated tune re-tells the loneliness of his mysterious existence. Friday's dancing, on the other hand, is a more potent attempt to bridge the gulf between the silent and audible world. Friday, living in a world that prevents him from any form of verbal participation, uses his dancing to transcend his powerless existence. Susan is cognizant that Friday's dance is an attempt to say something meaningful about his own history. When she undertakes to communicate with Friday, Susan learns that her own method of communication is both frustrating and futile:

Tears came to my eyes, I am ashamed to say; all the elation of my discovery that through the medium of music I might at least converse with Friday was dashed, and bitterly I began to recognize that it might not be mere dullness that kept him shut up in himself, nor the accident of the loss of his tongue, nor even an incapacity to distinguish speech from babbling, but a disdain for intercourse with me. Watching him whirling in his dance, I had to hold back an urge to strike him and tear the wig and robes away and thus rudely teach him he was not alone on this earth(98).

Susan, in her moment of anger, feels the urge to render Friday naked; to strip him of all substance and identity, which the robe and dancing appear to suggest. By donning Foe's robes, Friday overcomes his muteness to the extent that he is able to give his performance voice
and authority. Friday ceases to be a marginal character only because his dancing becomes the voice through which he can express his predicament. It is through his dancing that Friday is able to give substance to his own life: it provides him with a meaning and identity that Susan and Foe fail to comprehend.

Susan's intrigue with Friday's dancing leads her to mimicking Friday's dancing in as much as she learns that "there is after all design in our lives, and if we wait long enough we are bound to see that design unfolding"(103). Experiencing the potency of the dance, Susan shows us that she is partially understands the unaccountable mystery behind Friday's silence. The dancing is just one example of Susan's efforts to give voice to Friday's silence, however Susan realizes, like Coetzee, that the author is confronted, in Gallagher's words, with the "issue of how one can write for-in support of-the Other without presuming to write for-assuming the power over-the other"(Gallagher:192). In the course of writing her own story, Susan finds that Friday is a pivotal part of the narrative. "It is for us", says Susan, "to open Friday's mouth and hear what it holds: silence perhaps, or a roar, like the roar of a sea shell held to the ear"(142). Despite the puzzle surrounding Friday's reticence, Susan goes on to say that Friday cannot write because he lacks the words to do so:
How can he be taught to write if there are no words within him, in his heart, for writing to reflect, but on the contrary only a turmoil of feelings and images? As to God's writing, my opinion is: If he writes, he employs a secret writing, which it is not given to us, who are part of that writing, to read(143).

Focusing on that "space" that Friday's silence occupies, Susan tells us that Friday's speechlessness is a form of linguistic collapse: Friday, because he has no tongue, is incapable of expressing words and feelings to others around him. In fact, Susan assumes too much authority over Friday and her endless speculations about Friday's silence only adds to her own insecurity. It is this insecurity that motivates Susan in her attempts to explain Friday's lack of speech. Susan, then, relies on Friday for meaning and substance, and without these two things she is just as empty as Friday.

Foe, in response to Susan's observation, tells her that "we cannot read it, I agree, that was part of my meaning, since we are that which he writes. We, or some of us: it is possible that some of us are not written, but merely are; or else (I think principally of Friday) are written by another and darker author"(143). Foe undertakes to show Susan how the need to code, un-code and re-code Friday has resulted in her inability to interpret Friday's reticence. Clearly, to make her point more valid and meaningful to Foe, she says that:

Then there is the matter of Friday's tongue. On the island I accepted that I should never learn how Friday lost his tongue, as I accepted that I should
never learn how the apes crossed the sea. But what we can accept in life we cannot accept in history. To tell my story and he silent on Friday's tongue is no better than offering a book for sale with pages in it quietly left empty. Yet the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost(67).

Friday's "lost tongue" holds the secret to his untold history. The effort Susan makes to write Friday's history is designed to show how Friday's dilemma is an essential part of Susan's quest for "substantiality". Brenda Marshall believes that Friday's lack of tongue and consequent loss of speech "is a reference to the lost ability of a people, of Friday as slave, to speak". She goes on to argue that "on a linguistic level...Barton's reference...is to the role that silence, lack, absence, Otherness...plays in our apprehension of meaning"(Marshall:56). Similarly, Gallagher proposes that "Friday's voice will liberate not only himself but also Susan, for her story is dependent on his meaning"(Gallagher:184).

Friday, then, serves as the centre of meaning for Susan's story. Coetzee's break from conventional realism, a form that he employs in parts of Michael K, shows us how the text is the enemy "through which the white author shuts the racial and cultural Otherness of colonized peoples into closed European myth systems and codes of interpretation"(Wright, Fiction:118). Susan and Foe feel the urge to code and re-code Friday so that they can find answers to explain his silence, but more importantly to clarify the nature of their own existence.
Friday's history is written from a Euro-centric perspective in which he is the unspoken, silent black fighting for voice in a world that denies such a position to the Other. Coetzee invests Friday not with heroic attributes, but with attributes that represent the black position in South Africa. In fact, Coetzee cannot apply any heroic status to Friday because he does nothing worthy of the label. The problem is that without his tongue, Friday cannot be called heroic. It is, therefore, left to Foe and Susan to locate those qualities that constitute Friday's heroism. Gallagher and Attwell have cogently argued that Friday is the sum of all European thought relating to the Other and his place in colonial literature is one of marginality and enforced muteness.

Coetzee's inarticulate black hero in *Foe* is rendered voiceless through the loss of his tongue. Allegorically, Friday's voicelessness suggests the curtailment of a black presence. David Ward has succinctly argued that "Friday becomes a figure of the African diaspora, stranded, robbed of his speech and culture, and put to work in furthering an incomprehensible construction of alien purpose" (Ward:169). In fact, Friday's dilemma is one constructed by white myth; a myth that prevents the Other from opposing and undermining white authority, hence the symbolic absence of Friday's tongue.

In the final chapter of the book, Coetzee abandons conventional technique in favour of a more surrealistic, cinematic style that places the book's protagonist
somewhere in the future, where, it seems, the semi-articulate gurgles from Friday allow him partial expression. The detached narrator who stumbles across the three bodies of Foe, Susan and Friday - and later the dead Captain - tells us that "this is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday"(157). Like the barbarian girl from *Barbarians* who represents the "lost", unaccountable history of her race, Friday, too, becomes a subject who has moved beyond the boundaries of language and into a realm where silence can speak. Friday's silence is finally given voice in this chapter because it anticipates a future in which blacks, like Friday, will be able to break free from their enforced muteness:

His mouth opens. From inside him comes a slow stream, without breath, without interruption. It flows up through his body and out upon me; it passes through the cabin, through the wreck; washing the cliffs and shores of the island, it runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth. Soft and cold, dark and unending, it beats against my eyelids, against the skin of my face(157).

The style in which the final section of *Foe* is crafted allows Coetzee to project Friday into the future where black silence becomes a powerful weapon in the fight against white authority. Only in a future state can Friday's silence speak - a state that is expressed by Coetzee's metafictional element. Coetzee, then, is suggesting that a literary style other than realism has the ability to provide a voice for the black Other.
Ironically, Friday does not and cannot speak because Coetzee has made sure that Susan and Foe are not empowered to speak for the voiceless, marginal Other. At any rate, Coetzee is cognizant of the fact that the white South African author cannot and should not assume a voice for the Other. To do so would mean that Coetzee is assuming the role of author as God, who, it would appear, has the ability to create and destroy the presence of the Other. This, paradoxically, is the dilemma Coetzee faces in all of his fiction, and his next book *Age of Iron* continues to reiterate this point. As David Attwell has observed, "Coetzee is careful not to disqualify Friday from having a history, even though the emphasis falls on the silence that Friday keeps within the context of those authorized to speak...Friday is [at least] acknowledged to have a history"(Attwell:115).

As we shall see in the next chapter, Coetzee returns to conventional realism so as to show the plight of South African blacks during the State Emergency. Moreover, Coetzee continues to develop the black consciousness, which he began to do in *Michael K*, in as much as it becomes the omnipotent voice in the novel. Ironically, this seems to be the next logical progression on from the indecipherable silence of Friday.
Age of Iron

In Hands not Foreseen: Children and South Africa.

Coetzee's most recent novel marks a significant change in his approach to South Africa and the racial problems facing both white and black. This is a book in which the white (female) writer struggles to find the words to tell "South Africa's story". Elizabeth Curren cannot find the right words to portray the violence, bloodshed and apocalypse engulfing South Africa insofar as she feels that the contemporary South African writer is ultimately writing about death. "Death", says Elizabeth, "may indeed be the last great foe of writing, but writing is the foe of death"(106). When she first introduces Vercueil, Elizabeth acknowledges that everything around her is part of her writing: "When I write about him I write about myself. When I write about his dog I write about myself; when I write about the house I write about myself. Man, house, dog"(8).

Elizabeth's story is one in which black consciousness is given omnipotent expression, suggesting that there is a rival voice seeking to undermine white authority to the point where it becomes omnipotent and threatening. Moreover, the black voice is becoming increasingly omniscient as far as its presence gives substance to Elizabeth's life. When Elizabeth writes about her
experiences with the Other - experiences that bring her into an antithetical world of violence and bloodshed - we notice that there has been a crucial development in the way that the Other is portrayed in Coetzee's fiction. The black presence has developed both articulation and the ability to communicate, yet we find that this expansion is geared more towards a political rather than cultural purpose.

Here we are dealing with politically conscious blacks who, as in Gordimer's *Burger's Daughter*, have taken on a greater sense of autonomy and freedom through language. Like Baasie in *Burger's Daughter*, Coetzee's black heroes - Florence, Bheki, John and Thabane - assume an outspoken position on the plight of black South Africans. The irony is that this promulgating black consciousness and voice is conveyed by a white liberal consciousness, struggling to come to terms with the decay of her own society. Elizabeth and her world - that "late bourgeois tomb", that "museum in decay" - are now the subject of death: "Life is dust between the toes. Life is dust between the teeth. Life is biting the dust"(179). Coetzee appears to be suggesting that Elizabeth has herself become a dehumanized, deterritorialized colonial struggling to find a space in which to release her voice. The power of voice that is given to Bheki and John implies that Coetzee is prepared to recognize the presence of the black voice in
South African literature, yet he will not assume a voice to speak for it.

Asked whether *Iron* was an emergency novel, Coetzee responded by saying that "it was written during the years of the State Emergency in South Africa." He goes on to remark that:

It reflects not only the outward manifestations of those years - the boycott of schools, the running battles in the townships, the relentless control of the media by state - but some of their inward temper as well: bitterness and rage on the one side, despair and exhaustion on the other (Viola: 6).

Coetzee's novel, then, expresses contempt for the brutalities and atrocities inflicted upon black South African children during the period 1986-1989. Hitherto, Coetzee has presented us with many passive, communicative and uncommunicative Others and to look for similar characteristics in *Iron* proves to be an unilluminating task. Here, Coetzee is dealing with a different generation of Other. The Other has become increasingly aware of his/her socio-political position in contemporary South Africa and in so doing strives to remove the stranglehold that the white liberal society has on the black consciousness.

From the conception of Michael K, Coetzee labours in his search for the most faithful representative of the South African Other. Considerable merit has to be given for this exercise because Coetzee acknowledges, through his writing, the problems of historical and literary
constraint in speaking for the Other. Furthermore, Coetzee has presented his readers with, on the one hand, a contracting white consciousness, and, on the other, with an expanding black consciousness. *Iron* moves us into the realm of the collective conscience of the Other. The search for a true and faithful black hero is no longer an individual matter. The fight for voice becomes a public matter in that South Africa is forced to confront the shame of its atrocities. While Michael K and Friday were very much the isolate in a world that silenced their presence and nullified their existence, the collective, communal presence of the Other in *Iron* violently opposes the colonial authority. As a united black consciousness, Coetzee's black hero in *Iron* speaks for all the marginalized majority who find it difficult to express their own voice. The evolving hero, then, is a subject who speaks for all the black people; who ever this hero is, he/she has the responsibility to uphold the values of black South Africans. Coetzee is not dealing with the adult innocence of Michael K nor the empty space of Friday's existence: he is focusing on the role of children as harbingers of "hope and beauty".

Coetzee believes that the "children are the only hope we have, if only because our children are the only way of projecting ourselves into the future"(Viola:6-7). Nadine Gordimer conveys similar sentiments when Rosa Burger says that:
Our children and our children's children. The sins of the fathers; at last, the children avenge on the fathers the sins of the fathers. Their children and children's children; that was the future...in the hands not foreseen(348).

Gordimer, like Coetzee, believes that "this time it is coming from the children of the people, teaching the fathers - the ANC, BPC, PAC, all of them, all the acronyms hastening to claim, to catch up, the theory chasing events"(BD:348-49). Indeed, the children represent the future and stabilizing force in South Africa. Yet to reach a future where one and all can live peacefully, South Africa must first, it seems, experience the wrath of the children. Curiously, all of Iron's predecessors are explicitly doubtful of what the future holds: in most cases the future is an unfathomable "space" waiting to be colonized. The protagonists recognize that the future will arrive in some specific form, induced by some specific person or group and participated in by the group that, in Michael K's words, is "heard the loudest". All that Michael K and Susan Barton can do is plant seeds, seeds that will one day grow into a future South Africa. We are confronted in Iron with the "seeds" (children) who are fighting to survive the purgative fire that "the sins of their fathers" initiated long ago.

Iron, with its apocalyptic imagery of fire and death, suggests that South Africa is dying from the inside, and the wrath of the children is likened to a cancer eating the colonial bone. Coetzee presents us with two
antithetical landscapes that striving for existence and authority in a country that is predisposed to white rule. Elizabeth Curren's South Africa is a decrepit, smouldering environment where everything is apparently breaking down. Elizabeth makes a point about the state of the country when she refers to her car:

This old car, it belongs to a world that barely exists any more, but it works. What is left of that world, what still works, I am trying to hold on to...It is a world in which cars cannot be depended on to start whenever you want them to. In my world you try the self-starter...This is how things are in the world where I belong. I am comfortable there, it is a world I understand(65).

In fact, South Africa is indicative of a state of constant decay. It is that "black hole" into which everyone is falling. Vercueil and his dog embody the state of contemporary South Africa and Elizabeth's observation of him implies that he is "one of those half-mythical creatures that come out of photographs only as blurs, vague forms disappearing into the undergrowth that could be man or beast or merely a bad spot on the emulsion: unproved, unattested"(177). Baring a strong likeness to Michael K, Vercueil, we realize, is neither white nor black and his marginality allows him a degree of independence from social structures. He is a "mythical creature" as far as Elizabeth cannot find the appropriate language to describe his existence. As a harbinger of death, it is fitting that Vercueil should represent the end of life: a life that has been lived on
the peripherary of society. More importantly, Vercueil is a referent for Elizabeth's own identity and she uses his presence as a means to "substantialize" her own moral and ethical certainties. Elizabeth knows that South Africa is facing imminent death and she raises in her narrative the problem of inheritance. The problem of inheritance adumbrates the novel in as much as Elizabeth refuses to recognize that both white and black will inevitably be free:

I have no idea what freedom is...I am sure Bheki and his friend had no idea either. Perhaps freedom is always and only what is unimaginable. Nevertheless, we know unfreedom when we see it - don't we? Bheki was not free, and knew it. You [Vercueil] are not free, at least not on this earth, nor am I. I was born a slave and I will most certainly die a slave. A life in fetters, death in fetters: that is part of the price, not to be quibbled at, not to be whined about(150).

Clearly, Elizabeth is proposing that the "price" of freedom in South Africa is "unfreedom". While the black consciousness appears to gather strength and expand throughout the novel, Bheki and John, who serve this consciousness, forget that there is always a "price" attached to freedom. Bheki promotes the black consciousness "movement" in that he is prepared to sacrifice his life for the "price" of freedom. For Elizabeth, Bheki represents "the rising generation", a generation struggling for absolute independence.

The children fighting in the townships are the ones fighting for a stake in South Africa's future. They are
fighting for a future where they will have an active, influential voice. The landscape into which Florence takes Elizabeth is one of violence, "a landscape of scorched earth, blackened trees". In this landscape, Elizabeth is brought closer to the racial struggles devastating her country; she then realizes the symbolic importance of the names Hope and Beauty. Florence's daughter's names signify a South Africa where these two states of being will eventually prevail. Moreover, Elizabeth herself recognizes that the names are suggestive of "living in an allegory". By acknowledging the allegorical nature of the two names, Elizabeth commits herself to a life of powerlessness and decline. Already, Elizabeth has encountered Gordimer's interregnum that prevails in *July's People*, and Coetzee has assumed a similar position from which he attempts to write from the inside out: he brings both Elizabeth and Florence together in an attempt to show the obviously volatile relationship that exists between the two cultures. While there are similarities to Gordimer's *July's People*, Coetzee's book tends to move away from Gordimer's "Disneyland" vision of South Africa to a realm where the white authority is powerless. Elizabeth lives in an allegorical world because there is no longer any specific framework left to describe the world in which she lives. She has no relevant place in the "new", emerging South Africa because the very fabric of her own society is being eaten away by the growing authority
of black consciousness. Elizabeth's "empty life" is colonized by the black consciousness, a consciousness that acts like the cancer eating away her life.

The prospects of extinction in *Iron* are quite alarming considering that South Africa, in Elizabeth's words, "is a land without heroes". It seems that without a national hero, South Africa is destined to fall into that smoldering pit upon which it precariously rests. Ironically, it is from this pit of ash that Elizabeth believes the new South Africa will emerge:

Death by fire the only decent death left. To walk into the fire, to blaze like tow, to feel these secret sharers cringe and cry out too, at the last instant, in their harsh unused little voices; to burn and be gone, to be rid of, to leave the world clean. Monstrous growths, misbirths: a sign that one is beyond one's term. This country too: time for fire, time for an end, time for what grows out of the ash to grow(59).

Like the Phoenix rising from its own ashes, the children of South Africa - the martyred black children - represent a future of optimism and national growth. Yet the battle that the children must fight becomes the main focus of the novel. It is this fight for freedom that preoccupies most of Elizabeth's epistolary narrative.

At first, the fight for authority and voice seems to be a futile one. Reflecting on the internal and external turmoil confronting her country, Elizabeth concedes that "the time calls for heroism". Yet, the picture seems too bleak to call on heroes and heroism to stop the township
violence and death. Elizabeth’s laments on death, knowing that she herself is quickly approaching death, are both poignant and sympathetic to the black consciousness. She confesses that many black South Africans have died in the fight for freedom, and that the death of Bheki just adds to the "millions of figures of pig-iron floating under the skin of the earth":

Now that child is buried and we walk upon him. Let me tell you, when I walk upon this land, this South Africa, I have a gathering feeling of walking upon black faces. They are dead but their spirit has not left them. They lie there heavy and obdurate, waiting for my feet to pass, waiting for me to go, waiting to be raised up again. Millions of figures of pig-iron floating under the skin of the earth. The age of iron waiting to return.(115).

Clearly, Coetzee’s protagonist sees the submerged "pig-iron" faces not only as martyrs but as the strength and inspiration for future black children. Coetzee’s children represent an "age of iron" - an age that is becoming strong and powerful in its capacity to challenge white authority. At any rate, Elizabeth recognizes that this is a time "when childhood is despised, when children school each other never to smile, never to cry, to raise fists in the air like hammers. It is truly a time out of time, heaved up out of the earth, misbegotten, monstrous"(46-47).

The black children in Coetzee’s novel are fighting for a history in which they are their own authors and storytellers. Children, like Bheki and John, throw
themselves so far into their violent regime that they are more than willing to accept death as a means to the future. Susan Gallagher believes that "the novel suggests how the idea of childhood has been perverted in contemporary South Africa and implies that the hope for the future embodied in the children has been obliterated" (Gallagher: 193). The fight for emancipation from a system that has for so long silenced the Other, ends up destroying the notion of childhood. Elizabeth Curren accepts that she is powerless in "this fight for freedom" because she and her society are the subject of destruction:

Yet who am I, who am I to have a voice at all? How can I honourably urge them to turn their back on that call? What am I entitled to do but sit in a corner with my mouth shut? I have no voice, and that is that. The rest would be silence. But with this - whatever it is - this voice that is no voice, I go on. On and on (149).

David Attwell asks whether Coetzee's dilemma in *Iron* has moved away from a discourse about the difficulties and dangers of speaking for the Other, and focuses, not on the discourse of enforced silence, but on a discourse that aligns itself with death as a form of limits. Elizabeth's narrative, at any rate, aligns itself with the presence of a strong black consciousness. The narrative acknowledges the presence of the black movement and, in so doing, anticipates a future where the Other will be the writer of their own history. *Iron*, then, is concerned with the struggling voices of the black consciousness:
The question, however, is who has the power to grant authority to the black narrative?

The Other's struggle for freedom and power is something into which Elizabeth feels that she was born. She concedes that the death and violence enveloping South Africa represents "a crime that was committed long ago". More importantly, it is a crime which "is part of my inheritance", a part of her own being. The experiences in the township and the disgust she feels for South Africa, leads Elizabeth to the conclusion that "it is part of me, I am part of it". She goes on to say that:

Like every crime it had its price. That price, I used to think, would have to be paid in shame: in a life of shame and a shameful death, unlamented, in an obscure corner. I accepted that. I did not try to set myself apart. Though it was not a crime I asked to be committed, it was committed in my name"(149).

The children, now, are fighting this crime, a crime that involved the silencing and erasure of the black consciousness from South African history. Elizabeth is drawn into the black conflict not because she feels that an injustice has been carried out, but because she is a mother who believes that "children cannot conceive what it is to die. It never crosses their minds that they may be immortal"(14). Appreciating that children represent the life and essence of the future, Elizabeth's notion of immortality is undermined by the irony that in contemporary South Africa children also represent
violence and death: they are, in Elizabeth's words, "the children of death".

Florence tells Elizabeth that "there are no more mothers and fathers" left to nurture their children(36), a similar idea that we find expressed in Michael K. In a country ravaged by the chaotic turbulence of township violence, the whole notion of the family unit is destroyed to the extent that the relationship between parents and children is nullified and they destroyed by that "black hole" enveloping South Africa. Yet Coetzee believes that the children cannot survive without their parents, a conviction that he has Elizabeth clearly express in the novel:

Children cannot grow up without mothers and fathers. The burnings and killings one hears of, the shocking callousness...Whose fault is it in the end? Surely the blame must fall on the parents who say, "Go, do as you wish, you are your own master now, I give up authority over you". What child in his heart truly wants to be told that? Surely he will turn away in confusion, thinking to himself, "I have no mother now, I have no father: then let my mother be death, let my father be death". You wash your hands of them and they turn into the children of death(45).

Free from the constraints and "authority" of the family, Coetzee's black adolescents begin to question the validity and strength of white rule: Coetzee's children are, on one level, the true heroes of South Africa, but on another level, they bring death and destruction. Confronting Florence about the neglect Bheki shows towards his schooling, Elizabeth comes one step closer
in understanding why the children must fight: "I can't believe you want your son out on the streets killing time till apartheid comes to an end. Apartheid is not going to die tomorrow or the next day. He is ruining his future"(62).

For the first time in his fiction, Coetzee liberates the Other and allows him to question and undermine white South African ideology. In response to Elizabeth's "complaint", Bheki delivers a strong rebuke to Elizabeth's own conviction about apartheid: "What is more important",blurts Bheki, "that apartheid must be destroyed or that I must go to school"(62). Elizabeth knows that Bheki's challenge and conviction will deliver him and John to death's "outstretched arms". Elizabeth's distaste for township violence is so extreme that she begins to admonish John against his fight for freedom. "They don't think of you as a child", says Elizabeth, "they think of you as the enemy and they hate you quite as much as you hate them"(131). Here, the very notion of childhood has been perverted, suggesting that Coetzee's children are educated not in the classroom or at home, but on the battlefields of the townships.

Elizabeth is not trying to mediate the situation because she feels that her own white liberal society is responsible for the black deaths: it is that "crime" that all white South Africans must inherit. Of the black atrocities, Elizabeth concedes that "this is the worst
thing I have witnessed in my life... Now my eyes are open and I can never close them again"(95). Shocked by the "terrible sights", which she finds hard to "condemn" because she cannot find her own words to tell the story, Elizabeth assumes a pseudo-prophetic by associating John with the heroism of Columbus. Elizabeth believes that John is one of the many black youths who wait for

the moment of glory when he will arise, fully himself at last, erect, powerful, transfigured. When the fiery flower will unfold, when the pillar of smoke will rise. The bomb on his chest like a talisman: as Christopher Columbus lay in the dark of his cabin, holding the compass to his chest, the mystic instrument would guide him to the Indies, the Isles of the Blest. Troops of maidens with bared breasts singing to him, opening their arms as he wades to them through the shallows holding before him the needle that never wavers, that points forever in one direction, to the future(137-138).

Elizabeth believes the future to be bleak for John because in the "old days" he would have been a garden boy, but now he is "battling... for all the insulted and injured, the trampled, the ridiculed, for all the garden boys of South Africa"(138). In fact, John has assumed a momentous task in that he fights for all black South Africans. Bheki and John fight for freedom and a future that will enable them to break the bonds of oppression. The young blacks in Iron are prepared to die for the future and Elizabeth knows that if the killing was to continue, South Africa would lose its "seeds" of the future. The only foreseeable future is one where death and violence prevail outright. Although Coetzee is
convinced that the children epitomize the future, he invests his protagonist with a conviction that contradicts the very essence of his confidence.

Elizabeth Curren shows us that a black consciousness has begun to emerge in South Africa. Moreover, she acknowledges that her own society no longer cherishes privacy and that the state has become increasingly impersonal towards its citizens. Elizabeth is told that "nothing is private any more", suggesting that the white authorities condemn its most loyal of citizens. Elizabeth, like the black conscience, needs "to be embraced" so as to provide substance to her meaningless existence. Coetzee's most recent novel, while continuing to focus on the dilemmas of writing, is ultimately concerned with need to expose national, racial and human injustices that, like Elizabeth's cancer, has hollowed out the bone of colonialism.
Conclusion.

The evolving black consciousness that we see in J.M Coetzee's three novels suggest that he is becoming increasingly aware of the role that the black figure will play in a South Africa of the future. In fact, the novels examined in this paper anticipate a future where "Hope and Beauty" will herald the return of the black voice. In *White Writing*, Coetzee argues that the title of his book does not "imply the existence of a body of writing different in nature from black writing. White writing is white only insofar as it is generated by the concerns of people no longer European, not yet African(11). What concerns Coetzee the most is the relationship of the author to his black subject, a subject who is both protean and malleable.

Coetzee's three protagonists - Michael K, Friday and Elizabeth Curren - struggle against fate. The picture Coetzee presents of South Africa is one, to borrow the phrase from Michael K, "a life lived in cages". Moreover, the portrayal of contemporary South Africa in *Age of Iron* involves exposing the atrocities of police brutality to the wider world. In fact, this fiction involves a "crime" into which, as Elizabeth Curren observes, "everyone is born". The only misfortune facing Coetzee's black figures is that they were born into a world that denied them voice. Coetzee, at least, acknowledges the history of the Other,
yet he is restricted in what he can say because he writes from the perspective of the Oppressor. Coetzee relies on various narrative modes to portray how black South Africans are a marginalized majority existing "outside" history. Kelly Hewson's words of "deindividualization", "deterritorialization" and "dehumanization" seem apt because they convey a sense of Otherness that is ubiquitous in the South African novel.

Coetzee's Other develops from a passive, inarticulate earth-hero into a omnipotent collective voice that is nurtured by the children. In each story we are presented with a black figures who is seen through a Euro-centric perspective. The concept of a black South African hero is a problematical one because their are many factors contributing to his heroic status. At any rate, Coetzee's black (and white) heroes assume a significant place in South African "literary" history. Like all of Beckett's protagonists, Coetzee's protagonists wait for something to happen. Yet, there is a conscious effort being made to break through the black silence and it is this effort that contributes to the heroic stature of Coetzee's protagonists.
J.M. Coetzee: Select Bibliography.

Fiction:


Essays, Interviews & Reviews:


Criticism on Fiction:


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