

**Master of Research Thesis**

**The Transnational & Intercultural Dimensions of J.M.  
Coetzee's Writing: Poetics of Servitude**

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### ABSTRACT

The Transnational and Intercultural Dimensions of J. M. Coetzee's Writing: Poetics of Servitude thesis focuses on three novels written during the South African apartheid period (1948-1994) using three theoretical frameworks. The works are also interpreted through a servitude lens, a recurring motif in Coetzee's oeuvre, as his formative years were spent in South Africa during the oppressive apartheid regime.

Chapter one examines *Life and Times of Michael K* (1983) using Abraham Maslow's eight-stage human psychology Hierarchy of Needs framework. Servitude is examined from a coloured, physically impaired man's point of view. The protagonist Michael overcomes near starvation and homelessness most of his life yet achieves ultimate transcendence.

Chapter two examines *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980) using Giorgio Agamben's Sovereign Power and Homo Sacer Bare Life philosophy. The status of the once-transcendent magistrate plummets when he is found guilty of consorting with the enemy. He is stripped of title, community and dignity and is classified as an accursed Homo sacer, who can be killed but not sacrificed in a religious ritual.

Chapter three examines *Foe* (1986) using Michel Foucault's Power and knowledge political/historical lens. The female place in 18<sup>th</sup> century society as well as the use of slavery is also examined along with the power of black versus white narrative.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis, *The Transnational & Intercultural Dimensions of J.M. Coetzee's Writing: Poetics of Servitude*, researches discrimination and servitude in its various guises through the eyes of the protagonists from *Life & Times of Michael K (TMK)*, *Waiting for the Barbarians (WFTB)* and *Foe*. These texts form the three, respective chapters of this thesis. Written by South African-born and raised Coetzee during the apartheid period, these texts were also chosen for this thesis because the servitude aspect, as portrayed from an educated white man's point of view, offers a challenging and critical dynamic. Coetzee is an observer witnessing mistreatment of blacks rather than an actual recipient of racial discrimination. His immersion in this apartheid regime as a bystander born into the white, ruling class minority has left an indelible mark on his psyche and it is perhaps for this reason discrimination is a motif in his work, whether it be based on race, gender or another form of inequality present in society.

Coetzee's means for representing the voice of the oppressed is to bypass and therefore negate the obvious white person's interpretation of the black African narrative. If Coetzee had been presumptuous enough to write from a black person's perspective, it could be misconstrued as an act of condescension and arrogance. Instead, he cleverly applies the literary technique of allegory and also creates impediments in some of his protagonists which physically restrict their ability to vocalise, such as a tongueless slave Friday in *Foe* or a harelipped Michael in *Life and Times of Michael K*. Literary techniques aside, Coetzee's intention is very clear, according to fellow, white South African author and academic Nadine

Gordimer. In *Telling Times, Writing and Living, 1954-2008*, Gordimer wrote: "The presentation of truth and meaning of what white has done to black stands out on every page." (401)

In *LTMK*, coloured man Michael K has a malformed mouth from which he rarely chooses to speak while in *Foe*, the black African slave Friday literally cannot speak because his tongue has been cut off. These two physically maimed characters, the first burdened with a congenital defect and the other subjected to a barbaric castration inflicted by a fellow man, symbolise in no uncertain terms the silenced, oppressed voice of those in servitude. Gordimer equates these maimed fictional men's, "split lip and strangled speech as the distortion of personality that South African race laws have effected, one way or another, in all of us who live there, black and white." (399)

Coetzee's oeuvre features oppression, racism and subjugation as a thematic core however he has extended this motif beyond the South African apartheid experience which has shaped his formative years. The characters chosen from the three novels used for this thesis may be seemingly living disparate lives hailing from various places, times and scenarios however their overarching common ground is being discriminated against by powerful people. For example, *WFTB*'s Magistrate is abandoned by the sovereign state when he is tried for consorting with the enemy outside the perimeter of the concentration camp confines. The "enemy" is a psychologically and physically scarred blind, native girl whose only currency is her body when negotiating a warm bed and meal. The cruel irony is this coloured Barbarian girl, who could not be any more helpless or any less a threat to the 7

sovereign state, however causes the Magistrate to be stripped of rank, rejected by his own people, tortured, humiliated and discarded leaving him totally bereft of any purpose in life.

Another oppressed, discriminated and powerless protagonist is that of *Foe's* Susan Barton. She is an educated, white woman born into the patriarchal 18<sup>th</sup> century where women were second class citizens. Throughout her life, Barton must suppress her desires and adventurous spirit to conform to the social mores of her day. She cannot roam freely, she is constantly watched by an oppressive patriarch and even her truthful story of being a female shipwrecked on a castaway island, is ruthlessly edited and then sensationally rewritten with tales of cannibals and wild apes by an authorial, male voice. Once over her disappointment of having her narrative refashioned for the sake of book sales and publicity, Barton then tries to broker another means of having the narrative retold. She tries to educate black slave Friday in reading, writing and drawing so his narrative can be shared. It is not an act of goodwill but rather a misguided attempt to have him fill the empty pages of *her* narrative. Friday, however, by refusing to partake in Barton's tuition and white person's narrative maintains his dignity. Solidarity to his slave community, who drowned at sea, is the only power he has in a life defined by servitude.

The three chosen novels have three vastly different settings and offer various servitude scenarios. The one uniting thread is their global significance and the subjects' unfair treatment by powerful oppressors regardless of where and when the stories are situated. Although the South African apartheid regime is no doubt the catalyst for Coetzee's canon of discontent, the characters' motivations,

experiences and story settings vary substantially whether it be in general society, a war camp, hospital ward, a sovereign state or a castaway island. For example, Coetzee has not named a continent or other geographic indicator in *WFTB* nor has he indicated a time in history when the story takes place. This has been done deliberately, one could surmise, to appeal to a global readership and to enable the story and the characters to be in the foreground. This generic location and time in history also then renders any associated cultural or political values attributed to a particular historical period invalid. *WFTB* is therefore very much a generic, outlying frontier on the edge of civilization anywhere in the world.

Paradoxically, this lack of historical and political specifics in *WFTB* provided by South African born and raised Coetzee in his fictional writing provides a stark contrast to the reality that was South Africa during the apartheid period. For example, the South African Population Registration Act of 1950 was just one of the many legal sanctions imposed on blacks during this time and has been duly noted by Gordimer. (399) This act meant South Africans were classified solely on the gradation of their colour and registered according to their racial traits. It is far removed from the generic, classification-free *WFTB* world provided by Coetzee.

In concluding, this thesis aims to define discrimination using three very different protagonists viewed through three different theoretical frameworks inspired by Coetzee's lived, apartheid experience. Apartheid was the original catalyst for the three novels however the scope and parameters of discrimination have now been widened in these three novels to give a more global and therefore intercultural perspective.



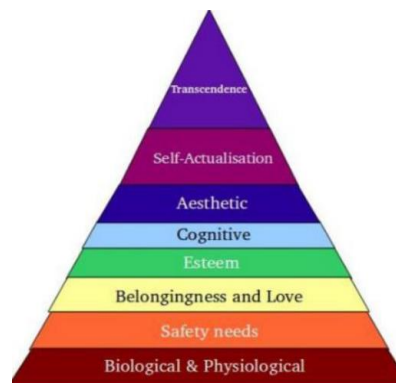
### TRANSNATIONAL & INTERCULTURAL FRAMEWORKS

In an ideal world, not Coetzee's fictional dystopian world portrayed in *LTMK*, *WFTB* and *Foe*, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights would seem a fitting meta framework for interpreting these three novels. After all, it deals with the charter of dignity, freedom and justice for all humans regardless of race, culture, sex or religion and advocates freedom of speech and freedom from fear. However, these three novels all depict times, places and scenarios which flout any notion of human rights. *LTMK*'s South Africa is in the grip of civil war and racial discrimination is rife along with the vilification of those physically disfigured or those born into poverty; *WFTB* is set in the dying days of a small, outlying Empire far from civilisation both geographically and metaphorically and *Foe* is set in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, well before the rise of feminism, the abolition of slavery and the declaration of human rights.

### CHAPTER 1: ABRAHAM MASLOW'S EIGHT STEP HIERARCHY OF NEEDS:

*LTMK*'s Michael is maligned by society for his lowly status as a disfigured, coloured male with minimal education born to a single mother and into poverty. His life is very far removed from that advocated in the human rights charter which declares in article one, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," as well of that in article 13, "Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each State." Instead, he is caught in a war of which he actively chooses to play no part and must therefore hide in the mountains and garden by moonlight to find his freedom.

The human psychology framework devised by Abraham Maslow known as the Hierarchy of Needs has been chosen. This eight-step theory is built on the premise humans must have their most fundamental, physiological needs for survival met such as food, water and air, before moving up the hierarchy and eventually reaching the most evolved step, or pinnacle, of the eight-step hierarchy which is transcendence. (See diagram)



Maslow's hierarchy has been chosen for several reasons. Protagonist Michael's life trajectory follows the hierarchy pyramid ascent from physiological survival needs right through to ultimate transcendence but, more importantly, he also typifies the very pillars of Maslow's premise as outlined in *Motivation and Personality*:

- i) "Self-actualized people...live more in the real world of nature than in the man-made mass of concepts, abstractions, expectations, beliefs and stereotypes that most people confuse with the world." (129)
- ii) They positively like solitude and privacy to a greater level than the average person. (134)

self-actualizing people are not dependent for their main satisfaction on the real world, or other people or culture or on extrinsic satisfactions.” (136)

Michael’s lack of voice, because he chooses to speak little and also because his physical impairment is assumed by others as a sign of mental deficiency, means he is an outcast and his goals are misinterpreted. Using Maslow’s mapping, however, offers greater insight into Michael’s non orthodox decisions, his stubborn reasoning and why he is, ultimately, a fulfilled man despite not fitting into society’s conventional rubric of success. Michael’s mother Anna, his only family, is forced to put him in an orphanage so she can do her job - slaving away in a white person’s home on minimal wages with no prospects. When she becomes sick, society abandons her. It is only after Anna’s death, Michael has an awakening – not to live his life in servitude. The Maslow framework provides a very clear, logical path of progression for all Michael’s motivations. It also helps decode Michael’s decisions which are often not articulated when he refuses to engage in social intercourse.

#### Literature Review

This chapter will debate whether Gordimer’s view of Michael as an African servitude representative who is, “anybody’s plodding refugee,” (399) and “a deceptively passive protagonist,” (403) is true or if he is in fact taking a very active, effective form of resistance against war and society. Gordimer also focuses on Coetzee’s use of allegory and her belief Michael is meant to represent, “the whole black people of South Africa,” (399) while others may see him as a symbolic 12

representative of Auschwitz or Stalin's camps. Irrespective of the viewpoint taken, Gordimer contends, "not even the oppressor really believes in what he is doing, anymore, let alone the revolutionary." (401) Rather than a story of hope Gordimer, sees *LTMK* as one of, "commonplace misery" (399) and "ultimate malaise" (401).

Catherine Mills' *Biopolitics, Law and Futurity in Coetzee's LTMK* claims, in contrast to Gordimer, that Coetzee's work turns away from history and, in doing so, offers fresh hope for the future. Her reading of *LTMK* is through the Giorgio Agamben biopolitical conceptual framework of human abandonment. This thesis extends Mills' use of the Agamben framework for Coetzee's work. Agamben is used in chapter two for analyzing *WFTB* which is another novel depicting human abandonment.

Food and its meaning will also be discussed including Kyoko Yoshida's analogy for near-anorexic Michael that eating means becoming sated and a whole person. She contends Michael's relationship with food is intertwined with his relationship to thought and language. Paul Brophy, however, claims Michael's emancipation from food, society and love is akin to transumption, meaning metaphorical transference, which he also applies to writers in a postcolonial context. It also means the ritual of eating the dead bodies of loved ones which is significant given Michel eats pumpkins harvested from the ground where his mother's ashes were laid.

## CHAPTER 2: GIORGIO AGAM BEN'S HOMO SACER & SOVEREIGN POWER:

In the second chapter of this thesis, Giorgio Agamben's power and

knowledge framework is used to analyse *WFTB*. Protagonist Magistrate starts as a transcendent citizen with his status and authority of a small empire unquestioned and unchallenged. He is at the evolved end of the Maslow spectrum when the novel starts and retirement beckons. The Magistrate is so used to doing as he pleases without his actions ever being questioned by a higher authority that he never considers the potential moral and legal consequences of his actions, even when he takes a Barbarian girl as his concubine. However, this arrogant act of entitlement is deemed as consorting with the enemy and causes a rapid fall from a position of unquestioned authority to one of total degradation and abandonment.

The Magistrate's life plummets from the height of transcendence to one below Maslow's most basic physiological stage. The Agamben framework is used to highlight the Sovereign State of exception and emergency where traditional law is abandoned along with fair treatment of those within the space which is defined as the concentration camp. This Sovereign State in *WFTB* is situated on a continent which could be anywhere in the world – China, Africa or even Australia – thus defining the transnational and intercultural dimensions theme of this thesis.

This abandonment or reduction of status which the Magistrate is subjected to sees him become a man in servitude to Sovereign law. Agamben's philosophical framework defines the true meaning of Homo sacer which, under ancient Roman law, means (s)he who is banned and can be killed by anybody but cannot be sacrificed in religious ritual. Once a person is within this state of emergency exception, such as a concentration camp where normal law no longer applies, they

are at the mercy of those in power.

### Literature Review

Agamben's framework is also used to compare the concentration camp in *WFTB* with other imagined and real examples of sovereign states of exception as outlined in Steven Caton's article *Coetzee, Agamben, and the Passion of Abu Ghraib*. Caton's critique on the, "ethics of Coetzee's aesthetic or the problem of evil lurking in artistic works that represent evil," (115) will be argued. Also being raised in this chapter is Stephen Watson's article *Colonialism and the Novels of J. M. Coetzee* which states Coetzee's work is, "an affront to South Africa's historical narrative," and much of his work including the dichotomy of law and barbarism, "can be viewed as a failed dialectic." (Watson 382). This chapter also extends Mills' interpretation of the Agamben lens for reading *LTMK* and instead uses it for *WFTB*. Her summation, applied to protagonist Michael from *LTMK* applies equally to *WFTB*'s Magistrate, "as a limit-figure of the human and the animal," (Mills 178) where, "a unified 'form-of-life' in which the human and inhuman elements of the human being can no longer be separated." (178)

Stephen Clingman also applies the Agamben lens in his article *Looking From South Africa to the World: A Story of Identity for our Times* for situating South Africa's political framework. He describes the apartheid regime condemned by The United States, The United Kingdom and also the United Nations, as an example of a state of exception where normal law no longer applies thus fitting the parameters of the Agamben framework. This thesis chapter will extrapolate Clingman's referencing

from the parochial South African apartheid context to the global context using the Agamben framework.

### CHAPTER 3: MICHEL FOUCAULT'S POWER & AUTHORITY LENS

Chapter three examines two examples of servitude in *Foe* using Michael Foucault's power and knowledge framework. The first is protagonist Susan Barton, an educated white woman who was born in the patriarchal 18<sup>th</sup> century where feminism was not an option let alone a word in the vernacular. One could consider Barton, a woman with a free spirit and forthright nature, to be a woman ahead of her time. Again, Coetzee has drawn from his South African apartheid upbringing to negotiate the pathway of discrimination in her character portrayal. Barton is trapped on a castaway island somewhere off the coast of Brazil, which acts as a surrogate microcosm of sovereign power. She is subjugated by a domineering island patriarch, is subjected to constant surveillance then chastisement if she wanders out of sight, and is also psychologically threatened by horrifying tales of cannibals and wild apes. Along with truthful narrative, her physical and sexual freedom are taken from her as well.

This castaway island is also where the black slave Friday is forced to call home after his African slave community drown. Friday, born into oppression due to his race and colour, has also undergone a double castration of tongue and penis to ensure he remains permanently mute and placid to his slave master. Barton and Friday's lives of servitude are examined using Michael Foucault's power and knowledge lens including the panopticon theory devised by Jeremy Bentham. He is credited with designing the perfect prison where inmates can be viewed simultaneously from a central vantage point. This panopticon design continues to

be used globally today and is also responsible for the prototype viewing tower.



*(Illinois State Prison Panopticon structure image. Image not subject to copyright)*

#### Literature Review

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak claims in her article *Theory in the Margin: Coetzee's Foe Reading Defoe's Crusoe Roxana*, that the male fictional characters are portrayed definitively in the historical narrative whereas women, like Barton, do not neatly fit the established, "periodizing rubrics or categories." (5) This article will be discussed along with Jennifer Rickel's contentious assertion in *Speaking of Human Rights: Narrative Voice and the Paradox of the Unspeakable in J. M. Coetzee's Foe and Disgrace* that, "for most of the narrative Susan is able to exercise both her right to speak and to remain silent about those things that she chooses." Also to be argued is Michael Marias' claim in *Interpretative Authoritarianism: Reading/Colonizing Coetzee's Foe* that Friday's sketches represent, "a graphic depiction of the metaphor of the reader as a traveller, a topos of eighteenth-century literature." A range of interpretations for the ending



of *Foe* will also be discussed including those of Holly Flint, Derek Attridge, Brian Mackaskill and Jeanne Colleran.

#### Transdisciplinary Influences

Coetzee is an international author who draws on a large source of transdisciplinary and intercultural references to create his novels with his South African apartheid upbringing his most fundamental influence. It is fitting, therefore, that the three selected frameworks for these three chosen novels originate from different countries and were devised by theorists of various cultural backgrounds thus furthering the transdisciplinary and intercultural dimensions aspect of this thesis. They are also representative of three different subject disciplines:

- 1) Abraham Maslow - a Jewish American human psychologist
- 2) Giorgio Agamben – an Italian political theorist and academic
- 3) Michel Foucault – a French philosopher and historian.

Coetzee's work, which has been heavily influenced by South African apartheid politics and post colonialism, has dealt mostly with authority and servitude. Derek Attridge's *Ethical Modernism: Servants and Others in J. M. Coetzee's Early Fiction, Poetics Today* states Coetzee's oeuvre is defined by figures of otherness, who are estranged and subordinate to those in the ruling class. Coetzee's novels highlight the ethical demands of his protagonists and their place in the historical and geographical narrative of the novel. They are usually presented from a first person perspective. Although Coetzee has resisted the South African novelist label, his characters often resist the hegemonic discourse of that culture. The relationship between master and servant is often apparent in

Coetzee's work, according to Attridge. This master/servant dichotomy will be explored further in this thesis with the emphasis on the servant, or the one in servitude, rather than the one who is in authority.

This Coetzee master/servant motif is also noted in *J. M. Coetzee South Africa and the Politics of Writing*. David Attwell writes, "His sense of the landscape and the history of the country has been shaped by his familiarity with the Cape and the Karoo, with their histories of slave and master-servant relations." (25) Attwell adds Coetzee's race and colonialism treatment have evolved more by, "biographical accident," than "desire for accurate historical representation." Again, Attwell like Attridge observes Coetzee's writing takes form from the oppressed person's narrative whether it be a coloured person such as Michael K or the black slave Friday in *Foe*, a fallen person such as the Magistrate in *WFTB* or a female protagonist trapped in a patriarchal society in the wrong century such as *Foe's* Susan Barton.

Apartheid, the Afrikaans word for separateness, resulted in a divided South African society ruled by the National Party for almost half a century. David McNally states in *Another World is Possible: Globalization and Anti-Capitalism*, apartheid is, "labour on its own terms: frightened, oppressed, vulnerable." (137) These three adjectives also define the four chosen figures of servitude in Coetzee's fiction as outlined in this thesis:

- 1) *LTMK's* Michael K is a coloured, physically impaired man

born into poverty with a single mother on minimal wages with non-existent, future prospects.

- 2) *WFTB's* Magistrate is stripped of title, dignity, home and community after consorting with the enemy.
- 3) *Foe's* Susan Barton is suppressed physically, psychologically and her narrative rewritten in the patriarchal 18<sup>th</sup> century.
- 4) *Foe's* black African Friday is born into slavery and does not know the meaning, figuratively or literally, of "freedom."

Coetzee has alluded to servitude, or words such as submit and bondage, many times in his fiction as well as in scholarly articles, interviews and speeches. The best known example is his Jerusalem Prize for the Freedom of the Individual in Society writing prize acceptance speech of 1987, which was reproduced in J. M. Coetzee's, *Doubling the Point: Essays and Interviews*, edited by David Attwell:

"South African literature is...unnaturally preoccupied with power and the torsions of power, unable to move from elementary relations of contestation, domination, and subjugation to the vast and complex human world that lies beyond them...South African literature is a literature in bondage." (99)

Because Coetzee's writing explores universal themes such as homelessness, displacement, lack of community and not belonging, his work also then transcends the geographic and political boundaries of South Africa, both metaphorically and literally. Maslow, Agamben and Foucault's philosophies have been chosen as the research frameworks pertaining to servitude as their theories, like Coetzee's writing, are as relevant globally today as when they were first created.

### Methodology

The premise for this English literature thesis is to investigate the overarching questions:

Does Coetzee's fiction, influenced by the South African paradigm of apartheid, provide an effective viewing lens for better understanding servitude in its various guises? These guises are not just based on the black versus white dichotomy evident in *LTMK* which has been influenced by the apartheid experience but also by other power position dynamics such as the ruler versus subject dichotomy (WFTB) and also the male versus female dichotomy (*Foe*).

Some of the other, pertinent questions raised in this thesis also include issues such as is true servitude only witnessed from a coloured person's perspective or can servitude apply equally to whites? To clarify further, does servitude extend beyond the external physical appearance of a person and can it therefore apply to whites as well, or to less educated and powerful people?

Do time, place and sex play an integral, determining role in situating a person's particular form of servitude? For example, in *Foe*, an educated, white woman such as Susan Barton is controlled by the patriarch on the island where she is marooned. If this same scenario had occurred in this century, perhaps her physical movements and lack of voice would not apply. In an ideal world in this given age, she would experience equality, a notion not even considered in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The steps to determine the outcomes are:

Identifying different examples of servitude from each of the chosen novels. The four chosen examples are: The human individual who is outcast in society (*LTMK*'s Michael); The sovereign power state of exception subject (*WFTB*'s Magistrate); The 18<sup>th</sup> century woman in patriarchal society (*Foe*'s Susan Barton) and the silenced, black slave owned by a slavemaster (*Foe*'s Friday).

Analysing the chosen examples using the three selected theoretical frameworks as effective viewing lenses. The frameworks for each chapter have been created by Abraham Maslow, Giorgio Agamben and Michael Foucault.

Determining the location, time and historical settings of the three novels. *They are: LTMK*: South Africa apartheid era during civil war, *WFTB*: A small empire in an unspecified time & place at the end of civil war, *Foe*: An island believed off the coast of Brazil in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and also metropolitan London also in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Mapping the findings against the criteria outlined in the thesis questions.

Synthesising the information to determine whether the overarching thesis questions are addressed.

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Chapter One:

Towards Transcendence

*"Self-actualized people...live more in the real world of nature than in the man-made mass of concepts, abstractions, expectations, beliefs and stereotypes that most people confuse with the world."*

(Abraham Maslow)

Analysing J.M. Coetzee's *Life & Times of Michael K*

through Abraham Maslow's eight-step

Hierarchy of Needs framework.

### Introduction

*Life and Times of Michael K (LTMK)* is set in South African civil wartime with a protagonist whose primary motivation is refusing to be in servitude to others. Michael's earliest memories are watching his mother Anna work long hours on minimal wages with non-existent prospects. This, unfortunately, was her wretched life until the day she died. However, Michael uses his mother's death as the catalyst for redefining his own life. Instead of being a lowly, council gardener he aspires against seemingly insurmountable obstacles of poverty, abandonment, near starvation and lack of community to attain a life of independence, fulfilment and eventual transcendence. The beginning of his life is defined by South African apartheid racism, oppression and servitude but transforms into one of steely resolve. He becomes an active, yet mostly silent, figure of resistance, ambition and self-determination. His one goal is to live life on his own terms.

Michael's bid for freedom manifests itself through near starvation for most of his life. This emancipation from not only food but also love and other common values held in human society equates to what Paul Brophy describes as transumption.

"Postcolonial writers have intervened on their own terms in the struggle for emancipation, creating narratives that depart from colonialist discourse and assert their own systems of value...This reconstruction occurs through a process I identify with the rhetorical term 'transumption'." (Brophy ii)

This ethos also seems to be the principle on which Michael runs his life – by his own terms in a time and place where war, regulations and authority matter little to him. Again, quoting Brophy, transumption can also be applied to Coetzee's methodical writing. "I consider transumption in a postcolonial literary context the means Salman Rushdie and J. M. Coetzee use to decolonize narrative forms and to seize interpretive priority over the

colonialist discourse that represents them as belonging to cultures that derive from metropolitan cultures.” (Brophy ii)

Michael’s skeletal frame and malformed mouth, however, mean he is often mistaken for having a mind that is not quick and he is further marginalised as being, “a figure of fun, a clown, a wooden man.” (Coetzee 149) Using psychologist Abraham Maslow’s eight-step hierarchy of needs as the theoretical framework to analyse this literary work, it will be evident Michael is in fact a highly evolved fictional character who, rather than just struggling to survive scrounging for food, water and shelter at the foundational level, is the very personification of self-actualized.

The original 1943 Hierarchy of Needs, featured in the paper *A Theory of Human Motivation* devised by American psychologist Abraham Maslow, had five stages - physiological, safety, belonging, self-esteem and self-actualization. Maslow believed physiological survival needs such as food, water and shelter needed to be achieved before a person could move up the next level. As each stage was fulfilled, he reasoned, a person could eventually progress until finally achieving self-actualization. This basic premise was created in the 1940s, refined in the 1950s and later revised in the 1960s. By the end of Maslow’s life in 1970, an additional three stages in the upper, or more evolved end, of the hierarchy were included.

The new eight steps of the Hierarchy of Needs became physiological, safety, belonging, self-esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization and transcendence. So why has Maslow’s theory been used to analyse *LTMK*’s protagonist Michael? The hierarchy of needs is a logical and intuitive progression for humans to navigate their pathway in life. For example, you cannot enjoy art, poetry or literature if your stomach is aching with 25



hunger, you are cold from lack of shelter or weak with thirst. Nor can you become self-fulfilled and transcendental when you are scared for your safety, have no family or friends to share your problems with or are constantly stressed with health and money worries. Maslow explains the relevance of his theory best by stating, "The human being needs a framework of values, a philosophy of life...to live by and understand by, in about the same sense that he needs sunlight, calcium or love." (1968, 206) Maslow's work, however, has polarised academics to this day with many dismissing his theories. Fragar and Fadiman's *Personality and Growth* (second edition) quote Maslow's detractors describing his work as, "unscientific and out of the mainstream of psychology," (376: 1984) and merely, "a collection of thoughts, opinions, and hypotheses than a fully developed theoretical system." (374) While others, in the sixth edition of this book published more recently in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, have praised his pioneering work as being, "an inspiration for virtually all humanistic psychologists," (342:2005) and, "his genius was in formulating significant questions that many social scientists today consider critical."

Maslow himself, however, admits his work was exploratory and inconclusive rather than completed and proven work. Fragar and Fadiman quote Maslow confessing:

"It's just that I haven't got the time to do careful experiments myself. They take too long, in view of the years that I have left and the extent of what I want to do. So I myself do only 'quick and dirty' little pilot explorations, mostly with a few subjects only, inadequate to publish but enough to convince myself that they are probably true and will be confirmed one day." (395)

Whether or not the credibility of Maslow's work will ever be proven true or not is not the aim of this thesis chapter. The focus is instead on the relevance of his psychological framework which directly reflects the Coetzee-created protagonist's journey and acts as an effective lens for interpreting this literary work.

The hierarchy, both the original five-stage and subsequent eight-stage versions, were both created, coincidentally, during the first half of the South African apartheid period of 1948-1994.

### 1 Physiological

The most basic needs such as food, water, shelter, sleep and air must all be available for a person to progress to the next step of the Maslow hierarchy. *LTMK*'s Michael spends much of his existence trying to obtain these essentials and, when he does, it is a source not only of comfort but also of great joy. "He chewed with tears of joy in his eyes...he found pleasure in eating...The aftertaste of the first slice left his mouth aching with sensual delight...such pumpkin I could eat every day of my life and never want anything else." (Coetzee 113) Kyoko Yoshida equates Michael's sated appetite to becoming a whole being. "For K, the only food (or word) worthy of eating (or speaking) is the food (or the word) that is word (or food). After the words/foods are 'eaten up', nothing remains but a complete self, or, to the narrator's eye, 'a black whirlwind roaring in utter silence.'" (142)

Yoshida's summation of Michael as a, "complete self" when he eats and speaks could not be further from the truth. Michael spends most of his life in a state of self-induced anorexia because he would rather starve than eat food not to his liking. He refuses camp and hospital food more often than not and his desire to just eat from his

pumpkin garden is not a “complete” diet. Michael is capable of speech but prefers to “hide” behind his physically impaired mouth and use this as a ruse for not communicating verbally. Michael, in fact, is nearer to a “complete self” when he chooses *not* to eat or speak. He eats and speaks only enough to ensure his survival. Michael asserts his own value system even when it is outside the normative values of his state.

Michael’s fraught relationship with sustenance began at birth. He was unable to suckle his mother nor drink from a bottle due to his malformed mouth so a cold, hard spoon was used to feed him instead. Michael’s lack of attachment and nurturing - a mother unable to breastfeed and who is repulsed by the being that had grown inside her - transitions very early on in life from (lack of) nurture to nature, or mother earth. This transition, especially in later life, is Michael’s way to be free from any kind of servitude. Living alone with nature and apart from society is, he believes, the only route to gain personal freedom. Maslow defines this lack of attachment at the physiological or foundational stage of the hierarchy of needs that Michael experiences as one of the exceptions to his theory. He states in *A Theory of Motivation*: “There are people who have been starved for love in the earliest months of their lives and have simply lost forever the desire and the ability to give and to receive affection (as animals lose sucking or pecking reflexes that are not exercised soon enough after birth).” (387)

Michael’s deliberate denial of food when institutionalised in a hospital or war camp is akin to anorexia. The Australian Government Health Department’s website, National Eating Disorders Collaboration’s (NEDC) *Eating Disorders Explained, Anorexia*

*Nervosa fact sheet*, states: "For some people, restricting their food and weight can be a way of controlling areas of life that feel out of their control and their body image can come to define their entire sense of self worth. It can also be a way of expressing emotions that may feel too complex or frightening such as pain, stress or anxiety." The decision to eat or not is one of submission (assimilation) or power (differentiation) with Michael actively choosing the latter, according to Kilgour and Probyn. "Eating becomes a metaphor for assimilation and absorption. To chew and digest becomes an act of identification, not differentiation." (136) In other words, Michael is less concerned with using food for satisfying his physical need for hunger and nutrition most humans respond to but more interested in using food as his means of control.

To clarify this further, the refusal to eat food when incarcerated inside with strangers and authoritarian figures, is a direct contrast to the food Michael willingly eats from his garden or when he is with fellow travellers who accept him. Then, Michael accepts bread, condensed milk and even half a banana. Michael's basic physiological needs, whether it be food, water or shelter, are overruled by his wants. He would rather starve than eat food he does not want, and he would rather be homeless than be answerable to hospital doctors and camp wardens. His motivation stems from seeing his mother's treatment in society both in life and death. It has made him bitter, resistant to being an integral part of a society who rejected his mother when she was vulnerable and dying. "My mother worked all her life long...When she died they threw her in the fire. They gave me an old box of ash and told me, 'Here is your mother, take her away, she is no good to us'." (Coetzee 136)

When physical needs are met, or enough to ensure survival, safety dominates an individual's motivations, according to Maslow. Michael and Anna flee the violence of South African civil war and attempt to live in the country. However, her dying wish is not granted and she dies before they reach their destination. Some critics interpret Michael's vain attempt to transport his dying mother from the bloodshed of civil war to the country as an act of bravery while others, in particular Gordimer, reject this notion outright. Her claim Michael is a, "passive protagonist," (403) can be countered by his numerous instances demonstrating active resistance. Firstly, his hunger strike is a deliberate act of self-denial. "A hospital, it seemed, was a place for bodies, where bodies asserted their rights." (Coetzee 71) Secondly, Michael's silent hunger striking protest is a highly effective strategy because he cannot be easily categorised. Even the learned, perceptive and empathetic doctor who had treated many people throughout his career, struggled to fully understand Michael. "I slowly began to see the originality of the resistance you offered," (163). The doctor also admitted how little he knew about some things in life compared with Michael. "People like Michaels are in touch with things you and I don't understand." (155) This means medical staff struggle to oppress Michael because he defies their narrow framework of a compliant, obedient patient in servitude to their authority. Michael rejects the normal servitude to food by only eating when and what suits him just as he jeopardises personal safety in civil war to be free of servitude.

### 3 Belonging

Maslow's third basic human need is to belong and be loved by family or friends and to have meaningful and intimate relationships with others. He believes if these needs

are lacking than a person will suffer negative social emotions such as anxiety and low extraversion values. Michael's mother Anna, "took the child with her to work and continued to take it when it was no longer a baby. Because their smiles and whispers hurt her, she kept it away from other children." (Coetzee 3) This rejection of his mother's acceptance and belonging, who cruelly referred to him as "it" and the smiles and whispers of others "hurt her," instilled in him the negative social emotions to which Maslow noted. Later in life, when Michael becomes a motherless adult, he continues to find social interaction difficult and of no interest to him.

The scene where he speaks the most, to a travelling "family" of misfits who befriend, feed and save his life then urge him to tell his story, is fraught with anxiety. Although ill from malnutrition, he also displays the symptoms of what may have been a panic attack triggered by the stress of normal, civil communication. "It struck him too that his story was paltry, not worth the telling...the nausea passed but the sweat that had broken out on him was turning cold and he had begun to shiver. He closed his eyes." (Coetzee 176)

However, even for Michael K who was rejected at birth and committed to an orphanage, his mother's needs still took precedence. "But he did not shirk any aspect of what he saw as his duty....he had been brought into the world to look after his mother." (Coetzee 7) Yet this love and devotion was never reciprocated. Even while dying, Anna spurned her loyal son. "When she knew her end was coming, it was not me she looked to but someone who stood behind me: her mother." (Coetzee 117) For Michael, mourning the distant relationship he had with his mother started long before he eventual passing

because he, “did not miss her, he found, except insofar as he had missed her all his life.”  
(34)

In *Life Beyond Law, Biopolitics, Law and futurity in Coetzee's LTMK*, Catherine Mills states, “*LTMK* is a work of mourning. The defining motif of the novel is loss: the loss of a mother, the loss of land, of a nation, of peace, the loss of one's self - even if it cannot clearly be said that these existed, in whatever fragile form, prior to the violence that destroys them.” (189) Mills' assumption about the defining motif of loss including one's self can be strongly argued. Michael “found” he did not miss his mother because she had never really been a true mother in the first place. Yes, he tended to Anna by transporting her in a homemade carriage but it was selfless duty rather than love. Michael also never experienced “the loss of one's self.” He is single-minded, lives by his own rules and to be very much the driver of his own destiny, even when hiding in his secret, mountain hideout.

#### 4 Self-esteem

According to Maslow, all humans want to feel respected, have self-esteem and the need to engage in activities, either hobbies or a profession, where they feel accepted and valued. For Michael K, it was gardening which served as both his career and his means of survival. Gardening, not people, provided Michael K with his only real, true source of fulfilment and happiness. “There were times, particularly in the mornings, when a fit of exultation would pass through him at the thought that he, alone and unknown, was making the deserted farm bloom.” (Coetzee 59)

African academic and ecologist Pippin Anderson states South African gardeners

have a very lowly status in society which is reflected in their pay, their treatment by their employees who are generally white females and by being called “boys.” This not so subtle undermining of the gardener status even patronizingly extends to their manhood by reducing them to mere boys rather than acknowledging them as strong, physically capable men who work long, hard hours working in the garden.

Anderson writes, “One can only speculate that making grown men feel diminutive in this way arose as a function of historic issues around race, gender, and hierarchy, where the garden is traditionally the domain of the woman of the house and having a ‘boy’ working for a woman, in her space and taking her orders, was somehow more socially acceptable than having a man working for her.” (Anderson 2005)

For Michael K, gardening was so important it was almost like a religious vocation that could not be forgotten even in war times. “There must be men to stay behind and keep gardening alive, or at least the idea of gardening; because once that cord was broken, the earth would grow hard and forget her children.” (Coetzee 109)

## 5 Cognitive

Maslow’s fifth stage of human psychology needs, which also marks the start of the higher half of the hierarchy, is humans seek knowledge. This cognitive need is sought via learning, exploring, discovering and creating. Although Michael K was considered “slow” because he rarely spoke and was maligned for his skeletal frame and malformed mouth, he was actually a gifted schemer and dreamer. This sentiment has also been echoed by Derek Attridge in *J. M. Coetzee & the Ethics of Reading*, “K is some kind of amoral being, more animal than human, or that he is perhaps still an infant at heart? Certainly not; the very fact of his open-minded speculation on this matter indicates a - profound ethical awareness.” (54)



Michael is also, in the camp hospital doctor's words, "The obscurest of the obscure, so obscure as to be a prodigy." (Coetzee 142) He is a talented cultivator who can create a secret garden resurrecting a once-abandoned irrigation system and is also a willing philanthropist. "What grows is for all of us. We are all children of the earth." (Coetzee 139) This universal earth, in Michael K's case pertaining to gardening, is described clearly *In Constructions of Apartheid in the International Reception of the Novels of J. M. Coetzee* by Clive Barnett. He states although, "South Africa is an enclosed terrain", it "can be read as having a universal moral significance, rather than a specific political one either with reference to alternative understandings of South Africa or to the politics of writing. This double movement is recognisable in commentaries on those novels in which South Africa is an indirect referent, such as *LTMK*, where 'there is a certain fictional haze between the events and their local reference'." (Barnett 293)

Gordimer erases Barnett's poetic gossamer of fictional haze claiming, "while it is implicitly and highly political, Coetzee's heroes are those who ignore history, not make it." (401) Gordimer's bold statement, in the case of Michael and his choice of gardening career, should be revised as being Coetzee's heroes are those who *are part* of history and who *mark* history through the legacy of the gardens they leave behind for future generations.

## 6 Aesthetics

Maslow's sixth stage on the Hierarchy is aesthetics. This more evolved need 34

enhances rather than prolongs or enables life. Michael K is not one of the privileged who has access to culture such as art and theatre but he appreciates nature throughout his life in the form of gardening, a beautiful sunset or the sound of bird song. Even in his subconscious dream state when dreaming of his dead mother, his appreciation for aesthetics is evident. It bypasses his own ill health and transcends the civil war surrounding him.

“He was walking with her in the mountains. Though her legs were heavy, she was young and beautiful... he realized he was in danger of losing his footing and being carried over the edge of the rock-face into the vast airiness of space between the heavens and the earth; but he had no fear, he knew he would float.” (Coetzee 119)

This mystical scene where Michael K can escape in his dreams to a better place is inspired by his love of nature. Maslow describes this aesthetic experience in *Personality and Growth*, by Robert Frager and James Fadiman. “You can go on about the beauty of the world, but the fact is that these plateau experiences are described quite well in many literatures...if your mystical experience changes your life, you go about your business as the great mystics did.” (Krippner 115)

Michael’s evolved state of inner being takes him far away from war torn, apartheid South Africa and the life of servitude he is expected to accept as a homeless, uneducated and physically deformed man. In its place he is transported to a utopian world of beauty, equality and freedom denied to him on earth. Michael’s interior world is the antithesis of Mills’ description of mourning with the defining motif of loss. It is a world

of discovery, optimism and most of all freedom from servitude.

### 7 Self-actualization

Michael's doggedness to keep toiling the earth, even when he was risking his life as the flourishing crops were evidence of his whereabouts to armed soldiers, is typical of Maslow's self-actualizers. His focus, commitment and passion to gardening surpassed any mere mortal concern about physical safety. "Their strong commitment to their chosen work and values may even lead self-actualizers to be quite ruthless at times in pursuing their own goals." (Frager, Fadiman 1984: 380) This total absorption in gardening also created a much-needed refuge for Michael K who was only occasionally reminded of war when, "the jet fighters whistled high overhead." (Coetzee 116)

The penultimate step in the Maslow Hierarchy of Needs is self-actualization or the ability to reach personal potential and generativity, that is, the need to ward off stagnation. In *A Theory of Human Motivation*, Maslow wrote, "a new discontent and restlessness will soon develop, unless the individual is doing what he or she, individually, is fitted for." (1206) This is why Michael K's revelation, "I am a gardener", (Coetzee 59 & 181) is such a significant turning point. Being classified as a gardener means he is no longer defined as a motherless son, a war camp inhabitant, hospital patient or figure of ridicule.

Michael's vocation of gardening is also the pathway to how he has managed to ascend the first seven stages of the Maslow hierarchy framework:

- 1) Physiological: Crops provide food he wants to eat
- 2) Safety: The garden is Michael's safe haven from war

- 3) Belonging: Mother earth provides a surrogate family
- 4) Self-esteem: Derived from creating a thriving garden
- 5) Cognitive: Gardening builds self-awareness/knowledge
- 6) Aesthetics: He appreciates the fruits of his labour
- 7) Self-actualisation: Being a gardener is who he is.

Maslow's criteria stated for self-actualization, as stated in *Personality and Growth* is: "Dedicated to a vocation or cause. Two requirements for growth seem to be commitment to something greater than oneself and to doing well at one's chosen tasks." (378) Michael's commitment greater than himself is, without a doubt, gardening. Being a gardener is the only title of importance for his self actualisation. He does not define himself by race or colour and neither does his creator Coetzee. Penner writes in *Countries of the Mind* Coetzee deliberately avoids classifying Michael. "I am doing that very consciously. The reason, I think, has a lot to do with the over-simplicity of the black/white dichotomy." (91)

### 8 Transcendence

For Michael K, death holds no fear just as his living held so little life. He longs for the afterlife because to him, who knows no god and has no living family, death simply means relinquishing humanity which has already rejected him. Perhaps transcendence to Michael does not mean death but instead retreating into Mother Nature as a snail would into its shell, to his own interior monologue and becoming part of nature.

"He is like a stone, a pebble that, having lain around quietly minding its own business since the dawn of time, is now suddenly picked up and tossed randomly

from hand to hand. A hard, little stone, barely aware of its surroundings, enveloped in itself and its interior life.” (Coetzee *LTMK* 135)

This transcendent or spiritual life, according to Maslow, is only achieved when a life is fulfilled and self-actualized. Given the three Maslow pillars for self-actualized people as outlined by Fragar and Fadiman in *Motivation and Personality*, Michael has surely achieved this coveted status:

- 1) “They positively like solitude and privacy to a definitely greater degree than the average person...They find it easy to be aloof, reserved, and also calm and serene...This reserve may shade into austerity and remoteness.”
- 2) “My subjects make up their own minds, come to their own decisions, are self-starters, and are responsible for themselves and their own destinies.”
- 3) “They are propelled by growth motivation rather than by deficiency motivation, self-actualizing people are not dependent for their main satisfactions on the real world, or other people or culture or means to ends or, in general, on extrinsic satisfactions.”

Perhaps the most poignant and fitting ending to the story of Michael K’s life is not so much whether or not he lives on earth or transcends into his preferred after life, but the epiphany, “there is time enough for everything.” (Coetzee 183) Unlike Maslow, who only had time to create “quick and dirty” exploratory human psychology theories and hoped one day they would be answered by others after his passing. This luxury of time was one not afforded to Anna either who was reduced to nothing but ashes in an old box and society deemed her, “no good to us.” (136) Anna’s futile life and premature

Passing are a direct contrast to Michael's final epiphany on life, and the transcendent afterlife, that there is indeed time enough for everything.

### Conclusion

Coetzee's writing of the nature-loving protagonist Michael who seeks solitude on a mountain top away from the bloodshed of civil war is an example of a subject ascending the Maslow hierarchy. Conversely, some people can also move downwards. Maslow explains just as one person may move towards good health and self-actualisation another may regress to weaknesses and sickness. He describes neurosis as being a spiritual disorder where there is loss of meaning, hopelessness and lack of courage. He also says it can manifest as despair about the future and the awakening that one's life is being wasted.

This lack of self-actualization is evident when Michael's hospital doctor, who has spent his career trying to save, "young men dying spectacular deaths," (Coetzee 5) realises he is the one who needs saving. "I was wasting my life...wasting it by living from day to day in a state of waiting, that I had in effect given myself up as a prisoner to this war." (157) Even more depressing is the comparison the doctor makes with one of his patients. "Even the concussion case, turned wholly inward, wrapped up in the processes of his own slow extinction, lives in dying more intensely than I in living." (158)

Michael, conversely, is a profound and evolved character because he escapes his impoverished background and forges an independent path through life to the pinnacle of

the Hierarchy of Needs. Michael also becomes a mentor by default to the doctor who realises too late in life that his vocation had been squandered devoting himself to the war effort and medicine. The doctor knows only at the end of his futile career he can learn so much from Michael who refuses to bow to authority. Jane Poyner's *J. M. Coetzee and the Paradox of Postcolonial Authorship* states, "Michael K *attempts* to stand outside this system by resisting the regime's regulation of the body by means of time, space and the land." (70) Poyner's statement, however, should be rewritten to read, "Michael K *succeeds* in standing outside this system."

Chapter Two:

Sovereign Power

*"The camp is the space that is opened when the state  
of exception begins to become the rule."*

(Giorgio Agamben)

Analysing JM Coetzee's *WFTB*  
through Giorgio Agamben's  
*Homo sacer Sovereign Power Bare Life* framework.



### Introduction

Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians (WFTB)* follows the descent of a once powerful Magistrate who rules a small, colonial outpost. When the Magistrate is interrogated and tried for, "treasonously consorting with the enemy," (Coetzee 77) he then becomes labelled an enemy of the state and his lofty position turns from being an oppressor to one of the oppressed. In Maslow's framework, he maps a very clear descent in the Hierarchy of Needs from transcendent to physiological. However, the Magistrate's decline escalates further until he is classified as Homo sacer. This Latin term means that in Roman law, according to Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, "the bare life, that is, the life of homo sacer (sacred man) may be killed and yet not sacrificed," (8). The Sovereign also has the right to declare a state of exception where conventional law is replaced with a state of emergency exception. The inhabitants of this defined space of exception, which could be a prison or a concentration camp for example, are then governed by this new jurisdiction. Sovereign power then decides who is included and who is abandoned by the political body with the latter deemed Homo sacers. In Agamben's words, "the inclusion of bare life in the political realm constitutes the original -if concealed - nucleus of sovereign power." (6)

Giorgio Agamben's Homo sacer and sovereign power theory raises ontological questions concerning the primacy of sovereignty, which is the over arching terminology for the various forms of state powers throughout history. Or, in Agamben's reckoning, "if we understand the theoretical implications of bare life will we be able to solve the enigma of ontology." (182)

States of exception have been part of the political landscape since time began

ranging from the ancient Greek and Roman Empires, Nazi concentration camps, the Monarchy and controversial prison camps including Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib where abuse was inflicted by US troops with military impunity. In other words, the Geneva Convention was overruled and those within the prison camp were at the mercy of the authoritarian military personnel. The Agamben framework provides a viewing lens for better understanding the mechanics of a concentration camp, usually from the authoritarian vantage point. The Coetzee protagonist in *WFTB* experiences life both inside and outside the sovereign state in both authoritarian and later Homo sacer status. *WFTB* therefore provides a comprehensive overview of all facets of the Agamben theory especially from the perspective of the oppressed, that is, a prisoner who has been reduced to being a mere subject of servitude within the sovereign power state.

The best reason for using Agamben, and not another philosopher's theoretical framework, is best explained by Steven Caton in his article *Coetzee, Agamben, and the Passion of Abu Ghraib*. "The utility of Agamben lies in the applicability of Homo sacer for reading these difficult images and explaining them." (116) The use and misuse of power is analysed by Agamben from both beyond and within the concentration camp confines where the Sovereign power dictates punishment and any outside law is rendered invalid as it is classified as a state of emergency. Therefore, it is a sanctioned place where all forms of punishment, oppression, subjugation and torsions of power can be inflicted on those imprisoned. Some may equate this to the South African apartheid regime with its sanctioned racism and oppression of the black majority.

Agamben's framework, like Coetzee's writing, is transnational and intercultural

and is irrespective of time and place. The small outpost colonial settlement in Coetzee's novel is deliberately set in an unspecified location as it represents any form of global sovereign power and abuse of authoritarian rule. The generic term Magistrate means the protagonist can represent any figure from any nation without heritage being indicated by name. Stephen Watson's *Colonialism and the Novels of J. M. Coetzee*, however, takes the stance that Coetzee's writing, which addresses the duality between empire and colony, master and slave, law and barbarism, only takes a negative view of South Africa's historical narrative. "As is the case with South Africa today, so much of Coetzee's work can be viewed as a failed dialectic, a world in which there is no synthesis, in which the very possibility of a synthesis seems to have been permanently excluded." (Watson 382) This criticism of Coetzee's writing, which also inadvertently addresses the paradox of the sovereign state of exception within the concentration camp, could also be considered a painfully truthful interpretation of South African history by an author who lived and witnessed the apartheid regime. This chapter uses factual examples ranging from Nazi Germany to Abu Ghraib to depict what has happened in our distant and recent past within sanctioned Sovereign state times of emergency.

These states of exception, also characterized in Coetzee's fictional *WFTB*, flout the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* legislated in 1948. The specific articles most blatantly contravened are:

- Article 5: No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.
- Article 8: Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him

by the constitution or by law.

- Article 9: No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

*WFTB* is a novel that transcends the literary, geopolitical and historical South African perspective which has shaped JM Coetzee's oeuvre. The unnamed story location is, "merely space, no meaner or grander than the space above the shacks and tenements and temples and offices of the capital. Space is space, life is life, everywhere is the same." (Coetzee 16) According to Dick Penner's *Countries of the Mind*, Coetzee's borderless writing goes far beyond the parochial South African political context to, "transform urgent societal concerns into more enduring questions regarding colonialism and the relationship of mastery and servitude between cultures and individuals," (X111) which enables him to strike, "at a more fundamental problem; the psychological, philosophical and linguistic bases of the colonial dilemma." (X1V)

*WFTB*, Coetzee's third novel, was written while South Africa was still in the grip of the apartheid regime so authoritarian sovereign power, violence and inhumanity to fellow man have inherently permeated the fictional characters created by Coetzee including, "the colonel and the magistrate, the man of war and the man of law." (Penner 85) *WFTB* deals with power and subordination in a collective rather than individual state as in chapter one's *LTMK*. The Sovereign has the power to overrule normal law during times when it is considered a state of emergency. This means then the exception becomes the norm in a juxtaposition of the empowered and disempowered.

The mindset of those disempowered, or in servitude to the sovereign states, is

better described by Coetzee as, “Without exception they are dreams of ends: dreams of not how to live but of how to die. And everyone, I know, in that walled town sinking now into darkness...is similarly occupied.” (133) Agamben’s framework is used to navigate *WFTB*’s relevance and is also used as a precursor to comprehend the duality between biopower and sovereignty apparent in French philosopher Michel Foucault’s foundational research which will be analysed in chapter three of this thesis. Biopower means having power over other bodies or, in Foucault’s words from *History of Sexuality*, “numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations.” (140)

According to Agamben, a Homo sacer is one who is outside both civil and divine law and is thrust into a state of exception or, as Germans would say, *Ausnahmezustand*. (The relevance to Hitler’s Nazi regime will be discussed later in this chapter.) Homo sacer’s status enters the realm of biopolitics and is very much at the mercy of the sovereign power’s state of exception.

Agamben’s three-part thesis published in *Homo sacer Sovereign Power and Bare Life* comprises:

- 1) The Logic of Sovereignty
- 2) Homo sacer
- 3) The Camp as Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern.

These three chapter headings will be used as the scaffolding to map *WFTB*’s interpretation of the Agamben framework. They will be supplemented by three accompanying subheadings pertaining to Coetzee’s writing comprising:

- 1) The Art of Torture
- 2) Man's Impotency
- 3) Human Guinea Pigs/Geospace decay.

The Logic of Sovereignty & The Art of Torture

The glaring juxtaposition of these two disparate titles together – The Logic of Sovereignty and The Art of Torture – highlight and also inadvertently encapsulate the non-sensical and pathetic world that defines Coetzee's *WFTB*. What is most paradoxical in *WFTB* is the much-anticipated arrival of the Barbarians, who instil fear, loathing and panic in the so-called civilised population. However, it is not the Barbarians the Empire citizens should fear but themselves. This "civilisation" is one in which people are tortured as sport in the public arena, where even children are forced to watch and participate in inflicting protracted, humiliating torture on others. "I watch the face of a little girl who stands in the front rank of the crowd gripping her mother's clothes. Her eyes are round, her thumb is in her mouth: silent, terrified, curious, she drinks in the sight of these big naked men being beaten." (*WFTB* Coetzee 105) Agamben aptly defines this scene of depravity by stating, "at its center lies a scandalous unification of the two essentially antithetical principles that the Greeks called *Bia* and *Dike*, violence and justice. Nomos is the power...with the strongest hand." (31)

The Magistrate's torturers include warrant officer Mandel, with his clear blue eyes, "as clear as if there were crystal lenses slipped over his eyeballs," (Coetzee *WFTB* 118) and Colonel Joll who hides his eyes behind dark disc glasses which, "look opaque from the outside, but he can see through them." (1-2) When the Magistrate and others are being tortured all they can see is not the eyes of the perpetrator but, far more chilling, "only my doubled image cast back at me," (44) from the two glass discs.

As Penner clearly states, “Joll is ethically blind, as is the empire that he represents; in the capital, he tells the magistrate, everyone wears such glasses. The magistrate’s dilemma is that in Joll’s dark glasses, he can see a shadowy reflection of himself.” (Penner 77) Joll, this elder statesman of torture, is at the pinnacle of his career, and regularly herds naked humans *en masse*, much like the live cattle trade today. To keep them, “meek as lambs,” (Coetzee 103) a loop of wire runs through the flesh of each man’s hands and through holes pierced in his cheeks.

Steven Caton’s article *Coetzee, Agamben, and the Passion of Abu Ghraib*, compares this fictitious scene of herding humans to the real horror of the Holocaust. “I argue, after Agamben, that modern sovereignty turns the victims of its power into ‘bare life’. The sovereignty of the Nazi state ultimately depended on the killing of Homo sacer, by the millions.” (116) These marked or accursed men, Homo sacers, who may or may not survive their torture in Coetzee’s fiction (unlike those who were gassed to death by Hitler and his men and women personify what Agamben has described as existing, “with a life that...is defined solely by virtue of having entered into an intimate symbiosis with death without, nevertheless, belonging to the world of the deceased.” (99-100)

Coetzee’s *WFTB* describes the sado masochistic punishments inflicted on soldiers similar to that used in Abu Ghraib prison during the Iraq War which began in 2003. Caton explains nakedness was a particularly significant aspect of the punishment, “because of Arab cultural notions of shame associated with the public exposure of the naked body, they believed prisoners would feel humiliated and would thus be more likely to ‘talk’.”

(120) Of both the Iraq War and Nazi Germany, Caton asks, “Why were torture and abuse conducted in this highly revealing, self-reflexive way, unless their perpetrators thought that they were authorised to do so and they would not be implicated in criminal acts?”

(120) This question could also be asked of warrant officers in *WFTB*. Coetzee’s *WFTB* warrant officers are perpetrators of torture who are clearly not driven by any sense of morals. Therefore they are not motivated by the fear of being, in Caton’s words, “implicated in criminal acts.” They are driven instead primarily by the power they wield, their narcissism and their slavish, unquestioning indoctrination into the world of torture.

The state of emergency, or exception, when Sovereign Law dictates that conventional law no longer applies, is described by Agamben as, “monopoly over the final decision.” (16) In other words, Sovereign Law has *carte blanche* to treat citizens, especially Homo sacers, any way they want. These Homo sacers can be killed but not sacrificed as this implies a religious or deified status which is beyond their earthly status.

The crucifixion scenes in Coetzee’s fiction belie and satirise the true message in the Christian crucifixion. Caton states, “Christ is the quintessential sacrificial figure, whose death is filled with transcendent meanings.” (119) Coetzee’s evil character Colonel Joll can also be compared to director Mel Gibson’s *The Passion of The Christ*’s depiction of Roman governor Pontius Pilate who condemned Christ to crucifixion. According to Caton,

“The paradox Pilate faces is the paradox of sovereignty: To uphold justice or



the law, sovereign power must resort to violence; violence, in turn, is the enactment of the law...killing without transcendent meaning - so his Christ figure loses this sacrificial sense - indeed, loses almost all intelligibility.”(119)

## 2) Homo sacer and the Impotent Man

Being deemed a homo sacer with bare life status may seem like the lowest caste a person could be subjected to but no, in Coetzee’s *WFTB*, degradation and humiliation are added to the description. Public humility, wearing women’s clothing, having children whip you and taunting crowds jeering add to the final degradation. The Homo sacer status of the Magistrate is characterised by certain emasculation when he is forced to be naked or wear a frock then left hanging by a rope near death. Other times, he is simply overlooked or even forgotten as if he no longer even existed. The *WFTB* contrary concentration camp guards are just as likely one day to say to a cowering prisoner, “How can you be a prisoner when we have no record of you?” (Coetzee 125) This non-entity state of confusion adds to the prisoner’s minimisation and belittlement. “How can I regard myself as a victim of persecution when my sufferings are so petty? Yet they are all the more degrading for their pettiness.” (84-5)

Agamben cites a similarly paradoxical scene from Franz Kafka, stating, “When the priest in *The Trial* summarizes the essence of the court in the formula, ‘the court wants nothing from you. It receives you when you come, it lets you go when you go,’ it is the originary structure of the nomas that he states.” (Agamben 50)

The descent to Homo sacer status occurred when the Magistrate is found guilty of consorting with a blind Barbarian girl, considered the enemy. He is summoned by the Colonel, stripped of his title, imprisoned and shunned by all. The Magistrate is reduced

to a shell of a man in total servitude to his amoral torturers. He is literally left hanging in the abyss between life and death, "as my feet leave the ground I feel a terrible tearing in my shoulders as though whole sheets of muscle are giving way. From my throat comes the first mournful dry bellow, like the pouring of gravel." (Coetzee 121) Another Homo sacer in Coetzee's nameless "civilisation" is left for days on end hanging until eventual exhaustion, dehydration and pain claim him. "He is lashed to a stout wooden framework which holds him upright in his saddle. His spine is kept erect by a pole and his arms are tied to a cross-piece. Flies buzz around his face. His jaw is bound shut, his flesh is puffy, a sickly smell comes from him, he has been several days dead." (139-40)

Both these explicitly graphic Coetzee crucifixion scenes, where one Homo sacer barely survives and the other dies, are reminiscent of Mel Gibson's *The Passion of The Christ* film of 2004 which, Caton writes, has been slated by critics as, "gratuitous, sadomasochistic and pornographic." (117) Like Coetzee's crucified Homo sacers, Gibson's film portrayal of Christ was devoid of anything, "transcendent" and the suffering imposed was clearly, "senseless and unintelligible - violence merely for the sake of itself." (Caton 117)

It should be contested Caton misses the point of the graphic violence. It is, in fact, the reason why the senseless and unintelligible violence is so shocking, because it has absolutely no transcendent let alone worthwhile meaning. If there was a point to it, then there is some sort of perceived justification for its existence. In Gibson's film and in Coetzee's writing the graphic violence is an accurate re-enactment of the history of sovereign power which is characterised by, "violence merely for the sake of itself." (Caton 117)

Coetzee's two Homo sacers subjected to mock religious crucifixions and Gibson's interpretation of Christ's killing are representative of Agamben's explanation that, "A life that may be killed by anyone - an object of a violence that exceeds the sphere both of law and of sacrifice. This double excess opens the zone of indistinction between and beyond the profane and the religious." (Agamben 86) Agamben's Homo sacer premise is founded on the first of 15 ancient Roman Tribunician laws, believed devised in the second century AD by Pompeius Festus that, "if someone kills the one who is sacred according to the plebiscite, it will not be considered homicide." (71)

The status of Homo sacer also applies equally to women. For example, the Barbarian girl has ignominy thrust upon her after she is tortured, blinded and crippled then forced to become the Magistrate's concubine and a prostitute to survive. "She will never be courted and married in the normal way; she is marked for life as the property of a stranger, and no one will approach her save in the spirit of lugubrious sensual pity that she detected and rejected in me." (Coetzee 135) This Barbarian girl, name unknown, is simply referred to by the magistrate as, "an old man's slut." (Coetzee 63)

To ensure the blind Barbarian girl's Homo sacer status is complete, she is also often incapable of arousing interest in what should be her lover's anticipated climax. With the offer of sex her only true currency, even this is devalued. "In the middle of the sexual act I felt myself losing my way like a storyteller losing the thread of his story...the act itself became remote, puny, an oddity. Sometimes I drifted to a halt." Coetzee 45)

Brian May's article *Extravagant Postcolonialism: Ethics and Individualism in Anglophonic, Anglocentric Postcolonial Fiction; or, "What Was (This) Postcolonialism?"* states, "The Magistrate succeeds in conjuring a nostalgic image of the girl, turning her

into a kind of allegorical figure that he may manipulate, all the while trying to ignore or forget or efface the real of the girl herself." Aside from allegory, this assertion could be countered by asking if the blind Barbarian girl is actually being manipulated. She could, in fact, be the one doing the manipulating. The Barbarian girl starts as a victim of servitude but evolves into one where she learns from experience then begins to barter for her rights. For example, she chooses when she wants to talk (much like *LTMK*'s Michael in chapter one), scrounges a warm bed, food and a safe passage home and in doing so, destroys the well-meaning magistrate's life. She turns from being oppressed to being an oppressor in her relations with the Magistrate who is in servitude wanting more from her emotionally than she is prepared to give. She chooses to give her body to him only as a means to assert her power over him. Her life is initially defined by fear, oppression and victimisation as one in servitude and who is scarred both emotionally and physically by torturers. However, again much like *LTMK*'s Michael, she learns that silence and withholding emotionally to others can be a source of personal strength and power.

Even the Barbarian's girl father was in servitude to her, as well as her torturers, because he was unable to stop them hurting her. Rather than live with the shame of being a powerless father, he chose the end of pain and suffering with one, ultimate act. "Her father had annihilated himself, he was a dead man. It must have been at this point, when she closed herself off to him, that he threw himself upon his interrogators...and clawed at them like a wild animal until he was clubbed down." (Coetzee 80)

### 3) The Camp as Biopolitical Paradigm of the Modern

#### & Human Guinea Pigs and Geospace Decay

This third section connects Agamben's biopolitical concentration camp theory within the context of concentration camp torture techniques, in particular those experienced in historic Nazi Germany wartime. Coetzee has echoes of this real torture scattered throughout his fiction in *WFTB*.

In Agamben's theory and Coetzee's *WFTB* the concentration camp is the area of exception where Sovereign Rule is suspended and the state of emergency becomes the norm. This defined geospace, which is outside the jurisdiction of normal law, is also the place where the imprisoned and persecuted await their fates and are usually forced to do hard labour in even harsher conditions. This historical fact is replicated in Coetzee's writing, "the diggers must toil under a hot sun or in a biting wind with no shelter and with sand flying everywhere." (14) The most notorious concentration camps in history were those in Nazi Germany where prisoners were also used for testing as human guinea pigs, or in the German vernacular, *Versuchpersonen* (VP). Agamben recounts this episode stating, "at the Nuremberg trials, the experiments conducted by German physicians and scientists in the concentration camps were universally taken to be one of the most infamous chapters in the history of the National Socialist regime." (144)

(See diagram following)



*Site of the Nuremberg trials. Pic Credit: US Holocaust Memorial Museum.*

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Some of the experiments included the potability of water where the VPs were divided into three groups where one group was given no water, another given only salt water and the third group water mixed with a chemical additive. "The VPs reached such a level of prostration in the course of the experiment that they twice tried to suck fresh water from a rag on the floor." (Agamben 156) This particular Nazi experiment is reminiscent of Coetzee's autocratic Empire warrant officers who at times also chose saltwater as their means of torture.

"But my torturers were not interested in degrees of pain. They were interested only in what it meant to live in a body, as a body, a body which can entertain notions of justice only as long as it is whole and well, which very soon forgets them when its head is gripped and a pipe is pushed down its gullet and pints of salt water are poured into it till it coughs and retches and flails and voids itself." (Coetzee 114-5)

These horrors committed in concentration camps, both Coetzee's imaginary ones and the real chapters of history, are explained by Agamben, "as the absolute space of exception, the camp is topologically different from a simple space of confinement. And it is this space of exception, in which the link between localization and ordering is definitively broken." (47) However, Coetzee's historic reference points such as the one outlined above, have been dismissed by some critics including Paul Rich in his article *Apartheid and the Decline of the Civilization Idea: An Essay on Nadine Gordimer's July's People and J. M. Coetzee's WFTB*.

He states Coetzee's fictionalised re-enactment of Nazi Germany-inspired events portrayed in *WFTB* does not provide readers with an adequate, historical portrayal. "This vision of empire has seemed all too simplistic, lacking any understanding of the historical forces that produce actual imperial systems at particular phases of history." (Rich 385) Rich continues saying that Coetzee's fiction lacks, "any moral transcendence." (388) This neo-Marxist criticism reiterated by Rich can be countered by remembering it is not a work of history and actual imperial systems. It is, first and foremost, literary fiction which has only been inspired by history.

Bert Olivier's online article *Marikana: From Foucault's bio-power to Agamben's Homo sacer*, published by the Guardian African Network, defines this notion even more tellingly, "the state has the task of producing 'bare life' and although it has no 'jurisdiction' over it because of the 'state of exception' from human and divine law, nevertheless wields the power of (ex-)termination over it." (par 7) Olivier also discusses the 2012 South African Marikana massacre, when security and police killed around 44 civilians and injured many more, after a miner's wildcat strike

escalated out of control. He described this killing spree as one of the, “uncertain and nameless terrains...where brute killing can happen without legal consequence because the victims have already been excluded from the domain of the law,” (par 12) adding that, “these are just some of the manifestations of the hidden, “biopolitical paradigm of the modern,” (par 13) such as the concentration camp.

Brute killing is also what the *WFTB*’s empire citizens fear most with the much-anticipated but never eventuating invasion of the barbarians. “At night, it is said, the barbarians prowl about bent on murder and rapine.” (Coetzee 122) This barbarian no-show created in Coetzee’s fiction, and the chosen title name of his book *WFTB*, both pay homage to the poem penned by Egyptian-born, Greek author C. P. Cavafy. The last two lines of his poem read, “*And now, what’s going to happen to us without barbarians? They were, those people, a kind of solution.*”

This “solution” which never materialises in the fictitious world of Coetzee’s *WFTB* only adds further pathos as well as bathos to this decaying Empire. Every aspect of the State of Exception biospace represents decay in a range of guises. This includes from its people - “I should have stayed among the gross and decaying where I belong; fat women with acrid armpits and bad tempers, whores with big slack cunts” (Coetzee 97) - to the Empire itself - “One thought alone preoccupies the submerged mind of Empire: how not to end, how not to die, how to prolongs its era...By night it feeds on images of disaster: the sack of cities, the rape of populations, pyramids of bones, acres of desolation.” (132-3)

As for the concentration camp inhabitants, their last meal would only be given



so they had enough sustenance to be able to dig their own graves.

"It would cost little to march them out into the desert (having put a meal in them first, perhaps, to make the march possible), to have them dig, with their last strength, a pit large enough for all of them to lie in (or even to dig it for them!), and, leaving them buried there forever and forever." (Coetzee 23-4)

This shocking image, reminiscent of prisoners of war or concentration camps in any State of Exception scenario globally, is also echoed in Coetzee's, *LTMK* where a similar form of bare life existed. "When at last its time comes digs its own grave and slips quietly in and draws the heavy earth over its head like a blanket." (Coetzee, *LTMK* 161)

According to Alexandra Coghlan's online essay published in *The Monthly* titled, *On His Terms JC Kannemeyer's 'JM Coetzee: A Life in Writing', Coetzee's WFTB* manuscripts, "also expose the textual archaeology of Coetzee's writing: the early draft of *WFTB* is set in Cape Town." (par 14) However, in subsequent drafts the geographical location was removed. This may have been reflective of his own intercultural identity and fractured national ambivalence as, "a writer with an Afrikaner name and heritage but with English as his first language, not to mention Europe as his frame of literary reference identity was torn." (par 12)

Agamben states, "as the absolute space of exception, the camp is topologically different from a simple space of confinement. And it is this space of exception, in which the link between localization and ordering is definitively broken, that has determined the crisis of the old "nomos of the earth." (20) This lack of order is also reinforced in Ryszard Bartnik's essay *On South African Violence Through Giorgio Agamben's*

*Biopolitical Framework: A Comparative Study of J.M. Coetzee's Disgrace and Z. Mda's Ways of Dying.* "Different ethnicities can undergo victimization depending on who is in power, actual/physical or political, to (de)value an individual life." (30) The only aspect of the Homo sacer's that is localised is the fact they were persecuted and tortured by their own peoples. "They died or were executed due to the status of sacred men whose lives have become bare - paradoxically but rather unsurprisingly - within the same ethnic boundaries, within the realm of the formerly oppressed." (30)

The final ethical, existentialist conundrum is whether the Magistrate should stay with the people in the decaying fiefdom or resurrect, "the submerged mind of empire." (Coetzee 133) The Magistrate who is left in the final line of the story as, "a man who lost his way long ago," (156) could also be equated to Coetzee who has spent the second half of his life away from his birth country. However, Coetzee is still considered by many academics as being a South African writer in servitude to apartheid's historical truth-telling even when he writes fiction. According to Stephen Watson's article, *Colonialism in the Novels of J. M. Coetzee*, "this type of person is half in the world of being, only half in the world of becoming. They cannot fail to feel the wrench of history pulling them in one direction and, simultaneously, the opposing pull of a world of contemplation where time is cyclical and knows no interruptions." (385)

#### Conclusion

Chapter one of this thesis dealt with the lone protagonist Michael K from *LTMK* and his life journey to transcendence. This chapter, chapter two, used the political framework *Homo sacer* created by Italian academic Giorgio Agamben to interpret Coetzee's *WFTB*. It starts with a transcendent Magistrate protagonist who plummets

every stage of Maslow's hierarchy then enters the Agamben Homo sacer status. Chapter three will define servitude through the Michel Foucault power and knowledge lens applied to *Foe's* 18<sup>th</sup> century paradigm of a woman in patriarchal society as well as slavery. This final chapter analyses the shift in torture from physical to psychological means using the panopticon surveillance technique.

**Chapter three**

**Power and Knowledge**

***"Where there is power there is resistance."***

**(Michel Foucault)**

**Analysing J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*  
through Michel Foucault's  
Power & Knowledge framework**

### Introduction

This third and final thesis chapter will examine the relationship dynamics of the four main characters in the J.M. Coetzee novel *Foe* using the French philosopher and historian Michel Foucault's power and knowledge as well as discipline and punish lenses. The two lives of servitude being examined are Susan Barton and slave Friday. Barton is an articulate, educated woman who is subordinated by the 18<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal society. The Foucault lens will reveal how her physical movements are restricted by psychological fear and the panopticon framework, originally devised by Jeremy Bentham and later adapted by Foucault, and how her female narrative is taken from her by the authorial male voice. Conversely, Friday, the black African slave who has undergone a double castration, will use his silence as power when he refuses to share his story nor let it be interpreted and rewritten by the white person's narrative. This one, defiant act in a life defined by subjugation, physical torture and misery is the only time he stands up for his rights.

Coetzee, in creating *Foe's* mute Friday and *LTMK's* Michael who speaks little, has deliberately created these coloured men of silence as a way to bypass the conundrum of being a white man retelling their African narratives. Friday's castrated tongue and Michael's malformed mouth are created by Coetzee to navigate his way round trying to tell their narratives rather than their physical impediments being, in Gordimer's words, "laid on so thick." (399)

Chapter one looked at the individual in servitude via a human psychology lens and chapter two looked at a subject of sovereign power through a political lens. This

chapter focuses on Michel Foucault's historical perspective using two 18<sup>th</sup> century servitude case studies:

- 1) Feminism in a patriarchal society
- 2) The slave/slavemaster relationship

Coetzee's *Foe* is inspired and re-created from the Daniel Defoe's novel *Robinson Crusoe* of 1719. *Foe* is set a year later in 1720 and introduces a white, middle class female protagonist. Susan Barton would like to represent herself but, like women of that era, her voice is silenced by the patriarchal society. Feminism is not yet a concept let alone a word in the vernacular. Her physical movements on the island are also typical of women of that era by being restricted in and around the home. When the self-appointed island patriarch Cruso dies, Barton becomes a slave owner by default. She wants the slave Friday, who has undergone a double castration of tongue and penis, to tell his story and be part of her female, castaway island narrative. Barton believes teaching him to read and write will fill the empty pages of *her* story. However, Friday chooses silence and does not want to re-live his tale of servitude, oppression and subjugation which is also reflective of the South African apartheid story for the black majority.

Friday's slave community all drown at sea before he is castaway on the island so he is displaced from his African community in three ways:

- i) Geographically
- ii) Physically
- iii) Narratively.

The island location, believed to be somewhere off the coast of Brazil, acts as a microcosm of society typical of its era in regards to patriarchy, women's (lack of) rights, racial discrimination and the power of the written word. These four pillars are also represented respectively through the four characters of Cruso, Barton, Friday and Foe.

#### Literature review

Coetzee's *Foe* has been received and interpreted by academics in a variety of ways. For example, Jennifer Rickel discusses humanitarian grounds and storytelling's power dynamics in *Speaking of Human Rights: Narrative Voice and the Paradox of the Unspeakable*. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's *Theory in the Margin* claims, "Foe is more about spacing and displacement than about timing and labour," (7) and, "Coetzee's focus is on gender and empire, rather than the story of capital." (7) Michael Marais also discusses Coetzee's dilemma about truthful historic representation versus creative licence.

Interpretations of the controversial fourth and final chapter will also be argued including Holly Flint's contention Friday's stream of speech indicates a brighter future versus Mackaskill and Colleran's assertion it is symbolic of all previously established authorities, meaning the white narrative, being dissolved.

Foucault has been chosen for this particular chapter's theoretical framework because it applies to power and knowledge which best defines *Foe's* motif. Cruso withholds knowledge from both Barton and Friday thus reinforcing his

position of power. His power is relinquished only on his death bed then Barton becomes Friday's new slave

owner by default. She then attempts, in vain, to teach the tongueless Friday how to read, write and even draw his story. However, he refuses to take part in Barton's efforts toward creating a narrative and instead chooses silence. This pivotal moment is the first time Friday willingly asserts his authority by choosing silence rather than have it thrust upon him. He is, in effect, gaining power through his refusal to gain knowledge. Barton meantime is losing her power because she is not gaining the knowledge she wants from Friday to fill the empty pages of *her* story.

Foe represents the male authoritative voice of authorship and his intentions, as prefaced by his name, are not always true. Barton relinquishes her truthful version with little fight for truth and allows her real narrative to be silenced and rewritten by the male author. The novel's terrain becomes less about island location and more about servitude in both gender and race viewed within the historic parameters of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. It is therefore the ideal story for referencing Foucault's theoretical framework. It is also a time where so much more than just racial and gender apartheid is at stake. Imprisonment, control, exploitation and slavery are all integral and unquestioned parts of the culture which remain unchallenged by both masters and the slaves themselves.

#### Barton's gender perspective

Foe's narrative highlights the insidious oppression women, including white, educated and privileged ones such as Barton, felt in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. They



remain voiceless, secondary and, even through the silent route of the written word their voice is edited and rewritten, reshaped by the unquestioned, dominant power of male authorship. Women are enslaved by suppression to the patriarchal society and, as demonstrated by the once feisty, opinionated and educated Barton, silence, subordination and compliance are the safest means for her to navigate life on Cruso's island. This island is, in effect, a microcosm of the 18<sup>th</sup> century patriarchy which could also be seen as a Sovereign state of exception as defined by Agamben in chapter two.

Once on the island, Barton quickly conforms to Cruso's domineering ways. She learns to not wander off alone, to remain in the "castle" safe from supposed cannibals and wild apes as well as submit to his sexual demands. This shift in power mechanics uses Foucault's much-favoured panopticon framework, based on Jeremy Bentham's 1791 ideal prison design, where a subject can be watched at all times from a central location. Jeremy Stangroom and James Garvey state in *The Great Philosophers: Sir Karl Popper, Jean-Paul Sartre and Michel Foucault*, "according to Foucault, the panopticon brings together power, knowledge, the control of the body and the control of space into a single, integrated disciplinary technology...it produces individual human subjects who police themselves in terms of the discourses and practices of sexual, moral, physical and psychological normality." (329)

Whether or not Coetzee was even aware of this panopticon theory or Foucault's explanation of its effectiveness, this psychological control and surveillance technique is the means to which Barton is subjected. She is a cerebral

woman so using this form of control instilling fear and oppression is highly effective. This psychological oppression is similar to what *WFTB*'s Magistrate also endured, along with physical torture, at the hands of Colonel Joll and Mandel in chapter two. *LTMK*'s Michael in chapter one was also subjugated to authoritarian surveillance control however, ultimately, he escapes and seeks solace in the mountains.

Friday the  
silenced slave

Whereas Barton is silenced psychologically, Friday, is silenced physically. His double castration ensures he remains mute with no tongue as well as placid with no penis therefore neutering any drive to overthrow his older, less physically able slave master in a bid for emancipation. It is the answer to Barton's questioning of, "What had held Friday back all these years from beating in his master's head with a stone while he slept, so bringing slavehood to an end and inaugurating a reign of idleness?" (Coetzee 36) Once on the island, and under Cruso's command, the power dynamic shifts from physical brutality to ensure acquiescence typical of the 18<sup>th</sup> century to one of psychological control which began emerging in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both these forms of punishment and authority are outlined using Foucault's theoretical framework.

Gary Gutting writes in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, "punishment in the 18<sup>th</sup> century is a matter of violent assaults on the body: branding, dismemberment, execution, whereas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century it takes the apparently

gentler but equally physical form of incarceration...prisoners are subjected to a highly structured regimen designed to produce 'docile bodies'." (864-9)

The third chapter of *Foe* highlights the role of authorship and the dilemma of historic truth-telling versus fictional story-telling which protagonist Barton faces. It is also, quite tellingly, one Coetzee himself faces as an international author and academic who has been labelled forever as South African and is therefore burdened with the weight of expectation this brings to write truthfully about history, apartheid and oppression. In the article *Interpretative Authoritarianism: Reading Colonizing Coetzee's Foe*, Michael Marais states Coetzee is under greater pressure to present history truthfully than other fictional writers because his work supplements history...

"...with greater truth than those which rival it because the former are more engaged with the historical present. It could be added that the latter are condemned because they do not conform to the normative illusion which, in the South African context, is the model text whose content engages with the political crisis in the country."

#### Foucault's philosophy

Gary Gutting best explains Foucault's theory and its relevance to history as being: "Every mode of thinking involves implicit rules (maybe not even 'formulable' by those following them) that materially restrict the range of thought. If we can uncover these rules, we will be able to see how an apparently arbitrary constraint actually makes total sense in the framework defined by those rules." (Gutting 679)

For example, in *Foe*, the concept of freedom is one totally alien to Friday. He was born a black African man in a time of slavery and knows no other way of life other than that of servitude. Alternatively, Barton, who in this century would be considered a feminist and be entitled to free speech is instead suppressed by the ruling paradigm of the 18<sup>th</sup> century patriarchy.

The foundation for Foucault's next theoretical phase, the disciplinary power paradigm in the 1970s, was inspired by Jeremy Bentham's 1791 design of the panopticon for the perfect prison. A central viewing tower surrounded by a circle of cells means prisoners can be viewed in one location simultaneously. Johanna Oksala explains in *How to Read Foucault* that his genealogical study was devised on this foundation. "For him, it was a striking illustration, 'a diagram', for a new way of conceiving power. Rather than being based on a sovereign power...this new type of power was anonymous and mechanical. Rather than functioning through external constraints and spectacular violence, it operated through the internalization of a discreet, watchful gaze." (Oksala 852) Foucault's disciplinary rubric, classified as post structuralism as it focuses, "on the social, linguistic and unconscious determinants of thought," (81) will be the viewing lens along with the fictional viewpoints of protagonist Susan Barton The (would-be) Feminist and Friday The Silenced Slave in this thesis chapter.

#### Barton The (would-be) Feminist

Susan Barton, a once-privileged white woman quickly learns the hierarchy on the castaway island and the psychologically controlling ways of the patriarch

Cruso. "I am on your island, Cruso, not by choice but by ill luck...I am a castaway, not a prisoner. If I had shoes, or if you would give me the means to make shoes, I would not need to steal about like a thief." (Coetzee 20) Her adventurous spirit is curtailed not only by Cruso's reluctance to make her shoes but his talk of cannibals, apes and the need to stay indoors for safety. Instead of exploring her new surroundings Barton submits to Cruso's demands and withholds her opinions. "There were many tart retorts I might have made; but, remembering my vow, I held my tongue. The simple truth was, Cruso would brook no change on his island." (Coetzee 27) Her free speech is now controlled.

Cruso also instils fear and the need for physical imprisonment indoors in a bid to keep Susan under his constant control and surveillance. Although she questions the existence of the much-feared but never seen cannibals and wonders why an ape would not be as wary of her as a male, she conforms. "I prudently obeyed, and stayed at home, and rested." (Coetzee 15) In this fiefdom where patriarchy is the rule and the king is no taller than herself, she is still bound by the 18<sup>th</sup> century convention and expectation of being a middle class woman who dares not, "venture from his castle." (Coetzee 15) Her resolve to not let his angry looks inspire fear, soon makes way for "slavish obedience" (20) and "asking for Cruso's pardon." (20) Now, Barton's physical freedom is also controlled.

In Rabinow's *Foucault Reader*, Foucault states: "Traditionally, power was what was seen, what was shown, and what was manifested...Disciplinary power, on the other hand, is exercised through its invisibility. (199) This control method is the method Cruso uses to ensure Barton remains in servitude to him. For example,

“Cruso’s warning against the apes made me chary of leaving the encampment,” (Coetzee 19) and, “Cruso gave me his knife and warned me not to venture from his castle.” (16).

Barton landed on the island after embarking on a sea journey in search of her long lost daughter. When the crew mutinied, the captain was killed. “They put me in a boat with the captain’s corpse beside me, and set us adrift. Why they chose to cast me away I do not know.” (Coetzee 10) The crew has most likely assumed Barton to be the dead captain’s wife. She dodges death by surviving the mutiny and again by being washed up alive on the island. She has now learned to live on her wits and to assume the position of someone’s wife to ensure her safety. This is why, coupled with the parameters of 18<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal society, she so quickly relinquishes her own opinions and defers to Cruso.

Cruso was not just the self-appointed island patriarch, he was also a self-styled, kingly figure which also further adds to the relationship inequality for Barton. “With the sun behind him all red and purple, staring out to sea, his staff in his hand and his great conical hat on his head, I thought: He is a truly kingly figure; he is the true king of his island.” (Coetzee 37) However, when Cruso decides to take sexual advantage of Barton, akin to rape, she initially makes it clear the advance from this king-like figure is not welcome. Nevertheless, when he insists, she submits.

It is hard to imagine a woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century who is more physically able than a male rapist (as Barton is compared with Cruso) taking such a passive stand.

This lack of assertion, however, is ingrained in bourgeois women in the 1700s where male domination was not typically questioned. "I pushed his hand away and made to rise, but he held me. No doubt I might have freed myself, for I was stronger than he. But I thought, He has not known a woman for fifteen years, why should he not have his desire? So I resisted no more but let him do as he wished." (Coetzee 30)

The use of a deliberate, capitalised "He" in the first instance confirms the god-like status Cruso has been elevated to in Barton's reckoning. This scene is also reminiscent of another one of Coetzee's authoritarian white male figures, Prof Lurie, who abuses his position of power by dominating his female university student Melanie in what he calls, "not rape, not quite that." (*Disgrace* 25) In *Foe*, freedom of speech, movement and, now thirdly, sexual choice have all been stripped from Barton. Oksala equates this scene to Foucault's studies in Ancient Greek sexual ethics (or lack of) which:

"Was linked to the ideas of a virile society, to dissymmetry, to the exclusion of the other and an obsession with penetration...sexual relations in antiquity were not symmetrical, reciprocal or even consensual. The active partner was a free man and the passive partner, usually a slave, a woman or a young boy, was not expected to derive any pleasure from the act." (Oksala 1419-23)

This reference to ancient Greek sexual ethics is relevant to *Foe* because both Crusoe and Foe are men of the same ilk who both take Barton in an act of power and domination rather than pleasure and consensus. "Then he was upon me, and I might have thought myself in Cruso's arms again; for they were men of

the same time of life, and heavy in the lower body, though neither was stout; and their way with a woman too was much the same." (Coetzee 139).

Barton soon grows lonely on the island with two male castaways – one who chooses not to speak and the other who is tongueless and cannot speak. The loneliness is so unbearable she would rather create a child so she can have someone to talk with and mother again. "She must do whatever lies in her power to father her offspring". (*Foe* Coetzee 139-140) Barton's loneliness is so acute she decides if Cruso wants her again she would be willing. "I would have offered myself to him again, or importuned him, or done whatever was necessary to conceive and bear a child." (Coetzee 36) However, Cruso did not want Barton physically ever again. He just took advantage of her that one, selfish time to prove it was easy to exert his power and knowledge over her and thus rendering her subservient. Somehow, defiling Barton just the once, almost makes her degradation even worse knowing he did not want her a subsequent time. Barton's focus, however, is not whether she was placed in a position of physical servitude but rather if she could use the act as a means of conception.

Jennifer Rickel's *Speaking of Human Rights: Narrative Voice and the Paradox of the Unspeakable in J. M. Coetzee's Foe and Disgrace* claims Barton's life on the island was defined by free speech. "For most of the narrative Susan is able to exercise both her right to speak and to remain silent about those things that she chooses. Her moments of silence in *Foe*...are primarily a matter of choice." One could argue very strongly that (Susan) Barton has little or no choice when



remaining silent. She is marooned on an island where, “all tyrannies and cruelties” (Coetzee 37) are possible with an overbearing patriarch who makes it quite clear he is in charge of every physical, sexual and psychological aspect of her life. So, “choosing” to “remain silent” is far less to do with free will but much more to do with trying to survive on his terms and within “his castle”. (9)

Barton “prudently obeyed,” (Coetzee 15) as she has no wish to be subject to Cruso’s angry looks and passionate outburst, “while you live under my roof you will do as I instruct!” (20) The accompanying striking of the spade into the earth is an aggressive action designed to instil fear in Barton and it works. Fear is also invoked by the threat of cannibals who are probably fiction along with the wild apes who, strangely enough, seem to be fine with males but apparently would turn treacherous around a woman. Barton cannot exercise any rights on the island where she is a virtual prisoner, is denied shoes to restrict her movement and is subjected to a rape-like scenario where she submits to Cruso’s demands as it is the path of less resistance. No wonder she wants a child to love and nurture all of her own.

One can reason her freedom of speech is in no way, “primarily a matter of choice.” At all times in Cruso’s presence Barton makes, “a vow to keep a tighter rein on my tongue,” (Coetzee 25) and when she returns from venturing alone then, “asked his pardon.” (25) These are not actions of a woman enjoying freedom but of a scared, subordinate woman trying to make her life of servitude, trapped on an island, bearable while being completely dominated by a psychologically controlling oppressor. Barton, understandably, would rather choose to be compliant than risk

being turned out to fend for herself on the island alone. As the third person to arrive on the island, Barton is very much in the hands of Cruso's will. Barton also knows if she complies then Cruso's slave Friday will share the warmth of the fire he builds for cooking the birds he hunts, the fish he catches and the eggs he gathers. Food, water, shelter and warmth (very much on the fundamental physiological level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs as in chapter one) on an island with little comfort and company are of the utmost importance.

So, Rickel's comments about speech and choosing silence are not so much freewill actions but strategic decisions on Barton's part to ensure she survives given her limited and potentially perilous circumstances. Even when Cruso dies, Barton is still not free to tell her narrative truthfully or first hand. She cannot tell the whole story because she is told, "booksellers will hire a man to set your story to rights." (Coetzee 40) Instead of having choice and rights that Rickets states, Barton's voice, even in the form of written narrative, is rendered mute and futile. "If I cannot come forward, as author, and swear to the truth of my tale, what will be the worth of it?" (40)

Barton is ultimately, like Friday, voiceless in the shadow of male authority. Barton also tellingly knows, when she finally meets Foe in person, that her efforts at writing were in vain and refers to them as, "those letters that were never read by you." (Coetzee 133) Not only is her island story rewritten, sensationalised, turned from truthful history into fiction, the final ignominy is knowing her letters are ignored and, just like on the island, Barton is still a woman in servitude. "Sometimes I believe it is I who have become the slave." (87)

Friday the  
Silenced Slave

Friday, who has undergone a double castration (penis and tongue), is a victim of the 18th century authority/power regime typified by violent assaults on the body. The 19<sup>th</sup> century authority/power paradigm is a less brutal but more psychologically intrusive method of suppression. His castrations are also invisible when his mouth is closed and he is wearing clothing, much like Foucault's disciplinary power lens which is, "exercised through its invisibility." This invisibility of discipline extends to Cruso's power and knowledge domination of Friday by not teaching him to write, limiting the amount of words conveyed and by always ensuring Friday remains a docile body in servitude to him. Foucault explains this premise further in *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*:

"Education may well be, as of right, the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse. But we well know that in its distribution, in what it permits and in what it prevents, it follows the well-trodden battle-lines of social conflict." (227)

It is only when Cruso dies, on board the rescue ship *Hobart*, that Friday is finally free, in theory, of slavery. Freedom, however, is a concept and a mere seven letters easily erased that mean nothing to someone who has spent most of his life castrated, mute and without human rights. As Barton again sagely notes, "He does not know what freedom is. Freedom is a word, less than a word, a noise, one of the

multitude of noises I make when I open my mouth.” (Coetzee 100)

Friday, as with Barton, is also very much a subject of the Foucaultian panopticon surveillance regime when he is on the island. Although he is allowed to venture out foraging for food and water, he is, nevertheless, still under constant, watchful view.

Marais claims in *Interpretative Authoritarianism: Reading/Colonizing Coetzee's Foe*, incredibly, that Friday is an artist and a traveller demonstrated by his drawing done in lieu of the written word. Marais states:

“Reading is also accentuated by Friday’s sketch of the walking eyes, described by Susan Barton: But when I came closer I saw the leaves were eyes, open eyes, each set upon row of eyes upon feet: walking eyes, Friday’s design is a graphic depiction of the metaphor of the reader as a traveller, a topos of eighteenth-century literature.” (11)

Marais’ notion of culture, artistry and literature in Friday’s world are far removed from his reality of being an illiterate, castrated slave with no rights. He too, like Barton, is part of Cruso’s surveillance where he is always mindful of being watched. Even when outdoors amongst nature, the ominous eyes of authority are ever present. Far from it being, “a graphic depiction of the metaphor of the reader as a traveller,” the image “speaks” in far more insidious terms of being constantly under Cruso’s dominant watch. It echoes Foucault’s silent, panoptical, ever watchful psychological surveillance where Friday is the subject.

Friday always chooses to make himself physically small and fears the open,

in an active, anti-panoptican stance. "In the hallway I encounter Friday standing listlessly in a corner (he stands always in corners, never in the open: he mistrusts space." (Coetzee 77) The corner provides Friday with a vantage point where he can keep lookout in more than one direction, much like a panopticon viewpoint. Marais uses the word "graphic" in terms of visual artistry but it is much more than that. It is graphic insofar as Friday knowing he is blatantly aware of always being watched even when seemingly alone amongst nature.

This fear, oppression and life of servitude is so ingrained in Friday's psyche that straight away he erases the image which reveals or "speaks" so much when he is so used to not being heard. "I reached out to take the slate, to show it to Foe, but Friday held tight to it. 'Give! Give me the slate, Friday!' I commanded. Whereupon, instead of obeying me, Friday put three fingers into his mouth and wet them with spittle and rubbed the slate clean." (Coetzee 147) The metaphor of wiping the slate clean perhaps implies Friday like Crusoe, and recounted by Barton, would rather forget life before the island. "It was as though he wished his story to begin with his arrival on the island, and mine to begin with my arrival, and the story of us together to end on the island too." (34)

Barton, who regains her power on Crusoe's passing and becomes a surrogate slave mistress, is by no means the maternal, subservient woman she appeared to be in the first half of *Foe*. She resents the slave bequeathed to her on her "husband" Crusoe's passing and can only see the monetary gain to be made by Friday in a best-selling book. She even endorses the practice of slavery with her words, "There are

times when benevolence deserts me...I understand why Cruso preferred not to disturb the muteness...why a man will choose to be a slave owner. Do you think less of me for this confession?" (Coetzee 61) Much like the doctor in *LTMK* in chapter two who wasted his life on the war effort, Barton realises she was wasting her life on Friday.

Perhaps the most telling indicator of Barton's absolute disregard for Friday is finally noticing the scar left on him by chains. "About his neck – I had not observed this before – is a scar like a necklace, left by a rope or a chain." (Coetzee 155) Rather than reflect on the degradation and torture Friday had endured, it was more about a passing, flippant comment of not having noticed before. Equating the scar to a necklace reinforces the privileged prism from which she views the world. For Barton, a neck is for wearing jewellery, much like the Bahia women who, "put hoops of gold about their necks" (115) She does not once reflect on Friday's neck and how it has been used. He carries a bag of white flakes around his neck while paddling to pay respects to his drowned, fellow slaves; Friday later carries a bag around his neck for carrying manumission deeds for a freedom he does not understand; and bears the neck scars of being part of a slave chain. Friday has far more in common with a beast of burden than a white woman wily enough to take two concubines – one for island survival and the other because she seeks fame and fortune via his pen.

The meaning of *Foe's* fourth and final chapter has been debated, critiqued and has caused widespread dissention amongst academics globally. It could be

interpreted as a meta narrative for slavery, apartheid, racial oppression and human rights globally. Mackaskill and Collieran's *Reading History, Writing Heresy: The Resistance of Representation and the Representation of Resistance in J. M. Coetzee's Foe*, states, "In these final moments of the narrative, Coetzee positions a new narrative voice and, in displacing that of Susan, as well as those of Cruso and Friday, dissolves all previously established authorities. In its place he offers a substance and a silence."

However, Derek Attridge states in *Ethical Modernism*, "There are no communicative breakthroughs in Coetzee's fiction; at most there are moments at which a character talks himself or herself into a new mental position, a new constellation of thought and feeling." Holly Flint's assessment is far more positive when she states in *White Talk, White Writing: New Contexts for Examining Genre and Identity in J. M. Coetzee's Foe*, Friday's refusal to communicate in any way on the island and in England is his way of resisting the servitude imposed upon him and by maintaining control. The final, ghostly underwater scene with Friday's stream of speech, Flint claims, gives meaning to a brighter future. "*Foe* demonstrates such feelings can create room for new possibilities – even if those possibilities, like the stream of speech that flows from Friday's mouth in Part IV, are played out in our literary and cultural imaginations."

This final chapter ending can also be interpreted as being that even in death Friday, along with his black slave community who all drowned presumably with chains around their necks, will never be heard. There is only a silent stream (in place of scream) which, "runs northward and southward to the ends of the earth."

(Coetzee 157) In other words, even in the afterlife that transcends cultures, disciplines, time and place, the right to be heard continues yet some voices, those of the oppressed whose earthly existence has only been defined by servitude, remains unheard. Even the act itself of prising his mouth open when it chooses to remain closed and silent, is an act of authority and domination.

Rather than dissolving, “all previously established authorities,” as Mackaskill and Colleran reason, the white voice of authority can still be heard. After all, the last words to be uttered and heard underwater were Barton’s. “I tug his woolly hair, finger the chain about his throat. ‘Friday,’ I say, I try to say, kneeling over him, sinking hands and knees into the ooze, ‘what is this ship?’” (Coetzee 157) She is tugging Friday’s hair and fingering the chain about his enslaved neck, hardly the actions one would do in a world of equality. It is, in fact, echoing the words of Foe who believed, “To me the moral is that (s)he has the last word who disposes over the greatest force.” (124)

### Conclusion

Foucault’s framework helps navigate the dynamics of 18<sup>th</sup> century oppression and servitude through both the white woman representative in Barton living in a patriarchal society and the subjugation of Friday, the silenced slave. Foucault’s framework explains disciplinary power is exercised through its invisibility. Barton’s voice is silenced throughout the whole of *Foe* firstly by island patriarch Crusoe, secondly by Friday who refuses to share his black slavery tale story as part of the white narrative and thirdly by Foe who discards truthful



narrative for a sensational rewrite. She has, in effect, “prostituted” her story with no regards to truth. Barton is a woman imprisoned by the 18<sup>th</sup> century patriarchy who would, in this century, be a feminist with free speech. She is also a woman enslaved by men who take advantage of her physically. Even when she tries to apply her own reasoning to justify situations, it fails dismally. For example, she hopes her sexual relations result in conception but it does not and when she decides to teach Friday to write so he can share his story with her, he refuses. Her education, ambition and desires amount to nothing and she remains in servitude to the patriarchal society in which she is imprisoned.

However Friday, a man of no agency born into slavery with no concept of freedom who loses his slave community uses his lack of voice and knowledge to maintain control. He maintains his dignity and strength by refusing to share his narrative and remembers his past in a daily ritual sprinkling petals over the waters. Friday silently and privately respects his people and, more importantly, his truthful narrative. Friday’s refusal to partake in the white person’s discourse by refusing to be literate, or acquiring knowledge, is his only way to remain true to himself and his African heritage. He has maintained the integrity of his story by not allowing it to be told and rewritten. Friday’s silence, once believed to be a handicap which ensured he remained a servant in servitude to his master, is in fact the source of his strength. His story never told can therefore never be rewritten.

Thesis Conclusion:

Coetzee's protagonists are, according to Clive Barnett's article *Constructions of Apartheid in the International Reception of the Novels of J. M. Coetzee*, "figures on the margin of the defining axis of racialized conflict which defined apartheid in the Western imagination. This exploration of the multiplicity of positions and identities in South Africa is one of the features that recommends Coetzee's novels as distinctively 'post-apartheid' narratives." (294) Put simply, Coetzee's novels deal with protagonists who are outsiders. They are defined by oppression and subjugation as influenced by Coetzee's apartheid upbringing yet contextualised in transnational and intercultural dimensions through his novels.

The essence of this quote which has been contextualised in this thesis is, "multiplicity of positions." Michael K is prejudiced for not being part of the white minority as is slave Friday. The former seeks and physically attains emancipation by escaping to a mountain peak while the other achieves this through maintaining his silence and refusing to be articulated through the white voice of Susan Barton's narrative. *WFTB*' Magistrate is tortured and ostracised for "consorting with the enemy," (*WFTB* Coetzee 77) and in the end knows he is, "a man who has lost his way," (155-6) while Susan Barton undergoes belittlement sexually and her own narrative is edited and rewritten by the authoritarian male voice.

This selection of four servitude scenarios extracted from three Coetzee novels have been deliberately chosen to include both men and women, blacks, coloured and white people. The white protagonists, The Magistrate and Barton, both lose their power

through loss of status in the Sovereign power states of exception and the paradigm on the 18<sup>th</sup> century patriarchal society. Michael and Friday, meantime, who are both born into huge disadvantage with one committed to an orphanage for the poverty-stricken and the other to the African slave community, both use their lack of voice as a source of strength. Although they are not freed of servitude they learn to live within its strictures and, ultimately, use their perceived lack of voice as an active form of resistance.

They have both managed to escape Gordimer's description of the "ghostly pattern of master-servant," (400) as well as answered her question, "is there a space that lies between the camps?" (402) The answer is yes and this is the sacred place of memory. For Michael it is remembering the life of servitude his mother Anna endured which became the catalyst for him to live, "beyond the reach of calendar and clock in a blessedly neglected corner." (Coetzee LTMK 115-6). For Friday, it is the memory of his drowned slave community and the daily ritual of sprinkling white flakes onto the water to commemorate their passing.

For the white protagonists of *The Magistrate* and Susan Barton, their lives of education and privilege amounted to nought. He is left as, "a man who lost his way long ago," (Coetzee *WFTB* 155) while Barton never finds her lost daughter nor conceives again and proves to be an inept teacher of Friday thus rendering her story filled with empty pages.

The four chosen servitude scenarios have all now been answered in this thesis. Coetzee's fiction, influenced by the South African paradigm of apartheid, *does* provide an effective viewing lens for better understanding servitude in its various guises. True servitude *can* be witnessed from both a coloured person's perspective as well as a white

person's perspective and time, place and sex *do* play an integral, determining role in situating a person's particular form of servitude.

The theoretical frameworks used in this thesis all still resonate today and have implications for further, future applications. Maslow's hierarchy is still used in sports and corporate management as well as in palliative care. Agamben's sovereign power and state of exception is also evident globally and in recent history in the aforementioned Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib. Foucault's panopticon surveillance theory inspired from the original Jeremy Bingham prison design concept is still the prototype for prisons globally.

These theoretical frameworks, like Coetzee's writing, are transnational, intercultural and add further dimension to understanding not only the South African apartheid experience but also servitude and its many manifestations in the past, present and, no doubt, the future as well.

Ends

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